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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Martin Kirby
Telephone Interview
31 May 2007

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

[00:00:00.00] Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell, and this is May 31, 2007.

I'm sitting in my home in Greenwood, Arkansas preparing to conduct an interview with Martin Kirby, who is in his home in Augusta, Georgia. This interview is for the *Arkansas Democrat* Project of the Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville]. The first thing I need to do, Martin, is ask you if I have your permission to tape this interview?

MK: Sure.

JM: Okay. You at one time worked at the *Democrat* [and] had your own publication after that. You are now a full professor at Paine College—P-A-I-N-E—in Augusta, Georgia, but to get there I think we'll just start from the beginning. Tell me where and when you were born.

MK: I was born in Charleston, West Virginia, on January 4, 1943.

JM: January 4, 1943. Were your parents from there?

MK: No. They were essentially both from Arkansas.

JM: Were they?

MK: My father actually grew up—more or less—simultaneously in Memphis, Tennessee, and in Little Rock, Arkansas.

JM: Okay.

MK: He went to school in Memphis.

JM: Okay. What is your full name?

MK: Martin. M-A-R-T-I-N. Rucks. R-U-C-K-S. Kirby. K-I-R-B-Y.

JM: Okay, and what were your parents' names?

MK: My father's name was Jesse Martin Kirby.

JM: How do you spell Jesse?

MK: And my mother's name was Florence Leona Rucks—R-U-C-K-S—Kirby. She just died less than—about a month ago.

JM: Oh, is that right? Okay.

MK: And she was—her second husband's name was Carroll. C-A-R-R-O-L-L.

JM: Okay.

MK: She was—her obituary says Florence Carroll.

JM: Okay, and you grew up where?

MK: I moved to Little Rock when I was two. I lived there until just before I was six.

My maternal grandfather was a railroad engineer for Missouri Pacific [Railroad].

He was transferred to McGehee [Arkansas] where he had been some years before.

My parents were divorced by then. My mother went to McGehee with me and her

parents in 1949—Valentine’s Day of 1949, it was.

JM: Okay. Let me back up one step more. Let’s make sure we got it. It is Kirby. K-I-R-B-Y. Correct?

MK: That’s right.

JM: Yes, okay. All right. Where did you go to school, Martin?

MK: I went all twelve grades to public school in McGehee, Arkansas. M-c-G-E-H-E-E. Arkansas.

JM: Yes, okay. All right. Where did you go after that?

[00:03:18.09] MK: I graduated from high school in 1961. I went to Tulane University in New Orleans [Louisiana] where I graduated in 1965. I majored in English and French. Then I went immediately from there to John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and got a master’s degree in creative writing in 1966. Then—if you want me to keep going?

JM: Yes, keep going. Yes.

MK: After that, I spent most of the following summer at the Aspen Writer’s Workshop in Aspen, Colorado. Then I came back and became a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I was there for about nineteen months. I finally resigned, and fled to Mexico. I stayed in Mexico—I was in Mexico about four months. Then I went back to New Orleans and tried to freelance write with no success to speak of. While I was living there trying to figure out what to do with myself, I got a call from Gene Foreman, who said that he had become the managing editor of the *Arkansas Democrat* and [asked if I] would come to work for him.

JM: Okay.

MK: I had sworn never to return to Arkansas except for visits, but I swallowed my pride. I decided I didn't really have an excuse not to take his offer.

JM: Yes.

MK: I thought I would stay there just long enough to get on my feet and then find someplace to go. I stayed at the *Democrat* for three years, and they were three good years for me.

[00:04:50.12] JM: Yes. Why did you flee to Mexico?

MK: I just got—I had become twenty-five and I thought I was getting too old not to have any adventures. My two best friends were getting married to each other in New Orleans, and I wanted to go to their wedding. So I drove to New Orleans and then I went to Mexico and studied Spanish for two months in a small Spanish teaching school in San Miguel de Allende. I lived with a Mexican family there.

JM: What was the name of that school?

MK: It was called the Academia Hispano Americana.

JM: And where was it?

MK: It's in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. S-A-N. M-I-G-U-E-L. D-E. A-L-L-E-N-D-E.

JM: Sort of a famous resort is it? Resort area—or is it?

MK: Yes. It's sort of an artist colony.

JM: Yes.

MK: It was one of the oldest towns in Mexico.

JM: Yes, north of Mexico City.

MK: It's about—well, at that time it was about a four-hour drive north of Mexico City.

JM: Yes. Yes, okay.

MK: It's a beautiful place.

[00:05:59.13] JM: Yes, I've heard. Yes. Okay. How did you get interested in journalism in the first place?

MK: Well, I—even as a kid, I enjoyed writing. I fancied myself as a writer. When I was in the seventh grade, I won a local essay contest on fire prevention. I got \$5 for that. This was a contest between seventh and eighth graders, and I won. Both of my parents matched it with \$5 of their own, so I had \$15 for that, which was a lot at the time.

JM: Yes.

MK: English and reading were always my favorite subjects. I was a shy, introspective child. I guess you could say that I still am. I spent a lot of time reading as a kid. My mother read to me every night for an hour or two before I went to bed when I was a kid before I learned to read. I learned to read in the first grade, and I wouldn't allow myself to be read to anymore. So I read myself. My parents were divorced. I spent one weekend a month and two months in the summer in Little Rock with my father. When I would go there, the first thing that I would do was go to the library in Little Rock and checkout books for the weekend, some of which I would take back to McGehee and take back to the library the next month.

JM: What does your father do?

MK: He was a medical doctor.

JM: Oh, was he? Okay.

MK: What?

JM: I just said, "Oh, was he?" I didn't realize that. Okay.

MK: Yes.

[00:07:51.15] JM: Okay. So how did you wind up getting on at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*?

MK: While I was at college at Tulane, I had summer jobs. Well, actually, going back to high school, I was the editor of my high school paper for two years—my junior and senior years. After the first year of college, I worked for a TV station in Monroe, Louisiana, for most of the summer. Then the following summer I talked my way into a job as a summer reporter with the *New Orleans States-Item* in New Orleans. I worked there all that summer in 1963 where I almost interviewed Lee Harvey Oswald. That's quite a story in itself. But I didn't, so I didn't become famous at the time. The following summer after that I got a summer internship as a reporter with the *Atlanta Constitution*. That was the summer of 1964. I was there all that summer. When I was coming to the end of my master's degree program at John Hopkins, I really didn't want to go to college anymore.

JM: Yes.

MK: I decided that I would be a newspaper reporter. I wanted to be in the Northeast. The papers in New York were not hiring because there had been a big strike not too long before that that had lasted a long time. So I applied to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and I was invited up for a three-day tryout. They hired me.

JM: Okay.

MK: One of the things I did for the tryout was I was typing a story on—they had three paper sheet things with three sheets of copy paper with two sheets of carbon paper between each sheet. The first one I typed on there I had it backwards. I typed on the back of the last sheet instead of on the front of the first one, but they still hired me.

JM: Yes.

MK: I was there for a year and a half. It was not a bad experience. I was assigned actually to a supplementary section of the *Inquirer*, which is called the “Northwest Zone” edition. It came out twice a week. [It] covered a couple of counties in the suburbs. I spent a lot of time on the phone with that.

JM: Yes.

MK: It was not bad. I was an opera fan. I was able to go to the—Philadelphia had two opera companies at the time, both performing in the same auditorium not too far down the street from where I worked. I spent those Friday evenings down there in the upper balcony. It was not a bad experience, but I got tired of Philadelphia. I just—the air was very bad. I had a small apartment about four blocks from the *Inquirer* building, and sometimes just to torture myself I would open the window at night. [I] would wipe off the white window sill, and look at it the next morning. It would always be covered with really black grime. I just wanted a change, so I decided I’d—I heard about this place in Mexico, and I decided to go there.

[00:11:40.00] JM: Okay.

MK: I drove to New Orleans and then I drove back to McGehee for about a month. Then I drove to San Miguel.

[00:11:47.06] JM: How did Foreman run you down? And where did he run you down?

MK: I was living in New Orleans at the time. I was shamelessly living off my father’s money and trying to write, without any real success. He apparently found out where my mother lived and called her. She gave him my phone number in New Orleans, and he called me there.

JM: Yes, okay. I've heard one story—and I don't remember whether it was your mother or grandmother who Gene called up looking for you. I thought he said your grandmother. She said, "You're not trying to hire him for just a pittance—just pay him practically nothing, are you?" And Gene said, "Yes." [Laughter]

MK: Well, that sounds like my grandmother.

JM: I think he did say it was your grandmother.

MK: He did pay me less than what I had been making at the *Inquirer*, but it wasn't that bad.

JM: Yes, okay. So you . . .

MK: I had met Gene some years earlier when I was the McGehee stringer for the *Arkansas Gazette*, which I was about the last eight or nine months before I went off to college.

JM: Okay. Was Gene the state editor for the *Gazette* then?

MK: He was the state editor of the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

MK: I came up one time and went to meet him. I met him. I thought he looked about sixteen.

JM: [Laughs] Yes, he did look pretty young. He hired you for the *Democrat*. What did you do at the *Democrat*?

MK: I was assigned—as I recall—one of the first things I was assigned as a regular thing was to cover the Pulaski County School Board meetings. Generally, I did education for a while. I also did general assignments. You know, whatever came up. I tried to think of some of my own ideas for stories. I was interested in poverty and social problems, and I did poverty pieces. The Pulaski County School

Board had a major upheaval while I was covering it for the *Democrat*. They divided into factions, and the newly hired superintendent was fired for no particularly good reason. I reported on all of that. They had some fairly dramatic school board meetings, actually. I tried to capture as much of it as I could in dialogue and reproduced a lot of it in news stories.

JM: What did Foreman pay you when he hired you to the *Democrat*? Did he say anything about their efforts to remake and remold the old *Democrat*?

MK: He said that the old guy who had owned it had died and left it to his nephews, who were trying to improve it. He was hiring me as part of the improvement, I guess. I'm glad he did. I had a good time there.

JM: Did you?

MK: Yes.

JM: Okay. He brought in some other new people, too—I think—some of them from Pine Bluff [Arkansas], but others besides that.

MK: Yes. He brought in Brenda Tirey, who had been at Pine Bluff—but had gone to Louisville and came back—Lynda Zimmer, who came there because her husband was in the Air Force and stationed at Jacksonville [Arkansas]. He hired Bill Husted and a guy named Tim Hackler. There were still some reporters from the old regime who had been there a longtime, which included most of the photographers—except for Steve Keesee, who was a young guy there. He was an artist with the camera.

JM: Yes, really good. Still is.

MK: Is he still around?

JM: Yes, he's still—he's working for the *Democrat-Gazette* still. I think he's just get-

ting ready to retire, but he's still around.

MK: Yes.

JM: Hackler is living in Fayetteville now, and he's done a couple of interviews for me.

MK: He's living where?

JM: Fayetteville.

MK: Oh, Fayetteville.

JM: Fayetteville, Arkansas, not North Carolina. But at any rate—and then I believe he hired James Scudder?

MK: Yes. Yes. Scudder came there a little bit after I did.

JM: Did he? Yes, okay. So he—and Lancaster—he brought Bob Lancaster over from Pine Bluff, too, didn't he?

MK: Yes, about the same time that I came there, as I recall—maybe a little bit sooner. He had been there before I was. I can't remember.

JM: Okay.

[00:17:14.08] MK: I came there in July of 1969.

JM: That's when you started at the *Democrat*?

MK: Yes.

JM: July of 1969. Okay. What else did you do at the *Democrat*? What do you remember about the kind of paper that it was at that time?

MK: Well, in earlier times I had liked the *Gazette* a lot better, but—although at McGehee we subscribed to the *Democrat*, and I read it everyday. I was particularly fond of Karr Shannon's column, even though I didn't understand a lot of the issues that he wrote about. I finally met him when I worked for the *Democrat*. I had gotten more sophisticated about things as I grew up. I decided that the *Ga-*

zette was a real good paper, and the *Democrat* wasn't much of a newspaper. I hesitated before going to work for the *Democrat*, because I thought it was so much worse than the *Gazette*. But Gene told me that they were in the process of making it better. I didn't really have any other options at the time, so I decided I would go on back to work as a reporter. I went to the *Democrat*.

JM: Did you feel it made some substantial progress while you were there?

MK: Yes, it did. I thought it was a pretty good paper while I was there. It could have paid better.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MK: I was able to do pretty much what I wanted to do while I was there. My eccentricities were tolerated for the most part.

JM: Yes.

MK: I always had a hard time being on time for work because I don't like to get up in the mornings.

JM: Yes. Okay.

MK: I've been that way all my life.

JM: Yes, and the *Democrat* was an afternoon paper. So you had to get up pretty early.

MK: Yes, had to get up early for that.

[00:19:28.28] JM: What else did you do besides the education beat?

MK: I can't remember when I stopped covering the Pulaski County School Board, but eventually I guess I did. Then in the beginning—the early months of 1970—I started covering the major crisis in the Union National Bank in Little Rock. A guy named Harlan Lane had come in and bought controlling interest in the bank and was making various reforms that were being resisted by the preexisting direc-

tors of the bank. There was a—I think the first thing I did about that was—there was a major vote of the board of directors to—I believe they were voting to fire Harlan Lane, but he stayed on for a while after that. I managed to get the lineup for who voted for him and who voted against him on the board of directors, which was considered a coup at the time.

JM: Yes.

MK: They were not giving out any information.

JM: And that was an exclusive. In other words, you had it, and the *Gazette* did not.

MK: Yes. I had the first story on that. Actually, Tim Hackler had a co-byline with me on that, but he didn't do the actual reporting of the vote. I had read the list of the board of directors, and I discovered that I actually had a distant acquaintance with one of them, which surprised me. So I presumed on that and tracked him down on the phone. I persuaded him over the phone to give me the lineup of the directors—after telling him who I was and how I happened to know him.

JM: Yes.

MK: That was considered quite a coup. Gene had instituted a policy of paying little cash awards for good work every week or so. As I recall, I won \$15 and a complimentary note on the bulletin board for that. I just continued to cover that for a good while and got a lot of good information that they would rather not have had public, apparently. I never had done any business writing before, but it was just a matter of finding out how things were done and who to call. It wasn't that hard really. Eventually, I won a prize for that—for that reporting.

JM: Do you remember what kind of prize it was?

MK: It was a prize administered jointly by the University of Missouri and a natural gas

association [that] had the initials of INGAA. I don't know what it stood for. I think it was maybe International Natural Gas Association. [Editor's note: INGAA may refer to Interstate Natural Gas Association of America.] It was for \$1000, which was a pretty good prize then. I went up to Columbia, Missouri, to get the prize, and I had to give a talk or two. I was sort of lauded and feted there. That was kind of nice.

JM: Yes.

MK: I came back. My father matched my prize money, so I had \$2000, which enabled me to buy a new piano and pay off my psychiatrist in New Orleans.

[00:23:16.23] JM: [Laughs] Okay.

MK: So anyway, that was a good thing.

JM: Yes.

[00:23:24.26] MK: [In] early 1970 I also went to Vietnam, Laos and Paris, France, with H. Ross Perot as part of his entourage.

JK: Oh, okay.

MK: He was—I [went] to work one day and found out that an eccentric Texas billionaire that I'd never heard of before named H. Ross Perot was—had his people calling every newspaper, TV, and radio station in the country inviting them to send reporters on a airliner with him to go to South Vietnam and visit South Vietnamese prison camps. It turned out that he had been rebuffed in an effort to bring supplies to American prisoners in North Vietnam about the previous December. This was about the end of March of 1970. He had the idea—which I thought at the time was nutty and still do—that if he showed the world how wonderfully the South Vietnamese treated their prisoners that this would shame the North Viet-

name into letting us go to North Vietnam and visit American prisoners in North Vietnam.

JM: Okay.

MK: Of course, it didn't, but it was a very interesting trip.

JM: Okay. The *Democrat* agreed for you to go?

MK: Yes, they decided to go. I don't think they ever sent Perot a check for my passage. I think some newspapers and TV stations insisted on paying, but I don't think the *Democrat* did. I think that was why I was able to go.

JM: Yes.

MK: Because it was free.

JM: Yes. Yes, okay. [Laughs]

MK: It was quite a trip. I had never heard of Telex before. I needed a way to send stories back to the *Democrat*, so I asked around and I found out there was a thing called Telex, which would send things—I guess—by telegraph. I found an office, and I sent back a fairly long story. I had no idea what the *Democrat's* Telex address was. The office there in Saigon could not find it, so I wound up sending it to the First National Bank where I knew that Robert McCord, who was the editorial page editor of the *Democrat*, was on the board of directors. Apparently, somebody at the First National Bank discovered that there was a long story from Martin Kirby from the *Democrat* coming in on their Telex machine and sent it over to the *Democrat*.

JM: Yes.

MK: I managed to send other stories that same way directly to the *Democrat* after that.

JM: I remember using the Telex, but I have forgotten how it operated. [Laughs]

MK: I just typed out my story and gave it to them, and they apparently—they did something to send it.

JM: Yes, okay. All right. You didn't have to encode it into the machine itself.

MK: No.

JM: Okay, somebody—okay. What were the conditions like in the South Vietnam prison camps?

MK: They were pretty much what you would expect. They had stockades, and they were overcrowded. The prisoners looked sullen and hostile. Some of them were cooking rice in big iron pots outdoors. I went to one place that was a prison ward for amputee prisoners of war. They were lying around with missing arms and legs on wooden pallets in this long shed. We had various propaganda lectures given to us. Ellsworth Bunker the elderly ambassador to South Vietnam came and talked with our group. I recorded him on my little tape recorder, and I've still got that tape someplace. I don't know what I've done with it.

JM: Yes.

MK: I don't have anything to play it on.

JM: That's Ellsworth, right? E-L-L-S-W-O-R-T-H.

MK: Yes.

JM: Bunker.

MK: B-U-N-K-E-R.

JM: Yes. Yes. I remember.

MK: He was pretty elderly for an ambassador in that position. He came and intoned a few propagandistic words to us. It was a really interesting experience. We spent three days in Vietnam and then we flew to Laos because Perot wanted to go to the

North Vietnamese embassy in Vientiane and demand permission to go to North Vietnam. So we went to Vientiane, Laos, and we waited eight hours in the sun outside the North Vietnam embassy. They still wouldn't let us go to North Vietnam. They did finally let Perot in to talk to them, but he was not able to get permission to go to North Vietnam. Then he decided what he needed to do was go to the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris. So after spending three days in Laos—which was an interesting experience, I really liked Vientiane—we got on the plane, which was a lime green Braniff jet with “In God we trust” painted on the nose. We flew from there to Tokyo [Japan] for an hour. Then we flew to Anchorage, Alaska where I looked at the snow for two hours. Then we flew over the North Pole to Paris, where he tried to invade the North Vietnamese delegation's office. I don't think they would even talk to him. I remember going there, and there was some angry talk. We flew back to New York and then to Dallas. Then I flew back to Little Rock. It was the next day after it happened.

JM: Yes.

MK: And about a week after I got back, I got sick. The best diagnostic talent in Little Rock couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. They finally just called it Encephalitis, which was more of a syndrome than a disease. I was in the hospital for three weeks and lost thirty pounds. I was really sick. They wouldn't let me have visitors for a couple of days there. Finally, I pulled out of it and managed to go back to work. I couldn't collect workman's comp from the *Democrat*, because I couldn't prove that it was work related illness—which always aggravated me, because that was obviously how I got sick. I picked up some kind of unspeakable tropical bug.

JM: Yes.

MK: Boy, was I sick, too!

JM: Man.

MK: I was in a hospital in North Little Rock, which apparently was the only hospital that had an open bed at the time.

JM: Yes.

MK: It was really an unpleasant experience. The first thing I did when I got back to work was I covered a fire on the highway between North Little Rock and England [Arkansas] which is just right down the road from where my father lived, actually. Anyway, there was this fire at a gas station down there. I went down there in the hot sun and got all the information about that.

JM: How many of you were there on the trip with Perot?

MK: There was just me from the *Democrat*. I don't remember how many other people all told were there. It was a typical airliner of the time, and it was full.

JM: Oh, okay.

MK: It had reporters from all over the United States. It had one guy from *Newsweek*. It had a TV crew from Finland. It had a guy from the Springer publications in West Germany. Perot had several of his underlings with him who he made wear suits and ties no matter what the weather was. He also had half a dozen wives of American prisoners of war in North Vietnam. We referred to them collectively as "the wives." I'm not sure what their role was, but I think they were there to gain sympathy.

JM: Yes. What kind of guy was Perot?

MK: He was a little, short, bouncy guy with a kind of "seize him" mentality. He was

always in charge and giving orders. I wrote an essay about my trip with Perot, by the way. It was published in the *Arkansas Times* in 1994.

JM: Okay.

MK: If you're interested in looking it up.

JM: Okay. I might be interested. I'd like to read that.

MK: Anyway, it's one of my better efforts that I wrote. He was a—at one point, his minions told us that everyone could have ten minutes sitting in the seat next to Ross for a talk, but we had to submit questions in writing in advance. This was on the plane over the Pacific when we were headed to Vietnam. I had had a bunch of shots to prepare me for this trip all at one time, and I was having a reaction. I think the one that really did me in was the Bubonic Plague shot that they arranged for me to have in Dallas. Anyway, I was running fever and feeling bad, so instead of hedging my bets I wrote down my real questions which involved—well, let's see—things like was he not really trying to gain support for the war effort as opposed to really bringing succor to the prisoners of war—and things like that. And I guess he was miffed. He would—he found excuses through the whole trip never to have an interview with me. I would talk to one of his guys, and he would say, “Okay. It'll be later this day” and that kind of thing. And he always had something urgent that he would have to do at that time, so I never got my ten minutes with H. Ross Perot—which I figure was because he didn't want to answer my questions.

JM: Yes.

MK: I didn't hear of anyone else who had that problem.

JM: Yes.

MK: But it was kind of a lapse in my judgment, because by that time I knew better than to spook the game when I wanted to interview somebody.

JM: Yes.

MK: If I hadn't been sick, I wouldn't have done it.

[00:34:51.18] JM: Yes. So after you got back and you covered the fire down on the highway from England—then from there how about the rest of your time at the *Democrat*?

MK: Let's see. That was in the summer of 1970. I don't actually remember having a beat for the rest of 1970, as such. That was when I went to Missouri to get the award, which had been won the previous year by another Arkansas reporter, Harry Pierson at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. It was for business writing—that award was.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: Which was interesting to me, because that was the only business writing that I had ever done. Gene sort of thought that I was a business writer after that. He had me do several things of a business type nature, but my heart wasn't really in it. I remember at one point I did a story on professional football player Lance Alworth's financial dealings. I think they were hoping that I would find skullduggery there, but I didn't. I didn't want to do it anymore after I got the basic information.

JM: Yes.

MK: Anyway, in the early part of 1971 two things of a life changing nature happened. I met a girl, and three months later we were married. Right after I met her, I got a letter back from—a letter that I had written to Robert Sarver, the state's correction commissioner, asking him to let me come into the state prison and do a story on

prison life. He said, “Okay,” so from then on for a couple of months I spent three or four days a week down at Cummins Prison [Lincoln County, Arkansas] staying over night at their guest house—which I was surprised to find out that they had. I just pretty much lived there. I had *carte blanche* to interview anybody that I wanted to. I thought of categories of prison inmates that I would like to talk to, and the prison administrators would bring some out of the prison population for me to talk to. I interviewed the guards and other people. While I was there, Sarver was fired. He was replaced by a guy named Terrell Don Hutto while I was still doing work there. I eventually interviewed about forty inmates plus quite a few people who worked there. I interviewed them with the tape recorder and got their life stories and a general picture of life at the prison. Meanwhile, Gene and Ralph Patrick, the city editor, were getting very testy with me for not producing any copy. It had been a couple of months since I had anything in the paper. It took me a long time to transcribe those interviews. I found out that I really couldn’t just pick around through them and pick things out. I had to pretty much type out the entire interview.

JM: Transcribe the whole thing, yes.

MK: [Instead] of just parts of it. I finally wound up with—I think—an eleven part series on the prison. I think it was eleven. Peggy and I were married between the—I believe—the fifth and sixth installments on a Saturday morning.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MK: It couldn’t run on Saturday. One ran on Friday, [and] one ran on Sunday morning.

JM: Yes.

MK: My time at the prison was probably the highlight of my whole experience at the *Democrat*. It was an exhilarating experience. I always wanted to write a book about it, and I could never sustain the effort.

JM: Who fired Sarver?

MK: I think it was [Governor] Winthrop Rockefeller.

JM: Okay.

MK: No, wait. No, [Governor] Dale Bumpers had taken office then.

JM: Had he?

MK: Yes, so I'm pretty sure it must have been Bumpers who fired Sarver—or else Sarver quit. I'm not sure which come to think of it.

JM: Yes. Yes, okay.

MK: Anyway, suddenly he was no longer the state corrections commissioner. He was replaced soon after by this guy named Hutto.

JM: Yes, Terrell—T-E-R-R-E-L-L—as I remember.

MK: Yes.

JM: Don Hutto. H-U-T-T-O.

MK: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: He came there from Texas.

JM: Yes. Okay. Did you have any problems with him, or did he . . . ?

MK: No, not really. He let me stay there, and [I] still worked during the beginning of his tenure.

JM: Did you win any awards for that series on the prison?

MK: No, I didn't, to my chagrin. I applied for several of them. I had the paper rec-

commend me for a Pulitzer prize, a Robert F. Kennedy award, and I think a couple of other things. I never got it.

JM: Yes.

MK: I thought it was a pretty good effort.

JM: And the paper did recommend you for the Pulitzer?

MK: They what?

JM: The paper did recommend you for the Pulitzer?

MK: Yes, they did.

JM: Okay.

MK: I also applied for a Neiman Fellowship. I had to get a letter of recommendation from Gene. He gave me a copy of his letter, and it was sarcastic. It really wasn't a recommendation, which surprised [me]. I didn't realize it, but, apparently, I was competing with Bob Lancaster for that—or else he got it the year after, anyway. He got it either that year, or the year after. I didn't get the Neiman Fellowship, which bugs me.

JM: Yes.

MK: I have forgotten what was sarcastic about his letter, but it was kind of a sarcastic letter.

JM: Yes.

MK: It was not exactly a letter of recommendation.

JM: Yes.

MK: Which was the only thing that he ever did that I didn't care for.

JM: Gene left in 1971 to go to *Newsday*.

MK: Yes, then you came along.

JM: Right. Then I replaced Gene. Right.

[00:41:57.00] MK: Yes. In the fall of 1971, I was a newlywed—well, actually, in August of 1971. I had been married six weeks, and Bill Husted, Steve Keesee and I were threatened with lynching by a mob in Marianna, Arkansas—which was an interesting experience.

JM: Yes, I remember that.

MK: They finally let us go without lynching us. My new bride heard it on the radio before I could call and tell her what had happened—which was kind of a shocking experience for her, I guess.

JM: Yes. I can imagine.

[00:42:43.00] MK: So anyway, in the fall I started covering the [Arkansas] State Capitol for the *Democrat*.

JM: Okay.

MK: There were a couple of other capitol reporters, too. I felt a little behind the curve at the capitol. I didn't have that many contacts, and I didn't think that I was doing such a very good job, although I managed to uncover a minor scandal involving conflict of interest between state officials and the management of a computer company that had sold a lot of equipment to the state government. I enjoyed digging all of that out.

JM: That wasn't the one that they sold to the state police, was it?

MK: That what?

JM: That wasn't the one that sold to the state police?

MK: I don't know who they sold it to, actually.

JM: Okay. Okay.

MK: I don't remember what parts of state government had the computer equipment, but the company was called Management-Computer Interlock. It was headquartered in Texas. A guy in Arkansas who had been, I believe, a state legislator of some kind—or commissioner of some kind—had started selling stock to various state officials of one kind or another. He died of heart attack in the middle of all of that. About a year later, I came along and got the names of all the people in the company—all in the government—who had been buying stock into this company. There was a kind of brouhaha over that, but nothing came of it. I don't think that anybody was even punished. It was in Bumpers' administration that this occurred. He, apparently, wasn't inclined to punish anybody for it, but I enjoyed doing it. That was one of my better feats as a reporter.

JM: Yes.

MK: It started when a guy who was a disgruntled ex-employee came into the *Democrat* office—oh, they're always the best sources for information.

JM: I think that I was the managing editor when you did that story.

MK: You probably were.

JM: Yes, I think I was.

[00:45:15.27] MK: Anyway, then I got the idea of starting my own publication—sort of on the order of the *Texas Observer*. I managed to raise \$1500 from various donors in Little Rock in order to do that. So I resigned from the *Democrat* and started that. I managed to put out nineteen issues of it between 1972 and 1974, but my wife got her PhD in anatomy at the medical center in Little Rock.

[00:46:04.18] JM: What was your wife's name?

MK: Her name?

JM: Yes.

MK: Her full name is Margaret Loewy—L-O-E-W-Y—Kirby. Actually, she has a middle name—Margaret Elizabeth Loewy Kirby.

JM: Did you say R-O-E-W-Y?

MK: L-O-E. L as in “legal.”

JM: Oh, okay. Yes, okay. L-O-E-W-Y. Okay.

MK: Anyway, a year after she got her PhD—she got it just before I started the *Advocate*—the year after she got it, she was pregnant and working in a friend’s used furniture store. I felt sorry for her. To get her scientific research career going, she started sending out applications for . . .

[Tape Stopped]

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: Now then, this is Jerry McConnell here with Martin Kirby side two. Martin, you were just talking—when the tape ran out on the other side—about your wife applying to other places.

MK: Yes. She wanted to be a scientific researcher, and she was going nowhere in Little Rock. She finally got a job with what became the University of Central Arkansas [UCA] teaching anatomy to nursing students and other allied medical science types. She also had a job working at [Fort Roots] in a research project, but none of those would lead to anything. She was accepted by the University of Chicago. So we decided to go to Chicago in the summer of 1975. We had a two-year-old son at the time, Nathan. She was pregnant again when we went up there. We had our daughter, Julia, [in] September after we went up there in June. I

spent two years in Chicago mainly running up and down backstairs from our apartment on the second floor to the washing machine in the basement carrying baskets of diapers.

[00:46:04.18] JM: [Laughs] Okay. Before we go on from that point, let's talk about your publication. The name of it would be the *Arkansas Advocate*, is that correct?

MK: Yes.

JM: Tell me what kind of publication it was, and what the thrust of it was.

MK: It was to be what was known as an advocacy journal. It was liberal in its point of view. It was—I thought of it as a magazine in the form of a tabloid newspaper, which is the cheapest way I could bring out a publication at the time. It was done with offset printing at the *North Little Rock Times* office. A guy named John Thompson—I believe—was in charge there.

JM: Right.

MK: It was printed at a big printing place outside North Little Rock. It was supposed to be a pro-union publication, among other things, and it was printed in a non-union shop, which got me some nasty letters from union types.

JM: Yes.

MK: But I really couldn't afford a union shop at the time, which was kind of an embarrassment to me.

JM: Yes.

MK: It was a—I thought it was a pretty good effort. It lasted for nineteen issues.

JM: As I recall, you had some good people writing for you.

MK: Yes, I had—I pulled a lot of people out of the woodwork to write. I couldn't pay them anything, of course, but I gave them space to publish in. It turned out to be

a really worthwhile effort. I wrote a lot of stuff myself, and Gene Lyons started writing for me when I was running the *Advocate*. There was a guy named Neil Woomer, who was an outdoor-type biologist of some kind. He wrote.

JM: Spell his name for me.

MK: W-O-O-M-E-R. N-E-I-L.

JM: N-E-I-L?

MK: Yes, I think it was N-E-I-L.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: Various other people who turned out to be pretty good writers came forward and offered to do things for me.

JM: Do you remember any of them?

MK: Some of them were just one-time writers. I can remember a few names offhand. There was—well, there was Gene Lyons. And there was a guy named David Kersh, who had been in high school with me at McGehee. He popped up to write one piece for me. K-E-R-S-H.

JM: Okay.

MK: A girl named Wanda Warner—W-A-R-N-E-R—wrote a piece for me.

JM: Okay.

MK: Another girl named Debbie Gilstrap—G-I-L-S-T-R-A-P—wrote a piece for me.

And . . .?

JM: Did Walter Nunn write some things for you?

MK: He did write some things, I believe. He was a contributing editor. I had a whole list of contributing editors, some of whom never contributed anything.

JM: Okay.

MK: I had asked a number of people to write various things that I knew they had knowledge of, and some of them did and some of them didn't. It turned out that some didn't write because they were—because other people found out what they were doing and didn't want them to write it—which was disillusioning to me.

JM: Yes.

MK: I had one prominent political figure [who] wrote a long piece for me under an assumed name, which I didn't like to do.

JM: [Laughs] Who was it? Do you remember?

MK: Well, I do, but I don't know if at this date I should reveal it.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: Anyway, I think he is still around.

JM: Oh, okay.

MK: Although not in politics, as far as I know anymore.

JM: Yes. Yes.

MK: I have all of the issues that I put out, but I don't have them close at hand. I can't really remember who else wrote for me.

JM: Oh, that's okay. If I remember it seems to me—and refresh my memory, I may be wrong—that some of the things you wrote were sort of a critique of the press.

MK: Yes.

JM: And maybe both newspapers in Little Rock and other members of the media, is that correct?

MK: Well, actually, some of the things that I wound up using in the *Advocate* were things that I had either come across while I was a *Democrat* reporter or had gathered while I was a *Democrat* reporter. I got permission from the people who

were running the *Democrat* to print up some of the prison interviews I had that I hadn't used for the *Democrat*. I printed two or three of those. The last issue that I put out was a—consisted largely of an extended attack on the Hussman newspaper chain that had just bought the *Democrat*, which bothered me a whole lot. I had acquired a big stack of issues of their other papers around the state. I went through them and made fun of their productions and predicted disaster for the *Democrat* with them being in charge of it. I guess it is still going on. I was really upset to find out that they eventually absorbed the *Gazette*, which I thought was not a good thing.

JM: Yes.

MK: When I was at the *Democrat*, I always enjoyed scooping the *Gazette* because it was the competition. But I always respected the *Gazette* as a newspaper. I was sorry to see it get absorbed.

[00:55:15.26] JM: Yes. You are probably not familiar with all the war that started eventually between the newspapers, but Gannet bought the *Gazette* in 1986. They were the ones who ran it into the ground, I think, because they tried to do a little bit *USA Today*-ish stuff. And it wasn't the old *Gazette* anymore. But at any rate .

..

MK: Something about the *Democrat* having free classified ads . . .

JM: Yes, they did . . .

MK: It was bad competition for the *Democrat*—or the *Gazette*.

JM: Right. And they also went morning—went head-to-head in the morning. And, you know, both newspapers were suffering. But at any rate, so after you went to Chicago—you left Chicago after how long?

MK: Two years.

JM: Two years, okay. And went where?

MK: We came to Augusta [Georgia] in the late spring of 1977. Peggy had been offered an assistantship professorship at the medical college of Georgia. I didn't want to come here, but she was convinced that this was the only place that would offer her a decent job. I thought we would stay here two or three years, and she would find a better job someplace else—and we would go on someplace else, but the chairman of her department pretty much gave her everything that she wanted. She began to get grants and produce papers. Eventually she made herself the world's greatest authority on how the heart develops as an embryo. Millions of your tax dollars have gone to support her research since then.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] Okay.

MK: Anyway, six years ago she decided that I had become prematurely old and was too boring to be a fit companion for her. So she divorced me rather suddenly and took her entire scientific establishment, including most of her people who work for her in her lab, to Duke [University] [Durham, North Carolina] where she still is on the faculty.

JM: Oh, they went to Duke.

MK: Yes, they all went to Duke with her. It was like Abraham and all of his chattel leaving Ur of Chaldees and going into the desert.

JM: Yes, okay. But you, in the meantime, have started teaching at Paine College, is that right?

MK: Yes. I came here to Augusta—while I was still in Little Rock, I started teaching part-time at UALR [University of Arkansas at Little Rock]. I started teaching

part-time here in Augusta at various local colleges. I also started writing book reviews on a broad scale. I wrote dozens of book reviews starting with Columbia State, which is down the road in Columbia, South Carolina. Then I started writing for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, where I had worked previously, and I think where Gene Foreman was still working at the time. I wrote dozens—I think I wrote over forty reviews for the *Inquirer* in the early 1980s. I used the money to support my Diet Coke habit. I also taught part-time. Finally, I decided that I was just shriveling up and not getting anything done. I decided that what I needed was a full-time job, so I started applying for a full-time job. Nobody around here wanted to hire a full-time college English teacher with only a master's degree. One of the places that I applied to was the University of South Carolina [Columbia], which is about an hour's drive away from here. I was shifted over to a nice woman who told me that what I ought to do was become a graduate student at the University of South Carolina, because they actually paid a stipend to graduate students. It was like having a job with a low salary, and I would eventually get a PhD. That was in January of 1984. I went over there, and I was the eighty-ninth graduate student they had taken on that year for that department. I had a terrible schedule. It was a really rough first semester. After that, I was able to get both my teaching and my—I had to teach freshman comp, two classes a semester. I was able to get teaching and classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays after that, so it wasn't too bad. I made James Dickey's acquaintance and took his courses at the university. He became my dissertation advisor and was very encouraging to me. I had intended to write fiction for—one thing that lured me into a PhD program there was that they allowed a creative dissertation instead of a research disserta-

tion. I had thought to write fiction, but, when I made friends with him [Dickey], he insisted that I write poetry, or he wouldn't be my dissertation advisor. So I continued with poetry writing, which I started a few years before I went there. My dissertation consisted of poetry. My main effort since then has been poem writing, although occasionally I'll write an essay.

JM: Yes.

MK: I [have] kind of run out of steam right now. I haven't done much at all for several years.

JM: Did you get your PhD?

MK: Yes, I got my PhD in December of 1987. It was a year and a half after that before I was able to find a full-time job. This area doesn't have a whole lot of college English departments, and the ones that it does have don't have much of a turnover.

JM: Yes.

MK: But anyway, I was . . .

JM: Just a second. Let me stop for some of our readers—that James Dickey being a novelist and poet who has written several highly regarded books including *Deliverance*, correct?

MK: Yes. He wrote *Deliverance*, and he won the National Book award for poetry in the middle 1960s. He wrote two other novels that didn't make as big a splash as *Deliverance* but are good novels, nonetheless. He turned out to be a really nice guy, despite his reputation as a wild man.

JM: Yes.

MK: I really liked him. He was sophisticated enough to know that I was too old for

him to actually teach me anything, and [he] just patted me on the back and told me what a good boy I was. I just poured out the poems there for a while.

JM: [Laughs] Okay. Have you ever had any poetry published?

MK: Yes. I've published over sixty poems in literary magazines.

JM: Have you? Well, that's good.

MK: I've got probably about that many left over that I haven't published.

JM: Okay. Any thoughts of putting them into a book?

MK: Yes. I've tried, but nobody has shown any interest in my book manuscript yet. I have actually won some awards for poems.

JM: Have you? Okay.

MK: Yes.

JM: Any notable ones?

MK: They're all in the same contest, which is administered locally here in Augusta, called the Porter Fleming Literary Competition. It happens every year in September here. The poetry division takes entries from five different states.

JM: Oh, okay.

MK: It pays pretty good money. I won second place in 1997 and 1998. In 1998 I won third place for prose writing—non-fiction prose. Then in 2001 I won first place in the poetry division.

JM: Okay.

MK: I won \$750 for that.

JM: Pretty good. So when did you start teaching at Paine?

MK: I started at Paine in September of 1989. I had taught part-time at Paine along with a couple of other colleges when I first came to Augusta. The guy who had been

the president of Paine when I was there previously came back at that time to be president again. I pled my case to him directly, and he decided to hire me.

JM: Okay.

MK: He let me come in as an associate professor because I did have a lot of publications.

JM: Yes.

MK: Nine years later I was promoted to full professor.

JM: Okay. And, if I'm correct, Paine is a predominantly black institution, is that correct?

MK: Yes. It's a Methodist affiliated black college. It's very much like Philander Smith [College] in Little Rock.

JM: Okay.

MK: There aren't that many colleges around here.

JM: Is it in Augusta?

MK: It's in Augusta.

JM: Okay. Okay.

MK: I'm pretty much stuck here until either I die in office or decide to retire.

JM: [Laughs] Yes, okay.

MK: I'm not sure which is going to happen first.

JM: Okay.

MK: I'm sixty-four now, and my health is not very good at all.

JM: Yes.

MK: Social Security tells me that I can't get full Social Security benefits until I'm sixty-six, so that means two more years at Paine at the minimum.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: My son doesn't think I should retire even then, because otherwise I'll just vegetate.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: Which is probably true.

JM: Well, you—he probably—let's go back for a minute to the newspapers in Little Rock. You told me that the *Gazette* generally at that time was a better newspaper, but what did you think of the *Democrat* by the time that you left Little Rock?

MK: By the time I left Little Rock, I really had some standards, and I thought that the *Gazette* was far superior to the *Democrat* as a newspaper. I would read the *Gazette* mainly in Little Rock when I came to visit my father. It had—I thought—decent coverage of things, and I generally agreed with its editorials. The *Democrat's* editorials sounded like they were written by cavemen.

JM: [Laughs]

MK: I just didn't care for it. It was stodgy. I didn't think that I'd ever want to work for the *Democrat*, but I surprised myself. If Gene Foreman hadn't been the managing editor, I wouldn't have done it, but I knew he was sincere and a good guy. If they were actually trying to improve things, it sounded good to me. I never had any trouble at the *Democrat* with anybody trying to tell me what not to write or anything like that. I was—Gene instituted the policy of having most reporters, if not all of them, write a front page column once a month. I sort of let all the stops out when I did mine. I enjoyed doing that. Anyway, I thought the paper, while I was there, was actually a good paper. It covered social problems, and it had a reasonably progressive editorial page. It had pretty good photographs and that sort of

thing. I didn't really have much fault to find with it.

JM: So it was . . .

MK: I had worked for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which was not a first rate paper when I worked for them, but it was a big paper.

JM: Yes. When you left, had [Walter] Hussman [Jr.] already taken over the *Democrat*—when you left Little Rock?

MK: When I left Little Rock, he had, but he had not taken it over—he wasn't even in the picture—when I actually resigned from the *Democrat*.

JM: Why did you resign—other than . . . ?

MK: I resigned mainly to start my own publication.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: I was never able to make any money with that really, but I was able to sustain it for a year and a half. Then, after I left, it was kept going for several more years by Walter Nunn and a few other people.

[01:07:49.18] JM: As I remember—I'm just trying to remember, and maybe I'll look it up—the story you and Husted and Keesee did in Marianna—I think I was at the *Democrat* at that time. I went to the *Democrat* in August. I think it was fairly early August of 1971.

MK: Well, [it] was early August of 1971 that this incident happened. You may have just come to the *Democrat*.

JM: I think I had. But at any rate—yes, I do remember that. Husted has an interview and talks about that in his interview. Being—where were you? In the newspaper office of Marianna?

MK: Yes.

JM: Yes. Yes, okay.

MK: Yes. We had gone down there because we heard that there was a letter to the editor about the local racial situation that might be interesting.

JM: Yes. Yes.

MK: We were going to look it up.

JM: And it was a pretty tense racial situation over there, wasn't it?

MK: Yes, it was pretty tense. They had a town square in Marianna that was dominated by a statue of Robert E. Lee that I recognized as a duplicate of a statue of Lee in Lee Circle in New Orleans. The headquarters of the local black movement was right around the corner from this town square. On the opposite side of the square, a group of white men had taken to standing there all day carrying baseball bats. Their ostensible purpose was to protect black people who wanted to shop in the local stores, many of which had closed, because there was a boycott of the stores on the part of the local black leaders—a “Don't shop where you can't work” boycott.

JM: Yes. I remember that. Yes.

MK: They saw us leave the headquarters of the black movement when we walked across the square and around to the paper office. They filtered around and came up to the front of the building. Some of them came charging in and threatened to hang us “nigger-lovers”—as they called us—from the tallest tree in the town square. There were some pretty tall trees in the town square. We jawed around at them at the time. Apparently, cooler heads prevailed. They said we could—we had five minutes to get out of town, so we walked back to Bill Husted's car, which was across the square, and left. In the meantime somebody in the crowd

stole our notebooks and Steve Keesee's jacket, of all things. I never did figure out that—figure that out. I couldn't figure out why they would want to steal Steve's jacket.

JM: [Laughs] I don't, either.

MK: So anyway, we left. We had tried to call the *Democrat's* office while we were in the local newspaper office there in Marianna. We got a kid who was—either just started working there—he was Jon Kennedy's son. Kennedy was the cartoonist.

JM: Yes.

MK: I have forgotten the kid's name. But anyway, he . . .

JM: Could it have been Brad?

MK: Probably so.

JM: Yes.

MK: But anyway, he apparently couldn't get the idea that we were in danger, and [he] gave a garbled message to Ralph Patrick and maybe to you. I don't know what happened after that on that end.

JM: Yes.

MK: We had seen two carloads of state policemen next door to the newspaper office behind the county courthouse, but they didn't show up during this. As we were driving away from the town, we met a state policeman's car coming the other direction with its sirens running and its lights on. I guess it was coming to rescue us.

JM: Yes.

MK: I don't know.

JM: Yes.

MK: Anyway, it was quite an experience. I keep meaning to write an essay about that. I got a lot of notes on that. I've never been able to put it together here.

JM: Okay. I'd like to read it.

MK: Yes. That's one of my more interesting experiences.

JM: Yes, okay.

[01:11:54.29] MK: About three weeks after that, I went to my tenth high school class reunion. Whoever was their master of ceremonies introduced me as their class's biggest celebrity.

JM: [Laughs]

MK: Because I was a reporter for the *Democrat*, and they made a crack about my run in with the mob in Marianna.

JM: Yes.

MK: It was kind of interesting in some—more than sixty years—well, about sixty years earlier a great uncle of mine had been a deputy sheriff in that county—Lee County [Arkansas].

JM: Yes.

MK: He was shot from ambush and killed by a bootlegger he was pursuing. My grandfather, who lived in Mississippi, came over for the trial. He got up and grabbed a chair and beat the accused person over the head with it during the middle of the trial.

JM: [Laughs]

MK: I suppose that was the same building next door to where the mob confronted us.

JM: Yes, okay. All right, Martin, is there anything else you can recall about your times in the newspaper business in Arkansas?

MK: Well, I was kind of amused that the *Democrat* was housed in the old YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] building of Little Rock.

JM: Yes.

MK: There was an actual drain—a shower drain—under my desk.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MK: Which I thought was funny.

JM: Yes.

MK: My father said that he had learned when he was a kid

JM: He had learned to swim there?

MK: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: Well, I don't really—I can't think of other significant adventures. The highlights of my tenure at the *Democrat* were: the trip with Perot, the Union National Bank Crisis and the Prison work that I did, which was very interesting.

JM: Yes.

MK: I loved being at the prison and talking to all the [people]. I got to be good friends with some of them.

JM: Yes, well, I have to say that you did some damn fine work there, Martin. I was sorry when you left, but you were really a good hand.

MK: I should have stuck with journalism. It's the only thing that I have been unequivocally good at.

JM: Yes, well, well. You know that the salaries are not such—they're certainly not there to encourage you to stay with it.

MK: Yes. By the way, I went—Ralph Patrick wrote, or was running a statewide maga-

zine called *Arkansas: A Monthly Portfolio* in 1979 and 1980. For that I wrote an essay about my dealings with the Union National Bank crisis.

JM: Yes.

MK: I think it was supposed to be ten years after the events. That would have more memories from that.

JM: Yes. I'm not sure whether I got that. I was in Oklahoma City [Oklahoma] at that time, but I wrote a piece for that magazine for Ralph, too. And I still—I know I got that particular issue, but I can't remember if your piece is in it. I'll take a look and see.

MK: Yes. He also published a short story of mine.

JM: Yes, okay.

MK: It's one of the best things that I ever did. It's called "The True Story of the Fouke Monster."

JM: Oh, the Fouke monster?

MK: Yes.

JM: I remember the Fouke monster.

MK: Well, I made up a story about the Fouke monster that I printed.

JM: [Laughs] Yes. Yes, okay. Okay. Anything else, Martin?

MK: I don't know. The years at the *Democrat* were really one of the major highlights of my life.

JM: Yes.

MK: I miss those years.

JM: Yes.

MK: I enjoyed it, and had a good time there. I liked everybody I worked with. I prob-

ably made a mistake leaving there, but I had to get Peggy's career back on track.

JM: Yes.

MK: It turned [out] that they were—that the medical center didn't give post-docs to its own PhD graduates, which I didn't believe at the time.

JM: Yes.

MK: It turned out to be true.

JM: Yes.

MK: But I thought the *Arkansas Advocate* was a worthy thing to do.

JM: Yes.

MK: It's still probably the best thing I've ever done, although I now consider myself a poet. [And I like it].

JM: Yes. Yes.

MK: One of the major remnants of my earthly ambitions is to have a book of my poems published before I kick off.

JM: Well, I hope you do.

MK: I have diabetes, and my eyes are bad. I have glaucoma on—my right eye has gone blind. My son won't let me drive the car anymore, and he won't let me leave the house without a walking stick—because I tend to fall down. If he thinks I'm kind of—I think he thinks I'm in the early stages of senility, the way he treats me.

JM: [Laughs] Well, tell him that you don't sound like it to me.

MK: Well, thanks. I hope I'm not.

JM: Okay.

MK: Well, Jerry, I appreciate you giving me this chance, and, if you have anymore

questions . . .

JM: Well, as I say, if you decide that you want—something you think of that you would like to add, just feel free when you get it back. Well, I appreciate it Martin. I will send you a copy of this form in the mail, and you will be getting a transcript. I appreciate your help.

MK: If you talk to Bill Husted, tell him that I'm sorry I haven't gotten back with him. He did call me.

JM: I know he did.

MK: It was just before I started having eye trouble.

JM: Okay.

MK: Well, I appreciate it. I hope to hear from you again.

JM: Okay. And I'd like to see some of your work—some of your poems.

MK: Oh, really?

JM: Yes.

MK: Well, if I ever publish a book, I'll send you a copy.

JM: That'd be great.

MK: At this point, it doesn't look too promising.

JM: Yes.

MK: I'm way far out of the mainstream.

JM: Yes I understand. But, if you do, I want a copy.

MK: Okay.

JM: I'll get off.

MK: All right.

JM: All right, thanks Martin. Bye.

MK: Bye, bye.

[01:20:49.05]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Geoffery Stark]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]