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*Arkansas Democrat* Project

Interview with

Robert (Bob) McCord  
North Little Rock, Arkansas  
3 June 2005

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: I am sitting here with Bob McCord, on June 3, 2005, doing an interview for the [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's] project on the *Arkansas Democrat*. Bob, [the] first thing I need to do is start off. Do I have your approval to tape this interview and to turn the tape over to the history center?

Robert McCord: Yes, sir, you sure do.

JM: Let's start from the beginning this time. Tell me your full name, where you were born, [and] when.

RM: My full name is Robert Sanford. S-A-N-F-O-R-D. McCord. M-C-C-O-R-D. I was born in Camden, Arkansas, and at the age of two, the family moved up here to North Little Rock and I have lived here ever since.

JM: What were your parents' names?

RM: Mose and Myrtle. My mother's name was Hutcheson, and, of course, my father's name was McCord.

JM: So you moved up here to Little Rock at the age of two.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: What was the date of your birth, Bob?

RM: April 4, 1929.

JM: Where did you go to school?

RM: I went to all the public schools here in North Little Rock, then I went to the [University of Arkansas] at Fayetteville and got a journalism degree there. After I got out of the army, I went to Columbia University in New York City.

JM: Before we get to Fayetteville—I want to talk about that more later—you actually got started in journalism before you ever got to Fayetteville, while you were still in school. Can you tell me about that?

RM: I think the thing that really started it is that I was a photographer. My dad—you know, North Little Rock was kind of a tough town back in those days, and he didn't want me to get involved in a lot of things I could have gotten involved in. It was a railroad town, then—really, that was all that was here. And he bought a real fine camera for me and we set up a little darkroom in my house. I was about twelve years old, and I was a pretty good photographer. I got into about the eighth grade down at Fourth Street Junior High School—and you won't believe this, since you're an old sportswriter, but North Little Rock Junior High basketball team beat East Side in Little Rock, and we just couldn't get over it. I made a picture of the team and the coach, and it was a good picture, and one of the teachers said, "You know, I bet that the *Gazette* would print that picture." I said, "You do, you think so?" And she said, "Yes." So I took it—got on the street car and went over there. Orville Henry was still in high school, but he was working down there for sports editor Ben Epstein, and Henry came out and looked at it and he said, "Oh, that's a good picture, I'd like to run that, but you know, paper's scarce"—this was during World War II, and paper for newspapers

was scarce. Well, Epstein said no because it would take up about three columns “and we just can’t do that.” So I took it back to the same teacher, and she said, “Well, what happened?” I told her. And she said, “Well, why don’t you just put two people vertically—two here, two here, and two here, and you could get it all in one column.” I said, “Well, I never thought of that.” So I got them together down there and I made the picture and took it back over there [to the *Gazette*] and Orville said, “Gosh, that’s a good idea. Let me take that in to Epstein,” and he put it in the next day’s paper. And if you think I wasn’t proud of that one-column picture of the basketball team—I think that’s where my journalism career started. When I got to high school, I started to work at the *Democrat*, and would go over there—I couldn’t drive, because at first I wasn’t old enough to have a license—but my dad would get up and take me to work at 6:30 a.m. and I would work in the darkroom. I would catch the bus and come back over to high school. Sometimes I would work in the afternoons, after school. But I worked daily every summer until I went off to college. So you could say from 1945 [on], I was on a daily basis of working for an afternoon newspaper. I was making pictures and I started to write some.

JM: Well, I was about to say, you got into other phases.

RM: Oh, yes, police reporting—that’s what they make all the new ones [do].

Occasionally, on the weekends, I would get to write a little feature story. You know, until the war was over newspapers still had mostly women, and there were a lot of places women just could not go in those days, especially women photographers. I used to go out to all these crime [scenes] and, of course, I would

try to look as old as I could. Old Joe Wirges, the well-known photographer at the *Gazette*, took a liking to me. And the cops a lot of times would, you know, [say] “Get away from here, kid. You don’t work for a newspaper”—and Joe would say, “Ah, let him in, he’s a good fellow.” And I would get to go in and make a picture just like he did. There were a lot of good people and good journalists—male and female—at the *Democrat* when I was there. Dorothy Carroll, the society editor, knew everyone in Little Rock and wanted the pictures I took for her to be just right. She shared an office with Leila Maude, who wrote the religion stories. Both were real characters and didn’t get along. There were a lot of other good female reporters—Bobbie Forster, Inez McDuff, Marguerite Gamble, Matilda Tuohey. I learned a lot from Effa Laura Wooten, who was the assistant city editor during World War II. The men reporters were good—Marvin Balding, Martin Holmes and Charlie Allbright, who later became a columnist at both Little Rock newspapers.

JM: You went to the University of Arkansas and started majoring in journalism and working on the *The Arkansas Traveler*. You made that famous picture of [President Harry S.] Truman and [Governor Sidney] McMath walking down Main Street at the reunion of the 35th Division in Little Rock?

RM: That would have been 1949.

JM: Talk about some of the people whom you ran into on the *Traveler* who were later prominent in Arkansas journalism.

RM: Well, you and Bill Shelton were on the *Traveler* and there were a lot of guys whose families owned newspapers who were on the *Traveler*—John Troutt from

Jonesboro, Perrin Jones from Searcy, Bonner McCollum from Forrest City. Bill Secrest who went to the Democrat was on the *Traveler*, and so was Bob Douglas. He and I were the only members of the press when Silas Hunt went to the U of A law school. He was the first black person to go to a law school in the South. Douglas's story and my picture went all over the country.

JM: What did you do from year to year for the *Traveler*?

RM: Well, Jerry, I mainly made pictures for one year because I just kind of liked to do it and I had all my equipment up there, even a little darkroom in the trunk of my car, and that was something really hot in those days. My junior year, I think I was either assistant managing editor or managing editor, I can't remember. I must have been managing editor because, you remember, Muriel came up to apply for a job and Troutt was the editor. I interviewed her, and fifty-four years later, we are still married. She worked both those last two years, you remember. Then I was the editor of the *Traveler* for the last year. I had a minor in Spanish and was too busy to do a lot of class work. The professor of Spanish got me out in the hall and said, "Mr. McCord," [he] said, "You're the editor of the paper, but if you don't turn in this paper by a certain date, you're not going to leave this university with a degree." Boy, I was hurt. I thought that was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. So I rented a room in a hotel downtown for, I think, six days and finished the papers.

JM: Then what did you do?

RM: I came back to Little Rock and went to work at the *Democrat*. [I] tried to get into the Coast Guard because I had taken two years of ROTC [Reserve Officers'

Training Corps] and I thought with that I could get in because the Coast Guard was looking for people to do public relations and get out their little papers and what have you. I went down to New Orleans, and they said, “Your eyes are too bad, there’s not a chance. We don’t take people in the Coast Guard that have to wear glasses.” So I came back and kept working at the *Democrat*, and I finally got drafted into the army right at the end of the summer. For two years I put out GI newspapers. After basic training, I was lucky enough—they needed somebody because colonels and generals like to have their pictures made and stories written about them.

JM: I have discovered that. Let me regress just a minute. While you were going to Fayetteville and working on the *Traveler* and everything, in the summers did you still come back and work at the *Democrat*?

RM: Yes. And I was their correspondent up there until the last two years. But I just could not do that and run the *Traveler*, too. Oh yes, every summer I worked at the *Democrat*.

JM: What did you do in the summers with them?

RM: General assignments. Lots of traveling. We went a lot—they were trying to get the paper to be a little more statewide in those days.

JM: Were you still making some pictures then, too?

RM: Oh, yes. When they got into a tight [spot], I did. That was kind of what happened to that picture that won the AP [Associated Press] prize. I was in the darkroom that morning, developing O. D. Gunter’s film—he had been somewhere. The city editor came running in and said, “Look, Bob, pick up a camera and run down

there real quick and get a picture of the president coming down Main Street.” I looked like hell. I had on a t-shirt and what have you, but I just grabbed this four-by-five Speed Graphic [camera] and ran down there and made this picture. The first shot I made—why, just as I pressed the trigger, he threw his arm—the president threw his arm over to wave to somebody, so I knew I had to make another one. So I started going backwards and, of course, they were moving real fast. Governor McMath was on this side and then on the other was all of his 35th Division friends. I kept backing up, and I kneeled down and made a second picture, and I thought, “Well, that was pretty good.” All of a sudden, these two guys picked me up by the arms, hauled me out of the street and plunked me down on the sidewalk and they said, “Who in the hell do you think you are, running out there and making a picture of the president of the United States?” They were Secret Service agents. I said, “Well, I work for the *Arkansas Democrat*, just right down the street. I’m a newspaperman.” “Yes, yes, you get your butt out of here and don’t ever let me see you again.” Now, I guess they would have shot you if you did something like that. Scared me to death. [Laughs]

JM: So you got back with the picture and they ran [it] in the paper, right.

RM: In the first edition—you remember, it was 11:30, and it was in the first edition.

JM: How big did they run it?

RM: Six columns. That’s the first one I ever knew that they ran that big. They and Jon Kennedy, the cartoonist, liked it a whole lot. Jon Kennedy, you remember, used to retouch the pictures, and they kind of relied on him [to tell them] which was



good and which wasn't. And he told them, "You really need to spread this over," and they did.

JM: Did you win any awards for that picture?

RM: Yes, I won the Associated Press Picture of the Year, and they sent it in for the Pulitzer [Prize] and, of course, it didn't make it. There had been a murder up in New York and a picture about it in the old *Herald Tribune* won it.

JM: After you got out of the army you took the GI Bill and went to Columbia.

RM: Straight up. Bill Shelton, who had gone to Columbia, wrote a letter for me up there. You had to have letters because that's about the only [way] to get in. My grades weren't at all good.

JM: How long did it take you to get your master's?

RM: Ten months. It was a full ten months.

JM: Then you came back to the *Democrat*?

RM: Well, I didn't have any other place to go. I thought all these big-shot eastern newspapers would give me a job, but nobody did, so I came back here. Mr. [K. August] Engel, the *Democrat*'s publisher, came up. This is kind of an interesting story. Mr. Engel was not known for his social activities, you know. He was an all-business man, but he came up for the American Newspaper Publishers Association convention at the Waldorf Hotel. The next thing I knew, he called me on the phone and said, "I wish you and your wife would come in and have dinner with me at the Waldorf." I thought, "My God." And I said, "Well, we would love to do that." She was seven months pregnant, and we went to that fine hotel and sat there with Engel, and he told me, "Well, I'm glad you're coming

back,” and, “We’ll be looking for you,” and so on, and that was a great thrill when he introduced me to all those other publishers.

JM: Then what did you do on the *Democrat*?

RM: Well, I came back and I was doing general assignments—kind of what I was doing when I left—and I was traveling. I wasn’t making enough money to really stay alive, and we were in a little apartment in North Little Rock with the baby, so I hooked up with the *Christian Science Monitor* and with *Business Week* to cover Arkansas stories for them. They were especially glad to have me when [the Little Rock school integration crisis of] 1957 came along. They paid really well and I didn’t have to do too much. With that and with what I got at the *Democrat* I was doing okay. I’d do about one piece a week for *Business Week* and maybe a couple of pieces for the *Christian Science Monitor*. They really were fine people.

JM: What happened later?

RM: [Ed] Liske, you remember, our managing editor—Mr. Liske called me into his office, which was kind of unusual, and he said, “How would you like to be editor of the Sunday magazine of the *Democrat*?” And I said, “Well, I don’t know, Mr. Liske.” I said—whatever, you know. [Mr. Liske said,] “Well, I really do need somebody.” I said, “Why, what’s happening to Chester Allard, the editor?” So Liske got up and went over and closed the door to his office, and he said, “You know, I knew something was going on, and almost every week there was a story or a picture in there of a barber.” He said, “I just figured it out. I wrote their names down and I called two or three of them.” And he said, “That guy was

trading his haircuts—he would put their pictures and a story about them in the magazine.”

JM: He’d get a free haircut if he’d put their pictures in the magazine?

RM: That was how he paid for his haircuts. And Liske said, “I just can’t have that.” They didn’t fire him, but they moved him out into the newsroom, but Gene Herrington wouldn’t have him. So he finally left. Liske said, “All right, we’ll give you \$5 more a week.” Well that was a lot of money then, and I said, “Well, okay.” And so that’s what I did for a long time.

JM: And that was when?

RM: Well, that would have been late in 1955.

JM: When did you leave the *Democrat* and buy the *North Little Rock Times*?

RM: I left in 1959. A lot had happened. I had always hoped one day I’d have a newspaper of my own. And these people were friendly and they had a good price, so I bought the thing and stayed there ten years.

JM: Okay. But before you went to the *Times*, though, you were at the *Democrat* during the integration crisis. How were you involved in that coverage?

RM: Well, Jerry, it was so tough, you know, and the *Gazette* was just killing us. In the first place, a lot of it didn’t happen until late in the afternoon, when our paper was already out. I mean, that’s kind of an excuse, but still, that’s what happened. So they were really killing us. We lost a lot of circulation because everybody wanted to read about it. You know, it was the big story. So they put everybody to work. I had Roberta Martin, and she was very competent. She put out the magazine for about a month or more, [and] I just worked on that integration story. I also filed

for the *Monitor* nearly every day. And, also, I did several pieces for the *Democrat* magazine, too.

JM: So you were out there and doing the coverage?

RM: Yes, yes, several days.

JM: Do you have any episodes that particularly stand out in your memory?

RM: Yes, when they finally went to court, Jerry—the first court between the judge they brought in from South Dakota, who was going to hear it, and the lawyers for Governor [Orval] Faubus trying to keep the schools segregated. It was this lawsuit that they had brought, so this was the last day of the trial. And so the lawyers saw that they were losing. They knew, they felt almost certain that the judge was going to rule against them. And they got real snotty with him and made a little scene and left the Federal Building. Well, my boss found out what was happening from Margaret Frick, the girl that covered the Federal Building. She called him from the hall, said, “This thing’s coming apart. They’re going to march out of here.” I was out watching the mob at the school and he called me on the radio that they had put out there for the photographers. He said, “I want you to go to the governor’s house, I think that’s where they’re going to go.” I said, “All right, I’ll try to get in.” So I got to the mansion and went in. He, of course, wasn’t yet there, but in a few minutes he arrived with all his lawyers following him in other cars. He looked at me kind of funny and he said, “Why are you here?” I said, “Well, Governor, I just wanted to talk to you for a few minutes after the decision comes down.” Of course, he knew that it had already come down, but I didn’t know it. He said, “Well, maybe in a few minutes. Just have a

seat.” So I just found a seat and I looked out the window, and here came all these lawyers, and I said, “Uh-oh.” So I went upstairs because I knew they would throw my ass out of there if they walked in the front door and saw a reporter sitting there. So I went upstairs and found a place to sit, and I was sitting up there reading a magazine, and they talked, and they talked, and they talked but finally they began to leave, so I came down and the governor saw me. He said, “You still here?” I said “Yes, sir, I’ve been upstairs. I want to ask you about this.” He said, “Well, wait a minute.” The rest of [them] left, and he called me back in, and that’s when he said—it was a great line—he said, “The war is not over yet.” I think that’s what the line was in the lead. That was one of the bigger stories that I wrote. I was the only one that was there. We got it in the first edition.

JM: But generally the *Democrat* did not have as many people on the scene as the *Gazette* did.

RM: No. It was already going down. Again, the *Gazette* was really killing us because—mostly because it was hitting on their time.

JM: And the *Gazette* had Moseley on it, Ray Moseley.

RM: Yes, and Bill Lewis and Roy Reed and Jerol Garrison.

RM: Yes—all of those good fellows. They were fast. It was tough.

JM: About the only thing, I guess, where maybe the *Democrat* had a little edge, as it was—I guess they had more access to Faubus . . .

RM: Well, because of capitol reporter George Douthit.

JM: Yes, yes. So, Douthit was really in with Faubus?

RM: Oh, yes. Whatever came out of the state capitol, Faubus saw to it that Douthit got it first. The *Gazette* hated it.

JM: Who? Faubus or Douthit?

RM: Both! Both, but mostly Faubus. [Laughs]

JM: Was Bobbie Forster involved in some of the coverage for the *Democrat*?

RM: Yes, she sure was.

JM: I remember that the *Democrat* did have one sensational picture from the integration crisis out there.

RM: The best pictures of them all. Larry Obsitnik at the *Gazette* was a fine photographer and made some, but Will Counts at the *Democrat* really sent his pictures all around the world. And the reason for it was he had learned to use a 35-millimeter [camera]. That was probably the first big story in America where a 35-millimeter guy beat everybody else. Because he—you know, he was skinny, he looked like a kid, and he had this camera that looked like a toy that, you know, he would wear around his neck, so they wouldn't bother him.

JM: Counts was a great photographer.

RM: He sure was.

JM: He later left and went and taught journalism at Indiana University [Bloomington] right?

RM: First he went to the AP and was with them for years, and then Indiana, which has the best photo school of any of the colleges. He wound up there—head of the department.

JM: And he had this one sensational picture. Did you ever have any insight on whether or not it could have won an award—a Pulitzer Prize or anything?

RM: Well, it was second, you know.

JM: Was it?

RM: It was second. The *Gazette* and two reporters from national papers got the Pulitzer. It was just bad luck. We were all really mad about it. I think the Pulitzer judges were kind of tired of those kinds of pictures because, you know, after Little Rock, a lot of other places started having desegregation stories. I guess all of the editors that made the choosing got tired of looking at desegregation pictures and that three others had already given to the Little Rock story. We thought it was terrible that it didn't win the prize.

JM: What do you remember about the *Democrat's* editorial position during that time—during the integration crisis?

RM: Well, we had this old fellow, Bill Johnson, who had been there forever. Mr. Engel didn't want the editorials to get too tough about it either, I'm sure. And occasionally, the paper would write an editorial about it, but it was—when it was, it was just, “Now, everybody just be careful, and don't overdo anything,” you know. Some people said that the *Democrat* was on the side of the rioters. That never happened. That's not true.

JM: They just . . .

RM: They just wrote it. I mean, Engel said, “Now, let's don't lose our mind here, let's be calm.”

JM: They were pretty quiet about it. They didn't come out with any strong positions or anything.

RM: Karr Shannon, the long-time columnist, wrote about it, and he was—I guess you'd have to say—of the whole group, he was about the only one that ever showed any sympathy to the gang of thugs. And it wasn't all that much. He just said, "These people have a chance, they need to . . ."

JM: Through most of this time that you were at the *Democrat*— say, from the late 1940s—they just didn't take a very strong editorial stance on anything, did they?

RM: No. And that's just the way Mr. Engel really wanted it to be.

JM: He didn't want—antagonizing anybody.

RM: No.

JM: My memory of it is that their typical one was, "Now this is a problem, and somebody ought to think about it."

RM: [Laughs]

JM: Before we go on and get you coming back to the *Democrat*, what do you remember about the conditions at the *Democrat* then, in the newsroom, and the people? What stands out in your memory about working there?

RM: We had some awfully good people. They were hard-working folks. But they [the *Democrat*] didn't pay anybody much, as you know, and it was—we were just out-flanked. I mean, the *Gazette* was moving on, and they had done such a big job, particularly in 1957 on desegregation.

JM: In the early 1950s, before the integration thing came up—what do you remember about the staff at that time?



RM: Oh, it was first rate. I thought we had some really good people.

JM: [Is there] anyone in particular that stands out in your memory?

RM: Well, now—you're talking about before I left the paper or after I came back?

JM: Before you left.

RM: Well, we did. R. B. Mayfield was a real good hand, and we had Roy Bosson, a first-rate reporter. Gene Herrington was a good city editor. Allen Tilden was a good managing editor. He started out over there in the sports department of the *Democrat* as a kid. And he had worked his way into the city news and was the city editor when World War II broke out. He was called in right at the very first, and he was in that thing at least five years, but he came back to the paper. He was a good newspaperman.

JM: And then along about that time, you had some good reporters like Bill Secrest, Ken Francis, and Ken Kaufman.

RM: Then we also had Ozell Sutton, the first black man ever to work on a daily newspaper in the state of Arkansas. And we got some stories because of Ozell being there, too—particularly in 1957.

JM: I went back, a couple of years ago, and was reading some of the old clips—microfilm back from 1951, back when I started—and I just got to looking and reading some of Ozell's pieces and everything. Of course, they only let him cover the black community. But he did a pretty good job.

RM: He sure did.

JM: So, the *Democrat* wasn't overburdened with fringe benefits at that time.

RM: None. And no air conditioning.

JM: No fringe benefits and no air conditioning.

JM: No sick leave, no retirement. But they had some big fans in the summertime.

RM: They sure did.

JM: Somebody said that the fans edited the paper more than the editors.

RM: [Laughs]

JM: So you went to the *North Little Rock Times* and you were there how long?

RM: I was there until 1969, almost ten years to the day. Then Mr. Engel died, and just a few days after he died, Stanley [Berry] and Marcus [George], Mr. Engel's nephews, called me and asked me if I'd be interested in coming back to the *Democrat*. I said, "Well, first, let me tell you something—that the hardest work on the face of the earth is putting out a weekly newspaper." I have never, before or since, worked that hard, as I did [during] those ten years. And we were doing pretty well. It was a good newspaper, and I had good people, but it was a seven-day-a-week deal for me, my wife, and my kids. So I said, "Well, yeah, I'd come back if I could buy some stock." Oh, they didn't know about that, so they consulted their relatives who also held stock—Mr. Engel was a bachelor—and, finally, in a few days, they said, "Well, okay, you can have so many, and here's the price." It surprised me that they called me back, and they said, "Yes, you can do it." And I said, "Well, I'll think about it." So my wife and I thought about it two or three days, and I talked to Tom Riley, the advertising manager and good friend, and asked him if he wanted to buy my paper. He said yes, so that made me feel real good. Tom brought up John Thompson from Pine Bluff—he was the city editor on the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, and my partner and Thompson got their

money together and bought my paper. So that was real smooth, and I went back to the *Democrat*.

JM: What was your position?

RM: Editor of the editorial page. Marcus said, “We’re going to have an editorial page here, at last.” Hardest thing I did—the first two or three days—I had to go in and tell Karr Shannon that he couldn’t use hillbilly slang. Then I said, “And Karr, you can’t write your columns seven days a week anymore.” [Karr replied] “Why?” I said, “Well, Karr, people just don’t like to read the same thing over and over.” And I said, “And I’m not insulting you, but you write pretty much about the same thing every time—three times a week.” [Karr interjected,] “Three times a week! Why, I shouldn’t even be paid for that.” I said, “Well, that’s the way it’s going to be.” [It was] one of the hardest things I ever had to do because I had known him for years. He wouldn’t speak to me for at least a month, but he finally came to help me read copy because the guy was an excellent speller. I don’t know whether you knew that or not, but he never went to college, but he knew how to spell and use English. I’d make him read all my editorials. A lot of times, he’d find something was [incorrect] in them, too, in the way of English and of spelling. He was a fine man.

JM: When you came back, did you know that the paper was losing circulation?

RM: Yes.

JM: Losing money?

RM: Yes, I had a good idea because I have always kept up with what the national papers are doing, and I knew that the all afternoon papers were hurting. I thought

that we could change and do a lot of things. Marcus, the editor and half-owner, and I did do some things, and we did improve the newspaper, there's no doubt about it. We redesigned it, as a matter of fact. Jon Kennedy, the fine cartoonist, and some other people like Gene Foreman, had a good sense of how to improve the paper. I played a small part in redesigning the paper, but not so quick that it jarred readers. We did make it look more attractive. And then, Jerry, you left the *Gazette* to come to work with us as managing editor when Foreman left to go to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

JM: You had brought in Foreman.

RM: That's right. I went down [to Pine Bluff] and got him. Herrington had just run out to take a big job at the Arkansas Power & Light. He really wanted to go. He didn't have a pension or anything and he was getting up in age. Marcus said, "Do you think you could get Foreman to come up here?" And I said, "You're damned right, if you pay him enough, you can get him to." So they did. He came up, and he really shaped the paper. He's a hell of a newspaperman.

JM: He had been at the *Gazette*, the state editor at the *Gazette*, and then had up and gone to *The New York Times*—and about the time he got there they went on strike.

RM: Of course, he couldn't live without income. He didn't have any money. So he came back to Arkansas at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, and he did a great job for it. But he had worked a long time at the *Gazette* but it thumbed him when he had to leave New York. They just didn't pay any attention to him. He wanted to go back so bad to the *Gazette*.

JM: But that was probably A. R. Nelson's edict—he never hired anybody back to the *Gazette* who left.

RM: That was what he used to say.

JM: Until Foreman came back to the Democrat the paper had never had a page dummy to lay out the page.

RM: The old news editor would go upstairs and he would say to the printers, "Take that story and put it here, and take the type there—no, a picture—no, that one," and that's the way they made up the paper. That's right, but that wasn't the only afternoon newspaper that did that because time was everything with the damned afternoon papers.

JM: What other changes do you recall that were made?

RM: Foreman insisted that layouts had to be just so. Foreman gave us the first real copydesk that we ever had. Before the city editor and the news editor were really the copywriters, which didn't make any sense. But they always said, "It's too fast, you can't have a copydesk in an afternoon paper." And a lot of them did the same way. But some of them were a lot smaller than we were. It was the strangest thing. At first, Marcus wasn't too convinced that we ought to make a change. The first time that Gene went into his office, Marcus said, "We just can't do this." It was a tough battle getting that—because that was a big thing. You had to hire more people, for one thing.

JM: Foreman also brought a bunch of editors from Pine Bluff.

RM: He did. I've forgotten now who they were, but he did.

JM: I think Mary Lowe Kennedy was one of them. Another was Bill Eddins, who worked for him down there, and then maybe Tim Hackler, but he may have joined right out of Hendrix [College, in Conway, Arkansas].

RM: Right out of Hendrix. I hired him. I did a story up there of some kind, and he was in the story. I've forgotten what it was. He was just a bright guy, and he asked me, "Y'all [you all] ever hire anybody right out of college?" I said, "Yeah," and I said, "Call me." And he did.

JM: He was bright and a good reporter. Paul Nielsen was also in the crew Foreman brought from Pine Bluff.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: I think your idea was also starting an "Answer, Please" column.

RM: And that turned out to be very popular, much more so than I ever thought it would be. It was something new in the area. I think we copied it from some other paper, some out-of-state paper, but it brought a lot of people to the *Democrat* for answering their queries about anything.

JM: I think we eventually moved it out to page 1, and hired somebody to do it special and put their picture with it.

RM: That's right. And that was something new, too, for us.

JM: I think that was something. Its first writer was Julie Baldrige, whom I hired from the *Gazette*.

RM: That's right.

JM: So, at any rate, Gene stayed about three years and left and went to *Newsday*, right?

RM: Had a great job up there.

JM: And then you hired me to come in and replace him as managing editor. And then, during this time, I guess a lot of other things were happening, but the paper was still struggling in circulation and advertising.

RM: Yes, it was just [that] no matter what we did, it seemed like it just kept going down. That's when television got in full bloom, and that's what people liked at night. Men and women, too. You remember, there were a lot more women working—two workers in the family, than there ever used to be. And of course, they'd get the latest news in television and the radio when they came home. It was no wonder that they said, "Well, you know, we don't need an afternoon newspaper anymore because we can get it from television."

JM: When Marcus and Stanley decided to sell the paper to Walter Hussman [Jr.], were you privy to their decision to do that?

RM: Yes, I was a member of the paper's board. We'd meet and we'd whine and worry and try to see what else we could do, and we just couldn't find anything else we could do. It was obviously a hopeless kind of a thing and we just seemed to talk about it. We all knew that something had to happen, but then that arrangement that they made to sell the paper was done completely by the two of them. Nobody knew. I never knew until they called me down to Stanley's office. I said, "Well, has this [deal] been made? Is there any reason that I should express my opinion about it at all?" And Marcus looked kind of funny and he said, "Well, no." He

said, “We’ve agreed to do it, and our lawyers think that.” They had some fine lawyers. Not just lawyers, but fine citizens of Arkansas.

JM: So in 1974 they sold out to the Hussmans’ collection of Arkansas newspapers? And you sold your stock, too?

RM: Had to. That was part of their selling me the stock in the first place. You’ll remember now that Marcus George and Stanley Berry had already bought Channel 11.

JM: Yes.

RM: And so they owned that as well. So I had a little part of that because it was just one block of ownership.

JM: Okay, so I see. So you owned a piece of [Channel] 11 also. Engel started that station, didn’t he?

RM: Yes. And when they sold the paper, they had a place to go. They moved over to Channel 11.

JM: Do you recall that before they sold the paper, the ITU [International Typographical Union] had started an organizing attempt in the newsroom?

RM: That was part of the problem. We kept meeting with them over in the Albert Pike—it wasn’t the Albert Pike, it was the Lafayette. It was a hotel then. It had this big meeting room. And they were terrible.

JM: The ITU?

RM: Yes, they were terrible. I mean, they were complaining about everything and we didn’t have any answers to give them. No retirement, no—I mean it was just



terrible, you know, there's just so far you can go with that. We had reached the end of it.

JM: You think the union . . .

RM: Had something to do with it?

JM: Trying to organize the newsroom had something to do with it.

RM: Yes, sir. And the composers, too, they wanted more than anybody else did.

JM: They wanted additional benefits?

RM: Absolutely. Because they knew what was happening just like we did. They said, "Well, if we're going to get it, we need to get it now, because it's going to be too bad, too late."

JM: Who was the head of the union, do you remember?

RM: I can't remember his name. You knew him.

JM: Well, I can try to remember, but I don't guess it was the foreman. It wasn't Fred Campbell, was it?

RM: No, no. He was just another one of Engel's men. He'd been there all his life. You know, hell, he thought it was fine.

JM: He'd been there since 1942.

RM: Sure.

JM: At any rate, I remember that I got appointed to represent the company in that case, but nevertheless, that's another story for later.

RM: That was terrible.

JM: Then [Walter] Hussman came in, and, of course, when he bought the paper, he also inherited the organizing attempt in the newsroom and everything. So what do you remember about the start of the Hussman regime there?

RM: Well, Stanley and Marcus couldn't wait to get out of the building because, like I said, they had their offices all fixed for them down at the TV station. So they had a place to go to. So one day—if you'll remember, his office opened into my office.

JM: Marcus's office?

RM: Yes. He opened the door and said, "Come in here a minute." I said, "Okay." And he said, "I'm going to leave tomorrow." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, tomorrow. No reason for me to stay around here." And I said, "I guess he's [Stanley] going to leave, too." He said, "I guess he's going to leave, too." That's how they were; they never knew for sure what the other was doing. He said, "I'm going down to the station. They don't need me staying up here." You know, it was breaking his heart. He'd spent all his life there. It was the only real job he'd ever had. So I helped him pack up his stuff. He said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I don't have a place to go. I guess I'll just stay here." So, finally, they both left. Marcus left first, and then, I think, in about two days, Stanley left. And I can't remember the person downstairs that he turned it in to—one of people in the advertising department. I think. And I was to take care of getting the paper out. So, you know, I just kept getting the paper out as best I could. All of a sudden, I got a telephone call, and it was from the head man, Walter Hussman's father. I'd never met the man in my life, and he said,

“I’m calling to tell you that Walter won’t be up there for a while.” I said, “Oh, is that right?” And he said, “Yes, he’s gone on a trip and he just couldn’t get back. And he asked me to call you to see if you would stay there and run the paper until he gets back.” I said, “Well, I don’t have any place else to go.” So I said, “I guess I will.” It stretched out to about three weeks, and he came back and I met him—first time that I’d ever met him. He was twenty-six years old. And if you think that didn’t frighten me a whole lot [laughs]. But he’s very smart, as we all know. He’s really got a mind. There’s no question about it. [He is] one of the smartest people I have ever known. He said, “Do you want to continue to be the editor of this newspaper?” And I said, “Well, yes, that’s what I’m doing now and if you want me to I will.” He said, “That’s settled.” So I went back upstairs and made a few changes, and we did what we could. I later found out why he didn’t come to the paper immediately. Have I told you that story?

JM: Maybe, I’m not sure. What was it?

RM: Well, Walter was a fan of Evel Knievel. And he was performing, jumping [his motorcycle] over his race cars somewhere, and Walter just had to go to it [laughs]. So instead of coming to take the newspaper he was going to be publisher of, he went out to see Mr. Evel Knievel jump over cars. I got a big kick out of that. I never will forget that.

JM: What was Walter’s approach to trying to combat the problems of losing advertising and circulation and everything?

RM: One of them was that he decided to put out neighborhood papers, like Forest Park and places like that. I think we put out five. And, of course, we had so few

people working there that it almost broke our back, but we did it. They weren't bad, but the people didn't care anything about them—they were free. We'd put them in the neighborhoods and run some ads on the radio and on television to say that the neighborhoods would have them, but no one really paid much attention to them. We had a dickens of a time doing it because we had such a small staff, you know, with no money to bring anybody else in. He thought of a lot of things. He had a knack about the classifieds that was real good. He gave real good prices on the classifieds. He gave some of them free—if you ran them one time you could run them five times for the same [price]—that sort of thing, which was smart. And we changed up the paper some. We printed a lot more local news than we'd been printing. We pushed out a lot of the national and international stuff to print more local news.

JM: I remember Bob Lancaster wrote a front-page column. But he didn't stay long.

RM: I think it was. Oh, the reporters were just leaving right and left because they knew that the paper was losing readers and advertising. And so old Robert McCord had to start writing a front-page column twice a week. And also did all the other work that I had to do. It was just back-killing.

JM: And about the same time, I guess, Hussman bought a computer and started getting into computerized typesetting.

RM: That's when the union really came at us. But it worked. As I say, he's a brilliant guy, and he knew it would work. It was hell the first two or three months, I'll tell you. Then, of course, you, the managing editor, got a chance for a better job in Oklahoma, and you came in and told me about it and I said, "I think that's the

best thing that could happen to you.” So you left, and by that time, the others were really leaving. And it just got to where I couldn’t in good conscience go out and ask somebody to quit a good job and to come to work there. That’s not any good, to have somebody running a place who doesn’t feel like it’s ever going to work. And I told Walter that. I said, “Walter, I’d like to see this through for you, but I just don’t think it’s going to happen.” And he said, “Well, Bob, I understand.” He couldn’t have been nicer about it. He said, “I’m going to have one requirement.” He said, “You’re going to have to write a column every week. I don’t care where you are or what you’re doing.” And I did. All those years, I wrote a column every week.

JM: Tell me how you figured in hiring John Robert Starr as editor.

RM: Walter said there were two things I had to do. I had to find somebody to take my place. That was number one. The second thing was to write that column. So I started looking and, of course, no one else in the building knew anything about it at all. I found bright a guy in North Carolina that Foreman told me about. And there was a managing editor on the *Dallas Morning News* that I got to know on the Society of Professional Journalists where he and I had known each other serving on the board together. He said, “The man was bright as he can be,” and he said, “I’d like to see him get a good job like yours.” It sounded pretty good to me. So I had those two people, and I told Walter about them, and he said, “Well, they both sound good, but what about Bob Starr?” I said, “Well, how did you know him?” He said, “Through the Associated Press.” And I said, “Well, you know he’s left the AP. He’s teaching school over at Knoxville.” He said, “Is

he?” And I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Could you call him up and see?” And I said, “Well, yeah, sure.” I called Starr up and he said, “Aw, I don’t think I want to do that again—I don’t want to get into all that. You all are doomed.” And I said, “Well, of course, maybe we are and maybe we aren’t.” “Why are you leaving?” [he asked]. I said, “Well, I’m just leaving. Walter wants to make a change.” So I just went down and told him what he said. Walter said, “Well, I’m going to talk to my dad. My dad knows him pretty well.” I just left it like that and went back to work. A week later he called me, “Can you come down a minute?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Bob Starr’s going to take the job.” I said, “Are you sure?” He said, “Yeah, I just talked to him. I’ve been talking to him. I didn’t tell you, but I went over to see him. We spent half the day together. He’s got some good ideas.” So I went upstairs and called both of the other two men and told them the job was filled. I have to tell you about the first day Starr was there. I will have to say for him, he was a good bureau chief. He really was. He worked hard, and he had a good bureau here. And he was a hell of a good AP reporter. He’d work all night and all day, but he had never gotten out a newspaper in his life. So he came back to Little Rock—came up about 8:30 a.m. We sat there and talked for about thirty or forty minutes. I said, “All right now, let me tell you, I’m going to stay here for as long as you want me to stay because I ain’t got any other place to go.” Then I said, “This computer out here has been the most complicated thing I’ve ever had to deal with.” [Starr said] “Yeah, yeah, AP put all that in, too.” He said, “I know something—know a few things about that.” I said, “Well, that’s going to be great to help you,” and I said, “Just take it easy because the union is still not

satisfied.” [Starr said], “Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard all that.” This was about 9:30 in the morning. So [at] about 2:30 or 3:00 p.m., he came in and said, “You know, you all are just making all kinds of mistakes, the way the copydesk operates.” I just sat there and listened. He said, “You’ve got too many editions, you’ve got this, and fix those guys upstairs”—and he just went on and on. And I said, “Bob, you’ve never done this. You don’t know about making changes between editions like we have to do around here. We’re [having a] hard enough [time] keeping these printers here right now, or they’ll be coming out.” Starr said, “No, no, you just petted these people, you just treated them too good.” And he said, “You can leave whenever you want to.” I said, “Really?” [He said] “Yeah, it’s not all that complicated.” So I went down and told the publisher. He said, “No, I don’t want you to leave, you don’t leave.” He said, “That’s all right, that’s good, I’m glad he’s enthusiastic about it, you just stay.” You will remember, I think, that we missed three days in the paper—three days—first time in the history of the *Arkansas Democrat*. [On] three different days, we never got a paper out because Mr. Starr had taken control.

JM: Some equipment went down or something?

RM: Everything you can imagine went down. He just couldn’t get the paper out.

Three times. Rather than get in the middle of that, I gave myself an assignment. I assigned myself to cover the national Democratic Party meeting in Memphis [Tennessee]. I think they did that only once, and I think it was a flop, but I went to Memphis and stayed about a week and sent stories back to the *Democrat*. I then sent myself to Houston [Texas] for something that had to do with Arkansas

and wrote a bunch of stories down there. I was having a good time. I had to figure out a way to go because he had moved into my office by that time. After about two more weeks, I just left.

JM: Now, back up and tell me before Starr came what you and Walter were talking about to save the paper. Didn't you and he talk about selling the paper or saving the *Democrat* in some way by getting a joint operating agreement with the *Gazette*?

RM: We did. Of course, I know there were a lot of things he did [that] I didn't. But I was involved in much of that—not all of it—half of it, anyway. And one of the halves we had was this for some community things, for example, I would go to churches and talk to those people to be interested in the *Democrat*, and I also worked on the neighbor[hood] editions we put out, and I would make speeches about the *Democrat* at service clubs. And I'd go out and help them promote those and what have you—then begin talking about combining the two papers like it was being [done] all over the country. I knew Hugh Patterson saved the Arkansas Sigma Delta Chi chapter. The organization from the beginning was always without money, Patterson was very generous. So, one day, Walter called me down to his office and said, "I talked to Hugh about combining," and he said, "He just is—was not even polite." I said, "Well, let me try." I didn't go over to the *Gazette*, I went out to his house, and I just put it out to him as straight as I could. I said, "You know,"—now I had all the details, I said—"Detroit is doing it." I ticked off all the different towns that you'd never think would consolidate newspapers. I said, "I think this would be the greatest thing in the world for



Arkansas, to put two papers together and still have two newspapers in this town.” But Patterson said, “Bob, I just can’t do that. The Hussmans came in here and attacked me.” He took it all personally. He said, “I never liked those people, anyway.” One day when I went to his house to talk he followed me all out in his yard. I’ll never forget it. He said, “I know you think I’m making a mistake. I can’t do it. I don’t want any part of consolidating.” And he said, “Bob, we’re going to win this war, and you’ll be back over working for me.” I said, “Hugh, I don’t think that’s ever going to happen.” And he said, “Well, we’ll see.” And, of course, that’s what happened.

JM: Had you left when the *Democrat* switched to morning?

RM: Oh, yes.

JM: But they had started the free classifieds before you left?

RM: Well, he was warming up to it—it was almost free—he’d cut the advertising rate down. He blasted that out just about the time I left. And he blasted out all these good things, you know. The big one was the classifieds, there’s no question about that. The second biggest one was the one that I could never get Hugh Patterson to do. Walter said to his delivery people that they had to take that paper and lean it against the front door every morning and not in the grass. When I went to work at the *Gazette* I begged Hugh to do that, but Leon Reed, who ran the circulation department all those years, said, “Bob, that’s ridiculous.” And, to my grave, I will tell you I think that it was important in choosing the *Democrat* over the *Gazette*. It wasn’t the only thing, but it was one of them because people don’t like to go out in the yard or the sidewalk to get their paper. Walter Hussman did all kinds of

things to win the war. He went to Canada and saw what its papers were doing. He and his daddy decided they were going to have to spend some money to win, you know, and they did. Right after I left they really spent. Then Mr. Starr began his six-day column on the front page. He called people names and what have you, and people eat that up, you know. The *Gazette* was doing little to win, but it finally sued the *Democrat* in federal court [claiming] that the *Democrat* was using unfair business practices such as free classified ads. As you know, they lost. Just like that; it wasn't even close. I was not in on any of that. It was long after I left. Then, you know, I spent three years diddling around with television and I was still writing for *Business Week*. And I got four half-hour things on PBS. I was kind of proud of myself, but they weren't very good. I was having some fun with it, and I was making a little money. I also did a few commentaries on Channel 11. Marcus wanted me to do that, and they paid me well, and I was still writing the weekly column for the *Democrat*. Starr didn't throw my column out of the paper. I thought for sure he would, but he didn't. Hugh Patterson hired this fellow in from Washington, DC—William McIwain. He had been the editor of the *Washington Star*, the afternoon Washington newspaper, and it had gone down. He was a fine newspaperman. After he brought him up here, Hugh Patterson called me at home one night. He said, "Why don't you come to work for us?" I said, "Well, you know that wouldn't work. Those *Gazette* people over there would throw me out of the building if I walked in there." He said, "Well, you let me worry about that." And I said, "Oh, I don't think so, Hugh, but thank you, that's nice—I'm honored." So he sent McIwain over to talk to me to start an Op-

Ed page, and I was really impressed with him. He had some great ideas, he really did. And so I said, “Yeah, okay.” One of the hardest things I had to do was to walk over and tell Walter that I wasn’t going to write the column anymore because I was going to work for the *Gazette*. But he took it very well—[he was] a gentleman all the way around. He said, “Well, good luck to you. I can sure understand it.” He said, “I don’t have any hard feelings about it.” I thought the *Gazette* was really on the way, because this new editor was really good. But a lot of people at the *Gazette*—I hate to say this about many of my friends—a lot of them didn’t like that guy. They wanted the old paper to stay just like it was. And he was trying to change the newspaper and make it a more modern paper. To be truthful about it, Jerry, a lot of them didn’t like what I came over there to do. I came over there to develop an Op-Ed page, you remember. That’s what they wanted me to do.

JM: They didn't want some different opinions, conservative opinions?

RM: Yes. By this time, almost every metropolitan paper in the country had one of those pages. It wasn’t anything really new [laughs]. Yet, some people up in the *Gazette* tower on the third floor didn’t think much of the idea.

JM: Did Walter ever say to you, at some point, “I just don’t think we’re going to make it.”

RM: Not ever. Not once. He could be very discouraged, but always, at the end of the conversation, it was that the *Democrat* was going to stay here. They spent a lot of money, Jerry.

JM: It seems to me that he had a lot of stops and starts, that he would start to expand the paper at one time and then he'd decide that that wasn't going to work, and then he would try to contract it.

RM: That's right. The thing about the neighborhood editions—that took a lot of money and it took a lot of work, and so he tried that to the very best he could and it didn't work. And there were some other things that he did, too. But he never once said to me that he was going to give up the paper.

JM: And then, at some point in time—and I don't know whether you were still there or not—he got rid of all the unions in the paper.

RM: Every one.

JM: Every one. And he decertified the ITU and got rid of the Pressmen and I guess there was—the engravers had a union, too.

RM: He did, but mostly the same people stayed, but they quit the unions.

JM: Do you remember any details of how Walter accomplished that?

RM: Well, you know, there was no other local place for these guys to go, and, Jerry, they now needed fewer printers and no type-setters because of the computers coming to newspapers. The stereotypers were the toughest because they were still needed.

JM: As I remember, they converted to cold type that you just pasted up rather than the old hot metal you got from Linotypes. In some places, the unions were trying to negotiate the right to operate the computers.

RM: And at some newspapers, they got away with that, but they didn't here.

RM: In the *Gazette* newsroom, wasn't there the start of a union there?

JM: Oh, yes, that was back in the 1940s. That's when Bob Douglas was sort of in charge of the union movement. And, as I recall, they thought that the ITU was going to honor their picket lines and they crossed and it sort of collapsed and a lot of them lost their jobs, including Joe Wirges and Bob Douglas and some other top people. The *Gazette* had an election in their newsroom at the same time the *Democrat* did. It was the Newspaper Guild, I think, trying to organize the *Gazette* and the ITU trying to organize the *Democrat*. I assume that the ITU saw the handwriting on the wall—that this new technology was going to change everything. So they wanted to make some changes, too. You remember that one time that Walter wanted to greatly expand the space in the paper—particularly in the sports department, I think.

RM: And he did it. I guess a lot of that was my fault because, you know, I never was a great believer in these huge sports departments, and I held that off as long as I could, but he said, “No, we're going to do it.” That was a smart thing to do because people around here love to read about the Razorbacks.

JM: You probably were already gone by the time that Starr brought Wally Hall back to the paper and installed him as a sports editor. Weren't you gone by then?

RM: Yes.

JM: You were already gone.

RM: You had once fired him when you were there.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] But, at any rate—well, let me go back and ask a couple of questions. Did Foreman, when he came on, get rid of a lot of the old-time *Democrat* employees? Do you remember, were there any?

RM: I don't think he did. Jack Keady, the sports editor, retired. Foreman brought Fred Morrow in and he did bring some up from Pine Bluff. Then we hired a couple more.

JM: I never have known what happened to Jack Keady. He was a sports editor. Did he just retire?

RM: He just retired.

JM: They brought Fred Morrow in and sort of listed him as the sports director, so I guess technically he was in charge of the department, but Jack still wrote his column for a time.

JM: Okay, Bob, any other changes you can think of that were made at the paper, or maybe that Walter made to try to improve the circulation and everything?

RM: Well, the TV magazine guide in the Sunday paper was a very big improvement and was very popular.

JM: Now then, Bob, now that you've been through all that, do you think the *Democrat* could have ever made it if they had stayed an afternoon newspaper?

RM: I don't think so, Jerry, I don't think anything would have worked. I really believe that. I think it was hopeless. Do you realize that we have lost 300 daily papers in the last twenty years? Most of them have been afternoon papers. A lot of the dailies have consolidated, but that isn't the best in the world. You want your papers independent, not owned by out of town businesses that own dozens of them. But we're going to see more and more of that. Some people who are a lot smarter than I am say that in a few years, there won't be but twenty or thirty daily newspapers in the whole country.

JM: You mean things are going to wind up being people getting their news on the Internet, TV, and the radio?

RM: And the weekly newspapers. Some professors and researchers are saying that small medium size cities will have weeklies and in some cities they will come out twice a week. They say there will always be newspapers, but most of them—ninety percent of them—will be weekly papers. I sure hope they aren't right.

JM: You've kept track of a lot of these things, I believe, through your association with Sigma Delta Chi, now called the Society of Professional Journalists. In 1961, I believe, that you were one of the founders of the first Arkansas chapter—the one in Little Rock.

RM: Yes.

JM: And in 1975 you were elected the national president.

RM: Yes.

JM: You were also instrumental in getting the Freedom of Information Act passed for Arkansas.

RM: There was a lot of activity all over the country to have Freedom of Information laws. Our chapter got some help to write one for Arkansas with the free help of a couple of fine lawyers. We got Representative Leon Holsted of North Little Rock and Senator Ben Allen of Little Rock to introduce the bill to the legislature in 1967, and it passed in both houses and was signed by Governor Winthrop Rockefeller. I had the North Little Rock Times then, and right after the law was passed, North Little Rock Mayor Casey Laman threw my reporter, Ralph Patrick, out of a city hall meeting, and we then went to court. Phil Carroll, who was my

lawyer, took the Freedom of Information to court and won in the circuit court, and when Laman took it to the state Supreme Court, Carroll showed that the law won unanimously. This Arkansas Freedom of Information Law was the first one passed in any Southern State.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

JM: Bob, what do you remember about the newspaper back when you were a kid, or maybe even in college, working in the late 1940s and the early 1950s? What kind of professional ethics did they seem to have?

RM: When I first went to work at the *Democrat*, Jerry, it nearing the end of World War II, and it was lucky to have any kind of men there at all. A couple of them drank way too much, and one of them turned out to be a crook. Some were people who, under ordinary circumstances, you wouldn't have in the newsroom. There were several very old men there—also a few young men whose health kept them out of the army—and most were women. There were places that women couldn't go. I mean, that was all there was to it. And that's why men like me got jobs. But, no, I don't think it was all that different. I've worked with so many people in journalism in nearly fifty years that I have the opinion that very seldom do you ever find anybody in a newsroom who's not a good person.

JM: You had to be somewhat dedicated to work for those—for the pay, particularly back at that time. Do you remember, when you started full-time, what your salary was, at the *Democrat*?

RM: Thirty-two dollars a week.



JM: You weren't getting any overtime, were you?

RM: No! They didn't have any of that [laughs].

JM: And they were still—they were then paying by cash. Once a week.

RM: Yes, you had to stand in line.

JM: Every Friday, stand in line . . .

RM: And get your envelope with the money in it.

JM: I recall that I started in 1951, right out of college, with a journalism degree, for \$45.12 a week.

RM: Indeed?

JM: That was for a full six-day week.

RM: That's about right. Thirty-two—that's not that much different [laughs].

JM: Do you remember John Scudder?

RM: Yes.

JM: What kind of a hand was he?

RM: Well, John knew every politician in the state of Arkansas, and he was a nice guy. He worked hard, had a great conscience, and he really was a good reporter, but he just drank all the time. I made a lot of trips with him as his photographer, his driver, and his helper. I saw the first sub-machine gun I ever saw in my life when the veterans came back to clean up Hot Springs, led by Sid McMath. And they turned out Mayor Leo McLaughlin. I drove him over there, and we pulled up in this parking lot. John was from Hot Springs and he knew every crook over there. He got out of the car at one of the rallies and he said, "Now, you just stay here. When I need you, I'll come back and get you. Just kind of look around, make a

picture if you want to—I'll be back.” So he went to find some of his buddies for his next day story of what McMath’s “GI Revolt” was doing. So I got out and I was wandering around, and I looked at the back seat in this car, and there were four sub-machine guns in the back of the car. And one of the big tall revolvers came over and said, “Who are you?” Thank God I had the camera in my hand, so I said, “I’m the photographer from Little Rock.” He said, “You want to make a picture of this?” I said, “Yeah.” So I got all set, and I had him pull the door back as far as he could. Just then one of McMath’s leaders came up and said, “What the hell are you doing? Get your ass out of here, and you’d better not make a picture of the gun.”

JM: Whose guns were they?

RM: They were ex-GIs, guys back from the service that were trying to break up the Leo McLaughlin gang that was bleeding Hot Springs—Leo McLaughlin was running the town. There was violence in Hot Springs, but, happily, not that day.

JM: Do you remember any other big story you covered in the 1940s?

RM: Well, there were a lot of tornadoes. George Douthit, just back from World War II, was the best reporter in my early days. I mean, he could go and find out what was destroyed and how many were killed in thirty minutes. And George would always be back to get the story in the 11:00 a.m. paper. It was just amazing.

JM: He was fast.

RM: Fast. And he knew somebody everywhere. He knew a way to find out anything. He didn’t write very well, but he was a hell of a good reporter.

JM: Did he later have a falling out with Faubus? You know, he was sort of his Boswell.

RM: I think toward the end, he did.

JM: I remember that some of the reporters I've talked to said that if they were really hard up, city editor Tilden would put you on the circuit to cover all the luncheon clubs, so you would get a free lunch every day.

RM: That's right, yes. One of those reporters was Marvin Balding. That happened. I wish I could remember their names. He said that he had lunch four days a week already worked out. Going to the Kiwanis Club and the Rotary [laughs].

JM: Somebody told me that Tilden told them, "Well, I'll put you on the luncheon club circuit." Marvin used to brag about it. He said, "I get more of these than anybody, and I sure eat well." [Laughs]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Brooke Malloy]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]