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## ***Arkansas Democrat Project***

Interview with

Rex Nelson  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
3 May 2007

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is May 3, 2007. I'm conducting an interview for the Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville] with Rex Nelson. At any rate, the first thing I need to do, Rex—this project, I should say, is on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat* and the [Arkansas] *Democrat-Gazette*. The first thing I need to do, Rex, is ask you if we have your permission to tape this interview and turn it over to the archives of the Pryor Center.

RN: Yes, you have my permission.

JM: Okay. That's great. Okay, Rex, I know that in the course of your career you now are working for the Delta Regional Authority. Before [that] you were the spokesman for Governor Mike Huckabee. And before that I know that you

worked for the *Democrat* for some time, and that was one of your earlier newspaper jobs, I think, so I think we'll just start out from the beginning and get you up to the *Democrat* and then go on from there.

RN: Okay. Well, I began stringing for . . .

JM: Okay. Let me ask you one thing first.

RN: Okay.

JM: Let's start at the beginning. Where were you born and when?

RN: I was born in Arkadelphia in 1959.

JM: Okay.

RN: In Arkadelphia—grew up there, attended the schools there from the first grade all the way through high school and then attended Ouachita [Baptist College, now Ouachita Baptist University] and graduated from Ouachita. So I was in Arkadelphia all the way through college graduation, and when I moved to Little Rock to work for the *Democrat* in December of 1981, it was my first time to live anywhere except Arkadelphia.

JM: Okay. What were your parents' names?

RN: Robert and Carolyn Nelson. My father had a company called Southwest Sporting Goods, which he started and built into the largest supplier of athletic goods to teams in the state.

JM: Yes.

RN: He sold to high schools—colleges all over the state. He and his brother started that company. Dad had met my mother at Ouachita and graduated from there in 1948. His first job was head football coach at Newport High School.

JM: Was he really?

RN: Then [they] moved to Arkadelphia in 1952. My older sister was born in Newport, but I was born in Arkadelphia. So I first went to work in sports because I came from that sports background.

JM: Yes.

RN: Everybody I knew growing up was coach this or coach that because that's what my dad did. He sold to coaches all over the state.

JM: Was he also an official?

RN: Yes, he was.

JM: Yes.

RN: He was a football official, basketball official, and actually was the top track starter in the state.

JM: Okay. He wasn't known as Red Nelson, was he?

RN: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. [Laughter]

JM: Small world. I thought he was—I thought I knew him. [Laughs]

RN: Yes, absolutely.

JM: I remember him.

RN: He was Red.

JM: Yes.

RN: He did, like I said, college and high school football, college and high school basketball, and he did track all over the state.

JM: Yes.

RN: As a kid I used to come with him to Scott Field here in Little Rock every year for

the Meet of Champs.

JM: Okay. How did you get interested in newspapering?

RN: Just as long as I remember—I began collecting newspapers as a young child. In fact, I'm sure my parents' attic in Arkadelphia is—they still live in the house I grew up in. It's probably the biggest fire trap in south Arkansas because it has a lot of my old newspapers still up there. But from when I was a very young child, I was fascinated by newspapers—was fascinated by the whole business. In fact, my mom [would say?] “Be careful what you wish for—it's what you turn into.” My mom has framed a little thing I drew in the first grade where I wrote under it, “I want to be a reporter.” It was, “What do you want to be?”

JM: Oh.

RN: And I had drawn that in the first grade. So I don't know—my family does not have a newspaper background. I don't know how that came about, but ever since I was a young child, I was fascinated by newspapers.

JM: Did you do anything related to newspapering or journalism while you were in high school?

RN: Yes. I was actually the—my senior year in high school I was the editor of my school newspaper, but I had also gone to work during high school as the sports editor of the paper that no longer exists. Arkadelphia had a daily and a weekly, and the weekly there was the *Southern Standard*. I had gone to work for the *Southern Standard*. I was actually hired by Bob Fisher, who—the late Bob Fisher, who a lot of people in the newspaper business knew very well. Bob had owned the Crossett paper [*The Observer*] for many years and had bought the

*Southern Standard*, which was once owned by a guy named Keith [Tudor?] for many years, who was a very strong ally of Governor [Orval] Faubus. But Bob gave me my first newspaper job . . .

JM: Did he really?

RN: . . . and I was the sports editor all the way through high school. So that's who actually got me in the newspaper business.

JM: Okay. Good guy. I worked with Bob at the *Democrat* for a while.

RN: That's what I figured. That's what I figured.

JM: Yes, he wrote editorials there. Okay. So you worked at the—was it the *Southern Standard*?

RN: Yes, *Southern Standard*.

JM: In high school?

RN: All the way through high school. Then the summer between my graduation from high school and starting Ouachita, I was actually hired as the sports editor of the *Daily Siftings Herald*, which was the daily paper—five afternoons a week, Monday through Friday, which is still the publication schedule. At the time, the *Siftings Herald* was one of three newspapers owned by the Freeman family out of Pine Bluff. They owned the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. They owned the *Daily Siftings Herald* in Arkadelphia and the Yazoo City, Mississippi paper.

JM: Okay.

RN: So we were part of the *small* Freeman chain, but I was hired there in the summer of 1978 as their sports editor and served in that position until I finished school in December of 1981.

JM: Did you? Okay. What did you do when you got out of Ouachita?

RN: I came immediately to the *Arkansas Democrat*. I had strung for the *Democrat* a lot, starting with a sports editor named Todd Gurley, and Wally Hall had been hired as sports editor. He had been a columnist before that. And I was actually the third guy that Wally hired after becoming sports editor. The first was Bob Holt, who is still at the *Arkansas Democrat* [laughs] and covers the Razorbacks in Fayetteville.

JM: Yes.

RN: And a guy named Mark Potash from Chicago [Illinois], who's back in Chicago working in the newspaper business now. I think I was the third, but I came on full-time and immediately, among other things, but my main assignment was covering the old Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference, which, obviously, I had grown up with there in Arkadelphia.

JM: Okay. Before we get into that and your work at the *Democrat*, though, you had—you were a stringer while you were at the *Siftings Herald* for both the *Democrat* and the [Arkansas] *Gazette*?

RN: Yes. Yes. Right.

JM: Yes, that probably [ ].

RN: Yes, sports events and that [ ].

JM: Yes.

RN: Yes, I strung . . .

JM: Yes. You were telling me one interesting story . . .

RN: [Laughs]

JM: Tell me that story about . . . [Laughter]

RN: The Class B [high school] state tournament was being played on the Henderson [State University, Arkadelphia] campus, and one of the good things about the Class B tournament is the Little Rock papers usually wouldn't send a staffer because it was the smallest classification, which was great for me because I could make money then.

JM: Yes.

RN: If they sent a staffer down, obviously, they wouldn't need me stringing. So I was stringing for both the *Democrat* and *Gazette*, and I would change up the stories so they would look a little different.

JM: Yes.

RN: Neither one was giving me a byline, which was fine, but there was a great game [laughs] that went into double overtime, and for some strange reason, I guess because it was such a good game, both the *Gazette* and the *Democrat* decided on the same day to give that story very good play and give me a byline. This was after the *Democrat* had moved over to morning publication, and they were suddenly going head to head—early in the newspaper war. So you had “By Rex Nelson, special to the *Gazette*” in the *Gazette*, and you had a byline “By Rex Nelson, special to the *Democrat*” in the *Democrat*. I called in the next day to send my story in, and the famous Jim Bailey answered in the *Gazette* sports department. I said, “Jim, Rex Nelson in Arkadelphia,” and he said, “We got a new byline format for you.” And I said, “What is that?” And he said, “By Rex Nelson, *not* so special to the *Gazette*.” [Laughter]

JM: That sounds like Bailey. At any rate—okay.

RN: So I was doing the *Texarkana Gazette* and the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, you know, and their area teams.

JM: Yes.

RN: Everybody who'd pay me a little bit.

JM: Yes.

RN: I set up shop—and the late Sporty Carpenter, who was at the time the head coach at Henderson—in his office, and that was kind of my little bureau that week of that tournament.

JM: Yes, I knew Sporty. Yes, but at any rate—okay. So then you went—right out of Ouachita, you went to the *Democrat*, and what did you do at the *Democrat*?

RN: I covered the Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference [AIC] during the school, like everybody else.

JM: Yes.

RN: You still had high schools as a possibility.

JM: Yes.

RN: So I also covered high school football. I covered the AIC. And one of the great things that happened, for me at least—I had fallen in love with horseracing and had covered Oaklawn [Race Track in Hot Springs] a lot from Arkadelphia, since it was right down the road, and had really got to know it. Jeff Krupsaw, at the time—who is now back as the number two guy in the sports department at the [Arkansas] *Democrat-Gazette*—but “Krup” was covering the horse races. Jeff took a job right before the race meet started in January of 1982 with the *New*



*Orleans Times-Picayune*, and moved to south Louisiana, and they were left without it. So Wally [Hall] said, “Look, you can cover Oaklawn.” So I actually covered every day of the 1982 live race meet for the *Democrat* and then right at the end of that race meet was when they hired Randy Moss away from the *Gazette*, which was one of the big early defections in the newspaper war.

JM: Yes.

RN: That received a *lot* of publicity. So if you want a weird newspaper trivia question, I was the last Oaklawn correspondent for the *Democrat* before Randy Moss came from the *Gazette* back over to the *Democrat*.

JM: Yes.

RN: But that was a lot of fun. And in the summer, even though I knew nothing about the sport, Wally made me the tennis writer. [Laughs] So I covered tennis in the summer of 1982.

JM: Okay. How long did you stay in sports?

RN: In that stint, I only stayed until the end of 1982 and then was offered the job as editor of the *Siftings Herald*, and went back in January of 1983 to Arkadelphia as editor of the paper. I just thought I wanted to try that. I was the youngest daily newspaper editor in the state, but as luck would have it, I would end up back at the *Democrat* in the summer of 1985 as the assistant sports editor—the number two to Wally in the sports department in 1985.

JM: Okay. On your first stint at the *Democrat* in sports, how was the sports department operated then? What state was it, say, compared to maybe where it had been, and compared to the *Gazette*? Can you fill me in on that?

RN: Oh, yes, yes. [Laughs] We were still in the old second-floor newsroom, which, I'm sure you've got plenty of descriptions in this series of interviews. But it was straight—*still*, even at the end of 1981—was still straight out of the movie, *The Front Page*. I mean, it had broken chairs everywhere. There weren't enough terminals for people to write on. We were actually—you know, even though you were into the 1980s by then, we were actually still writing on electric typewriters—composing on electric typewriters and running them through a scanner at that time.

JM: Yes. IBM [International Business Machines] Selectrics.

RN: Yes, yes, IBM Selectrics. Absolutely.

JM: Yes.

RN: Yes—and would run those through the scanner. In my top right-hand drawer were those old balls to [laughs] put in that IBM Selectric [to change font style and size] and the ribbons to put on that. But, gosh, it was just—I mean, that's what I had *wanted* to do. I had wanted to work in the newspaper business after being editor of a smaller paper and a larger paper, so, you know, I wasn't making much, but it was a dream job to me. It was a lot of fun and there were some—to say the least, still some very, very colorful characters there in those days. And, like I said—this was getting on toward the modern [era], but, boy, it was still the old era because there were a lot of people smoking still [laughs] in the newsroom. They were probably drinking; they were just hiding that a little better. But a lot of smoking, a lot of cussing, a lot of things flying around.

JM: What colorful characters do you remember?

RN: Well, over in sports, my favorite at the time was a guy who was an outdoor writer named [Carl Christ?]. [Carl?] worked in sports at the *Democrat*. He also was the editor of *The Arkansas Catholic*. I think it was called *The Guardian* at the time. It's now known as *The Arkansas Catholic*, which was a strange combination because [Carl?] was a really interesting character—said he had played football for Bear Bryant at [the University of] Kentucky, and [I] had no reason to doubt that. Because he was a strong Catholic, we always assigned him to the Catholic High [School] football games—loved Catholic High and rooted for the other Catholic schools. I remember he was a huge Georgetown [University] fan during basketball season. But because I hunted and fished, more than once [Carl?] would be without a Sunday column and [would] tell me on a Friday night, “Look, meet me at 8:00 in the morning. We’re going to go squirrel hunting for a couple hours before we come in to work,” just so he could have a column. So it would be me and “friend Rex and dog Reggie,” he would refer to. Reggie was his squirrel dog. I still remember the name. And “friend Rex”—and knock out his Sunday column. But [Carl?] was really one of those old-style newspaper people. He’s one that I particularly remember that was there in the sports department at the time.

JM: Okay. Who else in the sports department from that era do you remember?

RN: Well, I had moved over—because he had been covering the AIC, and I moved over—and I think he moved over to UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock]—a guy named Sam Krebs. I remember Sam used to wear a trench coat around a lot. [Laughs] That was one way you could identify him. Another guy

that came soon after I got there came out of Texas and is still working at the *Morning News* in Northwest Arkansas in sports—a guy name Jerry Reed. The desks kind of backed up against each other, and Jerry and I had desks right across from each other.

JM: Yes.

RN: So he was writing sports there at the time also. Wally was the sports editor and columnist. Bob Holt was covering the Razorbacks, which he's still doing. Of course, they've got a number of people now in Northwest Arkansas. Bob, at the time, was *the* only one up there.

JM: Yes.

RN: And he was covering them. Jeff Krupsaw was there when I got there and then left, as I said, so that's how I ended up getting to cover Oaklawn. But one of the really [laughs] interesting things about the way that newsroom was configured—Walter Hussman [Jr.] had soon before that started what is still a staple of the *Democrat-Gazette*, and that is the Sunday “High Profile” section. Of course, you had Phyllis Brandon, who was from a well-known Little Rock family and covered the society and all.

JM: Yes.

RN: But her little area was right next to the sports department, and I—you know, we were kind of the animals, and she looked at us like animals [laughs] because we were loud and boisterous. I remember people used to get soft drinks and, like, Ices from some of the soft food places, and there was a big, high trash can, and they would throw at that trash can and often miss, and it was right by Phyllis's

section. And there'd be stains all over that wall.

JM: [Laughs]

RN: And Phyllis would put up signs on that wall that said, "Please clean." [Laughs]  
She would come in in the morning [and often would?] be gone when a lot of  
would come in to work nights, and there would be one of Phyllis's signs asking us  
to please clean that area. There was nothing clean about that newsroom at all, I  
can assure you. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

RN: But Phyllis was doing her best.

JM: How competitive were you with the *Gazette* at that time?

RN: *Incredibly* competitive, and I think that's what made it fun. It made it nerve-  
wracking, too, but Friday night football would be my favorite because we were in  
a war with the *Gazette* to see who could get the most scores in the paper. If we  
had certain schools that didn't come in, we had an Arkansas Activities  
Association directory, which, luckily, back then had home numbers for [school]  
superintendents. And, you know, you wake a few superintendents at about 1:00  
in the morning, and they'll get their coaches calling or somebody calling in the  
scores from then on. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

RN: So we'd be racing deadlines and then we would actually drive over to the *Gazette*  
printing press on the other side of Interstate 30—the first box that any *Gazettes*  
went in was right outside there on the street.

JM: Yes.

RN: They would put papers in that box, and we would stay up and we would buy a *Gazette* and then go back and count how many scores they had compared to how many scores we had.

JM: Yes.

RN: And if we had 107 and they had 103, it was a reason to celebrate. And people tended to sit in the parking lot right across the street. It was then the Metro Center Mall. It was closed off at that point. So Capital Street was closed right there until it hit Scott [Street].

JM: Yes.

RN: We would sit across there in what, at the time, was the Stephens Incorporated parking lot, next to the Stephens building. Everybody would sit in the back of cars and in the back of pickup trucks and drink beer for a while in the parking lot, actually, [laughs] and then go home at maybe 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

JM: Yes. [Laughter]

RN: The Friday night football [games] were where the competition, really—but, I mean, there was—it was really heating up at that point.

JM: Yes.

RN: I think we had that attitude, whether it was true or not, that the *Gazette* people really looked down on us that we were blue collar still, even though we had moved to a morning publication. So we kind of took that old Avis [advertising slogan], “We’re number two. We try harder.”

JM: Yes.

RN: In fact, one of my *favorite* memories is I was covering the country club at Little

Rock four ball and was out there under the tent getting scores off the wall. Nancy Clark was covering that same event for the *Arkansas Gazette*, and Hugh Patterson came rolling out of the country club and [laughs] obviously thought I was the *Gazette* correspondent because he saw a guy who was obviously a reporter—had a reporter’s notebook [and was] taking down scores [laughs] and came—Hugh had that Shakespearean delivery in his voice. He said, “Young man, I want you to know you’re doing a *wonderful* job—just *wonderful*.” [Laughter] And I thought Nancy was going to fall over; she was so mad. [Laughter] But I said, “Thank you very much, Mr. Patterson.” I was pleased to get the compliment from the *Gazette* publisher [laughter] that he thought I was doing a wonderful job.

JM: [Laughs] Okay. So before—okay, getting up to that—in earlier years, how competitive had the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* been in sports—say, before they got up . . . ?

RN: Yes. Well, obviously . . .

JM: You would’ve been seeing it from Arkadelphia . . .

RN: Yes, as stringing. Obviously, that competition was not the same much of the week when the *Democrat* was an afternoon newspaper. You’d have it on Sunday when they both came out in the mornings for Saturday football games. But the *Gazette* was *such* a dominant paper for much of that time that it just—you know, the *Democrat* had to look for different angles in sports, especially . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: . . . where you had night events and people had already gotten the score and gotten the details of the game in the morning *Gazette*, so the afternoon *Democrat*,

if anything, had to go to a little more analysis. I had become—I actually subscribed in my dorm room. They cut some kind of deal to the *Democrat* at Ouachita when I was a college student. I became a big fan of the *Democrat* just because of the quality of some of their writers. I was a Fred Morrow fan. I was a Jim Lassiter fan as a young guy who loved newspapers and really enjoyed the sports columnists and some of the more off-beat stuff that the *Democrat* had. But if I grew up wanting to be anybody in the newspaper business, though—you know, probably a lot of aspiring sportswriters would tell you they—you know, growing up in Arkansas, they may have wanted to be Orville Henry.

JM: Yes.

RN: I actually grew up wanting to be Jim Bailey because Jim covered the AIC, which was my bread and butter growing up in Arkadelphia, going to Ouachita and Henderson games. And when you'd see Jim roll into the gym or roll into the stadium, you knew it was a big game because Jim was there to cover it.

JM: Yes.

RN: So I kind of grew up wanting to be like Bailey. That's who I'd *really* grown up reading a lot in sports.

JM: Yes, good man to read. But, at any rate, you—so by 1981 I suspect that the *Democrat* had really gotten into the war. Were they already hiring a lot of people?

RN: Oh, yes. Yes, they were hiring a lot of people.

JM: And more space for . . .

RN: Oh, yes, [they] had a *huge* news hole. That was the great thing about it, because



I've never learned to write tight, although I should have [laughs] a long time ago, Jerry. Yes, I was always wordy. I told somebody, "I can't necessarily write well, but I can write a lot *fast*." [Laughter]

JM: Yes.

RN: And that's what the *Democrat* was wanting in those days.

JM: That counts sometimes.

RN: Yes. So I could flat turn them out. And we had that great news hole, so that was any writer's *dream*, you know?

JM: Yes.

RN: They weren't cutting you way back, because you had a lot of room. You'd write twenty-five inches on a high school football game, and they'd get it all in.

JM: At that point, had you gone to having the huge Sunday sections?

RN: Yes. They had added a *lot* of pages. Like I said, I would write—now, when I was covering the AIC—and the great thing about the seven football-playing schools in the old AIC is that they were so close together. Most Saturdays I would actually cover two games. I'd cover an afternoon game, dictate it on the phone right quick, jump in the car and drive from Magnolia to Arkadelphia or from Arkadelphia to Conway or whatever.

JM: Yes.

RN: And would actually *staff* two different games myself. Like I said, you could write twenty-five or thirty inches, and they'd get it all in.

JM: Yes.

RN: From that standpoint as a writer, it was really—with the newspaper war taking off

and Walter Hussman devoting a really large amount of room, it was a great time to be down there.

JM: He was really pushing sports at that time.

RN: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. He knew sports readership was important and, you know, I think—I mentioned the hiring of Moss right after the Arkansas Derby in 1982, and I think that sent a real strong signal—“Man, these people are *serious*. The *Democrat* is for *real*.” Randy’s a great writer—great handicapper—but I think the perception was as much as anything. And then the—of course, when Orville left a few years after that [laughs] to write a column for the *Democrat*, I think people said, “Boy, that’s—it’s all changed.”

JM: They hired Randy away from the *Gazette*.

RN: Yes.

JM: And at that time I think that Oaklawn [Race Track] may have been pretty much at its heyday anyway.

RN: Yes, absolutely—huge crowds.

JM: Big crowds. Yes.

RN: That was the golden era right there.

JM: And I know that they used to say that the circulation increased quite a bit when Oaklawn’s season started.

RN: Yes, Randy sold papers. Absolutely. Because people wanted to get his picks and . . .

JM: Did you ever hear how much Walter paid Randy to come over?

RN: I didn’t. I didn’t.

JM: I think I heard . . .

RN: And they weren't going to let any of the rest of us in sports know—we were making so little. [Laughs]

JM: I heard, but I don't remember now what it was.

RN: Yes. But that was the first really *name* defection, you know?

JM: I think maybe he gave him a big bonus, too, but I'm not sure.

RN: Yes. Yes.

JM: But at any rate—okay, so then you went back to the *Siftings Herald* for a couple of years or . . .

RN: As editor, right, for a little while.

JM: Yes, okay.

RN: Then [I] came back. Wally said, “Look, I need an assistant sports editor. Come on back,” so I was mainly in that position an administrator. Wally was out writing game stories. He still did some games' stories himself in addition to columns and writing columns, so I pretty much was administering the sports department in 1985 and 1986 still. I told him I wanted to write a little bit, so one thing—he knew I really enjoyed the Dallas [Texas] Cowboys [professional football team] and the NFL [National Football League], so I actually staffed all the Dallas Cowboys home games.

JM: Oh, did you? Yes, okay.

RN: Wally did allow that. Yes. I staffed the Cowboys in the fall of 1985 for the *Democrat*.

JM: Okay. So when was it you came back from the *Siftings Herald*?

RN: I came back to the *Democrat* in the summer of 1985.

JM: Okay. All right.

RN: And in the summer of 1986—after a year of that—Bob [John Robert] Starr sent me to Washington [DC], and I made the sports-to-politics shift, and have kind of been in the political news side or political work [ ] actual politicians ever since. I never got back to sports.

JM: When you got back in 1985, how was the competition between the *Democrat* and *Gazette*?

RN: It had tightened up. I mean, there was still a *big* gap when I was there in 1981 and 1982. By 1985 the *Democrat* had started to pretty seriously close the gap—still in the old second floor newsroom, but the equipment had gotten a little better. The travel budget had gotten a little better. And you felt by then, just in those few years that I'd been gone, that you were suddenly on a little more of an even playing field.

JM: Okay. Did you have more computer terminals and stuff like that?

RN: Yes, a few more. Still not—[laughs] I mean, we were still waiting in line . . .

JM: Not a whole lot.

RN: Yes, we were still *bad* from an equipment standpoint compared to the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes, I suspect there was always a little bit of a struggle through that time, getting the paper out and . . .

RN: Absolutely, and we still considered ourselves—again, the blue collar, number two—“We try harder.” I think that's part of what we used to drive our staff.

Once I became assistant sports editor and I was kind of administering the

department—I mean, that’s part of what I used to fire up the staff, and we were still going down and buying that first *Gazette* on Friday nights, you know, out of the [newspaper sales] box to count those football scores. Very intense competition.

JM: Were you into the—at what point did the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*, I guess, get in the mode of trying to decide who could send the most people to cover things?

RN: Oh, yes, flooding the zone. That had started by then. I mean, we sent a huge number of people. I remember when I was assistant sports editor in 1985, Arkansas played in the Holiday Bowl—the Razorbacks—in San Diego [California]. Big expense because it’s a long way, and San Diego’s not a cheap trip. And I remember—gosh, it seems like we sent half the staff to San Diego.

JM: Yes. You don’t remember how many you actually sent, do you?

RN: No, I don’t. It got even bigger the next year when Arkansas played [the University of] Oklahoma [Sooners] in the Orange Bowl. Now, that wasn’t the famous one where they won. This was when they got blown out at the end of the 1986 season—January first of 1987. I was already in Washington at the time, but Wally called me in Washington. Congress was out of session anyway, which was what I was covering by then. He said, “Look, Walter wants to print a special section *every day*.” And, again, back to my old line, he basically need somebody would could write a lot *fast*.

JM: Yes.

RN: He said, “I’m going to need some *help* down here.” I said, “Look, if the paper wants to pay my way to Miami [Florida] for a week during the middle of winter—

get out of Washington and this snow up here—that sounds great.” So I actually—we had a special section every day leading up to that game and then had eight open pages the day after the game, and that was a night game. So a lot of those we had to put together in advance features and so forth.

JM: Yes.

RN: But it had an eight-page, wide-open section on the Orange Bowl, actually, on January first of 1987.

JM: Did both papers tout or advertise, “We had more people covering this big game”?

RN: Yes, yes, Razorback coverage. That was, you know, part of the bread and butter. But just the overall sports—I mean, we were staffing a lot of the AIC staff.

JM: Yes.

RN: We were staffing Arkansas State [University, Jonesboro], you know? And like I said, the sports section was *huge* in those days.

JM: It was actually bigger than the *Gazette*’s sports section, I guess.

RN: Yes, it was. It was. And the *Gazette*’s sports section—even compared to other similar-sized markets across the country, it was *big*. But we were bigger. Yes. You know, an average weekday even, the *Gazette*’s sport section might have eight pages and we might have twelve on a Wednesday or a Thursday.

JM: Yes. I remember, and maybe—I was in Oklahoma City [Oklahoma] at that time, but I remember hearing. And I think maybe I saw a paper or two—there was this period in time when on Sunday it looked like the *Democrat* was taking every story that moved on the AP [Associated Press] wire—a football story—and running the full story. You might see a . . .

RN: Oh, absolutely. You'd see . . .

JM: You might see a fifteen-inch story on Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] and Harvard [University, Cambridge, Massachusetts].

RN: You are absolutely right. If you loved college football, that was the paper you wanted to pick up because—right—we had so many pages. You know, we would have eighteen or twenty pages, and a lot of them were wide open with no ads on them.

JM: Yes.

RN: On a Sunday—you are absolutely right. You would pick up the Holy Cross [College, Notre Dame, Indiana?] game—you know, run a sixteen-inch story on it.

JM: Yes. Yes.

RN: And [a box?]. [Laughs]

JM: Yes. Amazing. I remember the time all there was room for was the score.  
[Laughter]

RN: Exactly. It was all [running? writing?].

JM: Yes.

RN: Which, again, was great for writers. Now, by that point—1985, 1986—[during the] 1985 football season, I was assistant sports editor, so by then I wasn't actually getting to go out and cover games. I was in the newsroom acting the air traffic controller on Saturday, making sure everything got in.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Now, Rex, tell me about how you made the switch from covering sports to politics.

RN: Very reluctantly, but anyone who knows Bob Starr knows you didn't say no to *him*.

JM: Yes.

RN: The story on that was when I came back, Wally said, "Look, now. You worked for me only for about a year and then you left me to be out editor at Arkadelphia. If you come back, I need you to stay a few years." And I said, "Fine." I was *loving* being assistant sports editor, and, like I said, I had covered—Wally was letting me write some, so it wasn't all administrative. I had covered the Super Bowl that year. I had been to the Super Bowl down in New Orleans [Louisiana]. I was really having a good time, and I saw that the Washington [DC] correspondent's job had come open, but I really had no interest. And I still remember—I had an apartment and was asleep late on a Monday morning because, of course, weekends were your big time in sports. I used Mondays and Tuesdays as my off days and would stay even after we got the Sunday paper out. That's when I'd really wrap everything up and typically would stay and be the last one to leave and get everything wrapped up since I was going to be off the next two days. Typically, I would leave the newspaper at about 2:00 a.m. on a Monday morning and go home.

JM: Yes.

RN: I would go on to bed at about 3:00. I was still asleep, and I remember the phone ringing. I answered it, and he said, "Bob Starr." Boy, *that* would wake you up if you worked at the *Democrat* in those days. I thought, "Oh, man, what did we screw up if he's calling me at home?" I said, "Yes, sir." I can remember this



conversation pretty vividly. And he said, “Why haven’t you applied for that Washington job?” And I said, “Because I’m not *interested*.” He said, “Why not?” And I said, “Well, I’m enjoying what I’m doing. I told Wally I would stay for a few years.” And he says, “Well, Wally works for *me*. Wally’s going to do whatever I *tell* him to do, and I’ve already decided you’re the one I want going to Washington. That’s an important beat, and I like the work you do. Now, you—we have to kind of play the game because we’ve got some other people interested, so I need you to apply. We’ve got a few people in the newsroom that’ll interview you, but I’ve already decided you’re the one going.” Basically, [he] gave me no choice. It ended up being the greatest thing that ever happened because I met my wife when I was living there and made a world of contacts and have kind of been in the political realm ever since. Now I’m a presidential appointee [note: what was he appointed to?] and I go to Washington a lot. But I ended up living there and covering Washington for the *Democrat* from the summer of 1986 until basically the end of 1989.

JM: Okay. And how did that go? Tell me . . .

RN: Oh, it was an interesting experience. My first year up there I was scared to death. My second year I started to feel I knew what I was doing. The third year I felt I was really at the top of my game, and by the time I was getting into the fourth year, it was almost a little boring because you were covering—you know, “Now, didn’t I just do this? No, that was the appropriation a year ago. I’m having to do a story again.” But it was a great experience. I was a one-man bureau.

JM: Okay.

RN: You know, you could sign your letters, “Washington Bureau Chief,” and it looked real impressive. They didn’t know you also emptied the trash and . . .

JM: [Laughs]

RN: I worked out of where I lived. The *Democrat* subsidized my rent to work out of where I lived, so I had an old basement of one of those old Capital Hill townhouses—rented.

JM: Yes.

RN: I had my bedroom in one room and basically the *Democrat* bureau—my office—in the other. And still we weren’t at the technological heights. Of course, I thought that was high technology at the time, but—for four years almost I typed off of nothing but one of those little Texas Instruments—“trash eighties,” we called them. They had—you only see about five lines on the screen. And that thing had so little memory. There were days when I was doing enough stories that I would have to kill an earlier story after I knew it was in just to write another one.

JM: Yes.

RN: But the paper, again, was *huge* at that point, and they—Starr wanted a story on everything that moved. So I have had—I don’t know if I ever had more—I know, Jerry, during that Washington period there was more than one day when I’ve had six bylines in the paper up there.

JM: Oh. What sort of things were you covering?

RN: Anything to do with Arkansas—basically, the Arkansas congressional delegation at the time. Senator [Dale] Bumpers and Senator [David] Pryor were our two

senators. Bill Alexander represented the first district.

JM: Yes.

RN: Tommy Robinson represented the second district. John Paul Hammerschmidt represented the third district. And Beryl Anthony, Jr., represented the fourth district. So you covered those men. Steve Clark was the attorney general at that time. I covered some oral arguments on Arkansas cases that came before the Supreme Court. In 1987—we first thought Dale Bumpers was going to run for president in 1988, and they sent me all up and down the East Coast to cover Senator Bumpers. Then we thought Governor [Bill] Clinton was going to run in 1988 . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: Four years before he actually ran, and they sent me all up and down covering Clinton every time he was there, and Clinton was there all the time in those years. So I covered any time Clinton came to the area—anything, basically, to do with Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

RN: And there were some weird assignments that came with it. One of the things that was kind of interesting—every year, because it was a big deal, as it is in a lot of southern states, I would go to Atlantic City and cover the Miss America Pageant. I did that for several straight years.

JM: Oh.

RN: Which was kind of fun. I covered Arkansas State [University] against Delaware in the Division I-AA football playoffs one fall when Larry Lacey was the

coach at Arkansas State—again, just because I was close. So it was really great because you'd only got there—so you got to cover a mix of everything. In fact, I don't think I did a story, but my old contacts from the Cowboys got me a press pass, and I actually covered [Dallas Cowboys head football coach] Tom Landry's last victory, as it turned out.

JM: Is that right?

RN: Because his last victory ever was over Washington Redskins at RFK [Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy Stadium], which was walking distance from my house.

JM: Oh.

RN: I actually walked down and was in the Cowboys dressing room talking to Tom Landry. So I *can* say I was at Tom Landry's last victory.

JM: I take it that Walter's sister, Gail, was not still up there?

RN: No, Gail was still living in the area but was no longer with the newspaper.

JM: She wasn't stringing or anything.

RN: But she was very—she was very well remembered. Often I would introduce myself as being from the *Arkansas Democrat*, and they'd say, "Oh, Gail Arnold's paper," and I'd say, "It *used* to be."

JM: [Laughs] Yes. Okay. Any particular stories you remember dealing with any of the Arkansas officials?

RN: Oh, a bunch of them. Of course, Tommy Robinson, you know—there would be days [laughs] when—Tommy, of course, just loved to see himself in the paper. I'd go into his office—I had a good working relationship, fortunately, with all the congressional delegation—and I'd go back in Tommy's office, and Tommy'd say,

“Let’s make some *news*.” And I’d say, “Congressman, I’m not allowed to *make* any news, I can only *report* it. You can *make* news.” And sometimes he would think of something outlandish to say [laughs] and I would turn it into a story. He would decide he was going to make a little news and attack somebody or whatever. And we would turn [it] into a story. But when I first went up there, the *Gazette* had a veteran correspondent named Carol Matlack, who left while I was up there to go to work for the *National Journal*. But I was really, *really* nervous because Carol had been up there. I was coming out of sports, so I really felt lost, and yet—you know, the newspaper war had heated up by then. You did not want to get beat on a story. One of the great things that happened to me happened because Arkansas—again, such a small state—like the old saying goes, “We’re all kin to each other and know each other.” But the big story in 1986 was the Tax Reform Act of 1986.

JM: Yes.

RN: And Wilbur Mills was no longer in Congress, but obviously, having been chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee all those years, [he] knew more about tax law because he has *written* more of it than anybody alive, and was working at a K Street law firm. So I called and got an appointment to go see Mr. Mills. I remember he had a wooden cutout on his desk that said, “Mr. Chairman” on it. So I referred to him as Mr. Chairman. He was cordial, but not overly—oh, not overly friendly, just very professional.

JM: Yes.

RN: Then I happened to say to him—I said, “Mr. Mills, I think you knew my late

grandfather.” My grandfather on my mother’s side had been county judge and basically had held every other elected position in Prairie County at one time or another. Mr. Mills was from White County. He had been a county judge when my grandfather was a county judge. They were adjoining counties—White and Prairie Counties. He said, “Who’s your grandfather?” And I said, “He was W. J. [Caskey?] of Des Arc. Mr. Mills’ eyes lit up, and he said, “Son, if it had not been for the votes that Will [Caskey?] delivered me over in Prairie County, I wouldn’t have been elected to Congress the first time.” And, Jerry, you would’ve thought I was a grandson after that.

JM: Yes.

RN: Any time I called him, he would help me. They would put me right through. And he was more help that first year in any story I did about the Tax Reform Act.

JM: Yes.

RN: And usually he did not want to be quoted by name, only background. People only knew that my background source was a man who knew more about tax law than anybody in America—Wilbur Mills.

JM: You had a pretty good source. Yes, you did.

RN: Yes, that was my background source during that whole first year. So Mr. Mills really helped me out, and it was because he had been a friend of my grandfather’s.

JM: Yes, that’s great. Yes. How did you get along with Senators Bumpers and Pryor?

RN: Very good. If anything, I had gotten to be friends with some of their staffs. If anything, I almost felt you don’t want to get too close to your sources . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: . . . and the people I have to cover. When I left I felt that I had, if anything, become maybe a little too close to them. I just thought the world—and still do—of both of them as individuals. In fact, I remember—I don't want to get ahead of the chronology, but I remember when I was hired as political editor in 1992—I remember Griffin Smith saying, "Well, you're kind of identified as a Republican," because between stints [at the *Democrat*] I had worked for Judy Petty when she ran as a Republican for Congress in 1984. I had worked for Tommy Robinson when he ran for governor in 1990, and this was a mostly Democratic state. He said, "How do you think you'll get along with all these Democrats?" And I told him at the time—I said, "Griffin, you did not ask me to list any references, but if you want two, I'll give you David Pryor and Dale Bumpers because I think they both trusted me—knew I'd been fair to them—done a good job." So they were—actually, both senators were a delight to work . . .

JM: Who were their people that you worked with—their staffers?

RN: Well, their press secretaries changed some. Ann Pride was doing Pryor's when I got there and then Damon Thompson took over. And it's interesting because Damon had been the guy I had replaced as Washington correspondent. When Damon left—he had gone to work for the *Washington Times*—for the Moonies, as I'd always kid him . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: . . . and had left the *Times* after a while and gone to work for Senator Pryor as press secretary, so I worked closely with him. Senator Bumpers went through several people. He had a guy named Matt James, who was his press secretary.

Matt would later go on to become the top staff aid to Congressman Mo [Morris] Udall and also would be press secretary to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan out of New York.

JM: Yes.

RN: Later, Senator Bumpers' press secretary was named Melissa Scoffield. Melissa [and] I recently met up in Washington. She is now the vice president for communications of the Brookings Institute, which is one of the best-known think tanks in Washington.

JM: Yes.

RN: So they ended up doing very, very well.

JM: Who was covering for the *Gazette* at the time you were up there? Do you remember?

RN: Well, Carol Matlack at first and then Carol was replaced by Maria Henson, who had started at the *Democrat* and then [went] over to the *Gazette* and covered the state capitol.

JM: I've heard of her. I didn't know her.

RN: Yes. Maria would later go on to win a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing at the *Lexington* [Kentucky] *Herald Leader*.

JM: Oh, okay.

RN: So Maria's a—I believe she's in Sacramento, California, now, but she's a Pulitzer Prize winner.

JM: Oh.

RN: She came up for the *Gazette*. In fact, a funny story about that—Maria came up in



1987. I had been up there since 1986. She had covered the entire 1987 legislative session, and I had really—other than looking at a story in the paper when it would come to me occasionally—not even paid any attention because I was covering Congress. And Bill Clinton—this was when we [were] chasing him all up and down the East Coast, thinking he was going to run for president in 1988, [and he] was speaking to the annual banquet of the Boston [Massachusetts] Chamber of Commerce. So the *Gazette* flew Maria from Washington to Boston. The *Democrat* flew me from Washington to Boston, and we were at the Copley Plaza Hotel. Clinton came in, and Maria and I both went over there to visit with him. Clinton started talking about, “Boy, we’ve had this change, that change. I’m really going to have to call a special session of the Legislature. We’re going to start this special session on Monday,” and all—and I was not even taking good notes. I figured Maria—I saw her writing furiously, and I figured she was taking good notes just because she was kind of interested in it. Clinton had surely held a news conference. He wouldn’t call a special session standing in the lobby of the hotel in Boston—that he’d had a news conference in Little Rock or done it the day before, and I just hadn’t heard about it. But I noticed Maria was moving pretty fast to the phone when she left. So [I thought], “Well, I better call and check.” I called the newsroom, and I said, “Did y’all [you all] have everything you needed on that Legislative special session?” And they said, “*What* special session?” [Laughs] And I said, “Oh, no, you’re *kidding*.” And they said, “We know nothing about a special session.” I said, “I cannot believe Bill Clinton just called a special session talking to just the two of us.” They said, “That’s going to

be the lead story on the front page of the *Gazette* tomorrow. You've got to get more." I said, "I didn't take any *notes!*" Bruce Lindsey was traveling with Clinton that day. I found out what suite Governor Clinton was in and went up and knocked, and Bruce came to the door. I said, "Bruce, I apologize. I thought this was old news." He said, "No, he kind of sprang it. I didn't know this was coming either." I said, "I know he's getting ready for his big speech tonight, but would the governor give me a few minutes?" Bruce was nice enough to go back and ask him and invited me on into the suite they were staying in. So, fortunately, I was able to sit down with Governor Clinton and visit for a few minutes. I had my byline. At least somebody else didn't have to do it on the lead story next day, that Bill Clinton had called a special session while standing in the lobby of a hotel in Boston.

JM: [Laughs] Yes. So you stayed in that position until sometime in 1989?

RN: Yes, in late 1989 I was getting married. I got married on October 14, 1989. I was about to get married and had decided, "You know, boy, I'd really like to come back to Arkansas." My wife is from south Texas originally. She was living in Washington at the time, but she was, I think, ready to get back to this part of the country, too, even though her mom was living up there by then. I had talked to Mr. Starr, and he really had not offered me anything back in Little Rock that interested me. And Tommy Robinson, by that time—I had covered the news conference at the White House with President Bush forty-one [reference to President George H. W. Bush, the forty-first president of the United States] when Robinson switched from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party—in fact,

had broken the story that morning. They had given us a scoop on that. The *Gazette* ended up getting a little bit. I thought we had it entirely, and that's another story, too. [Laughs] But anyway, I had not thought about doing that, and a friend of mine named J. J. Vigneault, who was a Republican political consultant, called and said, "Look would you like to go to work for Tommy?" I said, "Gosh, that's a job nobody would want to do." And he said, "Would you go visit with me at Lee Atwater's office?" Lee Atwater was then chairman of the Republican National Committee, and [J.J. said that] it [had] to be all off the record. And I said, "Well, I'll do that." So we met with Atwater and then they flew me to Little Rock the next day because Tommy's campaign basically was a subsidiary of Stephens, Incorporated that year. I met with Mr. Jack Stephens in his office, and that was pretty heavy stuff for a kid still in his twenties from Arkadelphia—you know, in Lee Atwater's office one day and Jack Stephens's the next. I decided it would be quite an adventure, so I left the paper at the end of 1989—or in the fall of 1989—to go to work for Tommy Robinson's gubernatorial campaign, which we thought he would survive—you know, easily win the primary, and then it would be against Bill Clinton. But Sheffield Nelson decided to run as a Republican, and Sheffield knocked him off in the primaries. So it did not last even through the primary. I had told Tommy to try to keep his Congressional office on—I'd move over to the government side and stay on. So I actually stayed on with him until the day he left Congress. In fact, J. J. Vigneault [went out?]  
—you hear them locking the doors. We were the guys who literally locked the doors a week before Christmas at the end of 1990. Tommy didn't even go to

Washington. We went up and cleaned out . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: This is Jerry McConnell here again with Rex Nelson. This is side two of this tape. You were just saying, Rex, when we finished the other tape, that you and Vigneault went up and locked the doors on Tommy Robinson's office in Washington.

RN: Yes. That was the end of 1990. He had run for governor, so Ray Thornton had picked up that congressional seat. My job was coming to an end. I *really* didn't want to go back to Washington, but I thought, having worked for Tommy, and that it had been such a high-profile race, that I'd be a bit radioactive, and the *Democrat* wouldn't hire me at that point or the *Gazette* wouldn't. And I was right about that. So I interviewed in Washington, and I was actually offered two jobs: one with the American Farm Bureau Federation and another with the National Beer Wholesalers Association [laughs]. All my friends hated me. They said, "Man, you could've gotten us *free beer* if you'd have taken that," as their communications [ ]. But I wanted to stay here in Little Rock, and as luck would have it, I was offered the job as editor of *Arkansas Business*. It was kind of interesting because, at the time, Alan Leverett was running *Arkansas Business* in addition to the *Arkansas Times*. They were just starting the plans—really hadn't—the *Times* was still a monthly magazine—to take it weekly. And what was interesting about it—Alan had really led the fight against Tommy Robinson.

Alan was the guy who had printed the bumper stickers that said, "In your gut you

know he's nuts." So to hire Tommy Robinson's communications director to edit one of his publications was kind of interesting, but Alan's an interesting guy. That's why I enjoy him and he's willing to take a chance. [He] knew that the *Arkansas Business* publication appealed to more conservative businessmen, and it might not be bad having somebody who had worked for a Republican mayor. So I moved over to *Arkansas Business* in January of 1991.

JM: Okay. Now, let me go back just a minute. Tommy ran against Sheffield Nelson . . .

RN: Sheffield Nelson in the primary.

JM: . . . in the primary—the Republican primary.

RN: Nelson won the Republican primary in May of 1990—hugely publicized race. You had the ARKLA [Arkansas/Louisiana Gas Company, which sold natural] gas issue—it was basically the Stephens family against Nelson.

JM: Yes. That's what I was going to say. He was not a big fan of the Stephenses anymore by that time.

RN: No, and vice versa. You know, they had a falling out over ARKLA, and it was a blood feud. Sheffield won that and then lost to Bill Clinton in November in the general election in 1990.

JM: Yes. And Ray Thornton won the . . .

RN: The congressional seat.

JM: . . . congressional seat.

RN: He, of course, had previously been the Fourth District congressman from south Arkansas. [He ran] for the Senate in 1978, when you had that huge race with your

sitting governor, David Pryor, and two of your four House members, Jim Guy Tucker from the Second District and Ray Thornton from the Fourth District. And Ray finished third in the Democratic primary and had gotten out of politics. He had come to Arkadelphia, in fact, where I was at the time, to head up something called the Joint Educational Consortium between Ouachita and Henderson, and, of course, would later be president of Arkansas State [University] and president of the University of Arkansas system.

JM: Yes.

RN: But went back to Congress that year, filling Tommy's old seat.

JM: Okay. So how was it working for Tommy during that campaign?

RN: Oh, it was a mile a minute. I mean, for an old newspaper guy, what made it interesting is you had this really interesting character in Robinson, but to be inside the Stephens organization—I mean, there were—you know, it had always been so much—it was almost like the *Wizard of Oz*, you know—you'd sit over there at the *Democrat* and see that building across the street and say, "What goes on behind those curtains over there?" And to get to work behind the curtains—Jack's then-wife, Mary Anne, who's now married to Don Shula . . .

JM: Don Shula.

RN: . . . the [former coach of the] Miami Dolphins [professional football team]. Mary Anne was the chairman of the campaign, and we actually flew to different events on Stephens' corporate jets and would have many of our meetings in the guesthouse behind Mr. Stephens' home over on Palisades in the Heights [reference to Pulaski Heights, an area of Little Rock]. So it was a great

opportunity to really get to know the people around that operation. I got to know Mr. Witt [Stephens] a little. I got to know Mr. Jack [Stephens] a lot better. Even though we lost, I'm certainly glad I did it because it was really a great opportunity to get to know Jack Stephens, who I really thought the world of.

JM: Yes. Okay. So after Tommy lost the race and then didn't go back to Washington, you went to work for *Arkansas Business*.

RN: *Arkansas Business* at that time.

JM: And how long did you do that?

RN: I was there from the start of 1991 until midway through 1992, and, again, was very happy—not looking to go anywhere. We had actually won “Best Business Publication” in the country for any market of a million or less—had gone to Washington—had won a bunch of awards. I mean, we—I really felt we were at the top of our game and was really—it's still one of the highlights of my entire career to have won that when I was editor. So I wasn't looking to leave. The *Gazette*, of course, had published its last issue on October 18 of 1991. We had done a *huge*, huge issue after that, with the headline, “Death of a Lady” on it—I've still got it upstairs—and let a lot of the *Gazette* people write their columns that they didn't get to write otherwise. So I had covered the end of the newspaper war, actually, as editor of *Arkansas Business*. But once the *Democrat* became the *Democrat-Gazette*, Mr. Hussman made some significant hires. He brought in Griffin Smith as the executive editor. He brought Paul Greenberg over from the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. Of course, Paul was already nationally known—nationally syndicated—but brought him as editorial page editor. And they had

come on in the Spring. In the early summer of that year, Griffin called me, and I guess I should've known something was up when he said, "Do you want to meet Walter and me for lunch at the Little Rock Club?" So, anyway, I went to lunch, and they said, "You know, we've never had a position as political editor," and Bill Clinton's going to be"—it was obvious at that point he was going to be the Democratic nominee for president—"and we've got to have somebody to coordinate all this. And so we want to create this position of political editor, which would supervise both our state capitol bureau *and* our Washington, DC, bureau, and you're the person we want for that job." With Clinton about to be the nominee and soon to become the first president from the state of Arkansas—to be the political editor and supervise all that coverage for the largest newspaper—the dominant statewide newspaper—it was just an offer I couldn't refuse . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: . . . even though I was enjoying what we were doing at *Arkansas Business*. Then I went back to the *Democrat—Democrat-Gazette* for a *third* time.

JM: Yes.

RN: So that was my third stint, when I went back in the summer of 1992 as the political editor for the *Democrat-Gazette*.

JM: Tell me how that went. Tell me a little bit about covering all that stuff.

RN: Gosh, I'm glad I was fifteen years younger than I am now, and I'm glad that my kids—one was born actually in early 1993. The other one wasn't born until 1997, so I'm glad I didn't have older kids, because I couldn't do what I did now. It was literally consistently sixty- to seventy-hour work weeks—and I don't exaggerate



when I tell you that—because we had enough pride and I had enough pride that a lot of these national stories were also Arkansas stories. Whitewater was an Arkansas story. [Editor’s note: The Whitewater scandal involved some real estate dealings of Bill and Hillary Clinton and James B. and Susan McDougal with respect to the Whitewater Development Corporation.]

JM: Yes.

RN: You know, Jim McDougal, Susan McDougal—they were Arkansas people. David Watkins getting fired and flying the helicopter—that’s an Arkansas story. The surgeon general, Dr. Joycelyn Elders, getting fired—that’s an Arkansas story. So, suddenly, instead of competing at the *Democrat* against the *Gazette*, we were competing against *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* [and] *The Los Angeles Times*. I mean, those were our competition, and there was no shortage—there were so many stories during that first Clinton term. And it was night and day, but, you know, everybody in Arkansas kind of got their fifteen minutes of fame there, and they trotted me out on a lot of these television talk shows to represent the newspaper. I was on [“The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour”] on PBS [the Public Broadcasting System] several times. In fact, I was on there the day that [former Arkansas governor] Jim Guy Tucker was convicted. I did all these radio talk shows—became a regular on Oliver North’s show [on Fox News], *et cetera, et cetera*. So it was nonstop, but very enjoyable. You look back and say, “Man, I’m glad I was there then. I’m glad I did that then, but I wouldn’t want to do it again.” In fact, I do have very vivid memories of—I was finally just drained completely. The first six months of the Clinton Administration—from

January to July of 1993—not only were there huge stories every day coming out of Washington, there was an Arkansas Legislative session, and I was also supervising our state capitol bureau. My first child was born in February of that year, and I was writing a book with only six months to write the book. I wrote a biography of Hillary Clinton called *The Hillary Factor*. I was doing that at night and on weekends.

JM: Called what?

RN: *The Hillary Factor*.

JM: Oh, okay.

RN: So I was literally going in seven days a week. I would go in Sundays and Saturdays and work on the book, even when I wasn't doing newspaper stuff.

JM: Yes.

RN: Griffin said I could use the office to write from and use their clip files. I'll never forget—I was just totally drained, and one night I somehow got out of there early, and I told my wife—I said, “Do not wake me up for *anything*. I am so tired.” I went to bed at about 9:00 [p.m.], and at about 10:30 [p.m.] she came in and she shook me, and she said, “I know you said to not wake you up, but they *insisted* that I wake you up.” I answered the phone, Jerry, and it was a guy named Dan Bailey, who was the night editor at the time at the *Democrat-Gazette*. He said, “Rex, your wife said you were asleep. I'm sorry to bother you, but we just got an AP flash that they found Vince Foster [President Clinton's deputy White House counsel] dead in a park [Fort Marcy Park] near Washington.”

JM: Oh.

RN: You know, one night I was going to go to bed early—but that’s dramatic. But that’s an example of how there was always something.

JM: Yes.

RN: Because I remember we had three people in Washington: Randy Littleton, Jane Fullerton, Terry [Lemmons?]. We had gone from one to three in the bureau.

JM: Yes.

RN: When Clinton was elected, I said, “Get Randy, Terry, Jane on the phone—have them start working the phones. I’m on the way.” I jumped out of bed. I dressed in about three minutes, you know? That’s one of those things why you love the newspaper. You *hate* the newspaper business—I mean, you were like that—and *love* it both at the same time because your adrenaline’s flowing.

JM: Yes.

RN: I remember racing there and I actually remember calling Paul Smith, the general manager of the paper, and seeing if we could have a little extra time—to hold the city edition—which they allowed us to do. Pretty rare.

JM: Yes.

RN: But that was such a big story, and on the city edition [we] usually have about a midnight deadline. I think they gave us until 1:00 or so and, believe it or not, even though we didn’t get the flash until 10:30 or 11:00, we got a pretty good story put together for the front page the next day.

JM: Yes.

RN: But that was one of those days that you really remember. It was *exactly* six months after the inauguration. The inauguration had been on January 20, and that

was on July 20.

JM: Yes.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, now, you were telling me that you had to get the story together on Vince Foster, and you got it in. Any other particular memories from that particular time?

RN: Like I said, it just seemed there was always a big story breaking. It never, *never* let up [laughs] during that first [presidential] term for Bill Clinton. I would spend on average about a week a month up in Washington. Otherwise, [I] would work out of the Little Rock newsroom and supervise our bureau. We were very fortunate to have three very good reporters in Terry [Lemmons?] and Jane Fullerton, who are a married couple, and then Randy Littleton, who had been up there beforehand. One of the ironic things about Randy is that he had covered—had really been the first writer to cover Bill Clinton every day. He was—poor people were taking Clinton seriously—covered him almost every day of the campaign. But on the campaign *plane*—late in that campaign—Randy's appendix burst, so he didn't get to cover the final week or so of that campaign. We actually sent Noel Oman out to cover the end of the campaign. Randy recovered and got out of the hospital and did get to cover Clinton on election night and, obviously, worked with us to cover the inauguration week and then stayed on. But, like I said, it was always something. On top of everything else, during one of those years I was president of the Arkansas chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. We would have our meetings on Friday night. And it

seemed like some story would *always* come down late on a Friday afternoon that would make me late to the meeting I was supposed to be moderating. I had talked Senator Bumpers into speaking to us at a Friday dinner meeting, and I was about to get out of the office and, goodness, they called from Washington and say that Joycelyn Elders has just been fired as the surgeon general. [Laughs] So I was late, as usual. I'll never forget—I got there—I missed supper. I got there—Senator Bumpers, who I was supposed to introduce, was already speaking, and he started, in a good-natured way, razzing me unmercifully about inviting him and then not even being there [laughs] when he got there. And I said, “You blame your *president!* These stories just keep breaking late on Fridays.” But it was—it seemed almost that entire first term a seven-days-a-week affair.

JM: How was covering Clinton?

RN: It was never boring. It was never boring. I had covered him, you know, as governor, like I said, even from Washington—when he would come up a lot to Washington.

JM: Yes.

RN: In fact, I *have* from exactly thirty years ago—I have an old picture of when Clinton was chairman of the National Governors Association when Ronald Reagan was president. [Editor's note: Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980.] I remember it had snowed that morning, and I had walked to the White House. They would allow the reporters onto the White House lawn and then the governors would come out and you would interview them. I don't even remember who took the picture, but I've still got it, of a very young Bill Clinton

and a very young me standing there in the snow on the White House lawn talking to each other—interviewed him. So I had covered him as governor and then covered him as president. One of the little interesting anecdotes as president is I was in Washington doing a feature on Mack McLarty, when Mack was still the White House chief of staff. I met Mack at a nice restaurant called *Maison Blanche*, which was real near the White House, for lunch. Mack, being “Mr. Courteous,” as he always was, said, “I’m going to let you in on a little something. We have just bombed the Serbs in Bosnia.” That was before that *really* heated up the Bosnian affair. He said, “We are letting that word out soon, and it’s going to get busy.” I got a phone call. “Excuse me.” Sure enough, the *maitre d’* came over and said, “Mr. McLarty, you need to take a call.” And he said, “Rex, that’s what I was telling you about. I apologize.” So he came back, [laughs] and very matter-of-factly, he said, “That was the president, and I told him we were having lunch, and he wondered if you’d drop by with me to the Oval Office just to say hi.” [He] said, “No interview. I don’t think you’ll get an interview, but he does want to say how he loves seeing people from Arkansas.” And Mack, being his courteous self from Hope, you know, says, “Do you have time to do that?” And—what am I going to say, “No, I’ve got an appointment to play tennis with Jay Dickey. I can’t see the president in the Oval Office” ? [Laughter] I say, “Of *course* I have time!” So he said, “Well, it’s easier than walking,” even though they were close to [getting?] the gates—there was going to be a car to pick us up. We went outside, and this big black Lincoln pulled up. We went up and, sure enough, went into the Oval Office. They were having the news briefing

downstairs in the pressroom at that point, and Clinton, who was—*did* seem genuinely glad to see another Arkansan. I'll never forget. People had been getting on him about his weight, and I've always fought my weight through the years, so I said to him, "Mr. President, I think you look real good." He said, "Well, thank you. I've just got one question for you." I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Is John Robert Starr still fat?" [Laughter] I said, "He's pretty good size, Mr. President." And he said, "Well, I've been up here, and he hasn't come in to see me at all." He and Starr had had this love/hate relationship all these years, on and off.

JM: Yes.

RN: By then, Starr was still writing a column but [was] retired and mostly traveling the country in an RV [recreational vehicle]. And I said, "Well, he's liable to bring that RV up here." And he said, "Well, he can hook it up at the side of the White House." So I walked back to our Washington bureau, which was in the National Press building on Fourteenth Street, just a block and a half from the White House. And, sure enough, that briefing was still going on—this breaking news on all the news networks. So I called our city editor, the late Ray Hobbs. Ray would always sit in front of a bank of TVs—three TVs—so I knew he had it on. I'll never forget—I called, and I said, "Ray, you got your TVs on?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Are you seeing all this about us bombing the Serbs this morning all, that's coming out?" He says, "Yeah, I'm watching it right now." I said, "You want to know what the leader of the free world was doing during the middle of all that?" And he says, "What?" He said, "He was in his office wondering if John Robert

Starr is still fat!” [Laughter]

JM: Okay.

RN: Like I said, President Clinton seemed genuinely—even though the *Democrat-Gazette* wasn’t his favorite paper, obviously, [laughs] he seemed happy to see somebody from Arkansas [     ].

JM: So how long did you stay in that position as the [     ]?

RN: I stayed in that position for right at four years.

JM: Okay.

RN: Jim Guy Tucker had been indicted on two different occasions on two different sets of charges in the summer of 1995. Of course, that was a huge story for us. And the trial was a huge story. He was convicted on May 28, 1996—announced that night, which shocked all of us. We thought even though he was convicted, he decided, “I’m going to appeal,” and wouldn’t announce that he was resigning. But he announced that night that he was resigning. I remember we had already designed, basically—we’d had a meeting and designed our front page, and we had a *huge* headline that said, “Tucker Convicted.” And I remember watching—we were all sitting there in front of that TV, and I remember Ray Hobbs hollering, “Holy cow! We’ve got to have another meeting.” So we—all the editors ran back to the conference room, and the headline was changed to, “Tucker to Resign.” And we had basically two lead stories. We had a middle picture, and we had one on the trial and [     ] jury that had convicted him. We had the other on Tucker announcing he was resigning—crazy, crazy time. So your governor had been convicted—he was resigning—this on top of everything that was going



on with Bill Clinton in Washington. And, again, I was working seventy hours a week. And back to J. J. Vigneault again—the old Republican consultant—he called me and said, “Would you be interested in being Mike Huckabee’s gubernatorial press secretary?” And I said, “No, I really wouldn’t. I’ve done that—worked for Tommy Robinson, Judy Petty and, boy, I’ve got a great job here. I really wouldn’t.” He said, “All right, just wondering.” I actually edited the story that Huckabee had hired his brother-in-law, Jim Harris, away from the *Texarkana Gazette*, and Jim was going to be the press secretary. So I didn’t think anything more of it. Then Huckabee himself, with whom I had a good relationship as a reporter and editor, called me and said, “Can you come over?” He had been running for the Senate, so he was basing his gubernatorial transition out of his old campaign headquarters. They still called it the campaign headquarters. He said, “Can you come over to the campaign headquarters Sunday afternoon and talk to me?” And I was so naïve. I thought he was going to give me a big story. In fact, because I would rarely write anything for a Monday, I called whoever was running the desk on Sunday and said, “Save me a little space. I think Huckabee’s going to give me some kind of story.” So I went in there with this legal pad and my pen—I always worked off a legal pad, actually, and [I got to?] thinking—he said, “You’re not going to need that. If this doesn’t work out, this is all going to be off the record.” I said, “Fine.” And he said, “I’ve come up with this idea of a senior management team. There’s going to be about five of you, and you’re all going to report directly to me. This is how we’re going to run state government, and I’ve got you plugged in as director of policy and

communications. And, boy, I don't really have a Plan B." He was a good salesman. [Laughs] "You know, you gotta do this." And I—like I said, I was loving the newspaper business. I was on the "Arkansas Week" television show every week. I was doing a little radio show for KARN every afternoon. I was really having fun, but it seemed like an interesting opportunity because Republican governors, obviously, had been so rare in Arkansas. He was only the third since Reconstruction—Winthrop Rockefeller, Frank White. After several days of contemplation, I decided to take the job with Governor Huckabee—joined him on his first day in office—was my first day of work—July 15, 1996, and ended up staying with him for more than nine years of his ten-and-a-half years in office.

JM: Okay. I want to go over that in a minute and go on to what you're doing now. But I have to ask you one question—going back to the *Democrat* days and everything—what was John Robert Starr like to work for?

RN: He scared people to death, but he had a soft side. He was very good to me; I'll put it that way. I've told people before, "If you want to hear bad things about Bob Starr, you've come to the wrong person," because he plucked me out of the sports department and sent me to Washington.

JM: Yes.

RN: Which I told you was the best thing to happen to me. But he could be terribly demanding—terribly tough. Some will tell you unfair in certain circumstances, but he was always fair to me. Starr would write these critiques of every day's paper and compare what we had to what the *Gazette* had, and would post these

things. I know you've probably heard this in other interviews—would post these daily critiques on the bulletin board, and you would see people go up—and, of course, people would get in line to read that critique when it would go up there and see what Starr had to say about that morning's paper. And you would see people walk around—I mean, he could be *brutal* in those . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: *Literally* in tears as they would walk away from reading that daily critique because Starr would obviously have pointed out how they got beat by the *Gazette* on their beat on that particular day.

JM: Yes.

RN: So it was a true motivational factor. But I always had a very good relationship with him. Like I said, he picked me to go to Washington—really let me do a lot of things every time I would ask in Washington, and was very good to me.

JM: Okay. Let me go back a little bit farther. When you were on the *Democrat* and the—and say—well, all the way through the 1980s—different stints.

RN: Yes.

JM: Would you have ever thought that the *Democrat* would win the war?

RN: Probably not. In fact, I was already in Washington when Gannett bought the *Gazette*, and a lot of people will look back now and say, “Boy, that’s when the *Gazette* started going down.” But the way we looked at it that time was, “Here’s this biggest chain in the country with unlimited resources. We’re dead.” In fact, I was at my apartment, which was also the *Arkansas Democrat* Washington bureau—I had two phones: one that was personal and one that was *Democrat*.

The *Democrat* phone rang, and it was Ray Hobbs, then-city editor. And Ray said, “Have you heard the news?” And I said, “No, I have not.” He said, “Gannett has bought the *Gazette*. We’re screwed.” I’m substituting a word there.

JM: Yes.

RN: But I can still remember that word for word. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

RN: And I said, “Oh, me.” Gannett was, of course, based right across the river from where I was in Arlington, so I had to go over there, get their spokesman, get a bunch of background. I ended up doing several stories on the Gannett chain, actually, for our newspaper the next day. But we thought, “Oh, my goodness.” So even then, at the point of the Gannett purchase, I think most *Democrat* people thought, “Oh, I don’t know about this.” The one thing that always made me feel good is that I knew how devoted Walter Hussman was to winning this thing, and this was what turned out to be the case—is that Walter would take the profits from his other papers in Hot Springs and Camden and El Dorado and Magnolia—he’d take the profits from his radio and TV and all his cable television stations—and he had such pride to win that newspaper war and that Gannett *was* a public company. And if I’m a stockholder in Dubuque, Iowa, you know, I’m going to start asking questions eventually. “Why are we losing \$20 million a year in Little Rock, Arkansas?”

JM: Yes.

RN: And, as it turned out, that’s what happened. So if there was any comforting fact to all that, it was the fact that Walter was a local owner and Gannett, after the

Pattersons had sold was answerable to their shareholders all over the world.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: So during that period of time, though—let’s go back before Gannett bought the [*Gazette*—that last stretch you were at the *Democrat*—I guess—what was that, from 1984 to 1985 or 1986—somewhere along in there?

RN: Right. Right.

JM: Okay. What was your impression of what was going on at the *Gazette*? Did you have any feel for how they . . .?

RN: I was—you know, the old sayings about—suddenly, the UALR cheerleaders in Spandex on the front page [of the *Gazette*], and so forth . . .

JM: Yes.

RN: You know, a lot of that has almost become apocryphal. But I remember a lot of the changes that Gannett tried to make, just studying the paper every day. And even though we were in the 1980s, it was still the Dark Ages with no Internet or whatever. So they would mail both papers to me, and I’d get them several days later in Washington. But, boy, I’d go through them—all the way—as a newspaper junkie. And I remember being jarred by the changes. I mean, suddenly they were running—putting sports columns out on 1A occasionally. Like many of us here in Arkansas, I had actually grown up in a *Gazette* family.

JM: Yes.

RN: I mean, I could not wait to go out and get the *Arkansas Gazette* out of my driveway every morning. I had grown up with “The Old Gray Lady,” you know—eight, nine, ten stories on the front page—very little art. And to see, you

know, the changes. I remember it was jarring even to me. And from a marketing standpoint, I think Walter Hussman was brilliant when he went to that logo, “Arkansas’ Newspaper.”

JM: Yes.

RN: Because Arkansas people are very provincial and very proud.

JM: Yes.

RN: And I think that started to play to them. “This is not really our old *Gazette* anymore.”

JM: Yes, I think they . .

RN: You know, the *Gazette* as a newspaper may have died—and I know others have told you this [laughs]—in 1991, but the *Gazette* that a lot of us grew up with in Arkansas died a long time before that.

JM: In 1986, you mean?

RN: Yes, and when Gannett started to make so many changes.

JM: Yes. Yes.

RN: And bring in a succession of publishers that were from elsewhere, editors that were from elsewhere. And maybe I’m biased because a lot of my background, obviously, is in sports. But, again, perception being reality, when Orville left the *Gazette*—Orville Henry—to go to the *Democrat*, I think that sounded the bell to people.

JM: Yes.

RN: “This is not our *Gazette* anymore.”

JM: That was a big change.

RN: That was a *huge* change. Everybody in this state had grown up reading Orville Henry on a daily basis, and to have him suddenly go to the *Democrat*—I mean, gosh, that would've been like Ronald Reagan going to work for the Russians in the Kremlin. It's something you never would've imagined would happen.

JM: Before they sold—the *Gazette* sold—to Gannett—the last couple of years—had you noticed any deterioration in the paper, or was it still pretty good?

RN: In the last year of the Pattersons?

JM: Yes.

RN: It seemed to me that maybe the news hole was tightening up a little more, even though we had—we were going with huge news holes in the *Democrat*. Yes, they were not devoting as much room anymore. Of course, they still had brilliant people there. I mean, when you're talking about Ernie Dumas or Mike Trimble or—a lot of those names were there that were very, very good, and I enjoyed reading. But it did seem like maybe the resources were not being—and maybe that's a wrong perception—that the resources were not being devoted.

JM: I know a lot of people think that the Pattersons' fatal mistake was suing the *Democrat*.

RN: Yes. Well, I guess their fatal mistake was not accepting the joint operating agreement [JOA] that Walter offered Patterson.

JM: Yes, that was really a big mistake. [Laughter]

RN: Yes, they never saw what would be coming, that Walter would take it [to] morning [publication] and go ahead. Had they accepted a JOA—what's happened in so many JOAs—obviously, the *Democrat* would have continued on as an

afternoon paper for a while, and eventually gone away, as afternoon papers have gone away all over the country.

JM: Probably. Yes. But if they would've had them nailed down to the afternoon slot.

RN: Yes, absolutely. Whatever. Yes.

JM: [ ] couldn't do anything [ ].

RN: Under the Department of Justice's thumb.

JM: Yes. And afternoon papers, by long before that, were not doing very well, and certainly haven't done well since then.

RN: Exactly.

JM: Okay. Rex, since you—give me a little rundown on what it was like working in state government and working for Mike Huckabee.

RN: Huckabee was great to work for, especially if you were a communications guy because, obviously, he's a great communicator. He knows how to use the media. He *likes* to use the media. And we did some exciting things. I mean, not to sound corny, but you felt you were doing some good things for the state. And people would say, "Do you miss the newspaper business?" And there were things that I missed, but the great thing about being, you know, one of the top two or three people over all the communications in the governor's office—if it was a big night in the *Democrat-Gazette* newsroom, chances are it was going to be a big night in the governor's office also. I mean, if we had tornadoes hitting all over the state, we would be involved in that.

JM: Yes.

RN: If we had shootings at Westside School in Jonesboro, we would be involved in



that. If we had ice storms, we would be involved in that. So you still had your adrenaline rush; it was just a different kind, going from political editor at the *Democrat-Gazette* to communications director at the governor's office.

JM: You were with Governor Huckabee—did you say nine years?

RN: A little over nine years.

JM: Until when?

RN: I went to work for him on July 15, 1996. I was appointed by President [George W.] Bush to my current position and began work in this position on October 1, 2005.

JM: Okay. Now, tell me what this position is.

RN: The Delta Regional Authority was formed by Congress to help with economic development in 240 counties in parts of eight states: southern Illinois, western Kentucky, western Tennessee, the boot heel of Missouri, large parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Black Belt of Alabama. We're a regional commission. The president has two appointees: Pete Johnson of Clarksdale, Mississippi, is one; I'm the president's other appointee. And the governors of those eight states serve on our board.

JM: Okay. So what all do you do?

RN: We are charged by Congress as being the planner/coordinator and also advocate for the entire region up and down the Mississippi [River] and, again, over into the Black Belt of Alabama. We have a health care initiative. We've come out with a major highway plan for the region. We've got a news conference coming up in Washington to introduce some information technology plan for the region. We're

not a large agency, but we kind of coordinate the work or try to help plan and coordinate the work of other federal agencies and try to get inter-agency agreements and things to help an area of the country with a lot of needs—low per capita incomes.

JM: Okay, one other question, and this is a little different tack. Didn't I talk to you one time about a job? Did I . . . ?

RN: Yes.

JM: Didn't I try to hire you to come to the *Daily Oklahoman*?

RN: Yes, absolutely.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

RN: Absolutely. And I thought seriously about it. Now, my only—now, coming right out of college, my only three offers were the *Arkansas Democrat*, the *Pine Bluff Commercial* and the *Monroe News Star*. I remember Frank Lightfoot at the time was the sports editor of the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, and they had owned us, so we had been kind of a subsidiary. And Frank said, "I can't believe you're not going to come over here and work for me." I said, "Little Rock's a little bigger, and I want to be in a statewide newspaper." "Well, you'd get better training over here." But, anyway, I went with the *Democrat*, and that ended up being a very good decision for me.

JM: Yes. But I don't even remember what year it was.

RN: Yes.

JM: But we did talk.

RN: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, we did.

JM: Yes. Okay. Okay, Rex, anything else? Looking back on it, particularly—this is *Democrat* and the *Democrat-Gazette* history—anything else you remember that you haven't mentioned that you want to mention along the way?

RN: No. I just—you know, I'm glad you're giving people the opportunity to do this because, of course, there has to be two to be a newspaper war. And the *Gazette*—as it should—I mean, it was a great newspaper—one of the country's great newspapers for many years. But scholars—historians—have given so much attention to the *Gazette*, and I think there ought to be attention given to the *Democrat*, especially once you got into the newspaper war and the end of it.

JM: Yes.

RN: Because—to be trite and to use the cliché—it *was* David against Goliath.

JM: Yes.

RN: David ended up winning.

JM: Ended up winning.

RN: It's a story that people will tell in journalism for many years to come, and I'm glad I went to work there when I did because we had moved to morning. We were head to head by that point, but we were still *way back* number two in an old newsroom with a lot of colorful characters. And you probably look back now a lot more fondly than maybe some of those [times?] really were. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

RN: But, still, it was a great experience for a young guy. I can't imagine a more exciting job for somebody coming right out of college.

JM: Yes. Okay. Well, Rex, I really appreciate this.

RN: Thanks, Jerry.

JM: This has been a great interview, and I just want to say thanks very much.

RN: Thank you.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]