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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Fred Petrucelli
Conway, AR
14 March 2006

Interviewer: David McCollum

David McCollum: Hi. [I'm] David McCollum and [I'm] interviewing Fred Petrucelli for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History Project on [the *Arkansas Democrat*]. This interview is being held in the *Log Cabin Democrat*—at the *Log Cabin Democrat* on March 14, 2006. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript at which point you can sign a release. Our need for you today—for you to do now—is state your name and indicate you are willing to give the center permission to use this tape to make the transcript available to others.

Fred Petrucelli: I give my name? I'm Fred Petrucelli. I give my permission.

DM: Okay. Anyway, to start out with some very basic questions, where were you born?

FP: Oh, Bridgeport, Connecticut. Yes.

DM: And what date?

FP: Bridgeport, Connecticut, [March 24, 1918].

DM: How did you get from Bridgeport to Arkansas?

FP: Well, I went to the University of Alabama. Let's see, that was my second school. I went to the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut, then went to Alabama. I met a girl from Little Rock [Arkansas] at Alabama and we got married and I moved to Little Rock. This was 1945, I think. I was able to get a job on the *Arkansas Democrat* with very little experience, actually.

DM: How long did you work at the *Democrat*?

FP: Oh, good gracious, I worked for the *Democrat* for about—I think thirty years, I'd say.

DM: What was your first job?

FP: My first job?

DM: At the *Democrat*.

FP: My first job at the *Democrat* was beat reporter for North Little Rock. The North Little Rock beat, covering city hall, police and courts—everything about the city, because at that time there we carried a special North Little Rock column. It had all sorts of news in it—there was social news, police reports, and everything you could possibly think of. And that job—I was there for about—oh, maybe a year or so, and then I was moved into the sports department. I worked in the sports department with Jack Keady.

DM: That's K-E-A-D . . .

FP: K-E-A-D-Y—who had just come back from the service. He became the sports editor. At that time there was a shake up of the *Democrat*—of the *Arkansas De-*

mocrat, because people started coming back from the war [World War II] and taking over new jobs and taking jobs that they had or left, or somebody had replaced them and one thing or another. I remember that Allen Tilden—T-I-L-D-E-N—was a sports editor before Jack Keady, and he had taken over before the war. He took over as city editor. So that left an opening there for the sports editor job, and Jack Keady, who had been by himself got an assistant, until Tilden became the city editor. He replaced a man named James Berhoff—D-E-R-H-O-F-F, who was a city editor during the war years. Where are we now? Would you like for me to tell you who was on board at that time? Would that be interesting?

DM: Yes. It might be interesting.

FP: Okay. My first recollection of these people when I joined the newspaper. Tilden was the city editor. Edwin Liske, L-I-S-K-E, was the managing editor. Bill Johnson—we had two editorial writers—Bill Johnson and O. D. Williams were editorial writers. I remember that—Karr Shannon—S-H-A-N-N-O-N, was a columnist. The magazine section was run by Al Pollard—P-O-L-L-A-R-D. He went on to form a very prestigious advertising agency in Little Rock—the Pollard Agency [Brooks-Pollard Company]. There was an old gentleman named Vaughn Root—R-O-O-T—was state editor. [He sat in] one of the big, old-fashioned desk chairs. I remember him using a string to measure stories from our correspondents.

DM: A true stringer.

FP: An actual true stringer—that was the first time I'd ever seen that. [Laughs]

DM: And I think that's where it came from.

FP: That's where it came from, yes.

DM: He just had a piece of string. Correspondents got paid by the length of the string.

FP: By the length of the string, yes.

DM: [Laughs]

FP: I'll never forget that one. Let's see—the time may be a little convoluted here—I wonder if his assistant—Mr. Root's assistant on the state desk was Wayne Cranford. Well, some of the staff members were George Douthit—that's D-O-U-T-H-I-T—and Bobbie Forster. They were our capital reporters, and Bud Lemke, whose father was the professor of journalism at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

DM: Yes.

FP: He was the courthouse reporter. We had a few other—their names escape me, but these guys stood out, as far as I'm concerned.

DM: Let me ask you this, how big a paper was it at that time? Was it an afternoon paper?

FP: It was an afternoon paper. It wasn't as large as the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*, but—if I could remember what it was—I guess [circulation] was about 75,000 or something like that. Seven days a week.

DM: Describe for me back in—you worked in the newspaper business [for I guess half a century now?—describe what it was like to put out a paper at that time.

FP: Well, I'll do the best I can.

DM: Well, I know you used something called a “typewriter.”

FP: [Laughs] We had a typewriter. We had archaic stuff—old Underwoods. The publisher was—who was the publisher? [Laughs] I thought I'd never forget him because he wasn't very free with his money. He was like all newspaper publish-

ers of that era. K. August Engel—E-N-G-E-L—you remember him, don't you?

DM: Yes.

FP: He was publisher. One of the staff guys that we had was Joe Crossley—C-R-O-S-S-L-E-Y. He was a graduate of Harvard University [Cambridge, Massachusetts]. He was a brilliant fellow. He was friend of some of the top notch AP [Associated Press] writers at that time—Hal Boyle and several others that Joe was a personal friend and on a first-name basis. What he was doing at the *Arkansas Democrat* is beyond me. He had married a girl from Little Rock and had a child by her. But, he was the number one guy on the news staff and sort of directed all of the news—he and Allen Tilden, the city editor. Rod Powers was another desk man. R-O-D. P-O-W-E-R-S. Powers. He went off to California. I think he went to a San Diego [California] newspaper. I'm trying to stretch my memory. This is kind of a—if—can you ask me some questions? [Laughs]

DM: Yes, this is back in the days—this was when?

FP: The 1940s, the late 1940s.

DM: The paper had to be printed using linotype machines.

FP: Yes.

DM: Type your stories . . .

FP: Right.

DM: And I guess . . .

FP: Well, they were really archaic at the most. We weren't as modern as maybe the *Gazette* was, but, anyway, the staff would come to work, and they would go to their mailboxes and find most of them filled with clippings from the *Gazette*.

Somebody had clipped the *Gazette*. We were to follow up on the stories, rewrite

them, and get new leads, and new concepts, and so forth and so on. And once they did that, after they got through with that, they'd all—I think they reported about 7:00 a.m. They did that, did their rewrites and one thing or another, and they all fanned out. They all went out on the street. Most of them would call their stories in by telephone, and we had a couple of ladies who would type the stories and send them to the desk. Joe usually put the headlines on them. He made up the front page. We had a little sort of a pulley where copy was put in the basket and sent upstairs. [Laughs] And up there Freddy Rice was the manager—was the composing room manager. He put the stories on a spike, and linotype operators would go by and pick up the stories and set them in type.

DM: I remember one of my first jobs as a copy boy was we had to clip the morning newspaper in Memphis [Tennessee]. We would get the clips from the city editor and he would make assignments on who he wanted to do the story—or he would make notes about things for finding out further information or whatever.

FP: Yes.

DM: Did you ever work with rewrite people? You'd call in a story and they would actually write it.

FP: Yes. Yes. At one point of time, after I left the sports department, I moved over to the city desk and I was on the desk and was a rewrite man.

DM: But most of the stuff outside the office was you'd call in and somebody . . .

FP: Yes. Yes. We called it in. Yes. I remember sports guys used Western Union. I covered sports and then I covered ball games at Traveler Field. We had a Western Union guy sitting right next to us. We would type a story, and it was sent by the Western Union operator. Or, if we went off on, say, a football game out of

state, or even Fayetteville, why, we'd use the Western Union for stuff like that. I remember I went down to—when I was in sports in 1951 when we had that championship year—I'll never forget that one—I traveled with the team. I went to spring training and I stayed with them and I would send my dispatches back every day by Western Union.

DM: Was that baseball?

FP: Yes. That was pretty good, because I was getting paid by the *Democrat*, which was not very much. I think they paid me \$30 a week to start. Ray Windter, the baseball manger—not manager, general manger he was—put me on the payroll—his payroll. He gave me a meal money [laughs]. That was really a fun year for me.

DM: You went to Florida then?

FP: We went to Florida. We went to Lakeland, Florida. We were with the Detroit Tigers organization and were an average team at that time. And we didn't expect to be in there—you know, have that great of a team, but everything gelled for some reason—Hal Simpson, Milo Johnson pitching, and a lot of guys—you know, Scooter Koschoneck. They had a great year and they won the pennant that year. That was neat.

DM: Somebody told me one of your first jobs was a wrestling promoter?

FP: Yes. Oh, I was into a lot of that. That was just side money, that was just extra. You know, I had married and \$30 a week is not a lot of money, even in those days. I was into wrestling. I was the wrestling promoter—agent, I guess—in town. I'd do the stories before the matches, after the matches, and help in any other way. The promoter LeRoy McGark paid me—I think it was about \$30 or

\$40 dollars weekly, or something like that, for my services. I also did work for Hazel Walker. Do you remember Hazel Walker in basketball?

DM: Yes. The All-American Redheads.

FP: I was her booking agent there. And that was a pretty darn good job, although I just happened to run into it. I'll tell you how I did that. It is an interesting story. Henry Levy was a fight promoter in Little Rock. He was a little ol' Jewish guy, and he was just, you know, a sprightly little guy who loved boxing. He would—he booked some matches in Robinson Auditorium. I got to know Henry pretty well because I was covering the matches. He was dating Hazel Walker, [laughs] which was a curious match in itself. She was six feet whatever and Henry was just a little bitty guy. At one point in her career, she needed a booking agent. This was right after—well, it wasn't right after she started, but after she was underway. She didn't have a booking agent, She was doing the booking herself, So, yes, she asked me. Levy put me next to her, and we talked about the job. I took it from there and I booked games for her all through the South, you know. It was just lots of telephone work where I got on the phone and called police departments, or fire departments, or boy's clubs, and so forth, and set up arrangements with Hazel. Hazel wanted to play every blasted night, too. Oh, she was fantastic. It was a heck of a job to get her games all of the time, but she wanted to do it. We did a fairly good job of arranging games.

DM: Hazel Walker is probably considered one of the greatest, not only female basketball players in Arkansas history, but basketball players.

FP: Of course.

DM: She had a team of redheads, the All-American Redheads—and she was quite a

person.

FP: Oh, my goodness, you ought to know. She'd get up on the free throw line and would make fifty baskets, fifty in a row without missing. I mean, she was incredible and absolutely—I saw it happen, so it's not—this is not some fable. It actually happened. She was just a fantastic player. She was something else. A good gal. She was Indian.

DM: And they would—their group would play at a fundraiser or whatever?

FP: Yes. Makeshift teams of police officers, firemen, or whoever wanted to play, you know. They were fundraisers. He would split the gate with the guys. You know, it wasn't bad.

DM: Now, the wrestling thing—this was when you, the promoter would give you—you would advance a match and then . . .

FP: Yes. He would send me the matches. I didn't set the matches. He'd do the matches, and I would give them publicity. After the matches, I would write stories and send the stories to the *Gazette* and the Associated Press, and then the *Arkansas Democrat*. I would help guys get organized in hotels and whatever they needed when they were visiting here in Little Rock. Sort of like a what? Kind of a keeper or something like that. You know, these guys coming in didn't know where to go, and so forth, so we set up a—we ran a little headquarters in the Marion Hotel. They'd just drop in and get some information about places to eat, or one thing or another.

DM: Is it interesting to work with wrestlers?

FP: It was. It was really a strange bunch of characters. [Laughs] I'll never forget the—maybe I shouldn't be talking out of school here—one of the things they did

was to bleed. They wanted to bleed—blood and blood letting. So they took a little razor blade and made a little incision in their eyebrow. You couldn't detect it right there in the eyebrow. They would hit that damn incision [laughs] and blood came gushing out and the people went nuts about that. They went really out of their seats when they saw the blood. It was all contrived. [Laughs] Even though they seem like they're killing each other. They didn't, of course.

DM: Tell me some more about—I know there are some interesting people or stories you remember during that era of the *Democrat*.

FP: Well, you mean stories I was involved with?

DM: Well, maybe—what about personalities there? What were some of the more interesting personalities at the *Democrat* during those days?

FP: At the *Democrat*?

DM: Yes.

FP: I thought they were all kind of strange, [laughs] including myself. They were cut out of another cloth. They are not like the reporters today—the newspaper people today. They just drank an awful lot. Oh, my gosh. Every day . . .

DM: Somebody told me there was a bottle in the lower drawer.

FP: Oh, that's right. And you'd just go in there to see the managing editor. He would pull out the bottle if you were complaining about something. He'd bring out the bottle and the first thing you know you'd forget what you were thinking about. [Laughter] Newsmen drank heavily. No question about it. Joe Crossley drank and drank himself to death. And other guys—Bud Lemke was a constant visitor at a bar the state hospital, right on Markham street. [Editor's note: It was Peck's Drive-In] A lot of guys went there. Bud would go in there about 4:00 or 4:30

p.m., after his day was done. He'd order a beer and sit there in front of it. He'd sit there for at least an hour looking at that glass of beer—just looking at it, not touching it, just looking at it. It was just like he was mesmerized. We couldn't figure out what he was doing. When he finally got to drinking, he drank that beer down and he was gone. He was just like a horserace; more beers—set'em up, set'em up, set'em up—until the place closed. [Laughs]

DM: So, the stereotype of the newsman—if you saw a movie about the newspaper business, that was really happening.

FP: Yes. I tell you what, one thing that separated that era from this era would be the drinking—on the job and off the job—and that's all I'm going to say. Nobody made any money, so we scrounged around for everything we could possibly get. On the holidays, we acted liked voracious animals waiting for AP&L [Arkansas Power and Light] and the telephone company and all of these utilities to send stuff. We'd get turkeys and wine and beer and all the gifts, you know. The advertising agencies would just shower us with all their crap. You know, they don't do that anymore because it's repugnant, I guess.

DM: Yes. It's a different ethical era.

FP: Yes. Yes. Yes. We didn't even think about ethics at that time. What are you talking about? [Laughs] We needed the gifts, you know.

DM: That was actually . . .

FP: We got a turkey, or whatever. It was food on the table. [Laughs]

DM: And those people probably knew that to be true.

FP: Oh, sure. Sure they did. Sure they did. There was one episode that sticks out in my mind, but this was later on during the integration crisis [at Little Rock Central

High School in 1957]. And George Douthit, who became very close friends with Orval Faubus, was still a capitol reporter at that time.

DM: O-R-V-A-L. F-A-U-B-U-S.

FP: Douthit covered the integration crisis for us. At one point Faubus went into hiding when President Eisenhower was trying to serve him with a writ. Nobody could find him—federal agents didn't know where to serve it. They couldn't find him. The only person who knew where he was was George Douthit. That's true. George would send us stories about Faubus—what Faubus was doing—never telling us his location. . He considered it his beat, and he wasn't telling anybody. He didn't tell anybody what he knew. He would give us stories from Faubus's headquarters, He would scoop the *Gazette* every damned day. They would have to rewrite George Douthit every time. AP was rewriting. All over the country they were rewriting George because he was the only one who could get to Faubus. And that went on for several days, several days. It was amazing. It was incredible. I can't remember how long. The end came when the agents finally got to Faubus when he returned to the capital building. But at least for a couple of weeks, he was living *incognito*—is that the word? *Incognito?* *Incognito?* Or whatever—and nobody could reach him. Nobody could reach him. He had told a few people close to him, but as far as the press was concerned, George was the only one who could reach him. George was with him, and Faubus was telling him his story—where he stood, and how he reacted to all this, and about his concept of segregation. That is one of the episodes I really remember specifically.

DM: I guess that reflects how reporters did [their jobs] in those days. You got as close to the subject as possible, because they would give you exclusive information.

FP: Yes. Well, that's just because the *Gazette* used to call George "Faubus's Boswell"—I think they wrote that in editorials. Some guy wrote—an editorial man at the *Gazette*, you know.

DM: Harry Ashmore?

FP: Harry Ashmore, yes. He called George Faubus's Boswell. George didn't mind. He was getting a story. He was getting a scoop. [Laughter] We didn't care either. [Laughs] As long as he got his story, he didn't give a damn how he got it, really. [Laughter] But that's interesting.

DM: How has the newspaper business changed?

FP: As far as I can tell, the newspapers were more concerned with news—hard news, very few frills. Today, it seems to me, that everything is frills. Those magazines, and all kinds of column items, and so forth and so on. Even the columns in those days were straight, honest reporting, you know.

DM: Yes. The columns were like you wrote what was just basically a news item.

FP: That's right. That's right. With probably, a personal touch to it somehow or other, but nowadays everything is—I say, "frilly."

DM: Entertainment.

FP: Entertainment, yes. They've got to grab you by the antennae, you know. Even the way I write stuff today for the *Log Cabin*—because I'm always looking for a colorful lead, you know, and that sort of thing. It was that, you know, old inverted triangle stuff? We did that. And if you did anything else, they would rewrite it. The guys on the desk were pretty strict about that.

DM: They'd rewrite the state news . . . ?

FP: State stuff all the way—even the sports. Sports was the—they allowed a little

leeway in columns, you know? Jack had a column, a daily column, and I had a column on Sundays. We could write in little frivolous ways in there. Now everything is straight. Even the magazine section—our magazine section at the *Democrat* is straight.

DM: What kind of column did you write?

FP: It was a sports column. Whenever the thing struck me, you know, baseball or whatever. It was nothing—well, Jack stayed on the race tracks. He and Orville Henry had this thing going, you know, competition. And I would write real short—it was like—you know, sometimes the way you write sometimes, you know, little short paragraphs and so forth. Nothing in depth.

DM: I know Jack Keady was more—say, one of the more unforgettable characters in the, probably, history of the *Arkansas Democrat*. What was it like to work with Jack?

FP: Wasn't easy. Wasn't easy. Jack was a good man—shall I say, good Christian man—that was fundamentally what he was. He didn't smoke. He didn't cuss. He didn't drink. He didn't do anything. He was just as straight as an arrow.

DM: He didn't fit in with a lot of us.

FP: He didn't fit in. And that's what I couldn't understand. I remember one time when—do you remember Allan Berry by any chance? Allan Berry was manager of War Memorial Stadium. And do you remember for the first time they were bringing in a professional football team—I think they were bringing in the [National Football League] Buffalo Bills or maybe the Detroit Lions or Chicago Bears.

DM: Exhibition game.

FP: Exhibition game. They threw a little—what is it? A little breaker? A little, you know . . .?

DM: Mixer?

FP: Mixer. A little mixer with some team officials, and Allan Berry was there, and some of the Razorback people. I can't remember if Frank Broyles was there or not. They were drinking and carrying on and on like they do, and Jack was very offended by all that—immensely offended by that. He wandered around there for a while just talking that he was going to boycott the ball game. He wasn't going to—he was going to print that we didn't need that type of thing here. Man, he was that kind of a guy. So that made it kind of difficult to really put out a good sports section. We didn't put out a good sports section; the *Gazette* beat us all the time, I thought.

DM: Was it because of Orville? Or was it just . . .?

FP: Orville had—Orville was an insider. Orville had wormed his way—Orville became Frank Broyles's alter ego, for heaven's sakes. You remember that? And Jack was on the outside.

DM: Mainly, because of the disconnection?

FP: Because of that. Because of that. Right. Because of that.

DM: He was not a party guy.

FP: I always thought that Jack was ill-suited as a sportswriter—sports editor. I really did think that.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

DM: Tell me how to spell Petrucelli?

FP: Well . . .

DM: I guess we ought to spell your name. P-E-T-R-U-C . . .

FP: C-E-L-L-I. Petrucelli. We had some interesting people—some pretty good guys on there. Bob McCord was one of our good people. I remember when Bob was just a young kid coming into the *Democrat* as a photographer. He turned out to be a good newspaper man. Will Counts—you remember Will Counts? Excellent photographer.

DM: C-O-U-N-T-S.

FP: C-O-U-N-T-S. Will Counts, a young graduate from Central High School in Little Rock. I could see him shuffling through the city room. His pictures were so good. And during the crisis—the 1957 [integration] crisis, when he took shots that are still being used today. Tremendous. Then he went on to the University of Indiana [Bloomington] and taught journalism—photo journalism for a number of years. Wayne Cranford . . .

DM: Wayne . . .

FP: Wayne Cranford—best advertising agency in the state. Tom Hokersmith left us—he was another reporter. He was a sort of beat reporter.

DM: H-O-C-K . . .

FP: Hockersmith. H-O-C-K-E-R-S-M-I-T-H. Tom Hockersmith. He opened up an advertising agency in the building next to the *Democrat*, and he made a tremendous success of that. He got in with the horseracing crew. He got the Oaklawn Park account and really went with that. Unfortunately, he got mixed up with—I don't who it was, but there were some people of some, probably, ill repute, and he went out to Mexico and never came back. Nobody ever knew whatever happened

to him, which was quite a story in itself. Let's see, who did we say? We had—gosh, Karr Shannon was one of the best columnists, news columnist, still today— from Lunenburg, Arkansas—real country. But he was an excellent writer. He was a storyteller more than anything else. But, really, we had some good people at the Democrat.

DM: How was it competing with the *Gazette* in those days? I know two newspaper towns were not that unusual.

FP: Well, we always got—we always brought up the rear, so to speak. We didn't have the advertising dollars or the circulation of the number one newspaper. They preached that, too, you know, that they were number one in every respect. I always thought they were pretty snobbish. They looked down their nose at the *Arkansas Democrat*.

DM: You thought that they believed that you were not really newspaper people.

FP: We were real second-rate newspaper people to them. They thought the reporters were not very good. They didn't think much of the *Arkansas Democrat*, either. And sometimes at these—we'd go to Christmas parties, for example, and they'd congregate with each other and just ignore the hell out of us. You got that feeling that they thought they were better than we were, and maybe they were. Who knows? Well, they had the big shots like Charles Allbright. Well, Charlie Allbright was with us at the beginning. Charlie was there, and then Richard Allin, Dick—was it Richard "Bill" Lewis? They had a bunch of guys—pretty good people, good people on their staff. It was a good product, a better looking product than the *Democrat*. I always thought it was. So that was the competition. They had decided that there was no competition. There was no competition. We didn't

threaten them one little bit, and as a consequence we got to feeling a little chastened ourselves. Maybe we were not as good as we should have been [laughs] and so forth. That's the way that relationship . . .

DM: Did they get you to try harder to get special stories, or not?

FP: Well, not really. Not really. Because even the—just saying this is my own personal opinion, but I always thought that the public shared their opinion, too, as far as the *Gazette* was concerned. They thought the *Gazette* was the best newspaper in America. And let's face it, it was. It was the best newspaper by several yardsticks even though we had some good people on the *Democrat*. Number two—you know, we can't have two number ones in town. We were number two.

DM: Was coming out in the afternoon a disadvantage at all?

FP: Well, that may have had something to do with it. I don't know, but, you know, we were down at the *Democrat*. It's possible that that was a consequence of . . .

DM: Let me ask you a couple of—well, maybe milestone events that occurred and kind of get your reaction. First of all, you experienced the newspaper right after World War II and you had a lot of people come back from the service and take over some other jobs.

FP: Yes.

DM: Was that a different experience?

FP: Well, it was traumatic for a lot of people who found themselves usurped from their jobs, because a guy was coming back. And it became the law that you had to give that job back to him. Yes. And the conflict between the city editors—we didn't know who was the city editor because they were both acting like city editors on the desk, you know. Berhoff didn't want to relinquish his job, and Allen

Tilden wanted his old job back, so that made it interesting. When some of these other guys started coming back [and] they found that the *Democrat* wasn't paying enough money, they would quit quickly and leave, and there was a lot of flux like that.

DM: Was this . . . ?

FP: I was just doing my job—my job description.

DM: You already mentioned the 1957 school crisis. How did that really affect journalism across Arkansas? Or how did it affect the newspaper business?

FP: Well, see, one thing it did was it heightened competition. It heightened competition because the need to cover the events leading up [to] and during and after was so intense. You had to stay with that story; that would be the story for a long, long time.

DM: I guess, maybe, the first time that Little Rock was the focus of the national media.

FP: Yes, that's right. You're absolutely right.

DM: And we were really national.

FP: I remember seeing the 101st Airborne coming across the Broadway Bridge—marching across the Broadway Bridge. It was a sight that you wouldn't believe. I used to have nightmares just thinking about it. This is happening in our town? No. No way. Then the fight for the—the stuff at the Central High School with the National Guard and all the controversy. I mean, it was just unbelievable [that] it was happening. I remember I had a little girl—my daughter—my young daughter was going to dance school at Central High School. They had a special class for little kids. And I went there to pick her up, and when I came they wouldn't let me in the damn school. [Laughs] They wouldn't let me have my own kid. They

kept me on ice for about three or four hours before they would release the kid into my custody. I mean, things like that—it was just so—it was surreal, that’s what it was. It’s just really unbelievable, unbelievable. But as far as the newspapers were concerned, we—I think we held our own, really, with the *Gazette* in that episode. I think we did. We had Douthit, and Bobbie Forster was a hell of a good reporter. Now, Bobbie Forster had a radio show before she went on in Little Rock. It was a number one news radio show in Little Rock before she went to the *Arkansas Democrat*.

DM: B-O-B-B-I-E, I think.

FP: Yes. Bobbie Forster, and she was terrific. She and George Douthit carried the ball for us and the rest of us ran interference. That gave us the impetus to hang in there with the *Gazette*. I think we just did a good job. The only difference was that we took different sides. We were a more conservative newspaper, while the *Gazette* was damn liberal, even if some of them didn’t want to admit that. I tell you what, they were liberal—no question about it.

DM: I guess they were considered, probably, one of the most liberal newspapers in the South.

FP: Absolutely, absolutely. But I remember some of the people saying that, you know, that was just a concept that wasn’t really true. That they were not liberal, they were—well, if you would say now that they were “Fair and Balanced” like FOX [News Channel] says, [laughter] you know, that sort of thing. That’s not true. That’s not true. Harry Ashmore was one of the big—big left-wingers that ever lived. I believe he was from reading his stuff. On the other side, we had people like Karr Shannon writing stuff that was very conservative. So you made your

choices there, but we—and that’s really—I have to say this, we did prosper by that arrangement because the *Gazette* lost considerable subscriptions, you know, several readers and advertisers. We gained—not to a great extent—but we gained to some extent.

DM: The story is—and this isn’t about the *Democrat*—but that Orville saved the *Gazette* during that period because he kept the readers who wanted to read about the Razorbacks.

FP: Well, his coverage of the Razorbacks was really intense, there’s no question about it. You can call him a “homer” if you want to, but he was good. He was good. He could—well, as they say, when he got into Frank Broyles’s back pocket, that was the way he did it. You know, you can’t fault him for that. If you want your stuff, you go to where it is.

DM: That’s Orville Henry were talking about. O-R-V-I-L-L-E. H-E-N-R-Y. What about—do you have any memories of the [President John F.] Kennedy assassination?

FP: Kennedy assassination? The only memory I can dig up, we were at work the morning of the assassination. I was on the desk and John Ward was sitting right across from me at his desk. His wife had called him up and said that she just saw on the television where Kennedy was assassinated, and John let out just a yell. “God Almighty, Kennedy has been assassinated!” That stopped us in our tracks, you know. That’s how we found out. Not the AP. The AP is right behind us, you know. John [Robert] Starr was there, right there, but they didn’t have the damn thing—television beat them. And that’s how we found out about it.

DM: It happened during your cycle of news.

FP: Yes.

DM: I was wondering how you came about it.

FP: Yes. Right. Right. Yes.

DM: Did you notice any difference in the environment there from the end of World War II to the Vietnam War?

FP: Notice the difference—what?

DM: In the newsroom environment? Was it a different? Did the attitudes toward the war change from that war to the other?

FP: Yes, the attitude was there was a lot of [grousing?]. I remember that—among ourselves, I don't know about any particular news column, but I remember one particular instance when—you know Jon Kennedy, the cartoonist for the *Democrat*?

DM: Yes.

FP: He was very much opposed to the Vietnam—no, no—oh, this was the Korean War. The Korean War—this was five years after the end of World War II and we were going into Korea. He was so much opposed to it, he would be preaching around the newsroom about it. We sort of felt rather lukewarm about Korea. We didn't know very much about Korea. As far as the personal feelings of the people, I think they were pretty against any more conflict because there was a lot of it. Hell, five years is nothing compared to what—and here we were going in to Korea and the atom bomb and all that. It was just a little too much. As far as the newspaper was concerned—the *Democrat* was concerned—the reflection of it—we just carried the big headlines all the time. War stories all the time.

DM: What about Watergate? Did that change anything? [Editor's note: The Water-

gate scandal led to the resignation of U.S. President Richard M. Nixon in 1974.]

FP: Well, it depends upon where you stood; whether you were a Republican or a Democrat. [Laughs] My boss was a Republican, you know, the big shot. I don't think we paid a heck of a lot of attention to the coverage—how should I say this? Most of the writers—most of the staff people that were on the *Democrat* were not liberal in the sense of these liberals today, but they were not war mongers or heavy-handed people like that. They were just ordinary guys, you know, who were often looking down their throats with what was happening overseas. We were kind of scared actually. We didn't know what was taking place at the time just from reading the dispatches. As far as the war was concerned, I don't think it made a big splash with us.

DM: They said that—they often say that Watergate kind of changed how journalism was done.

FP: Well, for some people maybe it did. For some people maybe, but, as far as the staff people on the *Democrat* at that time, I don't think it had that much of an impact. I really don't. Maybe Bob McCord would have taken another position on it. [Laughs]

DM: What are some of the biggest adjustments you've had to make as you've gone through the newspaper business in your decades there?

FP: To write a newspaper story. [Laughs] Frankly, journalism schools, I thought, were a joke, at least the ones I attended—and I attended two of them—maybe there was another good school like [the University of] Missouri or whatever. I remember one of the major courses we had in journalism school was reading *TIME* Magazine.

DM: A course?

FP: A course on *TIME* magazine. Reading damn *TIME* magazine. A guy would just—a professor, I don't remember who the hell he is now. I don't think he ever worked a newspaper a day in his life. [He] would read the *TIME* story and point out how wonderful it was and how all this sort of thing. And we were up there, and we should prepare ourselves to be like these reporters at *TIME*. It was just a lot of crap.

DM: This was at Alabama?

FP: This was at Alabama. So it was just a matter—actually, for me, personally, it was on the job training, really.

DM: That's what it was.

FP: It was on the job training, and even today I still struggle. [Laughs]

DM: Of course, computers kind of came in on the tail end of your career.

FP: Well, yes. That's right. Computers were never a factor, as far as I'm concerned, because when I left there they were still banging around on typewriters. Computers were, you know, around, but they had not made that great of an impact in the newsroom.

DM: Yes, I think from—well, late 1960s [to] early 1970s newspapers were basically—[Johann] Gutenberg would have recognized the process, whereas, all of the sudden, there were more changes from probably the mid 1970s to now than there had been in the previous hundreds of years.

FP: You know, the atmosphere of the newsroom is so different now than what it used to be. The old newsroom was crowded and noisy . . .

DM: Smoky.

FP: . . . smoky and noisy—and they would always smoke like crazy. It was noisy and there were just happy-go-lucky kinds of things. I mean, yelling and cursing and shouting . . .

DM: Fighting.

FP: . . . fighting, and this that and the other. Really. But, nowadays, you walk into a newspaper office and you get these computers that don't make any noise. It's like working in a bank building; everything is so calm and sedate.

DM: When I started, you know, on any given day you'd have, maybe, somebody—well, several people clanking out the typewriters and those noisy AP machines . . .

FP: Oh, those machines were right behind the desks.

DM: . . . and maybe a couple of editors yelling at each other.

FP: That's right. Right. Right. Yes. The whole atmosphere of the newspaper business is just absolutely upside down, as far as I'm concerned. That's not the structure or anything like that, but the atmosphere.

DM: Well, even—as I seem to recall, the female reporters were—some of them were hard-drinking, smoking, just pretty much could go one-for-one with the guys.

FP: Oh, they were one of the guys, one of the guys. Yes. And there was a lot of camaraderie, too, among the guys on the staff—the people on the staff. I never did feel that way here at the *Log Cabin*, for example. Everybody went their own way, you know, but at the *Democrat* at quitting time everybody got together. That was one of the big highlights, getting together and socializing. You know, going to each other's houses and one thing or another, having dinners and picnics.

DM: You'd kind of, maybe, fight with each other in the newsroom.

FP: Yes, but it was a cozy atmosphere afterwards, right. We had that feeling of cama-

raderie, so to speak.

DM: I mean, if somebody changed a story or didn't have the right lead, that could lead to an exchange.

FP: Oh, there was always total conflict about that, yes. Well, we'd write a lead and [laughs] they'd write a headline, or [if] they didn't like how the story was played or something like that, we voiced our opinion. You know, we'd make a case for our story. If we couldn't win it, of course, we weren't shy about fussing about what we wanted someone to do.

DM: I'm just now noticing—and I think you can touch on it—it used to be in this business that you had to really earn a byline. If you got a byline, then . . .

FP: [Laughs] That's one of things that bothers the hell out of me. The fact of that is—really one of the things that bothered me working for the *Log Cabin* is that they put a byline on everything. I think all the newspapers are that way. If you had a byline on the story, that meant that was a good story. That was one of the top stories, either through effort, or whatever it was—an exclusive, or exclusivity, or whatever. You got a byline for that story, and you were proud of that byline. Now bylines are cheap.

DM: Bylines were rewards for exceptional work.

FP: Absolutely, absolutely. Those were prized possessions. A byline was almost like getting a damn \$5-a-week raise [laughs] maybe not that good, but something. But that is true, and I had noticed that trend to give bylines to everybody. And it's not just here, it's every place.

DM: Everything written.

FP: Yes, everything written. You write something, you put your name on it. Well,

that's such a crock. If it's good, that's when you get a byline. I think that's why the whole concept of a byline started. It was a reward for a damned good story, or a story that beat the opposition, or whatever—well-written, or well-researched or something like that, and you got a byline.

DM: What's the, maybe, most fun or most fulfilling thing you did at the *Democrat*?

FP: Most fulfilling?

DM: Yes.

FP: Most fulfilling. I guess, if I got a good story I felt fulfilled, but . . .

DM: If you got a byline?

FP: If I got a byline on a good story—and sometimes I didn't get a byline even if I was interviewing important people or something like that. I was better at that than hard news, actually. I could do better with personal stuff, human interest kinds of stories, but if I could get, say, if I ever sat down with someone—just off the top of my head—say the Bishop of Canterbury came to Little Rock one time and I had an assignment to interview him. Right across the street from Christ church—Episcopal Church—was where he encamped. I went there with trepidation not knowing what the hell I was going to say, even going to Episcopal Church at that time [laughs] I really didn't know what this man was all about. I was afraid about this interview, but, when I got over there and he put me at ease it was just like you and I talking. He was just a princely fellow, just absolutely good. He even helped me write the damned story. It was most fulfilling, I thought. And I was really proud of the fact that I was granted this interview.

DM: What were some of the other people that you were able to meet?

FP: Well, I know. Good Gosh. Matt Dillon on the television show *Gunsmoke* [played

by James Arness] and Primo Carnera, one time world heavyweight champion. I was just a young reporter at that time, but there were so many of them over the years. I put them down on paper one time and the list really surprised me. I can't remember very many of them right now, but it's just a few years ago. You know, I never did anything else but newspaper work, so I have no basis for comparison for any other job, so I can't say. I was fulfilled by the newspaper business at the *Democrat*. I did a lot of it. I loved every little minute about it. I wouldn't change it for any other job. I wouldn't do any other kind of job so, you know—even though I'm just an ordinary—kind of hack like—just an ordinary newspaper guy, that's what I wanted to do, and I felt fulfilled doing it, and to this day I'm still hanging in there. I hate to—I don't want to give up. I can't give it up.

DM: It's in your blood.

FP: I can't give it up. Sometimes I lie awake at night and wonder "What the hell am I doing? Forget it; you're retired. No more stories. No more, no more." But I can't—next morning I'm looking around for something.

DM: Something comes up.

FP: Yes. Something comes up and I get so excited. It's something that does get into your system. And you know that.

DM: Is there anything that you can think of that we haven't covered that you would like to . . .?

FP: Oh, I don't know. It was fun to associate with people like that. I enjoyed talking to people like that in the newspaper business, even outside the *Democrat*. Now, George Fisher was a good friend of mine, and he worked for the *Gazette* at one time. And Charlie Allbright, I practically grew up with Charlie Allbright.

[Laughs] The nights he would come over my to house and we would cook up hamburgers, and hotdogs, and fried potatoes, and get drunk. [Laughs] Anyway, Charlie was wonderful and John Ward was good, too. I enjoyed being with John. The association with these people was such that, even though we were not making money, you sort of didn't think about that until pay time came along. On payday at the *Arkansas Democrat*, let me tell you, this was archaic. The business manager—on a Friday—had a little box that he would carry around with him with little pay envelopes in them with cash money in there. Your name was on the envelope, and he would go around and say, "Here's your envelope." And hand it to you. Cash money. He did that to everybody.

DM: That was the checks.

FP: That was my pay. No change.

DM: No change.

FP: Hey, it was all cash—all cash, change and everything else. He'd go to the composing room, and those guys up in the composing room were making a hell of a lot more money than we were, but they were paid in cash in little envelopes. It was incredible. Christmas time—oh, Christmas time was wonderful. We would get \$25 bonuses in a little envelope—\$25 less tax. [Laughs] I'm telling you, it came about to \$21.68 or something like that, you know. But that was the—maybe that's archaic and all and probably we weren't aware of how the other newspapers did it. I'm sure the *Gazette* didn't do it that way, but that was the *Arkansas Democrat*. We had a publisher like K.A. Engel. People—when I tell that story to some people—I don't tell it around, but when I do mention it to people they have a hard time believing that. It's so, so—oh gosh, it's so exciting.

[Laughs]

DM: Well, I'm not sure I'd believe it myself.

FP: He was the man. He was the man. We didn't have a board of directors or anything like that. He was the number one honcho. We didn't have a management team.

DM: That was Engel you were talking about?

FP: Yes, Engel. He was it. And when Engel left, why, his nephew took over, you know, Marcus George. You remember Marcus, don't you?

DM: Yes.

FP: You do?

DM: Yes. Yes.

FP: And Engel partly owned Channel 11 television station and a recording studio. He owned that. When he died, I guess Marcus got that recording studio, too. So Marcus grew up. Marcus used to sit up there—he got to be city editor at one time and he'd sit there and say, [Impersonation of Marcus George] “Just hang in there fellows. Hang in.” He was one of the boys, you know. He knew we weren't making any money. Insurance? No insurance, nothing. He's say, “Hang in there boys. If I ever get hold of this place, you'll want to be here.” He got hold of this place and absolutely nothing changed.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]

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