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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Mary Dee [Terry] Taylor
Little Rock, Arkansas
28 June 2005

Interviewer: Jackye Finch

Jackye Finch: It is June 28, 2005. This is Jackye Shipley Finch interviewing Mary Dee Taylor. [We're going to do an interview for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, on the *Arkansas Democrat*.] Mary Dee, if you would just start by telling us where you were born, who your parents were, early childhood, et cetera?

Mary Dee Taylor: I'd be happy to do that, Jackye. There are those in the South who still think I'm a "Damn Yankee." I was born in Waukegan, Illinois, November 24, 1934. I grew up there and went off to school—the College of St. Theresa—for one year in [Winona] Minnesota, and then spent three years [1952-1955] at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin [and graduated]. Then I worked for a while in the Chicago area [1955-1956, Evanston, Illinois] and decided to seek my fame and fortune in San Francisco, where I met an Arkan-
san named Bill Terry. We were married January 31, 1959 in Cali-

ifornia and moved several years later—in 1964—back to Arkansas.

JF: What did you study at Marquette and [what were] some of your favorite activities there?

MDT: I was a communications major, although in those days we said “speech major.” I was not particularly active in anything having to do with journalism. It was theater that was my great love, and that's what I did at Marquette. I built sets and I made costumes and I did makeup. And I actually performed one time so well that my mother asked who had taken my part. She did not recognize me under a ton of makeup and a very, very deeply pitched voice as the third witch in "MacBeth." [Laughs] I loved that experience, particularly, and would have thoroughly enjoyed going into radio or television. There was one problem: my timing was off by about ten years. Radio was absolutely dying—going to FM and music and that sort of thing. And television was really not so far along that there were many opportunities, so I never had a career in the arts that I wanted.

JF: Now, why did you choose San Francisco? Did you know someone there? What was your first job there?

MDT: I really didn't know anybody there. I wanted to go to California because my sister, JoAnn Kibler, was living in L.A., but I didn't think I wanted to live in Los Angeles. San Francisco looked like a gorgeous place, and I thought, "Why not?" I was also able to make a transfer of job. I was with Illinois Bell as a service representative in Evanston [Illinois] and I was given a transfer to Pacific Tel and Tel [Telephone and Telegraph] in San Francisco, which worked out very well.

JF: Who were your parents? Give us a little bit of background.

MDT: My mother and daddy were born in a little town not far from Waukegan called

McHenry, Illinois—a town that was half German and half Irish. Mother was Irish; Daddy was German. Eleanor Walsh and Louis Young. They got married. I inherited the whole town. I was related to everybody out there, I think. Growing up was just one of those apple pie, normal American stories. We were not people of great means, but we were not impoverished. We just had a wonderful life. I have one sister. Things were good. I had *lots* of cousins, as you can imagine.

JF: You got to San Francisco and you were working for Pacific Telephone. How long were you there, and when did you meet Bill?

MDT: Well, let's see. I met Bill about three months after I arrived in San Francisco [in late 1957]. I had met a gal at work from Connecticut. She and I rented an apartment together—one of those wonderful San Francisco flats where you could see the Bay Bridge. It was just grand. We were having a housewarming party, and Bill came with a friend of my roommate. So that was how we met. A little over a year later, we were married at the Mission in Carmel, which was very nice. We continued to live in the Bay Area for the next four years. We had two children, Matthew Terry and Catherine Terry Marshall, while we were there. Then, for a variety [of] reasons, we decided to go east. One of those reasons was that Bill was going to be the next great American playwright, but I don't think I'll pursue that at this point. We wound up living in a beach community in New Jersey because it was relatively close to New York, and because he knew the fellow who owned it, who was Trapper John from the “M*A*S*H” television series—a fellow named—well, that's gone. I can't remember his name. [Editor's note: Wayne Rogers portrayed Captain John Xavier “Trapper” McIntyre on “M*A*S*H”.]

JF: And you were there for how long?

MDT: We were there from the first of November 1963 until mid-April 1964, at which point Bill had some business he needed to take care of in Arkansas. He brought the children and me back there with him, and I said, "I'm not leaving." It was the most beautiful place I had ever been.

JF: Was this your first time to Arkansas?

MDT: No, I had been in Arkansas a number of times before, but either in the heat of summer or at Christmastime—sometimes with snow and ice. I had never seen it in April, and that did it. I said, "This is it. I'm staying here." So we moved back here.

JF: At this point the children were how old?

MDT: The children were just—let's see, not quite one year and not quite three.

JF: Okay. When did you start working in Little Rock, and what was that?

MDT: Well, actually, I was doing more volunteer work than anything, except for a brief stint at the [Arkansas] Arts Center, when I was hired by what was then called their public relations department. I worked with a gal named Pearl Downs, whom a lot of people from Arkansas would know. I always thought of that as temporary work, and, really, it was. I don't even remember how long I was there, but I had done a lot of volunteer work at the Arts Center. Then I was doing volunteer work for the March of Dimes. My job was to write press releases. I delivered a few press releases to the *Democrat*, to Virginia Garrison, specifically. Virginia called me when she had an opening and asked if I would like to talk to her about a job. So I did.

JF: Roughly, what year was this?

MDT: I think I started working in the fall of 1968. I believe you were there at the time.

JF: Yes, I was.

MDT: Right.

JF: What was your reaction to this? Was this something you thought you might like to do?

MDT: Well, it turned out really to be a fun job. I don't know that Virginia hired me for my talent as a writer. I guess she figured I could put some sentences together. But I was incredibly well connected to "Little Rock society." My mother-in-law knew *everybody* who was anybody, and she was very good about introducing me to them. So Virginia asked me to write the society column, which had been called "Society Slants." I said, "I'm sorry, that sounds like terrible bias. I don't think I can call it that." I wanted to call it "Terry-Go-'Round." Marcus George was concerned about that. It was too personal. He said, "What if you walk out on Capitol Avenue and get hit by a bus? Nobody could write it then." So we decided to call the column "Carousel" for the goings-on.

JF: Generally, do you remember what the *Democrat* was like in those days?

MDT: Well, the *Democrat* had not begun to make any changes. The first thing I had to do was to admit I had no idea where to find my typewriter because it was buried inside an absolutely incredible desk that rolled, and up it came and—I mean, I was really lost as a goose those first few days. We were still paid in cash in a little pay envelope which was presented, and I thought that was appalling! But it was a new and different sort of thing, and it took me out of the world of ankle-biters [reference to staying home raising young children] and into dealings with real adult people, and I liked that very much.

JF: Now, the column—how often a week did it run?

MDT: Originally, I think it ran five days a week—maybe even six days. I'm not sure.

JF: So you worked at the office five days a week?

MDT: I worked at the office. I did. In less than a year—I'm not really sure of my dates—but I had a badly sprained ankle, and I started writing the column at home. My children really liked having me there when they came home from school. So I talked with—I think by then it was Kit King who was the women's editor. I'm pretty sure. Virginia had left, and Kit was there. I said, "You know, what I do, I do mostly on the telephone and then I write it up. Is there any reason I couldn't do that from home and send it in?" I had a neighbor—I've forgotten her name—but somebody just a couple of blocks from here worked, I think, in classifieds. I would send the column in with her three times a week. We cut it to three times a week. She would take it in for me, and that worked out really quite well.

JF: So this preceded the cutting edge now of people working from home.

MDT: Oh, absolutely! Nobody ever *heard* of such a thing as a computer to do work like that. In fact, I really did kind of force the circle of the powers that be to think outside the box. I said, "I would do this at home, but I don't have a typewriter." And they said, "Oh." I said, "But you could buy me a little electric portable, and"—
"An electric portable? Unheard of!" But they did, and it worked out quite well.

JF: Now, tell us about your mother-in-law and who she was, and her contacts. What was that like, coming from the North?

MDT: Oh, my. [Laughs] It was, believe me, a little bit of a culture shock. My mother-in-law was Cornelia Witsell Terry Thomas. She was absolutely a marvelous woman. We remained good friends to the end of her life, which was a long one,

and she lived it well. She had been an active member of the Junior League. She was one of those people who really did work to make her community a better place. So a lot of people knew her, and, as I said, she knew *everybody*. She was very southern in some ways, but she was very much a progressive woman. We used to say she could've run General Motors better than the fellows who were doing it. Very organized. A very clever woman.

JF: Did your column differ much from the previous column writer. And who was that? Did you change it?

MDT: Okay. I'm not entirely sure who wrote the column immediately before I was tasked to do it, but I think it changed only in the sense that I was more interested in people who were doing exciting things—traveling to interesting places, winning awards—things of that nature. Before that, it had mostly been who gave a bridal shower for Suzy Smith. Now, I didn't give up the bridal showers entirely. There was still a place for those, but I did see it, I think, a little bit differently from the traditional.

JF: Did you get much feedback from the people you were writing about, or perhaps the people you were *not* writing about?

MDT: Well, occasionally I would get a call from somebody who would say, "You didn't say anything about such-and-such, and it was really important." And, you know, maybe it was. It was important to the person who called me, certainly. I think at the time I didn't think it was all that important. Over time, I do think that I helped maybe to change some attitudes, and I think, Jackye, that you helped with that as well. We were really considered to be rabble-rousers; I know that. For instance, when we put the Little Rock Country Club debutantes on the front page and fol-

lowed that with the Alpha Kappa Alpha, I think—they were black fraternity debs [debutantes]. There were people who were very distressed by that.

JF: Did you have any problem with that from the newspaper management?

MDT: I think—because this was in—well, I started in 1968—this would have been in the early 1970s. Yes, maybe 1971. I think that management just didn't quite know what to make of me. And, for the most part, unless somebody called and really spoke harshly about me to them, they just kind of ignored what I was doing. They generally ignored what the women's department was all about, anyway.

JF: Tell me how that evolved into—what year did you become the women's editor?

MDT: Well, I'm not entirely sure whether it was 1970 or 1971. What happened was that management was not entirely happy with Kit King's work as editor. Mr. George called me in and asked if I would be willing to take the job, and I said, "Oh! I didn't know Kit was leaving." He said, "Well, Kit doesn't know it yet, either." I said, "Okay, when she does, talk to me again." I refused to say that I would take a job that belonged to the woman I worked for. I just thought that was inappropriate. So they let Kit know that she was on her way out. Then they called me back in and said, "Now will you take it?" I said, "Well, okay. I will." At that point, I was ready to come back into the office. It was fine.

JF: The children were in school by [then]?

MDT: The children were in school, yes, pretty much full days.

JF: Did they tell you what they didn't like about the previous editor policy? Did you change that in any way?

MDT: You know, I don't really think that we changed it. I really don't know why they were not wanting to keep Kit on the job. I can't answer that question. I just never

knew.

JF: But it was not a policy matter that they wanted you to change?

MDT: They didn't give me any direction . . .

[Tape Stopped]

JF: So, Mary Dee, did you have any specific things that you wanted to do or change about the women's pages at that point?

MDT: I really did want to get more in touch with the women's movement—with the changes that were happening around the country. Gloria Steinem was big. We were having consciousness-raising groups here in Little Rock. And I thought, frankly, that it was time to take lovely brides off the front page and put them inside, and do stories about what women were *doing*. That, to me, seemed much more important.

JF: Did you have trouble [with management] taking the brides off the front page?

MDT: There was a conversation about whether or not that was a good idea. And after a couple of weeks, when the calls subsided [laughs]—"Why isn't my daughter on the front page?"—apparently, management thought we were doing the right thing.

JF: Well, now, tell me a little bit about some of the people you worked with—not only in the women's section, but at the *Democrat*, and, generally, what it was like—who the characters were.

MDT: Oh. [Laughs] There were characters aplenty. I think Gene Foreman was the managing editor while I was there—most of the time. Eventually, Jerry McConnell took over from Gene. He [Gene] was an interesting person. He knew a whole lot about newspapering—not a whole lot, necessarily, about personal rela-

tionships, but it was interesting to work for him. And, of course, Marcus George was the editor-in-chief, and Bob McCord was there for some of that time. Working with you was a wonderful experience, since you were the best writer on the whole newspaper. Anyway, let's see—when I started, Lela or Lila Mae Funston was . . .

JF: Lelia Maude Funston.

MDT: Lelia Maude—that's it—was the religion editor, and she was absolutely lovable. And, of course, we were rotten people who were so young, we thought we should make fun of her occasionally. But she was a wonderful person. Johnnie Qualls was on the women's staff, and Johnnie was just sort of "Mother Earth," loving everybody to pieces. I have lost a first name. Her last name was Robinson.

JF: Carol.

MDT: Carol Robinson, who was such a wonderful photographer. You and Carol and I cooked up some awfully good ideas and really did some wonderful-looking pages, I think.

JF: What were some of the highlights for you, either of people you interviewed, or projects you had, or cover stories?

MDT: Well, my favorite interview of all time was with Dinah Shore. Dinah was there with Burt Reynolds. Burt was making [the motion picture] "White Lightning," and I had occasion to meet some of the cast because one of them was a friend of my sister's from California. Dinah was absolutely charming. She was just as gracious as could be. Her only request was that she not be photographed with flash bulbs. And, I think, in Hollywood they refer to that as "shooting through a mattress." It softens all lines. It gives no indication of age. She looked wonderful,

but she was a little conscious of the fact that she was quite a bit older than Burt, and she didn't want anybody to count those wrinkles. But she was just grand. One of my all-time favorite pages was about a half-page of a photo that Carol took in—a silhouette kind of thing. And I don't really remember even what the subject was, except that I know you wrote a good story to go with it.

JF She was a great photographer and writer, too

MDT: She was just wonderful. Yes.

JF: Tell me a little bit about what the competition [reference to the *Arkansas Gazette*] was doing in those days.

MDT: Well, the competition was still in private hands, as opposed to corporate hands.

You know, I don't remember a whole lot about what their women's pages looked like. [Laughs] Not too different from ours, I think, although we thought we were better.

JF: Do you remember who the women's editor was at the *Gazette*? Was it Betty Fulkerson? Was she still . . . ?

MDT: Betty probably was there when I started.

JF: Yes.

MDT: And I don't know if she was still there when I left. I really don't remember that.

Let me think—who else? Harriet Aldridge was the food editor. I've really forgotten their other people.

JF: How long did you work for the *Democrat*?

MDT: I worked from the fall of 1968 until—well, it must have been the fall of 1972.

What did me in was a political announcement. That was about the time people started announcing their political intentions. And what did me in was that I had

had lunch with Judith Rogers, who had said to me, kind of in passing, "If Jim Guy Tucker does not run for attorney general, I will." I asked her if she had made this known elsewhere, and she said there were some friends who knew it, but that was all. I said, "Are you going to announce it publicly?" She said, "Yes, I'd like to do that in a couple of days." I said, "Would you give me a twenty-four-hour lead?" That was the requirement. The women's pages had to be done twenty-four hours ahead of the rest of the newspaper. I said, "This is women's news." It was a woman making news, at least. I think it's women's news. It was very cheeky of me to do, and I knew at the time that I would probably get in trouble. I didn't know I'd get fired, but I did.

JF: Was it straight from the editor? Was Marcus George the editor then or . . . ?

MDT: Well, Jerry McConnell was the one who was tasked with firing me. And I honestly don't think he really wanted to do that, but he was told to do it.

JF: So you covered this—did they not see that you were doing this at the paper, or did it just appear in the paper?

MDT: It just appeared. Nobody *ever* looked at our pages in advance. Twenty-four hours ahead of the rest of the newspaper—they had *all the time in the world* to look at them, but they *didn't*.

JF: Did you get any feedback from the news staff reporters? Was there some rankling there?

MDT: I don't recall. There might have been. There might have been, but I don't really recall that. Things happened pretty quickly. The day that it appeared in the women's pages, I cleaned out my desk. So I'm not sure what sort of fallout there was after that.

JF: What did you do after this?

MDT: Oh, I did something I had been threatening to do for a while, anyway. I started a little company called RSVP. Because there was, at about the same time, an organization called the Retired Senior Volunteer Program—I decided to tack an "Inc." on the end of mine—so RSVP, Inc., was founded that fall to do party planning for small companies, for individuals—it just depended on what the needs were. And by the end of Christmas week, I had done one office party, one rehearsal dinner, one bridesmaids' luncheon, and a wedding reception for about a thousand people at the Arts Center.

JF: So you didn't have much time to moan and weep, then, did you?

MDT: I didn't! No, as a matter of fact. Well, there was one little thing that got into the middle of that. I was flying to California shortly after my departure from the *Democrat*. On the plane, I got into conversation with a gentleman who was a representative of the Thermador Company. I said something about that I had been the women's editor and, therefore, food editor at the *Democrat*, and my eight-year-old daughter popped up with, "Yeah, but she got fired last week!" Whereupon, this gentleman offered me a job helping to demonstrate Thermador appliances, which I did for a while.

JF: Right there on the plane?

MDT: On the plane. Yes. I had the job by the time I landed in L.A.

JF: Did you go through some kind of training?

MDT: Yes, I did. They sent me to Florida for the initial training. I worked with an actor named Richard Deacon, whom some people will remember from the old "Dick Van Dyke Show." He was the poor, hapless Mel—the one with no hair—and he

was a very funny, very nice man.

JF: And what did he do?

MDT: He was their spokesperson.

JF: Spokesperson. Yes.

MDT: Yes.

JF: So you were doing this at about the same time you were doing RSVP?

MDT: Yes. I was getting RSVP under way and doing that. The world has a funny way of turning just at the right time.

JF: How long did you own RSVP?

MDT: I had that from 1972 until, I think, 1976. I'm not sure, but I think it was 1976.

JF: And over that time, did you have a full-time staff or part-time? Who were some of the people you worked with? I seem to recall Olivia Brady.

MDT: Exactly. Olivia Brady, who is the mother of Evette Brady, who now has 1620 Restaurant. Olivia and several of her daughters, including Evette, who was about fourteen, did the majority of the cooking for things that I planned for other people. I worked with some wonderful, wonderful waiters—a man named York Wilburn, Louie Lee—just great—oh, and Calvin Shackelford—all among my favorites.

JF: Is he still working?

MDT: Yes, he is.

JF: Tell us about some of the events you did, some of the most interesting and some of the most unusual.

MDT: Well, as I said, that first week was really something else again. The wedding for a thousand was for Bishop Christoph Keller's daughter. Her mother was a Murphy from El Dorado, and they knew a lot of people, so they chose the Arts Center

as the place to hold the reception. We did an Elizabethan banquet, including roast, suckling pig, and as many items as we could pull out of the history books and find recipes for that would be appropriate to an Elizabethan banquet. That was great fun. The biggest event I had anything at all to do with was the opening of First National Bank, which happened in the summer of 1975.

JF: At which location?

MDT: This was First National when they built the tower at the corner of Broadway and Capitol Avenue.

JF: Tell us about that.

MDT: Well, there were a number of parties. I think there were something like thirteen small parties that I did, but the Lollapalooza was the public opening. We had the full cooperation of the Little Rock Police Department. They closed off streets around the building. It was open to the general public. We had an ice cream truck with Coleman Dixie cups being served on the street. We set up barrels of lemonade. We had a cotton candy machine, which some of the volunteers from the bank never forgave me for because it got in their hair and it was nasty and sticky. We had cookies by the, literally, hundreds of dozens. It was absolutely wonderful. We had the Keystone Cops, a band of merry men lead by the inimitable Leroy Donald.

JF: Now, tell us who Leroy Donald is.

MDT: Well, Leroy Donald, of course, *still* writes for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. He had been business newswriter for the *Gazette* for years, and just one of the most fun-loving, not-quite-ever-going-to-grow-up, Peter Pan-sorts you'll ever meet.

JF: So he was one of the Keystone Cops.

MDT: He was the head cop.

JF: What else do you remember about that event?

MDT: Well, according to the police, there were 25,000 people at the event on the street. And they based that on the numbers that were recorded for VJ Day when everybody came to downtown Little Rock. So it was impressive. I was exhausted.

JF: Did you take some time off after that?

MDT: I did. I had a couple of weeks just to rest my weary feet at that point.

JF: What were some of the other events that come to mind? And did you see a lot of these events covered in the society column in the *Democrat*? [Laughs]

MDT: Indeed, I did. Indeed, I did. Let's see. I did several things at the Arts Center. They were always covered.

JF: Any out-of-town things that you did?

MDT: I did. One of those was great fun. We did something at Wingmead [Arkansas], which was the Frank Lyon home near Hazen, I guess. Anyway, it's the fanciest duck club you ever saw in your life.

JF: And what did you do there?

MDT: We did a party, I think, for Ducks Unlimited. Gracious! I couldn't tell you the name, but there was lots of good food.

JF: So, to back up just a bit, tell us about your experience with the radio program.

MDT: As I said, I was doing a lot of volunteer work.

JF: Yes.

MDT: This was a volunteer job. KAAZ, the Mighty Ten-Ninety, did a series of taped programs—oh, what was it called? Do you recall?

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JF: . . . radio program you did. Now, tell us about that.

MDT: Well, because our next-door neighbor, Joe Dickey, worked for the station, we were invited—we, being Joel and—excuse me. Husband number one. [Laughs] Bill Terry and I were invited to work with Len Day —wonderful, wonderful character. And Bill wrote most of the scripts for this program, which was something like “Ear to Ear”—I'm not sure—I think it was a take-off on somebody else's more famous program. It was played on Sundays, I believe, and we would go in and record Wednesday afternoon. I did several of the voices. As I said, Bill did most of the writing, and Day did a lot of them—and there were several other people involved in voicing. My favorite one of all time—the *Democrat*, for years, had carried thousands of pictures of the forestry queens around Arkansas. Now, I don't mean to be mean to anybody who was ever a forestry queen, but it seems that it was excessive. There were forestry queens from not just every county—which would mean seventy-five of them—but I think they were from various cities within the various counties—so it really was a thing. And there would be dozens of pictures on a single page, week after week. So we did a *bad* take-off on the forestry queen, and it was my role to play. I was [said with a heavy Arkansas accent] Emma Branch, and my measurements were 50-50-50.

JF: [Laughs]

MDT: This gives you an idea of the sort of satire that was involved.

JF: And this was in the 1960s?

MDT: Yes, the late 1960s.

JF: Before you joined the *Democrat*.

MDT: Yes, that was before I—yes, that's exactly right.

JF: And how long did you and Bill do this?

MDT: Oh, probably close to a year.

JF: Yes.

MDT: As a matter of fact, I made a dreadful mistake. When I moved out of my last house, I left behind all the reels of those shows and didn't know it until much later.

JF: Oh! We're going back to about 1975 or late—you sold the RSVP business in 1976?

MDT: I did. Yes. I think it was in 1976. Mary Wildgen bought it, and Mary took it way beyond anything that I had even attempted to do. And I understand that she sold it for about \$1 million just last year. [Laughs]

JF: What did you do after you sold RSVP?

MDT: I went to work for the state of Arkansas.

JF: Okay. What did you do there?

MDT: I was travel editor for the Department of Parks and Tourism. And it was a wonderful job—absolutely a dreamy job. I got to go to lots of places and meet wonderful people, write fairly interesting, fun features. I had a staff of seven who wrote and did cartoons and that kind of thing. I was there—I'm sorry. I did skip over one. I was at the Hospitality Association for about two years prior to going to Parks and Tourism. And I was editor of the *Hospitality* magazine, which encompasses the travel industry—generally, hotels, motels and restaurants. Very largely, restaurants. So that was something that I just kind of fell into.

JF: And the travel editor job—about how long did that last?

MDT: I was there for five years. I really am getting old. I completely forgot one other role in life. I was invited to help open food service at the train station when the train station was being revitalized.

JF: Yes.

MDT: Yes, that happened—[laughs] let me think about that. That came after the Vineyard. Well, I'm *really* getting things out of order.

JF: That's okay.

MDT: I left the *Democrat* and started RSVP. I was doing RSVP when a group of women from the Fine Arts Club approached me and said they liked the way I did things, and would I be interested in coming down to run the Vineyard restaurant, which had been open for maybe five months at that point.

JF: And this was at . . . ?

MDT: At the Arkansas Arts Center. The Vineyard had not ever really become as successful as they hoped it would be, and part of the reason was its food wasn't very good. So I accepted the challenge [laughs] to try to come up with better food at the Vineyard, but I made it very clear to the committee from the Fine Arts Club that I couldn't do it overnight, and that I needed a minimum of five months to get it into the black, and closer to a year to make it a really successful deal that it was going to be. And they gave me that kind of leeway, and we—the board—wrote a contract that covered all those issues. I ran the Vineyard from 1974 until I was asked to go to the train station in 1976. I continued to do menus for the Vineyard and general inventory control while my friend, Mary Jean Davis, ran the day-to-day operation. So at that point in time, I was still doing RSVP. I was doing the

Vineyard, or at least the Vineyard menus and inventory, and I went to work at the train station. And we built a kitchen in conjunction with Slick Willy's, the game parlor, I guess, is the best way to describe it. It wasn't all billiards, but it had pool tables and lots of other things, and darts. And we opened a little foodservice thing called the Iron Horse Cafe. It ran for nearly a year when Buster Corley got interested in the building and responsibility, and I wanted to move on to something else. So Buster took over the operation at the Iron Horse and went on to open Buster's, and went from Little Rock, Arkansas, to being a national concern of D and B, standing for David Corveau and Buster Corley. D and B's went to Dallas and any number of other places—very successful—and I'm very proud of them.

JF: Well, now, when you were at the Vineyard, most of your staff was volunteers, but you had a couple, maybe, who were paid.

MDT: Yes. When I arrived there, there was a cook in place. She was a little reluctant to stay on because she said she had "never worked for no woman before." We made some accommodations, and we did okay for a while. But, eventually, she wanted to leave, and I was a little desperate. I just didn't have any idea what I was going to do about cooking lunch the next day. And some guardian angel sent a young woman through the doors. Her name was Aggie, and she was a jewel and a fabulous cook and wonderful to work with. I wound up having about three full-time employees and seventy-five volunteers a month.

JF: Who was harder to manage?

MDT: The full-time employees were a breeze. The volunteers, who were wonderful people, had one thing in common. As different as they could be, each one of them knew much better than I did how to run a restaurant [said facetiously].

JF: [Laughs]

MDT: But they were great, and, good heavens, it would never have succeeded without them.

JF: So you took the Vineyard from operating in the red into a profitable . . .

MDT We made a profit that fifth month.

JF: And now it's one of the . . .

MDT: Well, of course, now the Vineyard actually is no more, but it has been replaced by Drawings, which is run by Rob Best, who is *absolutely* the best. That's the perfect name for the man. So, yes, the Arts Center has [a] delightful restaurant these days.

JF: All right. Now, then, we've gone up through the train station. I know that you were—off and on—and then later you were more involved in political campaigns. Tell me a little bit about some of those that you've been involved in.

MDT: Well, probably the first one I was ever involved in was when Herb Rule ran for the state legislature, and Herb's then wife, Beth, and I pretty much managed his campaign—co-managed it. We wound up being on the front page of the *Arkansas Gazette*, or at least the backs of our heads were because we were wearing hats that had a catchy phrase. It was all based on the fact that a legislator named Paul Van [Dalsen?] had made some very politically incorrect comments. He said such things as [said in a macho voice with heavy Arkansas accent], "Well, up there in Perry County, we know how to keep women in their place—we just keep 'em barefoot in the winter and pregnant in the summer." So we were the Barefoot Pregnant Women for Herb Rule, and that caught some attention, and it wound up, as I say, on the front page of the *Gazette*. That was fun. That was strictly a vol-

unteer kind of operation. There were a number of others during the years. I was actually a paid employee of the first Winthrop Rockefeller [gubernatorial] campaign in 1964.

JF: What did you do?

MDT: I managed the home office. I learned some things. I was new to Arkansas, and I learned . . .

JF: And so was he! [Laughter]

MDT: Yes. Well, that's true. But I learned very quickly the names of the seventy-five counties, which I would probably never have learned otherwise. And I learned who the key people were in each of the seventy-five counties. So that was an interesting learning experience.

JF: I'll bet.

MDT: The last big campaign that I worked in was when Paul [Revere?] who was our secretary of state, ran for Congress. He ran against a fellow, you will recall, named Tommy Robinson. He lost it in the run-off.

JF: Well, that had to be fascinating.

MDT: It was. It was. It was also kind of a cut-throat campaign. I think that pretty well cured me of being terribly active in politics. I'm always interested, but I am no longer a big volunteer.

JF: So over the last few years, now, tell us what you've been doing. I know you're retired now.

MDT: Well, yes. I've retired two or three times, actually. You just never know what's going to come down the road. I worked for about five years for the League of Women Voters of Arkansas. They had a small one-person office, and I was it. I

worked just part-time for them—two or three days a week, depending on what needed to be done. Following that, I retired. Then I was approached because of a connection through the League. The woman who had hired me to work there became a very good friend, and she was a client of the Arkansas Financial Group. There was mention made to her the fact that they needed somebody to come in and help organize some things. She put them in touch with me. I met them and realized that Rick Adkins, who was CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the Arkansas Financial Group—he was the man who bought my house—that's how I knew that I left the reels in the closet because he told me he kept them for a long time and just didn't know what to do with them, so he threw them away. But I went to work for Rick and his partner, Cindy Conger. And I worked *there* for five years. While I was working for them, there was a vacancy in the Certified Financial Planning Association of Arkansas, which is a real mouthful. They needed someone to serve part-time as their executive secretary—executive director—and I was hired to do that. So when I retired from the Arkansas Financial Group, I just took that home with me, having learned many years before at the *Democrat* that I could work from home just fine. And since computers had come along, that made it even easier. And I have just retired from that this past December.

JF: So now are you completely retired?

MDT: Oh, I have all kinds of time to help my husband do everything he needs to do to bring a new product to market.

JF: Now, tell us who your husband is and a little bit about that.

MDT: My husband is Joel Taylor. I was Mary Dee Terry for thirty years and have been Mary Dee Taylor for fifteen. We like to think that between us we've helped Little

Rock learn about good food, because Joel was responsible for bringing Restaurant Jacques and Suzanne to Little Rock. And Jacques and Suzanne, you may recall, spawned fourteen other restaurants, which is pretty impressive. Joel had worked for the First National Bank, and, in fact, had worked for the state of Arkansas in Europe part-time. He was the AIDC [Arkansas Industrial Development Commission] man in Europe. He represented the bank overseas, so he worked closely with Finley Vinson. And when he heard about that new bank building, which I was going to open to the public, he asked what they were planning for the top floor. They thought maybe another private club. We had the Capital Club at Worthen Bank, and so on. He suggested that it be a restaurant open to the public, and that it be a very special restaurant. That was how he happened to bring Jacques and Suzanne here.

JF: And is that how you met him?

MDT: I met him during one of those parties to open the bank. Well, no, that's not true. I didn't meet him there, I saw him there. I met him about two months later.

JF: When did you marry?

MDT: Joel and I were married in May of 1991. He was working in Russia at that point in time, so our honeymoon was largely in Russia, and it was interesting. [Laughs] The In Tourist Hotel in Moscow is not my idea of heaven, but that's okay. We lived for a time in Santa Fe [New Mexico], which we dearly loved, but came back to Arkansas. He is an Arkansas native, and I'm an adopted Arkansan. So this is where we are now. And he is working to bring a small, portable, marvelous little exercise device to market. It's called the Slimmer Gym. He has two patents on it, and that's what I'm doing with all my spare time.

JF: Well, Mary Dee, is there something we haven't covered that you think would be of interest?

MDT: Oh, heavens, I don't know. I'm not sure, Jackye. It sounds like I was the world's worst job-hopper, having told you I went from here to there to elsewhere and back again. No, I don't think we've missed much of anything.

JF: Well, thanks.

MDT: Except for the fact that you and I have had a lifelong friendship, because of that meeting originally. [Laughs]

JF: Well, thank you, Mary Dee. It's been a wonderful interview.

MDT: Thank you.

[End of Interview]

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