

The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
University of Arkansas
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-6829

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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Jimmy Wilder

07 March 2007

Telephone Interview

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is March 7, 2007. I'm getting ready to do a telephone interview with Jimmy Wilder at his home in Murray, Kentucky, from my home in Greenwood, Arkansas. And the first thing I need to do, Jimmy, is to ask you if we have your permission to make this tape and to turn it over to the Special Collections for the oral history project on the [*Arkansas*] *Democrat* at the University of Arkansas [at Fayetteville].

Jimmy Wilder: Yeah, that's—you have my permission.

JM: Okay. Great. Well, at any rate, this is for The [David and Barbara] Pryor Center [for Arkansas Oral and Visual History]. And the first thing—just start out and—and—and tell me how—how you—your full name.

JW: Okay. James Lynn—L-Y-N-N—Wilder.

JM: Okay. W-I-L-D-E-R, correct?

JW: Right. Yes.

JM: Yeah. Okay, now, you worked for—in —in sports for both the *Democrat* and the [Arkansas] *Gazette*. Is that correct?

JW: Correct.

JM: Okay. Well, let's just start and—and—and I know you've done a lot of things since then, sports related, but let's just start—how you got there, and first, where were you born, Jimmy?

JW: Born October 29, 1942, in Malvern [laughs], Arkansas.

JM: In Malvern?

JW: Uh-huh.

JM: Yeah, okay. Okay. Is that where your—? I assume that's where your parents lived, then?

JW: At that time, yes.

JM: Yes. Okay. What were your parents' names?

JW: Woodrow and Pauline. P-A-U-L-I-N-E.

JM: Woodrow and Pauline.

JW: Wilder.

JM: What did your dad do?

JW: He was a printer by profession.

JM: Okay.

JW: And a magician [laughs] on . . .

JM: On the side?

JW: Uh-huh.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Did—did he work for the paper in Malvern?

JW: He worked for different, you know, printing—printing companies. Oh, you probably wouldn't call them companies back then—printing shops.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: And, you know, he worked at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, I remember, one year when we lived in Pine Bluff. But he never worked, you know, like, for the *Democrat* or the *Gazette*.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Okay.

JM: Okay, Jimmy, where did you go to school?

JW: In high school?

JM: Well, all the way through school.

JW: Goodness gracious, Jerry. This is gonna be unbelievable.

JM: Okay. Go ahead.

JW: First grade in Blytheville.

JM: Okay.

JW: In fact, I think it was—I may have started in Russellville and then we moved to Blytheville. But in second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth in Russellville.

JM: Okay.

JW: Okay. Seventh grade I went to White Hall Junior High. [Laughs]

JM: Okay.

JW: Okay. And then eighth grade was Benton Junior High.

JM: Okay.

JW: And then the ninth grade—that summer we moved to Little Rock, so I went to West Side Junior High.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: And then tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, Little Rock Central [High School]. Of course, you wouldn't count the eleventh because that's when the school was closed, so I wound up going to Morrilton High School.

JM: For your junior year?

JW: Yeah. You know, we waited around, Jerry. It was, like, the seventh week of school when I enrolled at Morrilton.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: Just waiting for the high school to open, and it never did.

JM: Yeah, that's when—that's when [Governor Orval] Faubus closed the schools during the integration crisis. My eleventh-grade school year was 1958-59.

JW: Yeah. Uh-huh.

JM: Okay. Yeah.

JW: That was my eleventh-grade year.

JM: Yeah. Okay. So you actually went to the tenth grade and the twelfth grade at Central.

JW: At Little Rock Central.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Eleventh grade at Morrilton with two other kids from Little Rock.

JM: Yeah.

JW: One of them was Doyne Davis. You know—you remember Doyne?

JM: Oh, yes. Uh-huh. Did you . . . ?

JW: He was starting halfback for Little Rock Central that year.

JM: Yeah. Did you have relatives up there?

JW: Yeah, I had an aunt and uncle I lived with.

JM: Okay. Then did you go to college, Jimmy?

JW: Yeah. Then out of high school, went to Little Rock University [now known as University of Arkansas at Little Rock] five years, and I was out of school two semesters. And then I graduated in 1966 from Arkansas State [University, Jonesboro]—transferred and went up there my—one year at Arkansas State and graduated that next summer.

JM: Okay. When did you—when did you get into newspaper work?

JW: Going into the twelfth grade. [Laughs]

JM: Okay. Okay. Where did that happen?

JW: That was at the *Democrat*.

JM: How did that happen? Tell me how that came about.

JW: Okay. That was—you know, Jerry, I was just probably like a lot of us that loved athletics and wasn't good enough in a lot of them. But I was playing—I had been playing [American] Legion baseball then over at Lamar Porter Field and . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: Mom got to be good friends with the Harts, and that's Delmar Hart, not Clyde Hart.

JM: Yeah.

JW: D-E-L-M-A-R.

JM: Yeah, I remember him.

JW: I know Mr. Hart was the principal at East Side, as I recall, then.

JM: Uh-huh. I think you're right.

JW: You know. Then he went to Central. But he knew Jack Keady.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: K-E-A-D-Y, who was a sports editor of the *Democrat*.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And they were looking for somebody—you know, I was keeping—I was playing [American] Legion ball and was a scorekeeper at Lamar Porter Field.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: I was doing Pony League and probably Legion, I guess, and maybe some Little League. And they were looking for somebody just to take the scores and the highlights each day—that was in the summer, you know, to—to the *Democrat*. So I would do that and just—I don't want to say "write up" [laughs] the reports. But, you know it was the agate-type deal, as I recall, Jerry. We did [that] with most of the scores and then, you know, just a little brief deal on the highlights. And so, you know, started there doing that. I had no background in—in journalism. You know, it was just the fact I loved sports and read a lot, you know?

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And, you know, Mr. Keady just started me with that. And that was going—that was going into my twelfth-grade year. But I would've probably been a printer [coughs]—excuse me—because, you know, Dad was a printer.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: In the tenth grade, you know, I was taking printing there at Little Rock Central.

And then the school closes the eleventh grade. When I came back, I had this going. And they had something—I think it was called DE—distributive education—and I just went to school half a day.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then, you know, you'd—you'd work in the afternoon, and so, you know, I was working for the *Democrat* then. You know, I couldn't write. I couldn't spell. Didn't know diddly.

JM: Hmm. [Laughs]

JW: But that's—that's how I—I started, and—and as I recall, Mr. Keady—and this is how I got to know, you know, you and some of the people there at the *Gazette*.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: He put me on Catholic High—assigned me to Catholic High. Then, I was on the *Tiger*—Little Rock Central—you know, the *Tiger* [Little Rock Central's student newspaper] staff. And so, [laughs] I was getting some writing there, but again, I wasn't worth a flip. I just started there. And I—I'd go out to Little Rock Catholic High, and nobody had ever—ever hardly really covered them, Jerry. Back at that point, except certain times—you know, certain games. But—but I—you know, I'd be out there every day. And, of course, they—they loved me because of that, as I recall. Of course, Mike Malham was the football coach. And I remember going out—you know, I'd go out there and go where they practice—back in the desolate [laughs]—it was several blocks from the school. I'd go out there and watch them practice, and then I'd go to their ball games and stuff. And [laughs] that was something else. Again, I can remember they liked me so much.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: I remember back then they had a kid named Steve Schubert, and it was S-C-H-U-B-E-R-T. He was a halfback and played basketball. You know, everybody played every sport. I spelled his name S-H-U-B-E-R-T about the whole year. I didn't learn until at some time in basketball season, you know, how to spell it. Nobody said anything because they were just so happy, I guess, that I was there.

JM: [Laughs] That you were doing something.

JW: Yeah, I'm not sure. The kids loved me, but I think they kind of hated it when I showed up for practice because Coach Malham was one of those—was one of those old-timers and, oh, he just loved to put on a show when I was there. That's when he would really grab them and shake their helmets and stuff. [Laughter] And he'd always look right at me when he got through with them. [Laughs] And I don't know what wanted me to—I was supposed to do. Maybe shake with them or something, but . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: So that's how I started, and, you know, I just . . .

JM: So you were—you were working in the mornings or . . . ?

JW: Well, I would work, you know, before—before school.

JM: Oh, okay.

JW: Go in there just—you know, very briefly and do whatever. In the afternoons you'd go—I'd go to practice and—and then if there were games that night. And I started covering junior high. That was basically it in the twelfth grade. And then when I—when I got in—you know, became a freshman at Little Rock

University—and they didn't have journalism. But they started working me more hours, and that's how I was able to—to go to college. And again, that's when I got to where I got to start covering more things. And that's where I got to know who you were.

JM: What else were you covering?

JW: You know, just wherever they assigned me. I got eventually where I was covering Little Rock Central some, but—I remember once going to a Cabot-Carlisle football game. That was a big rivalry. And I—I went to Carlisle to the game and, again, I'm just a little ol' kid starting in there, you know? The *Democrat* was perceived one way and the *Gazette* the other. And I remember just going there and I didn't even go to the press box. I was just—don't remember if I walked the sideline or whatever. But I remember they—they introduced—they recognized—before the game, Jerry, [laughs] they recognized Robert Shaw, you know, “We're pleased to have Robert Shaw from the *Arkansas Gazette*.”

[Laughs] That's how I got to know people like Robert Shaw and Bill Simmons.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And then I remember going . . .

JM: You all were probably pretty close to the same age.

JW: Uh-huh. Yeah. Well, we were. And, you know, they were maybe a year older than me.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Or a year or two at the most.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And I remember going to Cabot for a ball game, and the press box at that game was the back of a pickup truck.

JM: [Laughs]

JW: I'll never forget that.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

JW: No stands, really. We're there, so—we're standing in the back of the pickup truck. That was the press box, covering that.

JM: Yeah. Hmm.

JW: But that was that. I did that—did that all through college, and I got—I mean, yeah, all there at Little Rock University. I was doing—I'm trying to think that—the *Democrat* at the time—their high-school guy like you, Jerry, would've been Jim Pattillo. So, you know, Jim got the plum deals. And I—then a bunch of us got the other things.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: I mean we had good people at the *Democrat*. But Andy would be there in the summer and just whomever. I was over ...

JM: Andy Morris, you mean?

JW: Yeah, Andy Morris. Andy's the one that was a big help to me and—and Mr. Keady, you know? [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

JW: He really took me under his wings and tried to make me into something. And I think somebody told me that Jim [Pattillo] had died. You know, Charlie Adcock died.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Charlie was on the staff when I was at the *Democrat*. You know, Charlie would cover the AIC [Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference], and I'd get to go to some of those games. I didn't cover them, but I got to go, and that was a big deal to go to those and that's when I got to know who Jim Bailey was.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I just—the way I had it then—I had talked to Jim [Pattillo] about being interviewed, and then he died before I had a chance. It was P-A-T-T-I-L-L-O.

JW: Okay.

JM: And Morris is M-O-R-R-I-S, right?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Andy's retired now. Well, he's not retired now, but he's living in Austin [Texas].

JM: He's living in Austin. You don't know this, but Charlie Adcock, the sports—the track—state track hall of fame voted recently to take him in as one of the old-timers to take him in the hall of fame this year.

JW: Charlie Adcock? Now what would be the reason for that?

JM: Because of what he did when he became the AIC commissioner. And all—and he did a lot of promoting of track and everything after he got to be the commissioner and everything.

JW: Okay.

JM: All right. But at any rate, well, you—there was quite a crew there. What do you remember about the *Democrat* sports department and the sports operation at that

time, Jimmy?

JW: Well, I remember starting just—there that first year the big deal was to do your—the high-school roundups, you know?

JM: Yeah.

JW: The pre-season and we got those broken down. You were the *Gazette*. You're the ones everybody looked to. Jim Pattillo, as I recall—he had done something to—I'm just gonna say make Bill Stancil mad. [Editor's Note: Stancil was head coach of the Fort Smith Northside High School football team] He was mad at us at the *Democrat*, you know. I mean, he wouldn't speak to anybody anyway. But Jim had written something—I think that was maybe when he wrote the “Neanderthal offense.” I don't think—was that Jim Bailey that did that?

JM: No, I—no, I don't remember that.

JW: Oh, okay. But anyway, I just know Bill Stancil was mad, and he wouldn't talk to Pattillo. And so I drew. I had to call Bill Stancil, you know.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah.

JW: Here's a seventeen-year-old kid calling Bill Stancil that—you know, nobody looked forward to talking to anyway because he wasn't gonna say anything, and then he was mad at us. But I had to call him and I—of course, “Coach Stancil, this is Jimmy Wilder from the *Arkansas Democrat*.” You know, his first thing was, “Don't you know that I'm mad at the *Democrat* and I'm [not] talking to anyone?” [Laughter]

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

JW: You know, that was my—that was my first experience on that. [Laughter] But

that—that would've been unusual.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Because, you know, back then, Jerry, anybody was happy if—if you'd call them and . . .

JM: Yeah, give them some publicity.

JW: Yeah. And then back then, you know, journalism wasn't like it is today.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: Yeah. That's one of—that's—that's something I remember from the—from the early [years]—of course, Mr. Keady was wanting me to be Jim. Jim Wilder, not Jimmy Wilder. He thought that would be more mature.

JM: [Laughs] Did you ever change it?

JW: Never—never changed it. But, you know, just progressed through that.

JM: Yeah.

JW: So Andy—Andy, you know, was awful instrumental in trying to guide me along, and Mr. Keady, and then I would see what you were doing and try to halfway be able to—to do something half as good as—as you and the *Gazette* did. It just developed [that] eventually I was covering the big high-school games—me and Pattillo. And the state tournaments, you know. I remember the winning streak in football with Central and how good they were. And then basketball—that was always exciting to cover the state tournaments there in Little Rock. That was a big deal. I remember a lot of things about that. I do remember one time—Jerry this [will] show you how squirrely I was. The championship game was on Saturday night, and I'm not sure what the particular game was, but it was at Barton

Coliseum. So you're rushing back to meet a deadline and write. Back then it wasn't telecopiers, it wasn't back . . .

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: It wasn't any—and I got back to the dadgum *Democrat* and had left my notebook and everything out at Barton Coliseum.

JM: [Laughs]

JW: So I had—thank goodness the AP [Associated Press] had a story. So between the AP story and my memory, I wrote a championship game story. You know, when Lake Hamilton won it that year when Danny Sheets—nobody really knew that much about Lake Hamilton except they were—they had a heck of a team. And he came in there and he made—remember him making that throw from half-court?

JM: Oh, yes, I do—two-handed.

JW: Yeah. You and I were probably sitting down there, you know, pretty close to each other.

JM: Yeah.

JW: You know, I guess we probably weren't supposed to.

JM: No, we were probably—we may have been sitting side by side. Yeah, he hit—he hit that thing from half-court line leaning sideways.

JW: Uh-huh. That's right. That was right down there beside where I was because I remember when it was over with he just laid there on the floor just beating the—beating the floor and stuff.

JM: Yeah. That was a team that nobody thought much about going into it and they just caught fire. And, boy, they—you just couldn't—they couldn't stop them.

JW: And I—I remember something else about that. You know, back then, us being from the press, we could get in the locker rooms. [Laughs] When I was going to Little Rock University and Coach [Bill] Ballard and I were big friends—you know, the basketball coach at—at Little Rock University and the baseball coach, and he was trying to recruit some kids, and he said something—if he could get—I forget how many of them it was, you know, he—I forgot what he said he'd do. But anyway, I was able to get him in the locker room. [Laughs] And that's when he—that's when he got Charlie Sanders and Alvin Corder—C-O-R-D-E-R. From Lake Hamilton. He got off that team. I remember Tommy—Tommy Loucks. That's when Tommy was playing from White Hall.

JM: I remember that name. Yeah.

JW: Yeah. And I remember that. But I remember—again, once out there—you know, Barton Coliseum was full, and they wouldn't let anybody else in, and here—you know, my dad said, "I can get in." I said, "No, you can't." And doggone if I don't look, and here he comes down to press row.

JM: [Laughs]

JW: He made it in. He just flashed some type of Red Cross card or something.

JW: Yeah. Well, that's what I liked about the *Democrat* at the time, because you [Gazette] were always on deadline. And I wasn't on deadline until Saturday.

[Laughs]

JM: Until the next day. Yeah. Do you remember anything else about—about the rest of the paper—the *Democrat*—anything that strikes you—what it was like at that time?

JW: Well, it was just a—again, you weren't—you know, you were trying to compete apples against apples, but it was apples against oranges compared to what the *Gazette* was and was perceived as and had compared to the *Democrat*, you know?

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: Because [longtime *Democrat* owner and publisher] Mr. [K. August] Engel—you know, he wouldn't put any money in it. He wouldn't pay anybody. He wouldn't put any money in it.

JM: Yeah.

JW: But, you know, there were good people there. I can remember what Gene—Gene Herrington was the managing editor. Nicest guy in the world. And I can remember what—a guy named Fred Petrucelli. I think Fred may have worked at the *Gazette* at some point.

JM: No, he worked at the—no, I don't think so. He worked at the *Democrat* a long time, though, because he was there before I went to the *Democrat* right out of college.

JW: Okay.

JM: In fact, Fred was an usher at my wedding and . . .

JW: Okay.

JM: Fred and I were good friends. But Fred had gone to the news side by the time you were there, right?

JW: Yeah, he was news side. I remember he was—I thought he was awfully good and I liked him. I remember—again, they didn't have a journalism degree at Little Rock University, but had some journalism classes. And I remember taking one

once and I needed a paper written for me, and you talk about plagiarism or whatever.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah.

JW: Maybe it was a feature article, and I knew I—I didn't want to write it, and Fred wrote it for me.

JM: I'll be darn. Uh-huh.

JW: Uh-huh. And won first place in state whatever.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

JW: So I think I made a D in journalism and won our only first place. And it wasn't me that won it, it was Fred.

JM: Yeah. Okay. [Laughs]

JW: One thing I remember, Jerry, is getting up early in the morning—going in there and reading the *Gazette* sports but wouldn't have time for any other news. And we'd go out there and Tom Broce was the teacher's name—would give us a current event test. I'd do fine in journalism, but I'd flunk all the current event tests.

JM: [Laughs]

JW: And I remember—to show you how bad it was, he—Caroline Kennedy [daughter of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]—when she was born—just asked what the sex of the baby was. I couldn't tell if it was male or female.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. [Laughs]

JW: So I did that. But I remember a photographer, Will Counts.

JM: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

JW: So good as a photographer.

JM: Yeah, he was great.

JW: Uh-huh. And then, of course, you know, Jim Wyckoff was in circulation.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And he was doing the bowling stuff, you know . . .

JM: Still—do you know he still is?

JW: I know it—for the *Democrat-Gazette*.

JM: Do you know what year he started that?

JW: Well, it's . . .

JM: 1942.

JW: Okay. [Laughs]

JM: He's been there since 1942.

JW: Really?

JM: Yeah.

JW: He was the—he was the nicest guy in the world.

JM: Yeah, he was.

JW: Of course, I can remember the back shop—going to the back shop there. And I remember where the AP offices were. And what—that would've been, what, John Robert Starr then?

JM: Yeah. Yeah, Bob Starr? Yeah, I think he went by Bob then.

JW: Yeah. Bob.

JM: He became John Robert later on. [Laughs]

JW: Yeah. Okay. Yeah, I remember Bob Starr.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And you remember the teletype machines?

JM: Yep.

JW: Used to come across. I remember once Mr. Keady was gone—lucky I didn't get fired over this—but this was on a Saturday morning, and John Moore had the desk that day for us—John and I went back there and played with the stuff. And, you know, it was—I made it like bulletin—I wanted to make it run the thing—bulletin, bulletin. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

JW: And I did a thing that Lance Alworth [Razorback football star] had been killed [laughs] in an automobile accident at Brookhaven. And John went and told Gene Herrington [laughs], and they were gonna stop the presses and do it. Thank goodness that didn't get in.

JM: Yeah, that would've been a big story.

JW: Yeah. But just, again, you know, just competing with the *Gazette* and how difficult it was for a lot of reasons. It wasn't, in my opinion, because the *Democrat* didn't have good people. It just didn't have as many and wasn't able to do nearly as—as much.

JM: And they didn't stay long enough for them all to get as experienced as a lot of the people at the *Gazette*.

JW: Right. So then that—that's where I made so many friends and learned so much.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then I transferred to Arkansas State. I needed to get a degree. I knew I had

to get a degree to be able to get a job that I wanted in newspapering. And again, a lot of people have taken me in and tried to help me, and Andy [Morris] was the one that got me in with Tom McDonald at the *Jonesboro Sun*. Tom was the sports editor and he was a great photographer and . . .

JM: Uh-huh. What was—what was Andy doing then?

JW: Andy was—let's see—he went from the *Democrat*. He signed a professional baseball contract—came back during the summer. Andy would've been at the *Jonesboro Sun* at the time. In fact, yeah—so Andy would've been the sports editor then.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: But no—no, Andy was out of sports, but he was with the *Jonesboro Sun*, and, you know, they would hire college students. So my senior year at Arkansas State I worked at the *Jonesboro Sun*.

JM: So you had left the *Democrat* and were going to school at . . .

JW: I had left the *Democrat* and was at the *Jonesboro Sun*. Andy wasn't in sports then. So I did that my senior year. You know, it was high school—covered the high schools up there. And did Arkansas State. I was in the Naval Air Reserve. I joined that when I was at Little Rock University to try to stay out of going to Vietnam.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: I didn't get to graduate until the summer of that year. Then I had to go on active duty with the Naval Air Reserve. And when I [came] back, they hired me as a sports editor with the *Jonesboro Sun*. That would've been 1967.

JM: Okay. How long were you on active duty with the Naval Air Reserve?

JW: Not very—not very long. Went to boot camp that summer. I was in Naval Air Reserve. I got out at the beginning of January. I wound up getting discharged, Jerry, because—well, no, I wasn't discharged. I was still in the Naval Air Reserve then. Okay. So then I went to the *Jonesboro Sun* as sports editor. Again, feeling—feeling a lot of pressure [laughs] replacing Tom McDonald because he'd been there for quite a while, and [he was] just somebody that everybody loved there. So I—I did that. I'm not sure how the thing came about—why Orville—Orville called me, Jerry.

JM: Uh-huh. Orville Henry, you're talking about?

JW: Yeah, Orville Henry. [Editor's Note: Henry was a longtime sports editor and sports columnist for the *Arkansas Gazette*, *Arkansas Democrat*, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and Stephens Media]

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: But, you know, Orville got to know me, I'm sure, just—well, I know he got to know who I was when I was at the *Democrat*, and I'm gonna assume—you know, he didn't do much in high schools, but I guess I got to start helping Mr. Keady some at the *Democrat* with the [Arkansas] Razorbacks. So I guess Orville maybe got to form an opinion on me just based maybe some on that and maybe just the fact that I had a little bit of contact with some of your people. But, as I recall it back then, Jerry, we didn't fraternize too much.

JM: No. No, I don't think a lot. No.

JW: Yeah. I mean, I just always respected the people at the *Gazette*, and I guess

maybe they saw that I wasn't anything but a little twerp trying to learn. And you know, not being . . .

JM: No, I—I think maybe—I think maybe that there was a little attitude at the *Gazette* that you shouldn't fraternize too much. I don't think there was anything in particular against particular people, but it was just . . .

JW: Yeah. No, no, and certain people—but, you know, I don't recall you as being that way and . . .

JM: Well, I never did pay much attention [laughs] to that anyway, but . . .

JW: Oh, you were just trying to do your job, I think.

JM: Yeah, but . . .

JW: But I got to go to some of the Razorback games and maybe Orville saw what I was doing. He called and offered me a job. That would've been during the summer of—of course, you know, I was flattered that Orville would call me. You know, anybody—back then. But that would've been the summer of 1968.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: Okay. So I had, you know, graduated. I'd worked a year at the—the *Jonesboro Sun* full-time. That was my first full-time job. And then, you know, I had to go—had to take a physical before I could start at the *Gazette*.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And that's where it showed up I was a diabetic. So that got me discharged from the Naval Air Reserve.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: Okay. And I guess you had moved out of being the high-school prep editor or

whatever.

JM: Yeah, I—I was maybe by that time sort of Orville's assistant.

JW: Well, that's what you were at that time, Jerry. Yeah, you were Orville's assistant, so he was looking for someone to replace you. So again, here's somebody [laughs] coming in that's not nearly as talented as the person he's—I'm not gonna say replaced, but you know, the person's gonna be in a position [laughs] that someone had had. So, you know, I—he hired me as—I guess we called ourselves—we were the high-school prep editors. Or whatever back then.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And so I had that, which was a great honor. And then I got to go to all the Razor-back football games and help Orville. Remember he used to do that play-by-play?

JM: Oh, yeah.

JW: I had to edit that play-by-play. And then I would do a dressing-room story. And for me [laughs], it was always the losing [team's] dressing room or mostly the losing dressing room. [Laughter]

JM: Yeah.

JW: So that's how I started . . .

JM: Who—I guess he was taking two to do dressing room stories. Who was the—who was usually the other guy? Was it Bailey or . . . ?

JW: Well, I'm trying to think. When we used to fly in that little six-seat plane . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: You know, it'd be the pilot—be Orville . . .

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: It'd be Carolyn Henry. It'd be me. It'd be the photographer, Pat Patterson. And then—you know, who would the sixth—sixth one be back then? It would—you know, certain times it was Jim.

JM: Yeah, and then some[time] it was Bailey. And I can't remember whether Shaw was still there or not.

JW: No, Shaw was AP then.

JM: He'd already gone to the AP. Was Harry King still there?

JW: Oh, Harry was just—you know, he was kind of a copy boy then or something.

JM: Was he?

JW: Uh-huh.

JM: Okay. Yeah. Okay.

JW: Yeah. Who would it have been? Well, I know who it would've been. It would've been whoever the stringer was.

JM: Oh, okay. That's probably right. And then that—I can't remember what year who was stringing, but I know that Ron Robinson was stringer for a while and Jim Standard and over—that would've been earlier, though. And I can . . .

JW: Yeah, it would—it would've been whoever the stringer is. That's right.

JM: Okay. So how long were you with the *Gazette*?

JW: Okay. See, I was only at the *Gazette*—hmm—two years. And so Orville—I loved the situation I had there, and—when I went there, Jerry, it was—you could basically—I could work my hours—I could take my wife [laughs] to work in the morning and then come in there and make calls to the coaches and stuff and write

my stories. And I didn't have to work very many nights other than, you know, Friday night [for high-school prep football games] and Saturday with the Razorbacks. Then they started playing games on Thursday. Of course, [Little Rock] Catholic always played them, I think, on Thursday. It was getting [to] where I was having to work Thursday night, Friday night [laughs] and Saturday. So that got where it wasn't quite as appealing. But then, you know, going to the Razorback games and doing that was fun.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And, you know, Orville—Orville, as far as I know, really—I think he liked me as far as the kind of person I was. He really tried to take care of me, and he did to me everything that he could while I was there. I know Andy—Andy Morris was at Arkansas State then. He would've been the Sports Information Director [SID]. So that's what he was doing, Jerry.

JM: Uh-huh. Okay.

JW: Jerry Pierce of Northwestern Louisiana University [Northwestern State University in Natchitoches] called Andy, just wanting to know if he had someone to recommend for their SID position. And Andy recommended me. I went down there and interviewed, and they hired me. You know, Orville had just given me a [laughs] \$10-a-week raise, which, you know, back then if you got a \$10-a-week raise, you were . . .

JM: Yeah, that's a pretty good raise.

JW: Yeah. So, I mean, he had—I'd gotten raises both years I was there and—it was a deal where he'd done for me what he could do, and . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: . . . I'm sure he knew there was somebody else waiting in the wings that'd be happy to come in just like I did and come and do a good job. So, you know, I know—when I told him I was leaving—walked out that door—I knew that'd be the last time I'd be in the *Gazette* as an employee. It was just one of those deals where you know when you've made a decision, that was it. I don't think Orville lost any respect for me or anything. But he—he'd done for me what—what he could.

JM: To clarify things for the people that—you said the SID's job, and that's the—that stands for sports information . . .

JW: Sports information director. Yeah, and I—I think part of that—you know, Andy is always somebody I'd looked up to. Kind of modeled myself after, and [I] thought he was a good journalist, you know? And then here, he'd been an SID—could I be an SID? And so that was kind of a challenge to see if I could . . .

JM: So—so tell me—tell me about the *Gazette* operation at that time, though, and what it was like and how you might compare it with the *Democrat* if you could.

JW: Well, it was just—you know, the *Gazette* did things that the *Democrat* couldn't do. Had more staff. Had some things set up that was appealing to me. You know, the—I remember when I was at the *Democrat*, one thing I did, Jerry—you know, I started trying to do stats [statistics]. Nobody had done that before. And so that kind of—I imagine probably Orville saw that. I was just—and I was—I remember basketball stats. You know, I'd get them and I'd try to get the box scores and run scoring averages and stuff. But, I mean, when I went to the *Ga-*

zette, you were the high-school prep editor that everybody looked up to. Everything you all did, you had—let's just say, start with football. But, I mean, it was all competition. I mean, we put out our football tabloid or whatever you called it. And we did the best we could. But the *Gazette* was the one that everybody— [laughs] what you were measured against.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And so then you had the—let's just say, start with football—you remember each week we had the best dozen?

JM: Uh-huh. Oh, yeah.

JW: I mean, that was a big deal. I mean—and so you got to do that. Then I got to do it. You know, you pick the best dozen teams.

JM: Best dozen teams in Arkansas.

JW: Uh-huh. Then we broke them down into classifications. We had a—what, offensive player of the week? We had a defensive player of the week. You know, you did the rankings. The people looked forward to it. And then remember we picked the scores in football. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

JW: That was a—that was a big deal. And those coaches—I mean, it was fun to . . .

JM: People paid attention to it.

JW: Yeah, they paid attention to them. You'd—you called somebody—and what I liked about it, Jerry, you could—let's just say Little Rock Central—you know, it just wasn't Little Rock Central, it was—maybe one day you were gonna call Bill Stancil at Fort Smith. Maybe you were also gonna call somebody at Smackover.

And whatever. And, you know, most of them welcomed your call because it wasn't every day you got in the *Gazette*.

JM: Yeah. Right. Right.

JW: And, you know, most of what we did was always favorable. And so, you know, you had that in football.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And I think maybe I've told you that one year when Coach C.W. Keopple was there at Little Rock Hall [High School] when they were winning all the close games. It was when Jerry Bass was kicking the field goals. But two weeks in a row I—I picked their score exactly.

JM: [Laughs]

JW: And they were—you know, went right down to the end. And I remember Tom Gulley telling me, you know, because he played for Hall. That wasn't—that wasn't when they had one of their best teams. But they had a really good season. And he told me—I mean, they got up—whatever day it was that ran—that was probably on Friday when we did our predictions, I would assume . . .

JM: Yeah, Friday morning probably.

JW: Yeah, Friday—actually it was Thursday. I mean, they would get up and look at that to see what we picked, and I remember him telling me—Coach Keopple, boy—he'd put that up there on the wall.

JM: Well, they took it seriously.

JW: They did. But, you know, we can think of those rivalries, you know? Of course, back—you know, it was, what, Fordyce and . . . ?

JM: Warren.

JW: And Warren. You know, [then-Warren Coach Mickey] O'Quinn and [then-Fordyce Coach Jimmy "Red"] Parker back . . .

JM: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JW: Yeah, that was back in your days.

JM: Yeah. Yeah, it was. Yeah.

JW: The early days and those big rivalries. As I recall, Little Rock Central, back when I was first coming up—their—the way it seemed to me, their—in football, you know, they were by far the best and usually their second team was about as good as anybody else's . . .

JM: Yeah. Yeah, they were. Yeah.

JW: But, you know, that was football and, as I remember as it progressed, you know, Orville really got into it, Jerry.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: Remember we started having that banquet or whatever. I remember the one we had right there at maybe the Worthen Bank Building where we—we named a—we had always named—that was a big deal. We picked the athlete of the year and all that sort of stuff. And, you know, that meant something. And those people would look forward to that. And then Orville carried it a step further, I remember. We started having a—or we had that banquet that last year I was there where we brought them in for a luncheon.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. But—so you stayed two years and went to Northwestern Louisiana [State University].

JW: Northwestern Louisiana.

JM: Okay. The . . .

JW: A big—a big change, Jerry, between the *Gazette* and the *Democrat* was your deadlines.

JM: Oh, yeah.

JW: And you remember how the deadlines were back then.

JM: Yes, I remember.

JW: Remember Orville used to come in there on Friday night during football season. That's one thing that impressed me among many things. But, you know, he would come in there—I mean, he's all Razorbacks—gung-ho, working his butt off—come in there on Friday nights and work his butt off for the high schools. You know, he'd stay till 10:00 [or 11:00] . . .

JM: . . . working high-school sports.

JW: And we'd be working our butts off. He'd be there, and I remember, like, on the deadlines, Jim Bailey would be in there. I'd be out covering games. James Thompson would be out covering games. Wadie Moore—you know, we'd send him out. And then the reporters had to call in and dictate their stories. And that was tough for me. You'd always want Jim Bailey to be the one you got.

JM: To take your dictation. [Laughs] Yeah.

JW: Yeah, because, I mean, if you'd just give him an idea, he'd come up with . . .

JM: He'd help you compose it. Yeah.

JW: He'd help, and particularly, James Thompson.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: [Laughs] You know, he and James were very close.

JM: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JW: I told you the one—one time James went and covered—maybe it was Fordyce and Crossett. It was a big rivalry. And somebody blocked a punt at the end and recovered it in the end zone for the winning touchdown. And, you know, me calling in—it would've been, you know, let's just say, "Gino Mazetti blocked a punt and it was recovered by Jerry McConnell, and it provided the winning margin in Fordyce's seven-to-six win over Crossett." Well, Jim's deal with James was—and I don't want to take anything away from James—but I'm certain—I just know the way Jim was. He helped develop it where it was. It was, "With a play you'll never see diagramed on the chalkboard, Fordyce beat Camden or whatever or Crossett. Or Warren. Warren was their rival." Seven to six. And then he would explain, you know, it was a blocked punt based on a play that they worked on in practice—designed to block a punt. Yeah. I think, when you were saying a while ago, the difference—you know, I said the *Democrat* had good people, and they did. And you said maybe they didn't get the experience and stay as long. And I think that's what the *Gazette* did. They had good people who had—you know, were able to stay long. But, you know, let's just—okay, let's just say Orville. Okay. You had—you were his right-hand man. You know, you had me that maybe had some potential. James Thompson, the same way. You know, James—James started just—just like me, you know? He was just somebody that likes sports. Up to a certain point, but [he] had somebody to take him under his wings and develop him. You know, Wadie—know why—Wadie was the first

black. You know, Orville—Orville hired him. So, I mean, there's an example of—of thinking ahead. And I can remember how Wadie struggled beginning, not because he was black, but just because he had no background in writing. I can remember things about Wadie. And then we had the good outdoor person. Joe Mosby would've been the one at that time, and I think maybe Joe—Joe had been at the *Democrat* at some point, maybe. I may be . . .

JM: I don't remember that for sure, but I know that he worked [laughs]—he worked on the *Arkansas Traveler* [University of Arkansas student newspaper] when I was there. [Laughs] Charlie Rixse and I were sports editors for the *Traveler* our senior year, and he was—he was one of our staffers.

JW: You know, then again, Orville would do that on Friday. Then we'd get up and whether it was driving to Fayetteville the next day or getting on a plane and flying to Austin [Texas] or someplace. You know, the longer trips we would go in the night before, but that—you know, that was a great experiences for me on the Razorback deal.

JM: Yeah. Well, it was a fun thing to cover at that time, too, so . . .

JW: Uh-huh—lot of fun. I remember—again, you know, I had to do the losing dressing rooms.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

JW: And I learned a lot from that. I had, you know, Texas A&M [University]—they'd won the Southwest Conference the year before with [Head Coach Gene] Stallings, with a young team, and then the next year they were bad. I think I told you—he was one of those old schoolers that not many sportswriters liked to be

around to begin with, and then his best player was that linebacker named Bill Hobbs, and he was meaner than a snake, and Arkansas beat them. And then I have to go down there and go in that locker room.

JM: Yeah, that was Gene Stallings.

JW: That was an experience just to go and—you knew what Arkansas was like—what Fayetteville was like and Razorback Stadium, and you go to University of Texas and you see that, and you're thinking, "Holy mackerel."

JM: [Laughs] Yeah.

JW: We're competing against that. I got to go that—that one year down there when—I guess it was the year before the Big Shootout [1969] or whatever, when they had—I remember James Street was their quarterback and . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: I'm trying to think if Arkansas won. I'm sure they didn't win or—or [University of Texas Head Coach Darrell] Royal wouldn't have been in as a good a mood.

JM: Yeah. Hmm.

JW: But, you know, after the ball game—Dan Jenkins was there from *Sports Illustrated* covering it. And that's when Royal had the deal where everybody went [to his place] after the game. There was Darrell Royal, and there was [University of Arkansas Head Coach] Frank Broyles and there was Dan Jenkins from *Sports Illustrated*, who—that was gonna be the lead article in *Sports Illustrated*. And there's Orville. There's the sports people and that was the . . .

JM: Probably Blackie Sherrod—Sherrod.

JW: Yeah, yeah. And watching all them interact. Of course, you got the competitors

in football. You've got the competitors—the journalists. And then you've got a little twerp like me, just sitting—you know taking it all in.

JM: And enjoying it. Yeah.

JW: Just enjoying it. And I'm thinking—you know, there's Jenkins drinking some straight shots, and he's got, like, a 3:00 [a.m.] deadline for a national publication. And you're thinking, "How does he do it?" Because, I mean, he was having as good a time as it seemed like the others were.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And then you read *Sports Illustrated*. You're thinking, "Holy mackerel."

JM: He wrote a hell of a story, I'll bet.

JW: Yeah, a great story.

JM: Yeah, he was a—he was a great writer but . . .

JW: Uh-huh.

JM: He used to—I remember, though, that he used to come around, you know, and cover the—and he was with one of the—the Fort Worth [Texas] papers and the Dallas [Texas] paper for a while. And he would come—before he went to *Sports Illustrated*—he would come around at halftime sometimes if it was an Arkansas game and a Texas team—Arkansas and a Texas team—and pick Orville's brains.

JW: Really?

JM: Yeah. He'd say, "Okay, Orville, explain to me why Arkansas is doing this," you know? "Why are they using this formation or—or what's their—what's their," you know? And so Orville would explain it to him and . . .

JW: Orville—Orville could tell him, couldn't he?

JM: Yeah.

JW: And I guess Jim [Bailey]—the way maybe Jim got to know me a little bit, other than probably seeing [me] maybe a tag-along with Charlie Adcock to the AIC games was the [Arkansas] Traveler[s'] [minor league baseball] games. Remember, we got to be scorekeepers. One year the *Gazette* and one year the *Democrat*. So when Mr. Keady quit doing it—I got to be the official scorekeeper at Travelers' games.

JM: Yeah. Let me ask you one question, Jimmy. And I'm not sure how fair this is, and so you can tell me [laughs], "I don't want to answer." What was the—what was the difference between Jack Keady and Orville Henry as sports editors?

JW: Just two different—you know, total different people [and] personalities. Jack was just—you know, he was—I don't know how to say this. He was Church of Christ. And just—boy, just somebody straight down the book that just, you know, just did his job. I don't think it meant the same to him—the Razorbacks, of course, like Orville did. And I think maybe he tried to perceive himself as being more objective. And just being a pure journalist. Anything but that . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: And I think that's kind of what he tried to stress maybe—maybe to us. And both of them—you couldn't ask for—to me—better people to work for. But that, to me, would be it. You know, Jack didn't care about all that stuff like Orville did. Do you remember Orville and his Monday stories? Oh! And you'd think, you know, "How can he rip that stuff out?"

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

JW: And, you know, Jack would come and do his little deal, but it wouldn't be anything, like—you know, you were saying—Dan Jenkins wanting—asking Orville why Arkansas is doing this, this, that. You know, I don't think Jack cared. You know, he was just gonna report whether they won or lost. You know, and I just think that was a big difference. I mean, the Razorbacks were a—in my opinion, Orville's—I mean, that was his life. And for Jack, it was a job that he enjoyed. But I don't think he lived and died . . .

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Then you went on to Northwestern Louisiana at—kind of bring me up to date from there—what you've done since then—how long you were there, and then where all you went.

JW: Yeah. Well, I went to Northwestern Louisiana for a year and loved the job—didn't like—I liked my boss—didn't like the athletic director and football coach, who was Glynn Gossett, who had been at Arkansas at one time.

JM: Yeah, I knew that. Okay.

JW: Yeah. And I just didn't want to be a part of that anymore.

JM: Yeah.

JW: You know, the difference in the money—you know, I [laughs] think, what, I went for maybe \$1,000 more from there. You know, from the *Gazette* to—to Northwestern Louisiana. And I was young and thought I was good and wouldn't have any trouble getting a job, and that's when jobs were tough to get, you know? And any that I could get were just gonna be comparable. So the girl I was married to—Patsy and I—we moved back—moved to Memphis. She was from Lake City. She had worked in Memphis, and that's where my parents lived. So we went

back there, and I just—Bill Young, you know, who I'd met—who I'd known from the *Pine Bluff Commercial* was the—he would've been the—I'm going to say—would he be the executive sports editor or the . . . ? I'm not sure what his position was, Jerry, but Kyle Griffin would've been the Orville Henry of the *Commercial Appeal*. And Bill was whatever the other—whatever was.

JM: Yeah, he was sort of the guy who ran the office and stuff like that.

JW: He ran the office and everything.

JM: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

JW: So I went back there, and they didn't have anything full time at the time. You know, he promised me with—the first time something came open, he would put me on. And so I started out, you know, just doing—I forgot what they—they called it then, you know? You weren't a part-timer, but I—I did that.

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: And nothing ever—ever came open full time, but I—while that was going on, Bill Brill from the *Roanoke Times* [Virginia] called me. And I'm not sure how Bill found out about me, but he offered me a job at the *Roanoke Times*. I turned it down because I was wanting—you know, I was hopeful that something was gonna work on in Memphis at the *Commercial Appeal*. And nothing did. And then Bill called me back that next summer and had a position. And so, yeah. [Laughs] So I went to Roanoke. Worked a year at the *Roanoke Times*, but I wasn't the high-school prep editor. They had somebody there. I covered some high-school sports and was really a desk man. Sports desk man. And, you know, just a copy person in—in the office most of the time. But then I got—got to cover

VMI [Virginia Military Institute] some. Nobody wanted to cover VMI, and VMI didn't want anybody covering them. They were really bad back then. [Laughs] And the *Roanoke Times* was just brutal on them.

JM: Yeah.

JW: The *Times* had some guy named Bill Cate that was a great writer, but he was awful—some of the things he did. He covered one of their [basketball] games once, and he wrote about the guy that had—was setting a record for the most times taking a ball out of bounds over the course of the season. And the deal was, you know, every time the other team scored, he got to take it out. Well, they were happy when they saw me coming, though, so . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: But I got to be good friends with Bob Currie—C-U-R-R-I-E. He was the sports information director at VMI. I told him if—you know, if an SID position came open that he thought I might be qualified for and might have an interest in to let me know. And an SID position at The Citadel [the Military College of South Carolina] came open. And that was the following summer. So that would've been 1972-1973 is when I was at Roanoke.

JM: Okay.

JW: Okay. So then that happened in 1973, and I remember I applied for the position. Of course, Eddie Teague was the athletic director. Jim Parker had been the football coach. And, of course—our Jimmy Parker—and, of course, I had known him from Fordyce and Arkansas A&M [Arkansas AM&N, now known as the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff].

JM: Uh-huh.

JW: But he went to Clemson [University]. He went from The Citadel to Clemson. So I applied for the position and never heard anything for a while—pretty good while, in fact. And then Coach Teague called me and asked me to come for an interview, and I told my wife I really didn't think I wanted to go because I didn't think that I—thought he probably had somebody in mind, and I wouldn't get the job.

JM: Hmm.

JW: But I went for the interview, and the interview went good and he offered me the job. I remember I had some good references. Andy Morris would've been one and Charlie Thornton who was at [University of] Alabama at the time. So I got that job.

JM: Another former *Arkansas Gazette* sports employee as well as, I think—had Charlie been the SID at Arkansas State?

JW: Yeah, Arkansas State. He was at Alabama at the time.

JM: And he was—he was at Alabama under [Paul William] “Bear” Bryant [University of Alabama head football coach from 1958 to 1982].

JW: Bear Bryant. You know, that's where—that was his little deal. He's the one that did the *Bear Bryant Show*, you know.

JM: You got The Citadel job.

JW: Yes, I was there six years.

JM: Were you? Okay.

JW: Unbelievable. Went in there with—Coach Ross was the football coach. He just

came in, so . . .

JM: Which Ross, Bobby?

JW: Bobby.

JM: Bobby Ross. Okay.

JW: So we went in there together. He came in in the spring and I came in the summer.

That was a great deal, you know? Football staff had Frank Beamer. [Laughs]

Ralph—Ralph Friedgen. [Laughs]

JM: Hmm. Ralph who?

JW: Friedgen. You know, the head coach at Maryland. But I was at The Citadel.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Bobby never won more than six games while he was there. That's the best we ever did.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Then I went to—I was there—I started getting into marketing and promotions plus SID work. And got to be good friends with a guy named Russ Potts—P-O-T-T-S—that was at Maryland at the time and he and Bobby were close. Then he went on to SMU [Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas] as athletic director. Now he's a state senator—a big senator. But I had to make a decision, you know—was I gonna be an SID or go marketing and promotions, where I thought I could make more money?

JM: Yeah.

JW: So I went to Old Dominion University [Norfolk, Virginia] for a year. I was athletic promotions director. [Laughs] And then while I was there, Beamer had

gone to Murray State [University in Murray, Kentucky]. He was an assistant coach then and he was just calling—they were gonna hire a promotions director. Wanted to know if I had anybody to recommend, and I gave him some names. And then he asked if I'd be interested. And I said I didn't think so. But he said, "I think we can make it interesting." So I went and interviewed and went to Murray State.

JM: Yeah. Okay. As the—as the promotions . . . ?

JW: As their first—yes—[laughs] athletic promotions director. Yeah. So I had a great year at Old Dominion. That year in basketball our women's [team] won the national championship and our men played in the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletics Association] tournament. Lost the first round to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], and that's the year UCLA got to the finals. That's when Larry Brown was there. And we had the biggest crowd they ever had and . . .

JM: All right. Larry was, where, at Old Dominion?

JW: No, he was at U—UCLA. Yeah. That's when Old Dominion was the Tennessee of women's basketball. [Editor's Note: Old Dominion won three NCAA women's basketball titles between 1979 and 1985. The Tennessee women's team has won eight titles, including 2007 and 2008] Yes, we won the national championship in there. So [we] played the Russians that year. We beat the Russian men and played the Russian women the closest that anybody had played them on their tour.

JM: Hmm. Okay, so how long were you at Murray State?

JW: Three years.

JM: Three years.

JW: Yeah. You know, Gottfried was the football coach the first year I was there.

And, of course they were great. And then Frank Beamer—well, he was there the first two years and then Beamer my last year.

JM: Who was the football coach the first two?

JW: Mike—M-I-K-E—Gottfried—G-O-T-T-F-R-I-E-D. Yeah, they were great. He went to Cincinnati [Ohio] and Kansas and Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania]. And then Ron Greene was the basketball coach, and he'd come there from Mississippi State [University], where he had—where he was the SEC [Southeastern Conference] coach of the year.

JM: Uh-huh. Okay. So what'd you do after three years at Murray State?

JW: Went three years at Memphis State [now the University of Memphis].

JM: Okay. Doing what?

JW: Athletic marketing director. Timing was perfect there. Coach [Rex] Dockery was the football coach. And he was turning it around, and then he got killed, you know, the first year I was there, in a plane crash [1983]. That was awful. I could've very easily been on that plane. I was the last person he saw at Memphis State.

JM: Is that right?

JW: Leaving the building that day. Yeah, he was—you know, he was going to get in the car, and he said, "Jimmy, come on and go with me," you know? I said, "No, I've got my son with me." And got killed in that airplane crash. And that's when Dana Kirk was the basketball coach.

JM: Uh-huh. So what did you do after Memphis State?

JW: Okay, then went to Ole Miss [University of Mississippi, Oxford] . . . [Laughs]

JM: Oh, okay.

JW: Jerry, I've been too many places. I couldn't be like Bob Bradley and get to Clemson [University] and stay.

JM: Okay, so you went to Ole Miss two years and then who was—who was the AD [athletic director] there?

JW: Warner. Warner Alford.

JM: Okay, I remember him. Who was the football coach then?

JW: Well, Billy Brewer.

JM: Billy?

JW: Yeah. The first year I was there we played in the Independence Bowl—had a good team. Went eight and three [eight wins and three losses].

JM: Yeah. Okay. Then where next?

JW: Then the Southern Conference.

JM: Okay.

JW: That was in Asheville. That was Dave Hart. You know, service bureau director.

JM: So you were—that's—that's in where?

JW: It was in Asheville.

JM: Asheville, North Carolina.

JW: North Carolina. I'd met Dave when he was the athletic director at the University of Missouri, is where I got to know him. I had gone to one of his marketing seminars so that was how—he keeps telling everybody he—he'd tried to hire me

before. I said, “Yeah, he tried to hire me, but he wasn’t gonna pay anything.”

JM: Yeah. So what were you doing for the Southern Conference?

JW: Well, the title was service bureau director, so it would—you know, it would be like an SID. I handled the publicity for the conference.

JM: Publicity and stats and everything else.

JW: All that—brochures. Yeah. I loved that. And then Dave retired. And so the new guy coming in wanted his own person.

JM: Yeah.

JW: So I came back to Murray State two years as SID.

JM: Oh, okay.

JW: Then I got sick. You know, or I got sicker with my diabetes. You know, really couldn’t work. So my wife, Joanna, just happened to call back to Asheville, and they had a job open—librarian at a high school there, and so we went back to Asheville, and I took a year—trying to get healthy and took some computer classes. And then I worked two years in the county school system there, just working in the computer lab. And then a position came open at UNC [University of North Carolina] Asheville. I guess, I was director of athletic development. I was there six years.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JM: And then we came back here [Murray, Kentucky] in the summer of 2003. And now, you know, I’m on disability and trying to be retired, but trying to be healthy enough to do some work—I tried to help Ripley over there with his junior college program he’s trying to start in Little Rock.

JM: Yeah, Charles Ripley you're talking about? Charles Ripley?

JW: Yeah. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah. So you sort of retired back to Murray, then?

JW: Yeah, that's—that's my wife's hometown.

JM: Was it? Okay.

JW: Yeah, her whole family's here. My brother's in Memphis, so . . .

JM: Yeah. Okay.

JW: We loved Asheville. We would never have left Asheville.

JM: Yeah. Well, that's pretty—that's pretty country. I don't know about Murray. I've never been there. But Asheville, as I remember, is the home of [author] Thomas Wolfe.

JW: Uh-huh.

JM: Yeah.

JW: Yeah, beautiful mountains, you know? Murray's pretty. It's close enough—about three hours to Memphis. And then, you know, we get over to Fayetteville to see a football game and can get to Little Rock and . . .

JM: Okay. Tell me about Orville calling you one time when you—I guess—were you working The Citadel then?

JW: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. What happened on that?

JW: Well, as I recall—and you know, again, this was—would've been spring or summer. Jerry, I can't—I can't recall for sure, but I was the SID there, and I hadn't had any contact with Orville—gosh, I don't know when would've been the last

time I would've ever talked to him. But he called me—you know, just—again, to show you how sharp Orville was and—you know, for a—some way he knew that I was there. You know, probably—I don't know if I kept in touch with Butch. I know Butch and I stayed in touch some, so . . .

JM: Yeah, that's—that's—this is Butch Henry you're talking about that was Orville's son.

JW: Yeah. So, you know, I bet Butch probably was the one. So, yeah. Yeah, so he called me and, you know, "This is Orville." [Laughs] "I need Frank." [Laughs] "He's at The Citadel." "Okay, Orville."

JM: So he'd heard a rumor that Frank was getting to retire as coach?

JW: And so I went and got Coach Broyles. You know, I—I'm sure I saw Frank when he came in. I would've met him or shook his hand or whatever. And he would've been up with Coach Teague, athletic director. And so I went up there and interrupted whatever they were doing and told him who was on the phone. And he came down to my office, and I left. [Laughs] And Orville told me what was coming down. But that—that's where that happened. Nobody is probably aware of that.

JM: Yeah, that's—that's—Frank confirmed it for Orville, I guess, then.

JW: Uh-huh. You know, Orville broke it that day.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

JW: Officially.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. I'll be darn.

JW: Do you remember kind of how things were? Do you remember . . . ? I remem-

ber, like, at the *Gazette*—what, Bob Douglas was the managing editor, wasn't he?

JM: Yeah, for quite a while.

JW: Do you remember—do you remember the time Archie Bennett got shot—football player?

JM: Yeah, I do. I'd forgotten that.

JW: Orville wasn't—wasn't gonna put anything in the paper about it. [Laughs] I think he was gonna do something about he was gonna miss the next game or something because of—[laughs] maybe—maybe he was gonna say that he'd been shot or whatever. Bob said, "No, Orville, we've gotta announce first that he's been shot . . ."

JM: Yeah.

JW: . . . "before you can wait a—a day or two and announce . . ."

JM: Yeah [laughs], that he's gonna miss a game.

JW: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

JW: I can't remember—once, Jerry, something happened, you know—Orville used to scoop Butch on some things going on at the university. And, you know, it was one of those cases where, again, Orville was gonna break something that I'm sure Butch had been told you couldn't release. [Editor's Note: Butch Henry was the UA sports information director at the time]

JM: Hmm. Okay, Jimmy. It's been fun talking about all this stuff. I just wonder before we close it off here if there's anything else that you think of that you might've forgotten to tell—tell about that you'd like to tell.

JW: Well, no, just—I'm proud of the opportunity I had to work at both the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*. And to me, I feel honored that Orville would have ever called me to . . .

JM: Yeah.

JW: . . . even offer me a position. And, you know, I can remember a lot of good things about the *Gazette* and Orville. And one thing we didn't talk about, Jerry, was you remember—I remember Jon Richardson, the first black football player at the University of Arkansas. I remember the recruiting on him. He was the first black and only black at the time. And freshmen could not play on the varsity then. I remember going to the games, and Jon would be up there in the stands sitting all by himself, you know? And Carolyn would go over there and sit with him.

JM: Yeah. Hmm.

JW: And then . . .

JM: This was Carolyn Henry. This is Orville's wife you're talking about.

JW: Yeah. Right. And then I know Orville—Orville, you know, really gave him some encouragement to help him get through that first year. But I remember that and just—you know, I feel also—as I said, to go from the *Democrat* to the *Gazette* was pretty special because, again, I don't recall that happening very often.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Uh-huh.

JW: That used to be—you know, it used to really be fun to go—you know, you'd work your butt off on a Friday night because, I mean, we prided ourself at the *Gazette* on the high-school coverage. And that wasn't just Friday night, it was all

week. We never—we'd do that, and then it would be fun to go to the games. And then we would try—we would—you would come back, and if our flight was correct we'd come—we'd fly back and then go to the paper that night and get the first edition.

JM: Yeah.

JW: And [laughs] look and see what your photographers—the photographers took great pride in what they were doing. Of course, you know how [laughs] Orville was. And it was just a fun time.

JW: I—I—I believe that.

JM: Okay, Jimmy. I appreciate it, and thanks a lot.

JW: All right. Good talking with you, Jerry.

JM: Nice talking to you. And thanks a lot, Jimmy.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]