

Gazette Project

Interview with

Pat Best,
Searcy, Arkansas,
10 January 2001

Interviewer: Jerol Garrison

Jerol Garrison: This is Jerol Garrison, and I am interviewing Pat Best—She is a former switchboard operator and news department secretary at the *Arkansas Gazette*—for historical purposes to shed light on the *Gazette*. We want to find out what kind of paper the *Gazette* was and what made it that way. Pat, this interview is part of an oral history project being developed by the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. The center will transcribe the interview, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcript, to make changes before the document goes into the archives at the university library. It will be available to persons interested in Arkansas history. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

Pat Best: Yes.

JG: I have a form for you to sign on this subject. Let the record show that you have reviewed the form and have signed it. Is this correct?

PB: That is correct.

JG: You have agreed with the form and signed it, so I will proceed with the interview.

PB: All right.

JG: Pat, please describe the time that you worked for the *Arkansas Gazette*, and what were your duties?

PB: The dates were 1953 to 1961. I was there twice. The second time was 1974 until

1987. 1953 to 1961 was all on the switchboard. Then after I came back, I started on the switchboard in 1974 and was transferred over to the secretarial position. I worked for Bob Douglas first, Carrick Patterson, and David Petty. On the switchboard at the *Gazette*, I worked crazy hours. I started work at six o'clock in the morning. I parked over on the east side of town. This was a long time ago. It was still dark when I walked three blocks to Third and Louisiana. The strange thing was that I wasn't even afraid.

JG: What time did you get off in the afternoon?

PB: I got off at 2:45. Eddie Best, my husband, worked at the *Gazette*. He went to work at 4:00 in the afternoon and got off at midnight. Somehow, we met.

JG: Were you married before you went to work for the *Gazette*?

PB: No, no, no. I got married in 1957.

JG: Did you meet at the *Gazette*?

PB: Yes, we did. I would occasionally work on Friday night for football, or sometimes I would switch out with Mary Grace for the night shift.

JG: Mary Grace is. . .?

PB: Grace is her last name. Sometimes we would switch out, so I got to know Eddie. We did a lot of dating after midnight. I would then go to work at six o'clock in the morning. I was young and invincible, and I could do it. [Laughter] I can't do it now.

JG: Was your office, the switchboard, on the second floor where the newsroom was?

PB: Yes, it was just outside the newsroom door. When you opened the door going down the hall, first, on the left, you would come to Mary Powell's office. She was the secretary for Mr. Heiskell and for Mr. Ashmore. To the right was the hall leading down to photography, Millie Woods and the society department. The editorial department was down the hallway, also.

JG: If I remember right, you sat in a room. . . .

PB: It was glassed in.

JG: I thought it was an open place there.

PB: No. I kept the windows up all the time. It was just a square room. It was glassed in. I kept the windows up all the time so people could stop in. There was also an “Information” sign there, so the public could stop and ask directions if they wanted to. Anyway, I described where Mr. Ashmore’s office was and Mr. Heiskell’s office. After Eddie and I did get married, there were times that I did work at night. Mr. Ashmore had a television set. It was very poor reception, but I would have to wait for midnight or after for Eddie to get off. I would go into Mr. Ashmore’s office and go to sleep on his couch or watch the “snow” and listen to it—the static of his television set.

JG: Pat, we were talking about your duties as switchboard operator. Did you handle calls for all departments at the *Gazette*?

PB: Yes, we only had one switchboard. It took care of all the departments: sports, classified, editorial, and personnel, just to name a few.

JG: If someone called in and had a question about an ad, you would transfer them to the ad department?

PB: Yes, that is right. We had five lines going into the classified department. I had two that I could connect when they called in for Franklin 4-5081, or we had three direct lines straight to the classified department.

JG: The departments that were on your floor were the news and sports. Those were the people that you saw in the hallway?

PB: Yes, plus editorial, society, food, photography, composing, AP and UP. The *Gazette* did not occupy any of the third floor at the time.

JG: When a call came in for Mr. Heiskell or Mr. Patterson, did they . . .

PB: Mr. Patterson was on the first floor at the time. Mr. Heiskell was on the second floor. Yes, they came in through me. All the *Gazette* calls came in through me except for the three direct lines through classified.

JG: Oh, I see. Those were direct lines.

PB: Yes, three of them. There were two more that could be used for classified.

JG: How many people would that be that you were taking care of? Two hundred people?

PB: Two or three hundred, I guess.

JG: Did reporters check in and out at your office when they left?

PB: No, they did not let me know right at first. Eventually, we had a board up there that had times they were leaving, and they would push the peg over to the time that they would be back. That was a few years later. Right at first— what I had on top of the switchboard was the old spindle, the dangerous spindle. It looked like an ice pick. We used copy paper to write their notes. We didn't have the formal notepads to write a note to them. I would just use the copy paper, ripped it off and stuck it on the spindle. When they came in, if they wanted to know about their calls, they would stop by and look on the spindle.

JG: Did they just help themselves to the spindle, or did you . . .

PB: They helped themselves. As a matter of fact, it was their responsibility. They were in and out an awful lot. It would have been a difficult thing to try and run them down to give them their messages. Sometimes they would call in, and that was fine. They would always stop by the switchboard.

JG: You and Eddie were married in—when was that?

PB: We were married in June of 1957.

JG: Things were starting to heat up there at that time. What was it like being on the switchboard at the heat of the integration crisis in the fall of 1957? It was

anything but routine, wasn't it?

PB: Routine is an unheard of word to describe that. It was frightening sometimes, believe me. Every call was usually—if we could get the calls through, they were usually cussing the *Gazette*. Everyone was upset and angry with the *Gazette*. They called us everything. Threats came constantly. They were going to come and kill us. They were going to come and bomb the switchboard. We had ten lines, incoming lines. At that time all you had to do was to go to a pay telephone and dial Franklin 4-5081, put the phone down and walk away to tie up our lines until the telephone company was able to physically go out and put the receiver back on the hook.

JG: Some people just wanted to make life difficult by doing that?

PB: Yes. They did that until all ten lines were busied out. When the telephone company would go around and hang up the phone, then we could receive more calls.

JG: You had to call the telephone company to alert them to all the calls and being stuck and needing them to help?

PB: Yes, and they did. We had a lot of trouble with that.

JG: A lot of hate calls, I take it, because of the stance on integration.

PB: You know how it was. We lost a lot of circulation. People did not agree with our editorial policy.

JG: This overload of hate calls started in August or September of 1957?

PB: It started after school started. We did not have any problems before that. It started after school started.

JG: In 1957?

PB: Yes.

JG: That was what started the hate calls to come in?

PB: Yes. The majority of the people in Little Rock were against integration.

JG: Did you get any calls supporting the *Gazette*?

PB: You know, in my memory, we didn't. There was only trouble all the time. Something was going on all the time. We had reporters there from all over the world. It was the switchboard's responsibility to try and locate them. The *Gazette* was their headquarters. They would go to an empty desk, any place that was empty, to type, use the telephone. At that time the switchboard operator had to place the calls physically for everybody in the newspaper. Not just newsroom but every person, including visiting reporters. They had to call their newspapers, and it was lots and lots of extra work.

JG: You had to place all long distance calls?

PB: All long distance calls.

JG: They could just do local calls?

PB: That is correct. They had their newspapers calling them. This was their headquarters. Then it was trying to find out which telephone they were on out in the newsroom or if they were even in.

JG: Did they tell you when they were settling in?

PB: Most of them were very good. They needed to get the calls from their newspapers. Almost all of them would go out and locate a desk and typewriter with a telephone and come back out to tell me. I would make a note of it.

JG: You were there from six in the morning until. . .

PB: 2:45.

JG: 2:45?

PB: That's right.

JG: When you left, you turned it over to Mary Grace?

PB: That is right.

JG: She handled their calls.

PB: Yes, she did. She worked until eleven o'clock at night. I have listed here some of the names of the people who were there. They worked the switchboard operators pretty hard. Some of them, just a very few, compared to the number that we had there, contributed. I have the names and the original sheet that they signed. As it turned out, there were three operators, and we received twenty-five dollars apiece. At that time, if Eddie and I had put twenty more dollars with it, it would have paid our rent for a month. [Laughter] Would you like me to read these names?

JG: I would like to have that. Can you give me the name of the paper they worked for, too?

PB: Sander Vanocur. His name wasn't on the list, but he was there and a much younger man than he is now—and he had hair. On the list were Farnsworth Fowler, *New York Times*; Ben Fine, *New York Times*; Clay Gowdin, *Chicago Tribune*; and Walter Lister, *New York Herald Tribune*—I heard later that Walter was a correspondent in Russia—Stan Opotowsky, *New York Post*; Rod McLeish, *Westinghouse*; Bob Baker, *Washington Post*; Al Meyers and Dave Reed, *U. S. News and World Report*; Bob Fleming, ABC; Dick Lyons, *Washington Post*; Wallace Westfall, *Nashville Tennessean*; Charles Quinn, *New York Herald Tribune*; and H. W. Bigard, *New York Times*. They called it The Franklin 4-5081 Fund.

JG: How much did each of the reporters contribute?

PB: I thought it was five dollars. You figure it out. I have listed them all, and I got twenty-five dollars, and there were three operators.

JG: There would have been roughly seventy-five dollars all together. It was to say a big “thank you” to the operators.

PB: Like I say, twenty-five dollars today doesn't sound like very much, but believe

me, it was in 1957. It meant a lot.

JG: When did they give this to you? Was it like in the fall, or do you remember approximately when it was?

PB: Let me see if there is a date on it. Just a minute. October 1, 1957. This is a memo from Mary Powell. Do you remember her?

JG: Yes.

PB: She was Mr. Ashmore's secretary and Mr. Heiskell's secretary. She was Mary Arlene Powell. She was MAP. So this was a memo from MAP. It just said, "The gentlemen named below have been a part of your cross to bear in the battle of Little Rock," and so on and so forth. She said that she had the money, and if we would contact her, she would give it to us.

JG: You also have a list there of those reporters.

PB: Yes, I have the original list of the reporters who contributed. It is on the bottom of this memo that she sent. It is signed. Many people of the *Gazette* will recognize a memo signed M-A-P, MAP.

JG: If possible, we would like to get a copy of that to include in the archives.

PB: Okay. That is possible.

JG: The hate calls came in over a long period of time, over a period of a couple of years there?

PB: Oh, no, it wasn't nearly that long. I can't tell you whether this was before or after, I just can't tell you--but I had a bomb threat called in that was not related at all to the integration. I think it was probably before the integration crisis. It was upsetting to me.

JG: Did they say that the bomb was going to be placed at the *Gazette*?

PB: No, no. It was a bomb threat on an airline that they called in. I was the operator, and I answered the phone. It was very, very early in the morning. There was not

a soul around to tell anything to. I called Bill Shelton at home and told him. He said, "All right, now call the police." I did.

JG: You called the police, and they took care of it?

PB: I called the police. I just remembered something. It was after the crisis because my oldest son was a baby. The reason that I remember that is because the FBI came out to our house. I wasn't working, and they needed to talk to me. They came out to my house, and they talked to me. They had a suspect and asked me to call and see if I recognized his voice. I was to call this private charter service and make up some kind of a story about wanting to charter an airplane and see if I could recognize his voice. I didn't. I called and tried to charter an airplane to Fayetteville for a football game. As far as I know, they never did catch him. At one point the FBI came to the *Gazette* because they wanted to talk to Bill Shelton and me. We went into the library so that we could talk privately. They asked Bill exactly what I said to him when I called him, and other questions.

JG: They were checking out all aspects, the threat and conversations about it and so forth.

PB: I am going to change the subject for just a second. I wanted to tell you about the calls that came in for the circulation department. About all I would get at six o'clock in the morning was "I didn't get my paper." I did not take the information myself unless they were just overrun in the circulation department. Occasionally, they would call and ask for the "prescription department." There were times when they would ask for the "description department." [Laughter] Most of the time, they did not ask for subscription or prescription. They started their conversation with, "I didn't get my paper this morning." I took the brunt of a lot of it.

JG: Did you have people calling in and canceling their subscriptions?

PB: Yes. I especially noticed it when I worked nights. After circulation closed at five o'clock, it was the operator's responsibility to take the starts and the stops and transfers. I did that at night. There was not anybody in circulation.

JG: I know that the *Gazette* lost circulation as a result of their stand on the desegregation crisis. That was the reason that I was asking about that. I suppose some of those calls came to you.

PB: The circulation department—yes, every one of them came through me. The circulation department was extremely busy in the morning because of missed papers. During the integration crisis, circulation was busy all day long because of the cancellations. They really were getting calls. They were as busy as on a rainy morning when everybody's paper was wet.

JG: In getting back to these reporters who were dropping in and hanging their hats at the *Gazette* while covering the desegregation crisis, I presume that Mr. Ashmore laid out a policy that made them feel at home at the *Gazette*.

PB: I am sure that he did. I was not privy to any of that. I would see them go in and stop at the city desk, which was the first desk that you would come to, and talk to Bill Shelton. I figured that he would tell them which desk to take or what to do. I figured that Bill was in charge of that. I didn't see Mr. Ashmore out in the newsroom all that much, frankly. Then they would come back and tell me which telephone they were using.

JG: Pat, do you remember Mr. Heiskell and what were your relations with him?

PB: I remember Mr. Heiskell very well. He was always on time every morning. On time being before anybody else. Sometimes it was the two of us on the second floor because he was early. The only dealings that I had with him was when he wanted to place a call. He had a secretary, Mary Powell, but most of the time he did not go through her. His office was very close to mine. He would just walk

out there and tell me to get so and so on the line. I am talking about long distance calls now. He made his own local calls. Every morning when the door opened down the hall from me—I couldn't see the door from the switchboard—but I recognized his walk. Without fail, every morning, he would say, "Good morning." I would say, "Good morning."

JG: What about Harry Ashmore? Did you handle a lot of things for him?

PB: Mary Powell was also Mr. Ashmore's secretary. I placed his long distance calls. He would also speak in the mornings when he came in, but that was mostly all I had to do with him.

JG: You handled Mr. Ashmore's calls over the phone. He would call you?

PB: Let me tell you, I just remembered something. Mary Powell and Mr. Ashmore had the same line. They used the same line. It was extension 86. When you got a call in on the old switchboard, you had to push the button to ring the telephone. Nothing was automatic. Every time I made the telephone ring, I had to push the button. I was able to distinguish the telephone calls for Mary and Mr. Ashmore. One of them, you rang once, and the other one, you rang two rings. Like ring-ring. I can't remember which was which now.

JG: You would ring the reporters, too?

PB: I would just ring them normally.

JG: Were they easy to answer?

PB: Frequently. With the hours that I worked, I frequently had no answers.

JG: The reporters did not come in until late. They wouldn't usually come in until the afternoon.

PB: Like Eddie did not go to work until four o'clock in the afternoon. Normally, I don't think sports was even opened until after I was gone for the day.

JG: You said that Mr. Heiskell was one of the first ones there. He would come in

around nine o'clock in the morning?

PB: Oh, no. He was earlier than that. I would say usually—I am taking a guess—about eight o'clock probably. I know that he was one of the first ones, and then the others would start coming in—the others not necessarily being ones from the city room. Editorial writers and Millie Woods, the food editor and society department, they were all in that area. At noon, or after, the city room would come in sparsely.

JG: The reporters started coming in. You had some reporters who did not come in the newsroom until five o'clock?

PB: That's right. Matilda Tuohey and Sam Harris came in when they would get through. They were at the State Capitol all day. When they started to work, they did not come to the *Gazette* first. They went to the Capitol. Whenever they were through over there, they would come in. Sometimes it was five o'clock in the afternoon.

JG: If you received a call for them during the day, could you ring them at the state capitol?

PB: Yes, we had an extension at the state capitol. We also had an extension at the courthouse. I could ring George Bentley over at the courthouse. I was trying to remember any other. . .

JG: Was there an extension to city hall?

PB: No. Well, yes, I guess there was. I don't know. I thought I remembered everybody's extension. Maybe I don't.

JG: What did you like the most about being the switchboard operator? What was the fun to you in that job?

PB: The physical work of it. I enjoyed that so much. When I was in high school at Little Rock High School, during my study hall period I worked the switchboard. I

loved it. One day I went downtown when I was a little girl and saw my aunt working the switchboard at Pfeifer's department store. I went home and got a cardboard box and pencils with strings tied on; and rocks down here for the weights. I made my own switchboard. When I went over to Little Rock High School, I got in on working in the office with the switchboard. It was just fun to plug them in and unplug them.

JG: That was the type of switchboard that they had back then, wasn't it? You had to manually plug in each cord?

PB: Yes. You answered with, "*Arkansas Gazette*." Whatever they wanted, you took the corresponding cord and plugged it in and reached down and rang it. They had a temporary switchboard after the fire in 1954. The news department and the switchboard operator were moved over to First National Bank. That is Channel 4 now. We went over there, and the telephone company handled transferring all the *Gazette* calls over to that location. The switchboard was up on a balcony that was glassed in, and you could look down and see all of the staff. When we returned to the *Gazette*, we had a temporary switchboard. Some of our wires and equipment in the basement had been burned. So they put a temporary switchboard in the newsroom, and that is where I worked. The temporary switchboard was the old cord type. The girls who worked in classified gave me my relief, my breaks and lunch. So I had to retrain them on this old temporary switchboard.

JG: I am not familiar with this fire. Would you tell me about this fire?

PB: Yes, the building was filled with smoke. Some of the people had to go out the windows. The basement caught on fire. A lot of old newspapers were in the basement, and they caught on fire.

JG: A lot of the telephone wires got damaged?

PB: Oh, yes. All of our telephone equipment was in the basement. The telephone

lines were damaged. It took about a couple of weeks for it to be repaired. Then we got our switchboard back, and we were back in our little room with windows pushed up. It was fun to be right in the newsroom working.

JG: How long did the *Gazette* relocate to the First National Bank building?

PB: Just for that first night. The one night to get the paper out.

JG: Pat, I am wondering if you could tell me a little bit about where you were raised? Was it Little Rock?

PB: Yes, I was born and raised in Little Rock. I went to Little Rock High School until the tenth grade. All my life I have had an eye problem. I'm blind in one eye today. When I was in the third grade, I had to miss a semester of school. I went back and continued on. Three months into the tenth grade, my eye flared up again with a name that I don't even remember. The doctor said at the time, "No more reading at all." I had to quit school. After the flareup settled down, my friends had advanced in school, but I would have to go back into the tenth grade. So I begged Mother and Daddy not to make me go back. They were afraid that I was going blind. They said, "Okay, we won't make you go back." So as a result, after the eye calmed down, I got a job. I went to work for Montgomery Ward on a switchboard identical to the one at Little Rock High School. That was no problem. I then heard that the *Gazette* wanted a switchboard operator. I went over and applied to Frank Duff, who was the personnel manager. He hired me. I was fifteen years old. Mr. Duff said, "I don't want to come up there and see a bunch of those reporters hanging around at the switchboard." Years later, I reminded him of that, and told him, "Eddie Best did not listen to you."

[Laughter]

JG: Did he hang around a little bit?

PB: A little bit. He left a few poems for me to find at six o'clock when I went in. He

left them on the switchboard, which was nice.

JG: How old were you when you and Eddie married?

PB: Nineteen.

JG: Tell me about—you came back to work at the *Gazette*—first of all, let me ask you about the telephone calls that you received while you were out on the switchboard. Did any of those calls bother you to where you couldn't sleep at night?

PB: Not at all. As I have said before, I felt young and invincible. It worried my mother. I was pregnant. I would tell her what was happening. She would say, "Just don't hang around any at all if you hear anything. Just get up and leave." I never did. I never really felt threatened myself. You know how you are when you are young. I wasn't afraid. One thing about the *Gazette* building, though, it was never locked. I mean twenty-four hours, it was never locked. I would go in in the mornings sometimes, and there might be someone asleep in the restroom. There would be a woman asleep in the ladies' restroom asleep. She obviously came in off the street. It happened many times, more than once for sure. At one time, there was a man—it was dark where my office was located. I have already described it. The newsroom was back to my right. It was a big room that was completely dark. Everything was dark except for my office. Even the hallway down to the other door, all of it was dark. Nobody was on that second floor except me, or sometimes the cleaning people. I heard the door open once, and a man came up. He was drunk! He started talking to me. He backed up and pulled out a pocketknife from his pocket and opened it. He put it between his two fingers and said, "I am so good with this knife. I could stand right here and throw it and hit you right between the eyes." Anyway, he didn't throw it. He did go away. At that time I immediately called circulation. They were the only other

people there. Some of the circulation guys came up and looked around. I told my mother, who—I didn't know at the time—told my daddy. It was still dark outside. The next door that I heard open was my daddy coming down the hallway. He looked all over that building. The man obviously left. He just came in out of the cold or something, just like everybody else did who needed a good warm place.

JG: He had to come up the stairs, didn't he?

PB: Oh, yes. You could go up the stairs or elevator and go anyplace that you wanted to.

JG: There weren't any offices to go into downstairs?

PB: There was a glassed-in office down there. There was classified, accounting, and personnel. It was a glassed-in office. They could lock that. He had to come on down the hall and come up the steps to come in that way. Even that did not scare me very much.

JG: You left the *Gazette* in 1961. Did you do any other kind of job?

PB: I filled in sometimes at the *Gazette*. I left my permanent job, and when somebody was sick, I would fill in, until 1965, when we moved to Pine Bluff.

JG: When a second child came?

PB: I had two children by then, and it was time to stay home for a while.

JG: The names of those children and the times they were born?

PB: Our children were born in Little Rock, in 1959 and 1962. Our oldest son, Dr. Tim Best is a neurologist in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He and his wife, Dr. Nancy Best, are parents of our only grandchild, Daniel, who is 2. We call him "Hurricane Daniel." You would too if you could see him blow in from Louisiana. Our youngest son, Marty Best, is a pilot with Continental Airlines. He and his wife Mary live in The Woodlands, Texas, and have been married 18 years. I left the *Gazette* in 1961. My mother died that year. I had to be off a lot because of

her illness. Then Marty came along in 1962.

JG: You came back to the *Gazette* in a different capacity a little later on in 1974?

PB: Yes, I came back as a switchboard operator, but we had a different switchboard. It was almost all automatic.

JG: The old manual switchboard was gone?

PB: It was gone from the *Gazette*, but I had one at home. I acquired a manual switchboard just like the one that I had at the *Gazette* some years ago. I had it in my third bedroom. Eddie said, "Eventually, I am going to get this hooked up and we are going to use it for our phone in the den," which never happened. If you want to see it now, it is in the Museum of Discovery in Little Rock. The plaque says, "Donated by Pat Best."

JG: Very nice. I will have to look for that. Maybe this is a good point to turn this tape over.

[End of Tape One - Side One]

[Beginning of Tape One - Side Two]

PB: I left the *Gazette* when Eddie went to work for Faulkner Advertising in Pine Bluff. We moved down to Pine Bluff. Occasionally, because I knew Gene Foreman, who was the managing editor at *Pine Bluff Commercial*, I would fill in for their switchboard operator. I worked with Gene at the *Arkansas Gazette*. He is now at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

JG: You came back to the *Gazette* in 1974?

PB: I came back to Little Rock from Pine Bluff in 1972. I worked for Aetna Life & Casualty on a switchboard just like I had at the *Gazette*, so it was not a problem. I worked for L.E. Lay Mortgage Company, operating a more automatic switchboard. While I was at Aetna Life & Casualty, I started talking to Mary Nell Moseley. She was head of personnel at the *Gazette*. She said it was going

to be time soon for Mary Grace to retire and asked if I would be interested in coming over to the *Gazette*. I told her that I would. Mary Grace retired, and I went back to the *Gazette* on the switchboard.

JG: It was a more modern switchboard by then, wasn't it?

PB: Oh, yes. It was Centrex.

PG: Did you still have to plug in the cords or did you flip a switch?

PB: Like a little computer. You pushed the buttons, that's all. You just sat there and pushed buttons.

JG: To connect up to the calls?

PB: Pushed a button to answer it and then pushed another button to connect it. It is considerably more detailed than that, believe me. [Laughter]

JG: Did you later become a secretary?

PB: Yes. After the *Gazette* remodeled and moved the newsroom to what used to be the composing room, and Bob and Carrick were separated. One had an office on one end of the building, and one had an office on the other end. Muriel Gentry had been secretary to both of them. Then they moved Bob around to the newsroom, and Carrick stayed back in the corner office, close to where Mr. Heiskell's office had been. Anyway, Bob needed a secretary. They talked to me about it, and I did it. I was just shaking in my boots most of the time. I have to say that Bob Douglas supported me. I have a lot of respect for him as a newsman. David Petty, too. They were both very good. That was the first time that I had done anything but work a switchboard. I was so used to answering telephone calls that I could do it in my sleep. When I became Bob's secretary, it would even frighten me when the phone rang. I could answer calls all night and all day, but it was a whole different situation. I could not say, "Just a moment, I will connect you." It was something that I had to handle. I had to take care of

whatever it was. It was different than saying, “Just a minute, I will get you that department.”

JG: Did you type letters for Bob?

PB: Yes, I did, but not very well. He was so considerate and so nice. In the ninth grade I had typing. I had never used it. I did not type well for any of my bosses. They were understanding.

JG: Did you have an electric typewriter that you used?

PB: Yes.

JG: When did you get a computer?

PB: I never had a computer when I was there. I left in 1987, and shortly after I left, they got personal computers.

JG: I think they had them in the newsroom.

PB: I mean, when all the secretaries got computers. Reporters had computers for some time. The secretaries did not have them until later.

JG: You were secretary to Bob Douglas and later to Carrick Patterson?

PB: Yes, and later to David Petty. David is a sweetheart. We have known David since he was a copy boy. At night when I worked on the switchboard, the copy boys would relieve me for supper break and everything. David was one who relieved on the switchboard.

JG: That would have been back in the 1960s?

PB: Back in the 1960s, yes.

JG: Wow, way back then.

PB: There were several special copy boys. One that I remember is Jimmy Standard, He started as our copy boy, and he wound up as managing editor of the *Oklahoman*.

JG: The *Daily Oklahoman*?

PG: I think. He is Jim Standard now. Also Bill Simmons. He was also a copy boy who relieved me for breaks and supper. He went on to AP and then on to the *Democrat-Gazette*.

JG: You also worked for Carrick Patterson for a while?

PB: Yes.

JG: So you were secretary to Bob Douglas, managing editor; David Petty, managing editor; and you were also secretary for a time to Carrick Patterson, editor. Do you remember any particular news event that occurred while performing those duties?

PB: Well, yes. I had an outer office, and Carrick's desk faced the newsroom. My back was to the newsroom. We could just almost look at each other. I had a telephone call that the Challenger had exploded. Someone had heard it on the radio. I jumped up and ran into Carrick's office and told him. I told him to turn his television on. He did. It went like wildfire. Everybody suddenly knew. We had a television set in sports, and it was turned on. Wherever there was a television, it was turned on. We were all in such shock. We watched it over and over. Every television had a group of people. Carrick's office was full of people the rest of the day.

JG: It was a grim news day.

PB: It was a grim news day. Another story about Carrick and David that I would like to mention is that we had a fellow named Patt Clark. He was a graphics person in the advertising department. For some reason, he had to be laid off. He was a fine fellow. He went to Hendrix with my oldest son, Tim. I really did like him and was very dismayed when he had to be let go. They said it wasn't anything that he did. A month or so later we needed somebody up in the newsroom to do graphics. David Petty was in Carrick's office, and I could hear them talking about hiring a graphics artist and wondering who to hire. I picked up a piece of

paper and wrote P-A-T-T C-L-A-R-K. I took it to where only David could see. I held it up, and David saw it and gave me a little nod. I went back and sat down at my desk. In a few minutes, David said, “Well, what about Patt Clark, Carrick?” That is who they hired. I never told Patt Clark that.

JG: You planted the bee in the bonnet.

PB: Yes, I did, and I felt good about it. I liked Patt Clark.

JG: Pat, do you have some comments and stories that you would like to tell about your time at the *Gazette*?

PB: There is a special thing that I wanted to mention. Bill Rutherford, who was the news editor, had an absolute heart of gold and was a dear friend. One year on Christmas Eve, we had a fairly new, maybe a week old, employee, who was a copy boy. His name was Roosevelt Thompson. A lot of people will remember Roosevelt. He was an absolutely brilliant, popular black boy. He was president of the student body at Central High School. He was friends with both of my boys, who attended Central High School. I am very proud that I helped him to get the job as copy boy. On Christmas Eve, he hadn't been there but a week. One of my duties was to give out the checks for the newsroom. Everybody would come to me for their weekly paycheck. Roosevelt's name was somehow left off the time cards. Whenever Roosevelt came, he was so happy that it was Christmas Eve. He said, “Now I am going to get my check and go buy the Christmas presents.” The *Gazette* Christmas party was going on back in the library at the time. I looked and his check wasn't there. Then it hit me, “I bet it isn't there because it didn't get on the time card.” I went back to Bill. The copy boys answered to Bill Rutherford. I went back to Bill and said, “Roosevelt is here, and there is no check for him. He wants to go buy . . .” Bill sat down and figured how many hours Roosevelt had and everything. He got into his pocket and I got into my purse,

and we put the money in an envelope and wrote his name on it. I went back and gave it to him. I told him, "This is for the first week. Next week it will be in a check form." He said, "Yes, ma'am." Then he left. Unfortunately, Roosevelt was killed in a car wreck on his way back to college later. I think it was Yale that he was going to. He was killed. They named the auditorium at Central High School, the Roosevelt Thompson Auditorium. They had his funeral in the auditorium. Bill Clinton attended. He was the governor. Roosevelt had done a lot of volunteer work for Bill Clinton. He wanted to be in politics. Bill Shelton had gotten to know Roosevelt. Bill and I agreed, and I still believe it, Roosevelt could have become the first black president.

JG: How long did Roosevelt Thompson work at the *Gazette*?

PB: I don't know for sure. He was a senior at the time, and then he went on to college. He worked several months. It could have been his whole senior year.

JG: That's a very interesting story. Bill really came through in a time of need.

PB: I am glad that we did.

JG: You and Eddie live in Searcy now. When did you move to Searcy?

PB: Eddie decided that he wanted to retire in 1995. He retired, and he had been off work for about three months. He decided that he couldn't stand himself or couldn't stand me, either one. Anyway, Rogers Yarnell called him and asked him if he would like to work up here. I was against moving to Searcy. Eddie told Rogers that he would work for him for one year as a consultant. We agreed to rent a house in Searcy and kept our house in Little Rock. We moved and he worked one year. We fell in love with Searcy. They fell in love with Eddie and wanted him to stay. They begged him to stay. He stayed, and we sold our house in Little Rock and bought a house in Searcy in 1996. That is what got us here. He has retired now from Yarnell's. I think that it is going to take this time. We

have fallen so much in love with Searcy that neither one of us would think about going back to Little Rock. Every morning in Little Rock—I had a little television set in my bathroom—I would go in and take my bath and turn the television on. It got to the point that I would walk down the hall and say, “Let’s go in here and see how many people were killed last night.” It was bad. We don’t have that in Searcy. Searcy is the best kept secret in Arkansas. It is wonderful. It has a Christian college here, Harding. It is a whole different way of life.

JG: Pat, tell me another story about your career at the *Gazette*.

PB: There is one more thing that I wanted to mention. It is what we call “snow days.” Our snow team was Pat and Eddie Best, Margaret Ross, and Martha Douglas. We drove our second car, which was a 1963 Rambler, stick shift. Eddie was the driver. To the best of my knowledge, none of us missed work because of the snow. Eddie was a good driver, and he got us there. Martha would go up and wait on the corner of Mississippi and Markham. We would go by and pick her up, after we had picked up Margaret Ross right off of Rodney Parham on Nob Hill. Occasionally, we would see somebody else from the *Gazette*, like Julia Jones, waiting for a bus and pick them up, too. We would slide in on Third and Louisiana. Martha Douglas was also part of what we called “the lunch bunch.” It was some of us from the *Gazette* who got together every day at lunch. We usually brought our lunch and ate together. We became great friends, all of us. We laughed a lot and cried. We shared things as really good friends. Let me name them. It was Irene Wassell, Marla Shivers, Martha Douglas, Harriett Aldridge, Dan Morris, and Bill Lewis. Before I go on, let me say one thing about Bill Lewis. He is still a good friend. On Fridays we would go out to eat. Friday was payday, and we would all go out to eat, usually in Bill’s car, which was small. I would sit in Harriett Aldridge’s lap many times. We would just go on

down the road. Anyone who knows Bill Lewis at all would say, “The old bean is the most polite human being when ladies are around.” Without fail, he would pull out the chair for every lady that was there. He was very, very polite. It was a different story when Bill got behind the wheel. He turned into a real devil, so much so that his daydream was to own a car with a big hammer on the hood, so he could knock all the people out of his way. He was a totally different person behind the wheel.

JG: He was aggressive.

PB: Aggressive wasn't the word for it. I love him though. He was a nice guy.

JG: Thank you very much. Pat, I wonder if you could tell us about John Reed? You have some information about him?

PB: Well, yes. John Reed is Roy Reed's son. He was a very nice young man who came to work at the *Gazette*. I found out that he spoke Spanish. Part of my duty at the *Gazette*, as a secretary, was to take care of the orders for reprints for the photographers. Anytime anybody called and wanted a reprint of a picture in the paper, I handled it. One day I spent a whole lot of time with a woman who could not speak English except for one word every fifteen minutes. I knew that she wanted a reprint order. I didn't know what I was going to do. It suddenly hit me. I looked around in the newsroom, and John Reed was there. I called him and told him my dilemma. I said, “May I transfer this to you?” He was so very nice and said, “Certainly.” I transferred it and went out there. He was talking and doing his gobbledegook. I would hear a “mañana” sometimes and “taco” every once in a while. John was a delight, and he handled it for me. I thanked him very much.

JG: Pat, I wonder if you could tell me something about what it was like to work at the *Gazette*, raise two children, and be a spouse to Eddie.

PB: The years that I was still working after I had my kids, I raised the kids by myself,

period. Eddie was going to work at four o'clock in the afternoon. He got in sometimes at one or two o'clock in the morning. In the daytime he would get as much sleep as he could. He attended UALR or Little Rock Junior College. The total responsibility was on me, as Eddie will tell you. Somehow they turned out pretty well anyway.

JG: You were going to work at six in the morning when you had the first child?

PB: Yes, I was. I would take the baby to a babysitter. I would leave Eddie asleep and take the baby to the babysitter so that he could have his sleep. We only had one car at the time, before the kids came and after. If he wanted to use the car, he would have to get up and take me to work at six o'clock after he had gone to bed at two. It was a real mess. He would have to come down and pick me up. There were times when I would call him at 2:45, when he was asleep, to come down and get me. He would go back to sleep sometimes, bless his heart. I was not fit to live with on those days. [Laughter]

JG: You have a wonderful home here. I am delighted to have heard about your remembrances of the *Arkansas Gazette* and all other interesting events that you have explained to us this afternoon.

PB: It has been my pleasure.

[End of interview]