

*Gazette Project*

Interview with

Bob Douglas,  
Fayetteville, Arkansas  
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Interviewer: Roy Reed

[Continuation of Session II]

[Beginning of Tape Three, Side One]

BD: Well, one thing I'd like to say, it strikes me that I am coming off extremely well in this interview by my own accounting.

RR: Why not? [Laughs]

BD: But I know somebody is going to tell you differently, and they will more than likely be right.

RR: I don't know about that. Now, this is your recollection, and that's the way it ought to be. Who was I going to ask you about? Oh, Orville Henry. We talked a little about Orville the other day, how young he was when he came to work and all that. But we didn't really get into his personality. I'd like you to describe Orville as a person.

BD: I'm not sure I knew him that well as a person. Orville did his work, you know, and did it very, very well and ran a great sports department and, certainly had an eye for talent. Orville brought Jim Bailey in from nowhere, who, you know, I think is one of the best sports writers in the country. Wilbur Bentley, do you remember him, that whimsical little sports writer, or did you know him?

RR: I didn't know him. I just knew the name.

BD: He [Orville] brought him in. He wrote a really funny column.

RR: Was he sort of Bailey's predecessor? [unintelligible] hired to be a sports humorist.

BD: Oh, yes, he was. He was the sports reporter who had that touch, that humorous touch, light touch.

RR: What was that column of Jim's, just one day last week, about boxing, about this boxer who had just stopped boxing in the middle of his match. [Laughs]

BD: Oh, I don't recall. I saw that fight.

RR: Jim just kind of wrote it with a straight face. You know, the guy explained that "the referee had said I had it going my way, or I had him right where I wanted him," or something. [Laughter]

BD: Yes. Jim had this interest in boxing. We shared that, except he had this encyclopedic knowledge of boxing. He knows every fight of any note, knows the date, knows the gate. He is amazing. And he has this great perspective on it. He knows that a lot of the bad things about boxing are funny. He was especially good about the Little Rock fight promoters who came along sporadically. At one time some of the burgeoning Little Rock magnates, like Sheffield Nelson, I think, Mac McClarty, and maybe one or two others, decided that they would own a fighter. So they bought a guy who had been fighting out of Las Vegas named Otis Hardy Bates. And, you know, anybody can put on a championship fight. You can create some organization, give it some letters, and, now you're fighting for a title. Well, Otis Hardy Bates fought a guy — whose name escapes me right now — in Little Rock for the light heavyweight championship or the cruiserweight championship of the world, according to this organization. Well, Otis lost every round. But the guy he was fighting — I think his name was Anthony Harris. Anthony Davis, that was his name — his trunks didn't fit, and he had trouble keeping them up. He was having to pull his trunks up with one hand and hit Otis with the other for fifteen rounds. [Laughter] And back in the dressing room after the fight, which Anthony won, they gave him some kind of plaque. I think it was just a piece of paper, really, kind of a script declaring him to be the light

heavyweight champion of the world. Anthony said, “I thought a belt came with this.” [Laughs] Jim [Bailey’s] line was, “No one needed one worse.” [Laughter]

RR: Who were the other editors that we haven’t talked about early in your career and later on?

BD: Well, we talked about Count Dew.

RR: Yes, and Tom Davis. We talked about him.

BD: There was a string of editors on the state desk. City desk was Bill Shelton.

RR: State desk, that’s — I keep forgetting about state desk. When I came there, Ken . . .

BD: Parker.

RR: Parker was state editor, but who was it before then?

BD: Oh, let me see if I can remember. I’m not sure that I can. Ken was not state editor when I came back from North Carolina. Somebody else was, and I do not remember who it was.

RR: Talk about Ken a little bit. What kind of a guy was he?

BD: Ken was a nice guy and told some great stories. I never thought he was that great of a newspaper man. Smart, certainly, but I don’t think he had the feel for it.

RR: Eventually, he went into PR.

BD: Yes. He worked for the chicken people for a while, the Poultry Federation.

RR: And Leroy was state editor.

BD: Leroy succeeded Ken. Nelson wanted to make Shelton city editor and state editor and did for a short time. He had implicit faith in Shelton — thought he could do anything — which was well founded. But Shelton decided that this wouldn’t work, much too much so he [unintelligible].

RR: Is that when Leroy Donald . . . ?

BD: That’s when Leroy, who had been an assistant under Ken Parker, that’s when he became state editor.

RR: Now there's a character.

BD: Yes, there is. [Laughs]

RR: My earliest memory of Leroy Donald was at some *Gazette* party, where Leroy and somebody else got drunk and started singing "In the Old Cotton Fields Back Home."

BD: Yes.

RR: And they sang it for two or three hours, more or less constantly, and then they danced to it.

BD: Leroy was a champion party man. He was the *Gazette's* champion party man. Leroy was a good writer, too, and a good editor, had a real good touch with certain kinds of stories. I never thought he was a great state editor. I don't think he was cut out for that job. Jimmy Jones succeeded him. I named Jimmy Jones state editor.

RR: Tell me about Jimmy. I mean, I knew Jimmy, but I didn't. I was gone from the paper by the time he came along.

BD: Jimmy was as dedicated a newspaper man as I have ever known and was dedicated to the *Gazette*. He had always wanted to work for the *Gazette*. He worked in Texarkana. He was the managing editor in Texarkana for a while and came to the *Gazette* as a reporter. I formed this — I hate to use the term investigative reporter, but I guess that's what I made him and Tucker Steinmetz. I sent them to work as a team on investigative stories and work with the beat reporters on good stories that they were aware of and didn't have time to get to, to do an accurate job.

RR: They did some good work, too.

BD: They did some very good work.

RR: Where was Tucker from?

BD: North Little Rock.

RR: Yes.

BD: His father was a sterotypist[?].

RR: And he and Jimmy, they worked together for, what, two, three, four years?

BD: Yes. I guess about two years, maybe three.

RR: Okay. What kind of a person was Jimmy?

BD: Oh, Jimmy was very convivial, very good company. He loved the finer things in life. He loved food and good wine and was very well liked. He was one of my favorites.

RR: He had a lot of girth, as I remember.

BD: A lot of girth, and so did Tucker. We had two kind of short fat guys, who did a lot of damage to bureaucrats. [Laughs]

RR: Jimmy died too young.

BD: Yes.

RR: How old was he?

BD: I guess he was forty, not much older than. May not have been quite forty.

RR: Our kids are older than that.

BD: Yes, oh, yes. There was a string of telegraph editors, too. Gene Fritz became telegraph editor. Ray Stephens was telegraph editor for a short time, and Harry Ashmore wanted to put Gene Fritz in that spot. Gene Fritz was a very good telegraph editor. The *Gazette* put a lot of emphasis on wire copy, and the telegraph editor had to handle any number of wires, and we put stories together. We took the information from all wire services and put it together in one story, which worked out pretty well, I thought. I succeeded Gene, who became editor of the *Gazette* magazine.

RR: Did you go from reporting to telegraph editing?

BD: No, I went from the copy desk. I came back as just a copy editor. I'd been a copy editor/reporter. I always wanted planned to come back, but I thought I should

wait a decent amount of time because of the strike. I came back a couple of years later and went on the copy desk. In less than a year, I think, I became the telegraph editor.

RR: Pat Carrithers had the job a long time.

BD: Pat had it. He succeeded me and had the job until the paper folded. Pat was a very good telegraph editor. He had a real feel for it.

RR: That's a gift. Nobody knows — it is entirely subjective — nobody knows what's the most important thing that happened in the world, you know. I mean, unless it is an atomic bomb going off or something like that. There is so much subjectivity to it, and yet there is this little tribe of men and women around the country, who, working independently like scientists across the world [from] each other, come up with the same stories generally to speak of.

BD: Exactly. Yes.

RR: Get the most reporting.

BD: Well, the big stories are pretty obvious, I think. Maybe people on the street might agree with you most times. I enjoyed being telegraph editor about as much as I ever enjoyed [anything], next to reporting. You work for yourself. You did at the *Gazette*. You worked independently. I liked that. You got to know everything that was going on. I also enjoyed that.

RR: Tell me about the telephone, the switchboard operators down through the years.

BD: Well, Mrs. Mary Grace was the switchboard operator, the main one, when I came to work and held that job, oh, until the late seventies, I think. When I came to work, the switchboard was right out in the middle of the newsroom. And it was an antiquated old switchboard. It would shock the hell out of you. [Laughs] Sometimes reporters had to fill in over there while Mrs. Mary Grace took a break. I always dreaded it because it shocked the hell out of you. [Laughter] Sparks would fly. Didn't bother her. [Laughs] I remember one night Gene Wirges, son

of Joe, who earned his own notoriety, he and I took over the switchboard. It was on election night. We started calling people at random in the city just giving them the election results. We'd call somebody, wake them up at two, three in the morning: "Here are your latest election results," and read them off and they would always say thank you. [Laughter] Not one person ever said, "What the hell are you doing calling me at this hour?! Who are you?!"

RR: Can you think of any other line of work where as much nonsense is tolerated as in the newspaper?

BD: No other serious line of work, no.

RR: I was thinking about those phone calls late at night that Pat Owens used to make.

BD: Yes, oh, yes.

RR: He'd call the *Democrat* city room and tell them some cock and bull story to get them going.

BD: He had all sorts, all kinds of pranks, he played. We had a kid named Greg Palmer, whom you will remember . . .

RR: Yes.

BD: He went to Ohio University, which has a football team — not a major football team, but they had a good record this one year. Greg was the kind of guy who wore his fraternity pin on his pajamas. A very loyal Ohio University alumnus. So Ohio University went undefeated. The Razorbacks were in the Cotton Bowl that year, and we planted a phony story — we used the AP machines, so this story seemed to come over the wires — and it was in, you know, that form that they use, in takes. We had one take with more under it, then it'd go to something else. . . . "Little Ohio University, has been selected to play in the Cotton Bowl, in a major bowl, against the University of Arkansas January 1<sup>st</sup>." Well, somebody brought that — Greg was over on the state desk — and showed it to Greg. Well, he went crazy. Called his wife. I guess he probably called friends back in Ohio.

[Laughter] And nobody ever told him differently. He left. I guess he got a little suspicious. . . . Well, he called the sports department. Jerry McConnell answered the phone. He said, "This is Shorty down at the pool hall, and some kid came in here telling us that the University of Ohio was going to play in the Cotton Bowl." Jerry said, "Oh, we got a fool kid down here who will believe anything that you tell him." [Laughter] Of course, it was Greg. Greg said, "Well, Goddamn, Jerry." Jerry said, "Well, you know you shouldn't fall for that." "I know but, Goddamn, Jerry." He was all broken up. [Laughter]

RR: Jerry McConnell, there was another guy. He was around the *Gazette* a long time.

BD: A very good sports editor and a track specialist. He knew more about track than anyone in Arkansas. Jerry originated the "Meet of Champions," high school track in Arkansas. That's the best runners from any school, small or large . . .

RR: The what champions?

BD: The "Meet of Champions."

RR: Oh, the "Meet of Champions," yes.

BD: I don't know whether they still do it or not, but that was his. See, he wasn't like Wally Hall, who has the Wally Hall softball tournament. He didn't use his name, it just became an important state event. Originally, Jerry handled the PR for track at the Olympics.

RR: I never knew that.

BD: He applied for just any job, and he got a letter offering him this job, PR for all the track events.

RR: When would that have been?

BD: This last Olympics.

RR: Oh, you mean [unintelligible].

BD: Yes. I talked to him just before that. Called him to congratulate him. I thought it was certainly a well deserved honor.

RR: Yes, oh, yes.

BD: But I haven't talked to him since he's been back.

RR: Jerry's a great democrat, he and Joe both. They've become very active in the Democratic Party politics.

BD: Yes. Jerry is the one who started the exodus from the *Democrat* over to the *Gazette*. A lot people had been too timid to move. They talked about it all the time. This is what Albright tells me. They all sat around talked about, "Well, I'm going over to be hired by the *Gazette*." Jerry was among them. Well, Jerry did it. The next day he came over and applied at the *Gazette* and got a job in the sports department. After that then the rest of them came, but they probably never would have had the nerve to apply for some reason.

RR: Yes.

BD: Then after Jerry, Albright, Charlie Rixse, and a couple of others.

RR: Rixse, there was a good reporter.

BD: Rixse was a good reporter.

RR: A very solid human being.

BD: He was assistant state and city editor. I don't know whether that was an official title or not, but that was his function.

RR: It was, yes. When I went to work there, he was assistant to Bill Shelton.

BD: He was good.

RR: And he was so patient with me and, of course, knew all about North Little Rock, which is where they flung me. They had to do something with these new people.

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BD: Yes, I think he was from North Little Rock, wasn't he?

RR: Yes, he was from out beyond Rose City somewhere, so he knew all that. Yes, they hired me and George Bentley at the same time. And George drew the better beat. He got the courthouse, I think, right off. I guess there was an opening right

then, and he was a known quantity. He had worked in . . .

BD: Fort Smith.

RR: Fort Smith.

BD: Well, he stayed at the courthouse, as you know, from then until his retirement.

RR: Hell, if they put me at the courthouse and George in North Little Rock, I might have stayed at the Pulaski County courthouse for thirty years. [Laughs]

BD: I don't much think so. You graduated to the Capitol, you got the Capitol from North Little Rock.

RR: That's right. I did. I went out there with Valachi [?]. I meant to come back to something we were talking about — Bill Shelton and his personal life. Tell that story if you will about him in the war, about being shot down.

BD: Yes, he was a bomber pilot and he wasn't shot down. He did some kind of a maneuver on a mission and two planes collided and his plane was going to have to crash, so his crew bailed out. Bill stopped just before he bailed out and went back to set the plane on some kind of course. When he bailed out, he was all by himself. Came down in Yugoslavia, hid behind a tree. So these resistance fighters showed up, and he jumped out, yelling "Americano." So they took him and got him back to the base.

RR: Wasn't that kind of a tense moment when he didn't know which side they were . . .

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BD: He didn't know who in the hell they were, yes.

RR: He just took a chance and hollered "Americano." If it had been Nazis, why, they would have just killed him on the spot.

BD: They'd have killed him.

RR: They helped him get out of Yugoslavia?

BD: Yes, and back to his base.

RR: Where was that? Italy?

BD: I don't know.

RR: I think it was Italy.

BD: I think it was, too.

RR: And then in his personal life he had a lot of sad... His wife, Helen . . .

BD: She died of cancer at twenty-eight.

RR: And then their son.

BD: Then he married Dixie, a real live wire, a great person, and then his son committed suicide.

RR: Yes. And Bill just went on.

BD: Went on. He wrote the son's obituary.

RR: Wrote the son's obituary.

BD: Wrote the story. He never was officially declared a suicide. He swallowed some poisonous stuff — I can't remember what it was — but it was spur of the moment. He was mad and didn't think. Yes, that was his only child.

RR: The first *Gazette* party that I ever went to that I can remember was either at the Sheltons' house while Helen was still alive or at the Obsitniks', but I remember both those couples, the Obsitniks and Sheltons being there. It must have been at the Obsitniks' because they had a house full of kids, and I remember being very interested in, noticing that these little, itty-bitty kids, four and five years old, who stayed up all though the party.

BD: Yes, oh, we did that at *Gazette* parties back then. You'd take your kids, put them all in a room and then go party. After Helen died — Bill brought up Dee [?]by himself — he got a housekeeper.

RR: Dee, her name was Dee.

BD: Yes. He came over to my house quite a bit then, he and Dee came over. Kind of talked his way through it. But he sure had his share of tragedy, boy.

RR: Dixie was sure a blessing for him when she came along.

BD: Oh, was she ever. I think his father was killed, hit by a train.

RR: Bill's father?

BD: Yes.

RR: Was he some kin to the Stucks, Howard and Dorothy?

BD: He married one. He married Connie Stuck.

RR: Bill?

BD: That was his first wife.

RR: Before Helen?

BD: Before Helen.

RR: Okay.

BD: They were divorced [unintelligible] He went to school up here and met Helen right on campus here. You know, the *Gazette*... I don't believe the *Gazette* ever had hired any University of Arkansas graduates until the summer of 1948. Can you think of any?

RR: You were in that first wave.

BD: Yes.

RR: Well, I never thought about it.

BD: I think one of the reasons was that Count Dew and Walter J. Lemke didn't get along. Had an old feud going. [Laughs] But I don't know that anyone ever applied either. I just don't know.

RR: Reckon that the two of them old men, ever had a fist fight? Count Dew liked to fight.

BD: Well, it could have happened. They were both feisty. I don't know that Count liked to fight. He just would. He wasn't any good at it.

RR: Yes. [Laughs]

BD: But he'd fight anybody.

RR: We didn't talk about Obsitnik, did we, the other day?

BD: No. You could write a book about Obsitnik.

RR: Well, make a start at it. Where would you start? What's the main thing that a stranger who had never met him ought to know about Larry Obsitnik?

BD: Well, Larry was a certainly a fun lover and a terrific photographer. He was the father of modern newspaper photography in Arkansas. He was the first.

RR: By that you mean more than just snapping a picture of folks standing in a pose.

BD: That's right. Doing some creative stuff. Larry finished high school, you know, and went to college. He could bring in a picture. Whatever the story was, he brought in THE picture that best illustrated it. He and Gene Prescott both did that, and neither one of them — I think maybe both were high school graduates. And they probably wouldn't bother to tell you what the story [was], if they even really know what the story was about. [They] just knew enough to know what best illustrated it and get that picture. Great [unintelligible] on-the-spot news photographers, and brought in great feature pictures. Well, Larry — in the late forties -- , we called him Rembrandt because he was so artistic. He was a painter, too.

RR: I never knew that.

BD: Just like a Grandma Moses. He just did it, you know. I think one of my kids has a painting that Larry did for me.

RR: Was he there before Gene Prescott?

BD: Yes.

RR: Now they had a whole string of . . .

RR: Joe Wirges was the first, but Joe was a reporter/photographer. And then, I guess, Gene [Wirges] had the same function except I think they finally made him just a photographer.

RR: Yes.

BD: And Gene didn't do much work.

RR: Gene Wirges?

BD: Yes.

RR: Then after these two older photographers, Prescott and Obsitnik, there was this long line of good, even brilliant, young guys. How did they happen to come there?

BD: I don't know. I think it was Obsitnik's influence.

RR: Rodney Dungan.

BD: Rodney Dungan.

RR: Willy Allen.

BD: Yes.

RR: Pat Patterson, Steve Keese.

BD: Yes. Some of them are over at the *Democrat* now. Steve is there, and I think maybe one or two others.

RR: I remember a young guy, I can see his face, but I can't think of his name right off hand. Real young guy came after I was gone, I remember, and he didn't — he went to work for *Southern Living* magazine or some such thing.

BD: I don't know.

RR: Really done wonderfully well, just [unintelligible].

BD: Was it John Portapillow [Portapillo?].

RR: Yes.

BD: Yes. No, he went to — he's at Mountain Home now.

RR: Oh, yes.

BD: He went to work on the West Coast, a good job for a good young photographer.

RR: Who took that famous picture of the moving of the old jail? And I guess it was the egg[?].

BD: I think Larry took that.

RR: Went up there.

BD: Either Larry or Gene. Excuse me a minute.

[Tape Stopped]

RR: When did the Patterson sons, Ralph and Carrick, come to work at the *Gazette*?

BD: Carrick came to work part time when he was about fifteen or sixteen, and he started out in photography.

RR: That would have been the 1970s?

BD: 1960s.

RR: 1960s.

BD: And, you know, he did it the right way, starting at the bottom and trying to get a feel for how a newspaper is put out and what have you. And in that process [it] didn't make any difference. It didn't take. He never understood a newspaper. Didn't understand the *Gazette*.

RR: Why is that? I mean here's a kid who has been brought up in a newspaper family. [He] never heard anything except the *Gazette* all his life.

BD: I don't know. I don't know. He thought he did. He thought he was a natural. Thought he had — I remember him saying that he had J.N. Heiskell's blood in him. Well, of course, he did, but he didn't get the right genes. And Mr. Heiskell counted on him to take over, had counted on him. And Mr. Heiskell of course, he never lived to see the day, but I think he would have always insisted on believing that Carrick was the right man for the job. Ralph had never showed much interest in it, but he was not the heir apparent. Ralph had more talent than Carrick. Actually, Ralph had a pretty good touch. If I could have had Ralph, I think I could have made a newspaper man out of him.

RR: What did they put Ralph to doing?

BD: Just odd things. He worked sports a little, and he worked — I had him on the copy desk a short time. That was when I discovered he had this talent. A good headline writer. Had a good appreciation for words. But Ralph was supposed to

have been sort of the playboy, and I guess he was. Carrick was about as insecure a person as I have ever known. Just had a complex. It's what prevented him from ever learning anything about what he needed to know about a newspaper. He thought it was a divine gift that he had.

RR: I guess part of your assignment was to teach him.

BD: Yes, it was. And Nelson's, both, and I know we both did our best.

RR: He ended up — what was his title at the end?

BD: Executive editor.

RR: Am I right, he had enthusiasm? He would get very interested in, let's say, the technology, the computers . . .

BD: Oh, yes. And was very good at that. Carrick really installed our first computer system. I couldn't have done it. He did a marvelous job picking the right one and understanding it and teaching it. I think he might have been a good publisher if he would have left the newsroom alone. I don't know. Production really was his strong point, but he wasn't interested. He wanted to be an editor.

RR: Well, why do you suppose that it didn't shake out that they put him in as publisher, you know, trained him to succeed his father as publisher?

BD: Well, publisher was not the thing to be. Editor was. [Laughs]

RR: Because his grandfather was that.

BD: Yes.

RR: Yes, well.

BD: The more authority he got, the worse he was. He influenced his father, and his father influenced him the wrong way. He sort of reinforced some of the bad decisions Hugh made, like killing stories, good stories. As long as I was dealing with Hugh, we could work it out. I could usually persuade him that we needed to do something. "Run this story." Carrick came along and, of course, when he became executive editor, he was a notch above me and there was just no trying.

God, we lost some good stories. One in particular — it's one that hurts me the most — was a story involving Harry Hastings, crime czar of Arkansas. Little Rock police worked awfully hard under Chief Gale Weeks to nail Harry and they got him. It was what at one time would have been called entrapment. That's what they would have been guilty of at one time, but there was hardly any such thing, as it was explained to me by the U.S. Attorney's Office. Because of the drug problem, it was almost impossible to entrap anybody anymore. That legal defense has just disappeared. Because they had used whatever measures to catch the drug dealers. But Harry Hastings, well, he was a criminal. What the police managed to do is arrange for a guy to steal a truckload of new tires on some highway in Arkansas coming out of Louisiana, I think. And they got a guysort of a Dixie mafia type, Ray Hamilton. And it was all arranged that the truck driver would stop at this truck stop, come in, have coffee, not turn around. And Ray would get the truck and drive it on to Little Rock, which he did, and then sell it to Harry. Which he did. I think that there was another piece of equipment involved, a tractor or something. Harry and his son bought both from Ray Hamilton. Well, there were pictures. The FBI knew about it. The U.S. Attorney's office, which I was working with, was tracking it all the way. Well, this Walter Riddick, who was Assistant U.S. Attorney . . .

RR: Riddick.

BD: Riddick.

RR: Yes, Walter Riddick, I remember.

BD: I met him over at the office of the chief of police, and he told me about this. He said, "Well, you know, we've got this thing. We've got the pictures. We've got the tapes. We've got everything." But he said, "I've been hearing, when I go to parties, that this has been fixed, that he is going to get off." He said, "Nobody has told us anything." He said, "I've been hearing that, and I'm beginning to believe

that's the case." Well, it was. I think it was fixed. I think John McClellan had something to do with it. John [protected?] him when he was chairman of the Senate rackets committee. Certainly, he covered up for Harry. His investigations of Arkansas organized crime were a joke. Well, yes, then the Justice Department ordered Sonny Delahunty, the U.S. Attorney, to kill it. You know, forget about it. Sonny wouldn't do it. He said, "You have to come down here and do it yourself." So they sent a man down to scotch the case. Well, then working with the police, I got that story. I got the tapes. I got the pictures. I got Ernie Dumas, brought him in on it. It was just the two of us. We didn't tell anybody else. Listened to all those tapes. Wrote the story. I went down and cleared it with the lawyers. I don't know if Hugh cued[?] or what. He said we couldn't run it, and Carrick said, "I must agree." And my question was why. Well, I never got a straight answer except they were afraid. Toward the last, Hugh's interest was in building on the estate and leaving his family a big rich estate. And he was scared. He was scared of the paper being sued. Unreasonably so.

RR: Do you suppose that it had anything to do with [the fact] that Harry Hastings had been involved in that earlier libel suit with Trout?

BD: Harry Hastings was not involved in that.

RR: Oh, I thought he was one of the people that Trout was supposed to have . . .

BD: No, it was Cecil Dunaway and — not Cecil — Cecil Hill and Harold Dunaway.

RR: Harold Dunaway, that's right. Okay. Okay.

BD: But if ever... We called the FBI to vouch for it. The FBI got scared of it because they thought it was going to be a violation of his civil rights. Anyhow, their bureau chief got scared of it. They didn't want me to use it [unintelligible]. Ah, hell, what did I care? I was going to use it, of course. I did a lot of work on that.

RR: You know, just this . . .

BD: Carrick nuked the whole story.

RR: This would have been in the 1970s sometime, the late 1970s.

BD: Yes, late 1970s.

RR: And just fifteen years earlier Harry Hastings was a hunting buddy of Orval Faibus.

BD: Yes.

RR: They went everywhere together.

BD: And probably McClellan, too. Yes, he was very, very close to Faibus. That's when my disillusionment started setting in, in a big way. After that, I was about to decide what's the use.

RR: Yes.

BD: The *Gazette* was no longer going to be the *Gazette*. Well, the *Arkansas Times* got it. It was just a magazine then. They got it and ran it and it didn't make any splash at all. But they didn't have the circulation. Nobody paid much attention to them at that time.

RR: Ran it without getting sued?

BD: Oh, of course. There was no way in the world — in the first place nobody like Harry Hastings is going to take the stand on anything. I've never known of a safer story, with pictures and tapes and the FBI's knowledge and police knowledge and a string of witnesses from here to Little Rock.

RR: Yes, and I suppose the tire thing was just kind of the tip of the iceberg.

BD: Oh, yes. That was just something they could nail him on.

RR: Was there any suspicion that he was in the drug business?

BD: I think there was, yes — marijuana, anyhow. I don't know whether he was, but he was apparently sponsoring some guys who were.

RR: He was the behind-the-scenes power of gambling in Hot Springs by the 1950s.

BD: Yes.

RR: Dane Harris was the front man, and Hastings was the silent power.

BD: We had this tape of Harry, you know, talking about the stolen tires and a lot of other things. It was a great story.

RR: Yes.

BD: I think at one point he said he killed six, eight people. We couldn't quite make it out, so we didn't use that.

RR: Yes. [Laughs]

BD: Well, what about Gannett's takeover? Let's wind up with that.

BD: Well, I wasn't there then.

RR: Yes.

BD: I'd like to get back to some other stuff, but we don't have to today, but you know, Joe Wirges, Obsitnik, some of the people. Some great stories.

RR: Okay.

BD: What did you just ask me? About Gannett?

RR: Well, Gannett, but that is really after your time, anyhow. You and I, I know, share the same opinion of that, but it is the opinion of couple of guys who were already gone from the paper.

BD: Oh, yes.

RR: But . . .

BD: Well, as I just pointed out, the paper started going down hill anyhow. It was no longer going to be the *Gazette*. Showed favoritism toward Witt Stephens and people like that, and Bill Dillard, who wanted to keep his name out of the paper and his son's name out of the paper when his son was picked up for some violation. And this was after I left that all this was going on. And Hugh was scared, too. He didn't want to fight the *Democrat*. He didn't want to spend any money. He could have knocked them off in two years, I am convinced. In fact, Walter Hussman confirmed that. But they sold to Gannett. And Gannett killed it. Killed what was left.

RR: Let's talk some more about Obsitnik.

BD: Okay.

RR: We kind of got distracted there talking about the other thing.

BD: Well, he had these great pictures. Of course, all of his negatives are at the university library now as exhibits. Although, he was a philosopher. He was hilarious. He was an awful lot of fun. And a philosopher on life, sex, whatever. You know, deep.

RR: Yes.

BD: Or he thought he was deep. Religion, spirituality. In the editorial section the *Gazette* used to have a feature called "Lines for Life." And it fell to Jerry Neil sometimes to put it out. It was a syndicated feature. They would send you these "Lines for Life." Jerry would occasionally throw one in there. He had one quote of Obsitnik's — I think it was, "Anybody can be somebody, but not everybody can be somebody." [Laughs] That sort of thing. Jerry would also throw some strange ones in. One once was, "The sad truth is that turtles do not breathe well in this climate," [unintelligible] that was his life line. [Laughs] A lot of great of stories about Larry, but I'm not sure I can remember one now.

RR: How about his driving habits? How . . .

[End of Tape Three, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Three, Side Two]

RR: . . . for travelers.

BD: St. Christopher?

RR: Yes, I believe. I remember Larry kept a little figure of St. Christopher on the dashboard of his car.

BD: And he wore a medal, a St. Christopher's medal, around his neck, too. He had all the guts in the world. He'd risk his life to get a picture. He would do whatever it took. Had all the brass in the world. But, I don't know — [Do you] remember

talking about his trying to get Harry Truman to read a comic book when Truman came to Arkansas? [Laughs]

RR: No.

BD: Larry and Tom Davis, I believe, were on the train with him [Truman], and Larry tried to hand him — first, he tried to get him to shave. He wanted a picture of him shaving. Well, no. “Well, would you just read this?” Handed him a comic book. Well, he wouldn’t do that. [Laughter] Then one time Henry Ford the second, was visiting Little Rock. I hope I haven’t already mentioned this story.

RR: No. I haven’t heard this.

BD: And there was some sort of receiving line, and Larry was there to get pictures. So he went up — he kind of went through the line and got to Henry Ford and said, “My new Ford” — I forget what kind of Ford it was — “My new Ford is burning oil already.” And Henry Ford the second said, “Well, see your local dealer.” So Larry came back and reported that, and Charlie Allbright put it in his column. The day the paper came out, people in suits and hats showed up at Larry’s door with a new Ford for him. [Laughter] He did things like that. And if he filled out a credit application, for a reference he’d put down Winthrop Rockefeller. [Laughs] Of course, he took a lot of feature pictures. He could get a good picture out of practically anything. He came back with a picture of the Little Rock Symphony Orchestra once. It was a block that I did. And he came in with a picture of them performing or rehearsing. He said, “I have got it.” He said, “This is the best orchestra picture of all time.” He said, “Look at this. You can hear them plucking oboes.” [Laughter]

RR: Who was the conductor?

BD: Joseph Blaas, I think. He loved pictures of pretty girls, of course.

RR: Oh, yes.

BD: I was with him one day — I think he was giving me a ride to work — we had a lot

of snow and ice. This girl in a mini-skirt was wiping the snow off her windshield, bending over. Well, we got a view went past her, and, woo, I mean he hit those breaks, we spun around three or four times, and stopped to get that picture.

[Laughs] Of course, Larry would have her lean further and further over.

RR: Yes. [Laughs]

BD: “Now, don’t... this is not quite it.” [Laughter] I mean I walked by a studio by the *Gazette* building once, and he was taking pictures. I think the dance craze was the twist. You remember the twist?

RR: Yes.

BD: And he had a professional dancer in there, a Little Rock dancer. She was doing the twist, and he was taking a series of pictures of the movements. He said, “Bob, would you come here a minute? I need some help.” He said, “Don’t you think this would be better without the slip?” [Laughter] I had to agree. [Laughter] Serious thought, you know. Wrinkled his forehead.

RR: Yes.

BD: Let me talk a little bit about Joe Wirges before we get done.

RR: Yes, yes.

BD: Joe was, of course, the police reporter for forty-nine years, and there was never a greater police reporter anywhere. There never had been any police reporter who got the stories Joe did. In fact, he practically ran the police department, the state police. One of my early assignments, about September of 1948, was to fly up with Joe to Yellville and join a manhunt. There wasn’t much for me to do. I think I flew back and brought the pictures was all. [But] Joe just took over. He just took charge. “All right, boys, there is no point in looking or doing anything else tonight. Too dark.” Although we did go in some caves. The way things were back then, nobody — the cops were solicitous of newspaper people, the safety of newspaper people, as I suppose they are now. I had to go in the cave first. You

know, a man-made cave. Of course I knew they knew he wasn't in there. But I went in with a little trepidation. He had been there – there was some bedding. [Laughter] Joe Wirges worked for practically nothing. You know the *Gazette* never paid anybody. Joe might have got up to sixty bucks a week before the strike after thirty, thirty-three years then. Making sixty a week. There was a radio show called “The Big Story.” [It] was about police stories. Reporters covering police stories. Some of them maybe — in Joe's case, he broke a murder case, so they had him on the radio — not Joe, but somebody acting his part. Of course, they didn't care much about the facts then. They had Gene also following him around and taking pictures. Joe would say, “Well, get a shot of this.” And he would say, “Okay, Pop.” Well, we were sitting there, listening to it. I asked when the story ran. Joe said “When Gene was two years old.” [Laughs] He always would be among the police. In the line of fire, whatever, he was out there. He had his camera. He was always there. One of my favorite stories was that — the stories he would tell, now a lot of these happened before I got there. Some woman had committed a murder, and she was sent to the penitentiary. Joe went in his car. He was going to cover her walking in through the prison gates. It was a men's penitentiary. They got there, and the warden or whoever said, “I can't take her. We can't take her here. Nobody told me anything about this.” And the deputy sheriff who brought her said, “I've done my part,” and got in his car and went back to Little Rock. So Joe gave her a ride back. [Laughter] And on Saturday night — the one night that we competed with the *Democrat* then -- the *Democrat* being an afternoon paper, we competed for the Sunday paper. So Joe drove her around and talked to her until past the *Democrat*'s deadline and then put her on a train. She got on a train and never served a day. [Laughter]

RR: That's a good story.

BD: He knew all the crooks, all the criminals. He would go down death row and eat

the last meal with the condemned man. Join him. Well, he got a good meal out of it.

RR: They wouldn't allow that now.

BD: He had pull. They wouldn't allow that now. And he'd talk them out of their corneas. Joe always had bad eyes and he collected corneas for the . . . whoever.

RR: For the eye bank.

BD: For the eye bank, that's it. Would talk them out of their corneas.

RR: Well, I never knew that side of Joe Wirges, that he had a charitable . . .

BD: Well, he was there for the meal, too. [Laughter]

RR: Well, yes. He covered a lot of executions.

BD: He covered them all.

RR: Now were these all electric chairs?

BD: All electric chairs.

RR: After hanging, I guess.

BD: Yes. He never covered a hanging that I know of. I don't know when we got the electric chair, maybe the early 1920s, didn't we?

RR: I can't imagine Joe being squeamish about an execution.

BD: He wasn't squeamish about anything in the world. One of his kids told me he'd come in with these pictures of some horrible gory car wreck, come in when the family was seated for dinner or at breakfast and throw them on the table. After he retired, he had a terrible case of emphysema, and he would call me every once in a while, and I knew that when he couldn't talk anymore, he'd just stop. That was the end of conversation. It could be mid-sentence or right in the middle of a word. It just stopped. I went over to see him a few times, and if I had had any sense at all, I would have taken a tape recorder and gotten these great stories. One time I went over to see him, and he'd had a visitor that Sunday. The previous Sunday —some guy came to the door, and Joe went to the door and said he didn't

recognize the guy. He was there with a lady, his wife, a nice looking, middle-aged lady. He says, "Joe, you remember me? I'm old Joe Brown." And Joe says, "Ah, Joe Brown, the bank robber?" "That's me." [Laughter] He had come to visit and told Joe about his life. He retired in Florida and was traveling around, calling on old friends. Another time, they were trying to get a guy to confess. I guess it was to bank robbery or murder. So they put Joe in the cell with him with a jug of moonshine. They thought the liquor might make the guy talk. It may have, but Joe doesn't remember any of it. [Laughter] Excuse me.

[Tape Stopped]

BD: There was one Saturday night, right after I went to work there, we were competing with the *Democrat*, of course, for the Sunday paper. Some guy got hit and killed on the Jacksonville Highway. Car hit him and killed him. Well, only Joe knew, recognized the guy as, I think, Matt Kinds, a notorious southwestern desperado. Well, that was Joe's story, and the *Democrat* had an unidentified man. [Laughter]

RR: Yes. Physically, I remember Joe as being a little guy. Kind of short.

BD: Well, sort of short and wiry. He was not big at all. Had this gravely voice.

RR: The voice, I still hear his voice on the telephone.

BD: Yes.

RR: What would he say when he would call station?

BD: "Got a little item here."

RR: Yes. [Laughter] He never would identify himself.

BD: No.

RR: He'd just start talking.

BD: Never had to. Joe wore the worst old clothes I've ever seen. His were every bit as bad as Count Dew's work clothes. Patched, ragged, and he never wore enough clothes in the winter. When we went to Yellville on that manhunt, I think I had

on a sports jacket. It turned cold. You know how it does in the mountains in September sometimes. It was cold as hell. Joe said, "Well, I'm going to stick them this time. Hell, I'm going to town and buy a sweater." That afternoon, Joe came back with a sweater. It cost a dollar and 15 cents, an old black one.

[Laughter] He really put it to the *Gazette*.

RR: Yes. He smoked cigarettes, didn't he?

BD: Yes, chain-smoked.

RR: I don't guess we ought to tell that naughty story about Joe and the women in the newsroom. It's not certain it ever took place, anyhow.

BD: It's not true. That's a Sam Harris story. Well, it did take place, but Joe knew the difference. It was a joke. It wasn't as — Sam told it as if old Joe were serious, asking how to spell this obscene term.

RR: Yes.

BD: I don't think there were any women in the newsroom. I was there.

RR: Were you there?

BD: Yes, but that was only Joe being funny.

RR: You know, that's the trouble with a place like the *Gazette*, there's just an unending selection of myth that rises up out of it. After a while, it's hard to tell truth from fiction.

BD: You know Max Brantley wrote a column in the *Gazette* about old *Gazette* stories that occurred when he was not there, of course. All the funny stuff happened way back when, it seems to me. Most of it. Not one of them is true. [Laughs] The stories they picked up just didn't happen. The story about Joe was one of them.

RR: Then he died the same day as Mr. Heiskell.

BD: I think about two hours before.

RR: They had both stories on the front page.

BD: Yes. Mr. Heiskell's was the lead story -- led the paper -- and Joe's was right

under it. Big headline. You know, we mentioned James Warren earlier. This was back in the segregated days. We need to talk about that a little bit, too. The change of the *Gazette* style and policy. James had an agreement. He had it with Fred Heiskell, but I think J.N. was going to honor it. He would be the first black man to have his obit on page one of the *Gazette*.

RR: Really?

BD: But it never happened.

RR: Wonder why?

BD: Nobody remembered it, I guess, when James died. And I don't remember when he died.

RR: What was the style when you came there on the — not just the style, but the policy on the handling of news about black man?

BD: Well, mostly we just ran police stories. There were never any positive stories about blacks. They were not called "Mr." and "Mrs." That changed. Ashmore effected one change. He talked Mr. Heiskell into using the honorific "Mrs." Harry pointed out that's legal, but we still couldn't call black males "Mr." I did it, and Mr. Heiskell got on me once. I think I used "Mr. and Mrs. Martin White," and Mr. Heiskell reminded me it's "Martin and Mrs. White."

RR: Seems almost quaint.

BD: I argued for "Miss," but I didn't get anywhere.

RR: Miss?

BD: That changed.

RR: What was the occasion? We didn't use honorifics in the news stories generally. Were you talking about obituaries?

BD: Yes, we did, too. Back then we used "Mr."

RR: I don't remember. When did that change?

BD: It changed in the 1950s, I think maybe the early 1950s.

RR: Well, I say, I don't remember doing it, and I came there in 1956.

BD: But if you had the names of a [white] couple, they were "Mr. and Mrs."

RR: Yes, yes, sure. And there were exceptions — clergymen were called "Mr." and it seemed like in obituaries we still referred to "Mr."

BD: Yes, we did.

RR: In obits.

BD: Yes, I remember falling back on a style point. Of course, minister is "Mr." I ran two stories side by side one day. One was on Stoney Beacher [Beachamp?], Mr. Heiskell's good friend, and the other was on Martin Luther King. I called Martin Luther King "Mr. King," and Stoney was just "Beacher [Beachamp?]."

[Laughter] He complained about that and changed the policy. If a minister was involved something that didn't have anything to do with the church, you didn't have to call him "Mr."

RR: The obits were segregated.

BD: Segregated obits. We had "Deaths of Negroes."

RR: Yes. There was that notorious story of a kid copy editor... copy boy who came for the obit and . . .

BD: Oh, yes. I get it. Getting the headings mixed up. We had one called "Other Deaths" for those people outside Arkansas. People of some prominence. And then "Deaths of Negroes." Those were the two headings, and he kept getting them mixed up, "Deaths of Negroes" or "Other Deaths." Did it one time too many and got fired.

RR: I was actually thinking about a more pernicious case. I can't think of that boy's name right now. I think he was a friend of Farrell Faubus, a racing car driver, a sky diver, and gentleman who was in charge of the craft desk and the obits.

BD: Paul Bryer.

RR: Paul Bryer, yes. And one day for a gag he slugged "Negro Deaths" "Nigger

Deaths.”

BD: No, that was a printer. Printers had their own slugs . . .

RR: I thought Paul . . .

BD: . . . which were supposed to be stricken before they went to the paper. No, I don't think Paul did that, but a printer did and got fired.

RR: Well, I sure thought Paul did it, but didn't get fired. Just got a good dressing down.

BD: I don't remember Paul doing it. I remember the printer because I turned him in.

RR: They actually fired a printer over that?

BD: Yes. It didn't get into the paper. It was just on the proof.

RR: Yes.

BD: And I saw it and turned the guy in.

RR: Say a few words about typos, embarrassing typos that afflict all newspapers. I am sure you've had to deal with...

BD: I've tried to block most of them out of my memory, so embarrassing. [Laughter] I think I — right off hand, I can't think of a good one.

RR: Wasn't . . .

BD: Obscenities crept in that way.

RR: That's what I, yes. Wasn't there some Blass' ad for shirts that dropped the R one day?

BD: Yes, that happened, and there was a Dial soap ad: “Keeps you clean around the clock.” Dropped the L. [Laughter]

RR: There are so many ways of going wrong in a newspaper every day.

BD: It's a miracle that we ever got through one cycle, especially during the hot type days when the printers set all the copy. It went through so many hands. And we railroaded a lot of type because we were always late. We got too big.

RR: Railroaded? Define railroaded.

BD: Wasn't proofread. Of course, copy is edited and then goes back to the composing room, is set in and typed, and then proofreaders go over it to watch for typos. And type that has not been proofread is railroaded, the term "railroaded," when it just goes straight to the paper.

RR: Yes.

BD: Bad, bad stuff. For a while I was so ashamed of our first edition because we had so much railroaded type.

RR: And we had good proof readers, of course.

BD: Oh, they were good proof readers.

RR: I remember that lady, can see her face, back there with an eye shade and glasses.

BD: Mrs. Griffin and her husband Mike. They were all old printers who became proofreaders. Boy, were they good. I called on them. I told them to advise me of any error they saw. It didn't have to be a typo. I wanted to know. And Jimmy Newsom and Mike Griffin, some of those people were just invaluable.

RR: Yes.

BD: They'd see an error, an error in fact, a wrong address or something like that.

RR: Printers are a breed apart, I . . .

BD: I loved them.

RR: You were talking about the race issue a while ago. Didn't the *Gazette* have some trouble out of the printers over some stuff that they didn't want set in type or something like that?

BD: I don't remember the degree that they were balking at setting in type. But they were all Faubus people, almost to a man.

RR: Well, Faubus reached into the *Gazette* composing room to get his labor commissioner.

BD: Oscar [Conlow?]. Great printer.

RR: Clarence, the Clarence [unintelligible].

BD: And became his executive administrative secretary or whatever the title was.

RR: That was Clarence.

BD: Clarence. Clarence, who was known as Oscar.

RR: I didn't know his nickname was Oscar.

BD: I never knew him as Clarence. I knew his name was Clarence, but I never called him anything but Oscar.

RR: Right.

BD: Yes, that was . . . No, they did the job. There was no sabotage or anything like that.

RR: No suspicions that they might have been reporting to the governor?

BD: Oh, that could have happened. But, what the hell, what difference did it make? We didn't care. Everything we did was public knowledge anyhow.

RR: Put it in the paper.

BD: There were no secrets. We did have one copy boy relieving on the switchboard who was calling people asking them to cancel their subscriptions.

RR: I guess he got fired.

BD: Yes, I don't remember. I am sure he did. I sure hope so.

RR: Well, I didn't know it got that close to home.

BD: There may have been a whole lot of stuff like that, that I was not aware of. We were pretty unpopular, as you know.

RR: Yes.

BD: And certainly outnumbered about one hundred to one.

RR: Pretty uncomfortable time at the *Gazette*.

BD: A really very uncomfortable time. It was a tough period to go through. I never felt like I was in any physical danger. It was just unpleasant. Any time you were out in public and somebody knew you worked for the *Gazette*, you were vilified.

RR: I do think it made us stick together, brought us closer together.

BD: It brought us a lot closer to management. Although they were losing money, they stayed on the raise schedule. If you were due for a raise, you got it. Well, hell, it didn't cost them very damn much. A five-dollar raise was tops.

RR: Yes.

BD: But at least they did it. They could have used it as an excuse not to give us anything. We would have stayed.

RR: Oh, yes, that was the place to be.

BD: Yes.

RR: 1957, 1958, 1959, I wouldn't have been anywhere else.

BD: Hell, no.

RR: Right in the middle of everything.

BD: The biggest story in the world at that time. Well, until Sputnik came along and Sputnik was not the top story very long, just for about a week, and then we were back to leading every paper in the country. Those guys who came down from the eastern newspapers and were good reporters, I wish we had them now for Whitewater. Those were solid reporters and . . .

RR: Claude Sitton, Lester Hill . . .

BD: Yes. Walter Lester

RR: Walter Lester, Walter Lester, yes.

BD: *Herold Tribune*, no *Chicago Tribune*.

RR: No, New York.

BD: Was it New York?

RR: Yes.

BD: Yes, that's right. Another guy [unintelligible].

RR: Tom Davis had left by then and had gone work for the *Detroit Free Press*. They sent him down.

BD: I read a good deal of their copy, and it was all very, very good. Just damn good

reporting. Balanced.

RR: Yes. You know there is a minor angle that we haven't touched on. All these big metropolitan papers from other places, a lot of them, in those days and still do, had stringers, and they'd come into a place like Little Rock, and they would try to find the best handful of people. As I recall all of the stringers were *Gazette* people.

BD: Yes. I did some of that for the . . .

RR: The *Democrat* might have had a few of them, but I never heard of them.

BD: I don't think the *Democrat* had any. They were out of it. Yes, I did some for *Newsweek* and the *New York Post*. I think four or five different papers.

RR: Yes.

BD: It was a good way to supplement our salaries, which needed supplementing.

RR: Yes. You know that is one of the dark memories I have of the *Gazette* — this gets into ethics, I am afraid -- but how willing the management was to have us lower folks take on outside jobs that were clearly in a conflict of interest.

BD: I remember we had one reporter who worked for the Chiropractic Association and covered their convention.

RR: Yes, that kind of thing.

BD: Yes.

RR: I remember Nelson himself, the managing editor, steered an assignment to me that I had no business in the world covering, when he was acting as a spy -- what it amounted to -- for the Automobile Manufacturing Association, I think was the name, during the legislative session, and they wanted a daily report on any bill that might have had any effect at all on auto manufacturing. Whether I wrote about it in the *Gazette* or not, they -- I had no business doing that. I mean, what's to say one of these bills had turned out to be a hot story for us, you know? In the daytime I am writing that for the *Gazette*, and at night I am slipping down

to Western Union to say, "You guys ought to be aware of this." Of course, the idea was that they would ship in lobbyists and start to work to try to kill it.

BD: Well, the paper would rather bend the rules than pay us.

RR: Yes, that was the thing. It beat giving us a raise.

BD: Well, back in the old days, the sports editor was expected to take bribes. Sell space. They got money from the wrestling promoters. Orville says he stopped doing that, and I suppose he did, but the sports editor spent half the time doing it, and it was understood. Of course, the newspaper paid the sports editor hardly anything. He was expected to make his money by selling news space. We treated professional wrestling as a serious sport.

RR: Yes. You know I better think about going.

BD: Yes.

RR: You think of anything else on your mind right now . . .

BD: Not right now.

RR: . . . that we need to cover today?

[End of Tape]

[End of Interview]