

Gazette Project

Interview with
Bob Douglas,
Fayetteville, Arkansas,
8 June 2000

Interviewer: Roy Reed

Roy Reed: This is Bob Douglas and Roy Reed, June 8, 2000, and this is the second interview, and we're going to start from scratch. And Bob, we have your permission to turn this over to the University archives?

Bob Douglas: Yes, sir. Okay.

RR: Why don't you just go ahead?

BD: Well, I'll start with when I came to the *Gazette*. What was it in? July of 1948. I was just out of college. I hadn't planned to go to work that early. For some reason, I was going to bicycle across Norway with some guy, and then I was going to law school. I didn't want to be a lawyer, but I had some GI Bill eligibility left, and I didn't want to waste it. But I went to Little Rock and visited Jerry Neil, a friend in the newsroom, and they told me to come to work Monday. So I came to work Monday. Grew up a child of the Depression. When somebody says come to work, you came to work. That's what I wanted to do anyhow, really. The *Gazette* newsroom was nothing to brag about. In fact, that's understating it. There were no screens on the windows. There were naked light bulbs. We were working — some of the new people were working on orange crates. One of the two news editors at the time, Heinie Loesch, was sitting on a keg. He looked like he had tears in his eyes when they threw it away much later. I was, as so many students in Fayetteville at the University of Arkansas were at the time, very much impressed with a Harry Ashmore editorial, a New South editorial. I don't remember a whole lot about it except that it was from a

[higher?] level than the *Gazette*'s reputation had been up to that point. I'd never met Ashmore, but I looked forward to doing so. So I was hired on this visit to see Jerry Neil, and this was on a Friday or Saturday, I think. Came to work Monday, started at forty dollars a week. I'd been promised a raise in three months of five dollars. I didn't get it. Three months passed. I didn't get it. Two more months passed, and I didn't get it. Finally, I said something about it. I didn't get five dollars. I got two and a half. The *Gazette* had just bought the Allsopp interest in the paper. Allsopp had about twenty-five percent interest in it, and they didn't think they could afford a full five dollars a week. So I just about — I nearly left. I went in and talked to Ashmore. I said, "If the paper is in that kind of financial trouble, maybe I just better bail out now. I've been offered a job in Shreveport." I didn't want to go to Shreveport and probably wouldn't have, but he said, "Well, let me see what I can do." So I got a seven and a half dollar raise. I also got placed on the copy desk three nights a week, and reported two days a week.

RR: You had been a reporter?

BD: Had been a reporter, which was a pretty good arrangement. I kind of liked that. It could have been either way. Three days as a reporter and two days as a copy editor, but it didn't matter that much. I learned a lot more on the copy desk than I was learning as a reporter. So my first financial negotiation hadn't gone all that well until I went to Ashmore. I was pretty impressed with old *Gazette* characters. Spider Rowland, the con-man columnist, political columnist. And Joe Wirges, who had been there that time, I think, about thirty-two or thirty-three years. It seemed like a long time to be anywhere at that stage of my career. I couldn't get enough of Joe's stories about Arkansas crime. And I had my first meeting with — well, the first time Spider Rowland ever recognized me, I was walking across the newsroom and met him. He had a cigar in his mouth and was delivering his copy, which he took to Harry Ashmore.

RR: Which one?

BD: Harry. He took his copy to Harry Ashmore. And before I could speak, he said, "Hello, Junior." Well, hell, I had been through a war, so in a moment of bravado I said, "I don't care what you call me or whether you speak to me, but don't call me Junior anymore." He just grinned. A moment I've never forgotten. He didn't pay any attention to it at the time. John L. Fletcher was the top reporter. He had been city editor during the war. So after the war they had brought back the city editor who went to war, a guy named J. B. Reaves, who had died before I got there.

RR: J. B. what?

BD: Reaves. R-E-A-V-E-S. I never met J. B. In fact, Sam Harris, from the Associated Press, had been hired as the new city editor, but he wasn't there at the time I was hired. He took a vacation before he went to work.

RR: Who hired you?

BD: Well, Carroll McGaughey and the old managing editor at the time, Clyde Dew, called the Count. An arbitrary old cuss. But a fearless managing editor. I don't think he ever liked me. Carroll McGaughey was a grand nephew of Mr. Heiskell and was acting as city editor during Sam Harris's absence. I am not sure Sam would have hired me because he took an instant dislike the first time he saw me that lasted up to this day.

RR: And, vice versa, I think.

BD: Well, I didn't develop a dislike for him until I had been on the job a little while.

RR: Not an instant dislike?

BD: No. Well, I can remember only a few of my earlier assignments. I can remember I had to, at first, I had to generate two feature stories a week. Well, they wouldn't let me out of the damn newsroom. How are you going to generate a story if you sit up here and you don't know anything about Little Rock? But I had to do it. So

I did. Jerry Neil and I were assigned two feature stories a week. Most everybody else had to come up with one.

RR: Did you all figure you were being picked on?

BD: Well, Jerry Neil was allowed out a little. Most of my — I did most of my work behind a telephone. I just wondered, “How am I supposed to get stories if I’m sitting up here?”

RR: How did you?

BD: Damned if I know. They weren’t very good. Didn’t matter much. Well, after I had been there a little over a year, there was a *Gazette* union already in effect. Nobody even mentioned it to me, I didn’t know anything about it. It wasn’t much of a union. It was some sort of — they had a catch-all category within the Teamsters Union, AFL. I think they had had one negotiating session. They sent in some Teamster negotiator who didn’t care anything about newspapers, of course, and the only agreement they got was that Mr. Heiskell promised the newsroom employees they’d get a raise every time the printers did. Now, there was a great disparity in pay between printers and newsroom, and printers made a whole lot more money. [We] didn’t ask for equal pay, pay commensurate with what the printers were getting, but just a raise when the printers got one.

RR: You remember the name of this union?

BD: No, I don’t. It was a Teamsters’ white-collar catch-all union. They had some of the other white-collar workers in it.

RR: It was more than just the newsroom?

BD: Oh, yes, yes.

RR: Business office?

BD: Well, no, I don’t know. There were no other unions except the printers’ union at the *Gazette*. Business office employees of the *Gazette* would not have been included. It was a general catch-all union nationwide. I’d never heard of it.

RR: Well, who belonged to it at the *Gazette*?

BD: Newsroom employees. Practically all of them.

RR: Just newsroom employees, not . . . ?

BD: No, just newsroom employees.

RR: And the printers, just to be clear, had their own International Typographical Union?

BD: Yes, the oldest union local in Arkansas, very strong. I think it was a closed shop. The printers did their own hiring and firing. Like I say, it was a very strong union, up until the new technology did away with it. But it finally occurred to the people in the newsroom, "Well, we didn't get a raise. Printers have gotten one or two, and we haven't got any raises." I got the one raise, which I was supposed to get after three months, a three-month probationary period. I'm not sure it was a probationary period. In fact, I discovered years later that there were three of us vying for the same job, and not one of the three knew anything about it. Now I am surprised I got it. If Sam Harris was — I think McGaughey went to bat for me and possibly Ashmore. Harry Ashmore, when I first went to work there, was just editor of the editorial page, when I went to work in July of that year '48. In September of '48, Harry Ashmore was made executive editor, which put him over the newsroom and the editorial staff. That was a very good move, by the way, and very fortunate for me.

RR: I wonder how that came about?

BD: I don't know. It was J. N. Heiskell's decision. And when they put him over the newsroom, Count Dew got upset and resigned, the managing editor. So I don't believe we had a managing editor for quite a while. Harry was executive editor. He took over the managing editor's duties. There were two news editors. A. R. Nelson, who later became the long-time managing editor, was a news editor, and Heinie Loesch, L-O-E-S-C-H, was the other. Nelson was news editor during the

week and Heinie on weekends.

RR: H-E-I-N-Y?

BD: H-E-I-N-I-E.

RR: Let me, while we're digressing, let me ask a question that somebody asked me the other day. Johnny Wells had been what? City editor?

BD: City editor.

RR: Was he still there when Ashmore came to work?

BD: I don't think so.

RR: Somebody asked me whether Johnny Wells quit because of Ashmore or was it something . . . ?

BD: I'm pretty sure he quit before Ashmore.

RR: So it had nothing to do with Ashmore's coming?

BD: No, there were some differences between Johnny and Mr. J. N. Johnny told me about it once, but I've forgotten what it was about. Johnny was more of a crusading editor, city editor, than Mr. Heiskell wanted. And a pretty good city editor, a good newsman from everything I've heard.

RR: If his politics hadn't got in his way, he might have been a great newspaper man.

BD: Well, he would have actually. If he had a little more support, probably would be, might even been a liberal. Nobody will ever know.

RR: Well, I'm sorry about that digression.

BD: No, that's all right, anytime. Well, when it occurred to the newsroom that they didn't get a raise as promised, Mr. Heiskell didn't renege. He just forgot about it. Hugh Patterson had become publisher, had been promoted from — Mr. Heiskell's son-in-law — he'd been promoted from business manager to publisher, and he was a big one for structure. So they had a big staff meeting and he — he had been a major in the army in charge of civilian personnel in Mobile, at a shipyard — not a shipyard, something. I don't know. I don't understand it, some defense . . .

RR: Yes, something to do with supplies. He told me all about it.

BD: Yes, that sort of thing.

RR: Mobile and somewhere else down in Alabama.

BD: So he fancied himself an expert on personnel, and he announced this big plan to us, the big pay plan. Well, it was a little complicated really. They had all these categories. You could be — say you're a copy editor. You could be a junior copy editor; you could be a middle-weight copy editor; you could be a senior copy editor. Same thing with reporters. After this meeting, after he announced it and passed out these charts and all that and these little slips of paper telling you where you were and everybody started comparing notes, the conclusion was "Okay, everybody is classified just exactly where they are right now, and nobody gets a raise." So after that, a very short time after that, there were Sunday meetings, and people were talking about the Guild. And everybody was pretty enthusiastic about it then, making a whole lot less than the printers were. There was no overtime, nothing like that. And we had a lot of new staff members right out of the war who were a little independent minded and not scared to death. So it was very successful. We organized a Guild local and began negotiations with the publisher. Now, I found out later that he never intended, the publisher, never intended to recognize the Guild. He had to, though, because we had an election in which the Guild was overwhelmingly voted in. Well, he never planned to really negotiate in good faith. He really kind of wanted a strike. Well, we were foolishly happy to oblige him. Negotiations weren't getting anywhere. I was on the negotiating committee. I was vice-president of the Guild local, although I had only been there about a year. Well, we weren't getting anywhere, but we struck over the wrong issue. We struck over a security issue that we didn't really need all that badly. It put the *Gazette* in a pretty favorable light, but the Guild representatives from international had recommended that we insist on that. So

when negotiations got nowhere, the publisher was pretty adamant about not giving in on any point, although there were some token offers, nothing about pay or anything that important. But everybody got pretty frustrated, so we did vote to strike. Struck in December of 1949. Well, we had to picket in the snow. It was terribly cold, the weather, but everybody had a lot of adrenaline up, and sort of early on, it was a pretty heady time. It wasn't a few months later . . .

RR: Went on for quite a while?

BD: Well, it went on. Officially, I don't know when it ended. I was on strike for a year and a half, and people started drifting away. I'd become president of the Guild. I called in the union representative and said, "Let's end this thing. We're not going anywhere." So they agreed.

RR: How'd they get the paper out?

BD: Well, they did it without much problem. The paper wasn't nearly as large back then. It didn't require nearly as much copy. All the executives, who were not eligible for our Guild membership, were not eligible for union protection -- they put it out and did a pretty good job. They were all on a big story. I can remember there was a prison escape, about four guys, that had ended in a shootout that left, I think, two or three dead. Of course, they missed a lot, too. We were needed.

RR: But the editors put it out?

BD: Yes. The circulation workers joined us, and that was a mistake. They were supposedly our weapon. It was kind of sprung on us. I didn't much like it. We didn't really get to vote on that. By the time we got to discuss it, it was too late to do anything but accept. So we hurt them by disrupting delivery of the paper. We hurt them in that way, and we, the *Gazette* strike, cost them more permanent loss of circulation than the 1957 boycott did. Railroad men in North Little Rock mostly.

RR: Now that's interesting. The same guys who opposed the *Gazette* eight years later

for integration. But this was a labor issue.

BD: Yes, this is where it started. I guess, finally, their offspring subscribed, but they never did. And it wasn't very pleasant. There was some destruction of property - - not much. Throwing papers in the river and that sort of thing by the circulation workers and the carriers. I had a lot of sympathy for carriers. I felt kind of bad about using kids, but we did it.

RR: About how many subscribers did the paper lose during that time?

BD: I don't know. It was a matter of a few thousand, damn near a thousand railroad men. We were under a hundred thousand circulation overall. I never knew how badly they were hurt.

RR: So you were gone a year and a half?

BD: I was on strike for a year and a half. We got some support from the Guild. They sent us what money they could, delivered on that. I went to work for a radio station, KARK, and I couldn't leave [the strike]. A few went back to the paper. I couldn't. I felt like I couldn't. Since I was then president of the Guild, I thought I had to see it to the bitter end, which I did until the international union released us. [Then] I didn't have any obligation to continue the strike. I started casting around for another job. There was a black list. I had trouble getting another job on a newspaper.

RR: A black list?

BD: Yes. No one wanted to hire me. The only paper that told me the truth was a Wilmington, North Carolina, paper. They said, "We won't hire anybody who's been mixed up with a Guild." But I think that was true even with Guild papers. They didn't want to hire us.

RR: I suppose you are probably looking at the *Commercial Appeal* because it was Guild?

BD: Well, the *Commercial Appeal* did much later.

RR: You mean it became a Guild paper later?

BD: No, it had been a Guild paper, strong Guild paper, but it didn't seem to be all that interested in hiring hotheads.

RR: Well, what was it that happened much later? I missed that.

BD: Oh, *Commercial Appeal* started hiring people about two years later.

RR: From the *Gazette*?

BD: From the *Gazette*. People who had been at the *Gazette*. I had a good friend who had been in the newsroom when I was on strike named Walt Damtoft. D-A-M-T-O-F-T. And he went back to his hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, and was hired by the *Asheville Citizen*. Well, while I was still with this radio station, they had a story that was developing in Little Rock, or a part of it was, of one of the big bookies with the big gamblers, who was picked up in Arkansas near Little Rock for a violation. He was cheating the racetrack. He was getting early results and was able to bet on them by use of radios after the races. I don't know how he worked it, but he did and got caught. So this *Asheville Citizen* asked me to cover the hearings in Little Rock, extradition hearings, which I did, and they offered me a job, which I readily accepted. I went up there for about — I had been told I could come back to the *Gazette*, not officially, but three or four times people had called, "If you want to come back, you can come back." But I didn't want to do it that soon. I didn't think — I didn't feel right about it. So I worked in Asheville for a little over two years and then asked if I could have my job back. They gave it to me.

RR: You talked to Ashmore?

BD: No, I talked to Hugh Patterson, who offered me my job back.

RR: Okay.

BD: During the strike I was in a wedding, Carroll McGaughey's wedding. It was a great big wedding. We wore tails and white gloves, and here I was a striker with

about six dollars in my pocket. I remember going to a big fancy wedding up in Asheville. No, not Asheville, in Richmond, near Richmond. It seemed to me like we had about fourteen ushers, something like that. Of course, I spent every penny I had to rent my uniform. That left me with six dollars in my pocket. Here I was all the way in Richmond, no way to get home. I went with Carroll McGaughey, the groom, and helped him drive. I was, for all practical purposes, the best man. I stayed with Carroll and all that, but at the wedding Mr. Heiskell and I were side by side as ushers, and we conversed. Here was a radical, rebellious newsroom employee on strike, conversing with J. N. Heiskell at this wedding. We were standing side by side. I remember he also had the white gloves, and they were still hooked together. The string hadn't been cut. He asked me to cut that, and I did, with my knife. Everything was very amicable. There was a lot of partying, and I kept asking at that time, and he told me, "I shouldn't say this, but you can come back whenever you want to." Well, I came back as copy editor and after a month or two, I became telegraph editor. I went from there, eventually, to news editor and night managing editor and, finally, managing editor, in 1972.

RR: You kind of telescoped all that. I hope you might spend a little bit of time talking about each one of these jobs along the way.

BD: Oh, well, can I get back to it? Just a lot of hard work. Not much to know about. I was telegraph editor at the time of the 1957 Central High crisis. I did some reporting, mostly for out of town newspapers. And that was, again, that was a perilous time, a frustrating time, but again a heady time. We were all really behind the *Gazette* and its editorial stance against Orval Faubus and for integration of Little Rock Central High. Well, I've made myself managing editor already, in '72, and held that job until I left to come to the University of Arkansas ten years later. I can go into those events if you want me to later. I can go into those circumstances that led to my departure.

RR: Let me — before we get into that, could I ask a question?

BD: Sure.

RR: Really off to one side of the *Gazette*, but you mentioned 1957, and Central High and the integration crisis. Some historians, I guess, have decided that the South missed a golden opportunity after the war to get on with integration and other kinds of progress in race relations, that maybe the time was right, along with returning veterans and a new spirit all over the country and even in the South.

BD: Before the Supreme Court decision?

RR: Yes. And that if the South, especially white Southerners, had provided the kind of leadership that was needed, we might have saved ten years in getting civil rights for black folks. You got any thoughts on that?

BD: Yes, I believe that. Because there was a spirit after World War II — and Hitler's gas ovens had something to do with it — against discrimination and oppression of people because they are of their race. The *Gazette* staff would have gone along with it, certainly. We'd have been all for it, but the changes at the *Gazette* itself came very gradually. Mr. Heiskell, after all, was the son of a Confederate colonel. Harry Ashmore made some style changes. They seem like nothing now, but the *Gazette* used honorifics, "Mr. And Mrs." for white people, not for blacks. Well, the first change in that direction was just to call — which Ashmore persuaded Mr. Heiskell that we needed to do — was to identify black women only as Mrs., but not the males. So if you had a black couple in the news, it would not be Mr. and Mrs. Martin Jones, it would be Martin and Mrs. Jones.

RR: But that was progress.

BD: That was progress and substantial progress. Mr. Heiskell, of course, had integrated the public library almost single handedly in Little Rock. He was not an unreasonable man, but, Lord, he was — to have been from the Old South, he was old himself.

- RR: He really was a nineteenth-century man.
- BD: Yes he was, and the Civil War was very much on his mind. We had to call it the War Between the States, though Ashmore managed to change that a few years later. But when I first went there, that's [how] we referred to it — only as the War Between the States.
- RR: Never knew that. That had already changed when I got there in '56.
- BD: Oh, yes. There'd been a lot of changes by the time you got there, resounding changes. But it was gradual. Ashmore expedited as much as anybody possibly could.
- RR: Could you talk a little bit more about '57, and those months from — well, beginning about Labor Day and going on through until the middle of the fall, when the federal troops came in? The *Gazette's* part in all that. You were right in the middle of it. You were the telegraph editor, and you were in the newsroom every day, and all this hustle and bustle was going on. What do you remember about that, [about] the paper itself during those two or three months?
- BD: The paper itself — well, Bill Shelton, city editor, did a tremendous job in directing the city staff. We had super coverage. We also had — I was telegraph editor. I went back to work the day the Supreme Court came down with the *Brown v Education* decision. Mr. Heiskell said, "We've got the best coverage on this than anybody in the country." And I was the — I handled all the copy, local and state and national, sort of a central command point for all the copy that we had on it. We got a pretty good start on that and got to where we were developing a reputation nationally.
- RR: Hadn't Ashmore written a long treatise of some kind on school desegregation?
- BD: Absolutely, and it came out the day of the Supreme Court decision. It was called "The Negro in the Schools," and it was sort of a text. It has held up very well.
- RR: And what did it say, just in a word?

BD: Well, I don't remember that the book had a lot of philosophy or editorial opinion in it. It did have a lot of facts and figures. Well, it certainly bore out . . .

RR: The unfair system of segregation of the schools?

BD: That's right, absolutely right.

RR: Well, I knew he was right on top of the thing because he had been working for months, I think, on this outside report on behalf of — who was it? Not the Ford Foundation, or was it?

BD: Yes, I think it was Ford Foundation. I believe so. Yes, he had, and just by chance the book came out the day of the decision. I had been — it was my day off, and I'd gone downtown to meet some of the boys and have a beer. Ran into Carroll McGaughey on the sidewalk, and that's the first thing he told me. "You hear about Harry's book?" Not the decision, which I hadn't heard anything about yet. Now about the timing of it. When I hear of the decision, I went to the newsroom, knowing that they would call me back in anyhow, and went to work.

RR: It occurs to me that Harry might have been — because of that circumstance, that book — might have been the best equipped editor in the United States to handle that story.

BD: I believe that. There was nothing he didn't know about the problem, about how schools were structured, what the different states had done and what they hadn't done. Arkansas, of course, was way ahead of everybody. While I was still in school, the University admitted the first black student voluntarily to the University, and the feeling on campus then was fine for a great majority of students, which goes back to those years you were talking about.

RR: We now have a building at the university named after that student. That is the name?

BD: Yes, that's right. And have had several observances, anniversaries, of his entering the university. I wrote a story while I was working on the *Traveler* staff. I was

— what was I? Managing editor, I believe — not editor because that’s an elective office. I couldn’t get any votes, but I was managing editor. I wrote a story that the *Gazette* drew on for its story. I was able to tell that he was not the first black to attend the university, but he was the first to do it officially. One of the early university presidents, D. H. Hill, was a Confederate general...

RR: D. H. Hill?

BD: Daniel Harvey Hill. I think that was his name. It might have been Noah Brooks, but I think it was Hill — tutored a black student on his own at the university right after the Civil War. But it goes back to what you said about the times, the mood, immediately after World War II. George Douthit, who was very close to Orval Faubus — and they now call him a Clinton supporter — [he was] sort of an apologist more than that he was a champion of Faubus and very much on the side of the segregationists. He had written a column in about 1946, calling for the full integration of the schools.

RR: George Douthit?

BD: George Douthit. John Robert Starr likes to say he wrote the first one. He liked to say he did, but, no, he didn’t. In fact, his was not really — it was not the clarion call that George’s was. It was much later.

RR: Lord, I had no idea of that. And it was in the *Democrat*, I guess?

BD: Yes. George had a regular column, a political column really. He was a political reporter and columnist. And it was no question about it, it was . . .

RR: In ‘46, I guess.

BD: It might have been ‘47, but I think it was ‘46.

RR: Probably during Ben Laney’s term as governor.

BD: Yes, one of the most conservative governors we’ve ever had, I guess. Faubus was not a conservative. Faubus was a radical. ‘46? Let’s see. Well, Laney succeeded Homer Adkins, who would have been less progressive than Laney. Homer

Adkins may have been still governor, but I don't know. I don't remember what year.

RR: And Adkins, hadn't he been a member of the Ku Klux Klan at one time?

BD: Yes, he had. A Methodist deacon. I meant he was a Methodist deacon. Spider Rowland dubbed him, "Holy Homer."

RR: Holy Homer. So at the end of the war Adkins was gone, a new spirit everywhere.

BD: With a very conservative governor. But he seemed like a reasonable man, not a mean man by any means.

RR: Adkins, A-T or A-D?

BD: A-D.

RR: So you came back to work at the *Gazette* the day the Supreme Court decision came down?

BD: No. I had been there.

RR: Oh, you meant you came back from your day off?

BD: That's right.

RR: May 17, 1954.

BD: I didn't remember the date.

RR: You went from telegraph editor to news editor?

BD: Yes.

RR: About what year would that have been?

BD: Well, I wasn't telegraph editor very long. Well, yes, I was. I guess a year or two. I became news editor about '58. I know it was in '58.

RR: Can you talk a little bit about the copy desk when you took over and during your time as news editor? Probably ought to explain just what the news editor does.

BD: Well, the news editor lays out the paper, everything except society and sports, and decides on page one. I changed that when I became managing editor. I wanted to make that decision. But he handles all the copy except the sections that I

mentioned. And we had a universal copy desk, which Ashmore had instituted.

RR: Meaning what?

BD: Meaning that all the copy goes through one desk, through one copy desk.

RR: And describe what it looked like.

BD: Horseshoe. The senior editor sat in the middle, in the slot.

RR: How many copy editors would sit around the outside of the horseshoe?

BD: Oh, about eight, I guess. I think that's about right.

RR: Were they all men when you took it over?

BD: Yes. — No, that's not true, no.

RR: Margaret Mobley ring a bell?

BD: Well, I hired her, but Nelson liked Georgia Dailey as the first.

RR: She was already there?

BD: Yes, well, she came in there while I was telegraph editor, I believe. But Nelson really didn't believe in women newspaper people. Or said he didn't.

RR: Yes, I remember hearing him say that he didn't think there was any place for women in a newsroom.

BD: He told about this nightmare that he had — I never believed the story — that he came to work one day and found a corset drying on the back of a chair.

RR: But there always were a few women even back then.

BD: Well, at the time I came back to the *Gazette*, there were two in the newsroom: Martha, my wife . . .

RR: Who was then Martha Leslie.

BD: Martha Leslie and Matilda Tuohey. Matilda, Sam Harris had brought her over from the *Democrat*.

RR: So at the copy desk you had around eight copy editors and how . . .

BD: Wait a minute, let me back up a little. At the time I came back to the *Gazette*, Matilda and Martha were the only two women. Before that there were two others,

Ruth Jacquemine, J-A-C-Q-U-E-M-I-N-E.

RR: What? J-A-C-Q-U-E-M-I-N-E?

BD: Called Jackie. And Janet Russell.

RR: What was Jackie's first name?

BD: Ruth.

RR: Were they reporters?

BD: Yes, they were both reporters and good ones. Janet was to marry my friend in Asheville, Walt Damtoft, the guy who got me the job with the Asheville paper.

RR: What became of Ruth?

BD: She died several years ago. After the strike she went first... I was sort of an employment agency, trying to get these people a place and job, and I got her a job in Jamestown, New York. She worked there for a while and then came to the *Commercial Appeal*.

RR: Okay. I was wanting you to describe how the copy desk worked. The news editor and the copy desk. The news editor passing out stories.

BD: That's right. The news editor passed out stories. Well, he would selectively pass out the big stories, just hand them to a [specific] copy editor, but the rest of the copy went into the basket and the copy editors dealt from the top. After they edited the story and wrote the headline, they put it in the bottom basket. From there it went back through the news editor and then back to the composing room.

RR: Was it the rule that if a copy editor finished one story, he just automatically reached to the top basket to get another story?

BD: Reached up, that's right. That was it, but the big stories I always dealt out to the people I considered the better copy readers.

RR: More seasoned?

BD: Just the better ones.

RR: And then headlines were written?

BD: Headlines were written. The news editor designates what size the headlines are going to be, and the placement of all the stories on page one and all the inside pages, too. I went to a seminar about 1965, at Columbia, and no other paper there of any size had ever done it that way. It worked fine because one man at least knew everything that was going into the paper, so there'd be no duplication, or we could put stories together when there was a reason to.

RR: Of course, it also meant very hard work for the news editor, I would think.

BD: Well, A. R. Nelson had done it before me. There had been another news editor before me, while I was gone — I think two. Tom Swint... And first, M. L. Stone was a very good news editor, and he was succeeded by Tom Davis, who was news editor for a while, but not very long. And Tom Swint. George Stroud was sort of a temporary news editor, and then I got the news editor job. I wanted to get back to reporting and was promised the Capitol job assignment, but George wasn't very popular. The copy editors were all walking out. So I got pressed into duty over there as a news editor and pretty much had to start it from scratch.

RR: Were you news editor...? Never mind. You stayed in that job until about what year?

BD: Until '72, when I became managing editor. I had a different title. It was night managing editor, but the job was the same.

RR: Okay, were you news editor, or night managing editor, when Martha Mitchell made her famous phone call to the *Gazette*?

BD: Yes.

RR: Tell about that.

BD: Well, I had gone home. It seemed like every time we had a crisis, I was home in bed with the flu or strep throat. I had strep throat the day Robert Kennedy was assassinated and got out of bed and went to work. But I had to go home early because I wasn't feeling well. Somebody called me, she said, "John Woodruff"

— who was a North Little Rock reporter working late — said, “John Woodruff has Martha Mitchell on the phone.” Well, the only person in that newsroom or in that whole staff who would’ve talked to somebody who did not identify herself, who called in at 1:30 in the morning, was John Woodruff. She identified herself finally as Martha Mitchell. Anybody else would have hung up long before.

RR: But John was that kind of a guy, you think?

BD: John liked to talk, and so did Martha Mitchell. So I got called at home, and somebody said, “Well, John Woodruff’s got Martha Mitchell on the line.” Somehow or another, I knew it was true. So I got hooked up so that I could hear Martha Mitchell.

RR: How?

BD: I don’t remember.

RR: Some wizard at the paper?

BD: I think they just held one of the receivers close to my receiver. We had to confirm it. That’s when I got into it. We were going to call her back, but... how did this work? We got disconnected somehow, and they were trying to connect me so I could hear. “Well, man, that story’s gone. We don’t know how to reach her.” She called back, said, “I got cut off.” So John was having a continuous conversation with her, and sometime she said, “Well, Fulbright has opposed the nominations of . . .” — I think it was Harold Carswell, a Nixon appointee to the Supreme Court, and the most memorable quote that Martha Mitchell gave us, she being the wife of the Attorney General in the Nixon administration, “I want you to crucify,” talking about Fulbright, which we included in the headline, of course. Well, it took two or three calls. We couldn’t call her back. She gave us a number. It didn’t work, so she called back again and she couldn’t give us — well, she gave us her secretary. She said, “I can’t read these numbers on the phone. They’ve all been scraped off the telephone,” so she couldn’t give a home number,

but she gave us a number for her secretary. We couldn't reach her secretary. So she called back again.

RR: She was determined.

BD: Absolutely. We said, "You've got to give us a number that we can reach," so she gave us the White House switchboard number. I think Mike Trimble called back, called the switchboard. Well, we were pretty well talked out then. We had the story, and we had needed to get it on into the paper, but Mike called her back and the White House switchboard put us in touch with her again. We didn't want to be put in touch with her again.

RR: I'm surprised they did.

BD: Well, Mike had to talk. He said, "Well, Mrs. Mitchell, we just wanted to thank you."

RR: Did Mike then write the story?

BD: I don't remember. I think it was a combined effort. John and Mike, yes.

RR: John Woodruff, yes. What year would that have been?

BD: Early, it would've been early in the Nixon administration. I don't remember right now exactly what year. Late sixties, I guess.

RR: Did she seem to be in her cups or do you know?

BD: I don't know. She probably was. From what I learned later, she was about the same drinking or sober. Pretty gabby.

RR: Didn't she end up making a series of late-night phone calls?

BD: Oh, she already had made some. That's one of the reasons I knew that, hell, this has got to be true. She had made some. She was known for making late-night phone calls, not to newspapers, but to ther people, administration officials.

RR: Pretty outspoken lady.

BD: Yes.

RR: From Pine Bluff?

BD: From Pine Bluff. A society girl from Pine Bluff. And Pine Bluff is one of the few cities in the state that has high society.

RR: So you had to handle this story as editor from your home in your sickbed?

BD: Right. And tell them where to put it and check the headline and all that.

RR: In the middle of the night?

BD: Well, no, the middle of the morning, the morning hours. I think the call — I think John got the call about 1:30. Hell, well, they're packing up to go. Everybody's planning to get out of there, and I think it was the first of John's report [?] -- sort of the reaction he got from the people who were hanging around the newsroom.

RR: So about what time would it have been when it was all wrapped up?

BD: At 3:00.

RR: Not many deadlines, not many editions left.

BD: Had to hold the paper wholesale. We held it.

RR: Held the city, not just that fourth little — What was that little edition that had a real late deadline, just a few hundred papers?

BD: Oh, we only had three then. There used to be a first edition that went to the outlying areas of the state. It was the first edition, and then there were second, third and city. But we were down to three editions by the end.

RR: So the city edition was what most of the people in Pulaski County got?

BD: Yes, Pulaski County. Well, within an eighty-mile radius of Little Rock.

RR: How long did you have to hold the paper?

BD: Well, we were supposed to have already been down. Of course, the press was supposed to have been running by 1:30.

RR: How rare is it to hold a paper like that, to hold a press run?

BD: Oh, I can remember doing it some other times. I remember when Robert Kennedy was shot. Again, I was home, sick.

RR: You were home, sick?

BD: Of course. We held till even later for Kennedy. I had to come down and remake the paper. It had to be done on the spot. I couldn't do it over the telephone.

RR: Where did you play the Martha Mitchell story?

BD: It was a one-column head, italics to give it a little more—we used italics a lot for stories that were a little offbeat. Italic headlines attracted a little more attention. That's the only spot we had for it on page one. That's about the play we would have given it anyhow.

RR: Whereabouts on the page?

BD: It was over near the lead story. It was on the right hand above the fold.

RR: Above the fold on page one, okay. So I guess somebody else actually remade the page, but you were kind of . . .

BD: Well, I remade it over the phone: "Take this story out and put this one in."

RR: Right. I don't guess you remember what story you took out?

BD: No, I don't remember.

RR: Lost to history . . .

[Tape ends abruptly]

[Tape begins]

BD: . . . held quite often for elections, that sort of thing. Any breaking story. There are a whole lot more [stories] than you realize that break after midnight, important stories. Disasters, for instance. And we never had all the votes counted [by deadline] as you can remember. There's always in local elections, Pulaski county elections -- there was always one box out, and we waited for that till we thought we'd go crazy and never get to go home. And then more often than not we'd discover the box didn't even exist.

RR: People who don't know anything about newspapers, I am sure, have no understanding what an aggravation it is to have to remake a front page.

BD: Yes, it is. You learn to do it with a minimum of disruption. The one I guess I

was most pleased with was the night we really made the entire page for Kennedy's assassination with pictures and all. And only...

RR: John Kennedy?

BD: No.

RR: Robert.

BD: John was killed early.

RR: Early in the day, yes, right. When you were at work and had to do this — when you were at the office, instead of in your sickbed at home — did that mean going back to the composing room?

BD: Yes, which I did every night anyhow.

RR: And do what?

BD: Follow the makeup. I'd make up the paper, of course, on what was called dummy sheets and send them back and then follow up by going back in the newsroom after all the copy was back and stand over the printers while they put the type in the pages and the forms.

RR: You're not allowed to touch the type as a newsroom . . . ?

BD: No, but I cheated sometimes. We had these engravings for pictures. You weren't supposed to touch those either. I didn't pay any attention to that.

RR: That's a union rule, wasn't it?

BD: That's a union rule, but I touched the engravings. They slapped them on the page. But I got along fine with the printers. We had an understanding, and I don't think I ever touched type except maybe once or twice, and they knew it, and it was when we were in a very big hurry.

RR: One of our old students, now at the *Dallas Morning News*, Denise Beeber, was on the news desk at 10:00 at night when they made that famous mistake about the Whitewater investigation or the Monica Lewinsky investigation. And it was Denise's job to remake the paper for the second edition because they had to pull

their original story, which was in error, insert a two-or three-paragraph box on page one, or maybe a new lead, anyhow, a correction of sorts, but the whole thing involved messing up the whole paper in essence. Because they changed page one, then they had to change some inside.

BD: Oh, that's what happens.

RR: And I think she was still discombobulated about that for days afterward because she had done it. She had done it very well, of course.

BD: I know she would.

RR: She's cool under fire. But it was one of those nightmares that editors have to deal with every now and then.

BD: Every night is a nightmare anyhow for the news editor.

RR: Why?

BD: Well, copy is always late. Reporters don't know any of this. They don't pay any attention to the deadlines.

RR: I don't want you to call any names, but were there particular reporters who were habitually late?

BD: Yes, one in particular. The very earliest he ever got a story in was right on deadline. I mean it was the last second, and he'd always have a late story you had to squeeze in there some way or another. And one night I showed him how much — I said, "Okay, we've got this much space left. Write your story to fit that because if it doesn't fit, I'm not going to fool around. It's got to fit exactly. It can't be any longer." Well, he did it. That was the last thing to go in the paper. I went back to work, back over to the copy desk. I heard his typewriter going. "Well, what are you doing now?" "I'm writing a sidebar."

RR: Let's move forward a little bit. You said as night managing editor you essentially had the same duties as news editor?

BD: Yes. Just an upgraded title. Bill Shelton, at the same time, was made city editor

and day managing editor.

RR: Okay, what was the next step in your career?

BD: From that?

RR: Yes.

BD: Managing editor in February 1972.

RR: '72. And you stayed managing editor for about nine years?

BD: About ten, yes, a little over nine. I left the last of August.

RR: What were the highlights of your years as managing editor?

BD: Let me see. Some of the local stories. We did a lot of investigative pieces. I had formed an investigative team. We got some good stories on the poverty program, where there was a lot of corruption and thievery. In fact, we put five people in the penitentiary on one story.

RR: Your investigative team was two guys, I remember.

BD: Yes.

RR: Tucker Steinmetz.

BD: And Jimmy Jones.

RR: Jimmy spell it with a Y or an I E?

BD: Y. His namesake, the state auditor, spells it with an I-E. Jimmie Red Jones.

RR: Yes. What were some of the stories they covered, these investigative teams?

BD: Oh, they did several series. We did some that were pretty dull topics just because we thought we ought to do them, or I thought we ought to do them. As you probably remember, the printing contracts — there's always controversy over the letting of the state printing contracts. Well, I sent Tucker Steinmetz out to the Capitol with a calculator, and he spent a lot of time in a dusty, old basement to find out how it worked. They were doing it according to a formula, which was as crazy as could be. You and I could go in Allsopp and Chapel and buy some plain white paper for a fraction of what the state was paying for it under its blue book.

RR: Was there some kind of collusion going on among the big printing companies?

BD: Well, there was a lot of competition as to who got the state contracts, and somebody was always crying foul.

RR: Didn't it usually come down to the same three or so printing companies?

BD: Yes, it did. I couldn't even name the three now except... [... and Morgan?] was one. Maybe Allsopp and Chapel.

RR: Did Tucker's story make a difference? Did anything change?

BD: Yes, it did, except some of the changes didn't work out too well. There was no reason the state couldn't print its own stuff in a lot of cases, so they just changed the law. Rudy Moore, Fayetteville, introduced a new bill, a reform bill, and one thing they did was buy a press and do some state printing at the penitentiary at Cummins. They put a press out there. Well, can you guess what happened? Started counterfeiting.

RR: Of course.

BD: But there were some major reforms, and it worked pretty well. The state saved a lot of money.

RR: Rudy was in the legislature at that time?

BD: Yes, he was.

RR: Do you remember some of the people that you hired as managing editor?

BD: Well, yes. Give me a minute, let me see.

RR: Well, I'll start you off. I know of one because she was interviewed by one of our interviewers just recently, Julie Baldrige.

BD: Yes. Well, no, I was news editor when Julie was hired.

RR: Ah, okay, all right.

BD: She worked for me, directly under me. Well, Tom Hamburger, Eric Black, I will fail to remember half a dozen or more. Carol Matlack.

RR: Carol Matlack.

BD: Let's see.

RR: Part of the Oberlin bunch?

BD: Oberlin Mafia.

RR: Yes. There were one or two more in that. I can't think of who they were. But — Eric Black. You hired Eric?

BD: Yes.

RR: Tell me about Eric.

BD: You sure? Oh, he was a good reporter, but Eric was a chronic bitcher. He was Jewish, so he thought we should recognize Jewish Christmas. "Well, okay, Eric, you want that day off? You got it." Well, no, he wanted it official. I said, "We don't have any official holidays. You just get off on these for economic reasons. Six days a week. If you have to work Christmas, you get another day off." Didn't satisfy him. What Eric enjoyed was being contentious.

RR: He ended up in Minneapolis, didn't he?

BD: Well, Tom Hamburger did.

RR: I'm pretty sure Eric is at the same [paper].

BD: Eric may have, too.

RR: In fact, somebody told me that he pretty well runs things up there, or he does what he wants to do.

BD: Well, I dealt with some troublemakers. I was a troublemaker myself, hell.

RR: Well, troublemakers sometimes make good reporters.

BD: Yes, they do.

RR: I can think of half a dozen troublemakers who . . .

BD: Well, all the good ones were troublemakers at one time or another, but there are some who just liked to bitch over minor things. Eric was one of those.

RR: What about Tom Hamburger? What kind of guy was he?

BD: Tom was an excellent reporter and a prince of a guy. I worked very closely with

Tom.

RR: What kind of stories did these two reporters do?

BD: Tom did the, oh, they both did, the variety stories. They were both general assignment reporters, and Tom did one or two pretty good series. One of them was the changing face of agriculture. We tackled pretty dull subjects just because we thought the issue had to be done. Which became part of a textbook at the university.

RR: You mean the agriculture series?

BD: Yes.

RR: What about Carol Matlack? What kind of stories did she do?

BD: She was a reporter. She was an outrageous feminist. She always had a chip on her shoulder and saw discrimination where there was none. Carol got more raises than most people on salary did, and more promotions.

RR: What kind of stories did she work on?

BD: No specific type of stories, but she usually did investigative pieces lots of times. She was very, very good, excellent.

RR: She's ended up . . .

BD: And very reasonable as far as... She'd come in and talk about [story ideas]. There was a big controversy in the med school. There were twins who were students, and they were accused of cheating on tests. They'd sit in separate rooms and come out with the same grades, it turned out. The students were in an uproar about it, their student committee, or whatever it is they had. But the faculty said, "There's nothing to it. These girls are not cheating." Students didn't want to give up on it, though. She did a story. I saw it and we talked about it. I said, "I don't see a story, Carol. We're not going to do student cheating stories." And she said she agreed wholeheartedly, said she'd come to the same conclusion. [She was a] very reasonable person as far as her news judgment was concerned.

RR: Do you remember some of the others you hired? Or just some who were in the newsroom during that time?

BD: Well, of course, Dumas was already there. Tucker and Jimmy were already there. I didn't hire either one of them.

RR: Dumas was still on the Capitol, wasn't he?

BD: Still on the Capitol. Dumas came to me and wanted me to know that he'd been offered the editorial job on the editorial page. I insisted that he take it. He wanted to stay a reporter. I said, "I can't give you any more money than they can, and you'll be a good editorial writer anyhow."

RR: And turned out to be a good one.

BD: Now, my predecessor. I'll say this, if they had an opening on the editorial writing staff, he'd try to get it. He'd encourage them to take somebody he didn't like. Some, not all of them, turned out to be bad editorial writers. They'd be in his doghouse, Bill Shelton's doghouse.

RR: Good way to get rid of them.

BD: Yes.

RR: Tell me about Charlie Allbright.

BD: Charlie Allbright had a unique style. Still has a unique style. The "Our Town" column started first. Well, Carroll McGaughey got at odds with the management and was — he had been managing editor, he lost it, they gave him a column, the "Our Town" column. He started writing it. When Carroll left, it became a staff effort.

RR: A what?

BD: Anybody on the staff could contribute to it.

RR: Oh, okay.

BD: It was finally given to Allbright, who was the best ever. "Our Town" truly suited [him] better than "Arkansas Traveler" did. He was succeeded by Richard Allin.

Nelson left it open. He asked people for trial columns. He was going to make a decision. One of the people that then submitted one was Richard Allin, who got the job. He and Nelson were on very good terms.

RR: Charlie was delighted to see me come to work at the *Arkansas Gazette* because that meant he could get off the North Little Rock [beat] and start writing the “Our Town” column. Apparently, it had been worked out that they had to [first] replace him on North Little Rock.

BD: I didn’t remember that.

RR: Yes. So he welcomed me with open arms.

BD: Charlie had a unique style, and his ear, his writing ear, his talent for interviewing and talking to people was — Charlie could write just a straight story and have a little touch. [It] might not be uproarious, but it’d be kind of funny. Like he’d say — his story might be a Shriners’ convention: He never wrote “A breakfast meeting or a breakfast session will be . . .” Charlie would write, “A breakfast will be eaten at 9:00, Thursday morning.” Charlie also turned out... Though we didn’t know it at the time, we turned out to be cousins.

RR: I had forgotten that.

BD: Apparently his grandmother and my aunt on my grandmother’s, — no, our grandmothers were sisters.

RR: Well, there’s some more of that Arkansas nepotism that Kenneth Starr . . .

BD: Back in those in days northwest Arkansas might as well have been in Montana. It was back when we were growing up.

RR: Well, you couldn’t get there for one thing.

BD: No. We both had relatives in the mountains, but we were flatlanders.

RR: You mentioned Nelson two or three times, A. R. Nelson. Tell a little about him.

BD: Nelson was the most skillful copy editor I ever knew. He could really edit copy. He was probably the best news editor, in many respects, that we ever had.

RR: Talk about his news judgment.

BD: Well, his news judgment and his feel for copy were... he could cut through the chaff. He could do that better than anybody I ever knew. He taught me a whole lot when I worked under him. I didn't think he was ever suited for managing editor because he didn't believe in writing bad stories, local stories. He didn't believe in controversy.

RR: Say that again, I'm not sure I follow what you are saying.

BD: He didn't want to make anybody mad. Anybody locally. Well, he didn't want to make the higher ups, the people who had money, mad.

RR: But he had this gift for copy editing?

BD: Absolutely, and for organization.

RR: He taught you. Who else became exceptionally good copy editors?

BD: We were the best copy editors in the country. Ray Stephens, Jim McDaniel.

RR: Ray Stephens?

BD: Yes, P-H-E-N-S. All of them became editors or managing editors.

RR: What McDaniel?

BD: Jim McDaniel. He became managing editor for the *Commercial Appeal*. Bill Shelton. Bill had become city editor before I came back from North Carolina.

RR: He started on the copy desk?

BD: Yes. In fact, I don't think Bill was ever a reporter. I'm not sure, but [if he was], it wasn't very long.

RR: Where'd Ray Stephens end up?

BD: Oh, various jobs. Associated Press, and then he became editor of two or three [?] papers.

RR: What interests me about what you just said is that here we have one man, A. R. Nelson, who was very good at what he did, and his influence then spread.

BD: Right.

RR: Throughout the *Gazette's* history, for the rest of the paper's life.

BD: That's correct.

RR: Or almost, except for an unfortunate few years, and then beyond the *Gazette* to these other papers.

BD: Yes, after. Anybody who ever worked under him swears by him and was grateful for what he taught them.

RR: Yes. Well for what it's worth, I think it ought be on record that people who worked for you as copy editors say exactly the same thing. "Bob Douglas taught me everything I know about copy editing."

BD: Well, A. R. Nelson taught me.

RR: So it really expanded — what's that fancy word? Exponentially?

BD: Yes. I'm not going to try to write it.

RR: So, in a way, this young woman, Denise Beeber, who's now the news editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, can trace her skill in a direct line from you, where she learned it at the University of Arkansas, to A. R. Nelson.

BD: That's correct. That's right. And even Count Dew, he was a good copy editor, and he may have taught Nelson.

RR: Somebody had to teach him. I want to believe that's still going on around the country and newspapers. There are still people, at least here and there, who care so much about the language and about the art or the craft of newspapering that they are. . .

BD: I think it is pretty inferior, and you tell that by reading the stories now. Pat Crow went to *The New York Times* as a copy editor. He said, "They're not very good up here."

RR: Yes, I've heard him say that.

BD: And there was one night, it was during the civil rights violence, Selma and all that — everything happened at night. I think that this was when the Episcopal priest

got killed and there were a lot of big events that day. The guy who was in charge that night — of course, at *The New York Times* the news editor's never there. He leaves at four o'clock in the afternoon or whatever. They had to turn it over to Pat because everybody else was paralyzed. The guy came around said, "Welcome to the team." He said, "I mean it." Pat said, "I wanted to vomit. Team, hell." Well, he did it the way we did at the *Gazette*. Slugs and takes and all that.

RR: I'm sitting here trying to remember whether I wrote that story about the Episcopal priest being shot to death. I don't remember it if I did. I think I was off somewhere on some other assignment.

BD: Oh, you were in Alabama during that time.

RR: I wrote about the guy who shot him.

BD: Tom Coleman?

RR: Tom Coleman, who was still alive the last I heard.

BD: Oh, those guys live forever. Byron de la Beckwith.

RR: Yes. I had an exchange of letters with Jack Nelson a few years ago over Byron de la Beckwith. Jack had written a book about one of the violent episodes in Mississippi and had a reference to Byron Beckwith in there. And it said that he served so many, six, years in the penitentiary for a bombing in New Orleans. And I wrote, said, "No, he didn't. I covered the trial, and they acquitted him." And we went back and forth two or three times, and finally Jack sent me the evidence. He was right. After I left New Orleans, apparently, there was another trial that I never knew anything about.

BD: A bombing? I don't remember anything about that. They killed Medger Evers.

RR: Yes, this was years after that. And he's now in the penitentiary for killing Medger Evers, but according to Jack, he was actually convicted in Louisiana over another — a bombing incident — and I think he said he actually served some time. That was a total surprise to me because I had moved on to somewhere else

and didn't know anything about it.

BD: Wonder if there was a race-related bombing or murder? If Byron wasn't in it, he sure would have liked to have been.

RR: Yes, he loved — oh, boy, he's a bad guy, bad guy. Let me turn this tape over.

[End of Side Two, Tape One]

[Beginning of Side One, Tape Two]

BD: All right.

RR: Okay, start with that, the second attempt to organize a newspaper Guild at the *Gazette*. 1974?

BD: Well, when I became managing editor, Hugh Patterson called me over to his house on Sunday afternoon and told me I was going to be the managing editor, and we talked about what we were going to do. First was to raise salaries considerably. He was willing to do that, but we were under a wage control. You couldn't raise salary. I don't remember how our wage controls worked, cost of living maybe, but that's all.

RR: This was during the Nixon administration?

BD: Early seventies. It was '72. We couldn't do it. It was illegal. And after that came the wage guidelines. You did have some leeway on wage guidelines, but he was negotiating with the printers at the time and wanted to keep the newsroom on the wage guidelines temporarily. That's when they started talking about union. Here had been this drastic, drastic rise in prices and a big change in the economy, and, of course, *Gazette* salaries were pretty damn low. And, of course we wanted to get them higher. The only people you could give raises to were the supervisors. We [Hugh and I] had agreed to a general, across-the-board salary increase. Well, we never announced things like that in advance. Nobody else knew about it. So they started having the Guild meetings, I mean, these meetings about forming a Guild, which I knew nothing about at first, except two guys,

Jimmy Jones and Ernie Dumas, called me up and called it to my attention, talked to me about it. I thought it was a bad idea because I knew we had big raises coming up, one. Two, I knew that the publisher would never accept a Guild. And, three, I knew these people liked to talk about it, but there was not more than four or five who would go on strike if it came to it, so it would have had no clout. In fact, Hugh Patterson — if they were going to have a Guild, he wanted [them] to go on strike as he did with the first one. When it was brought to my attention, I said, “Okay, I think it’s a mistake. I’m not going to say so, but I will if they’ll talk to me.” And I explained — there was not much I could say, because it’d be against the law, against NLRB law. — I said, “I won’t resist.”

RR: You mean it’s against the law for a member of management to say . . . ?

BD: Yes. Right. To say there’s going to be raises. Anything like that. I wanted to do that, but I said, “Talk to me. If we have a reasonable discussion, I won’t resist.” Well, they wouldn’t even bring that to a vote. So it was reported back, and I said, “Okay, I’ll fight you.” Whis I set out to do.

RR: So how’d it go?

BD: Well, management’s side was by this time mine, my side. We won. We won the election. It was pretty close, but we won.

RR: Who were the leaders on the two sides in the newsroom?

BD: Hard to say. There were — the organization of the Guild was hard to distinguish from the feminist movement.

RR: You mentioned Carol Matlack a while ago. Was she active in the guild?

BD: Carol, I don’t remember.

RR: Or was she there?

BD: I don’t remember. Leslie Mitchell was, Ginger Shiras, the librarian whose name was Dee Wilmoth — no, her name was Dee Carithers. She had married her Mary Carither’s [?] brother. Tell you a little bit more about that outside if you turn off

the tape recorder.

RR: And Carithers was one R or two?

BD: One R. And she was . . .

[Tape Stopped]

BD: Oh, I thought it was on.

RR: No, because I thought you wanted to tell me something about her off the record.

BD: Oh, turn it off again.

[Tape Stopped]

RR: We've been talking about the strike, the Guild organizing movement of the *Gazette* while you were managing editor. You had been a leader, in fact, president of the Guild years earlier, at the same paper and gone out on strike. And now you found yourself on the other side. How did you feel about that?

BD: Well, it was very, very unpleasant, but I did what I had to do, and I have no apologies for it whatsoever and no regrets.

RR: What was the . . .

BD: I was afraid the paper would be sold if there were a strike. In fact, I was pretty sure it would be. I knew that the strikers were not coming back, anybody who went out — although I don't think there'd been — I really I don't think they would have ever struck, but if they had, they wouldn't have gotten anywhere in negotiations either. Total waste of time.

RR: You had had indications that the owners of the paper were thinking of selling it if there'd have been?

BD: Yes.

RR: If what? If there'd been a strike?

BD: It was not a definite threat at this time. I just knew in my bones that that would be a possibility.

RR: Meaning if there'd been a Guild formed or if there'd been a strike?

BD: If there'd been a Guild formed, there would have been a strike because they would have gotten nowhere, and it would have been fine with the publisher if they had a strike. Let me say this now. I've put Hugh Patterson in a bad light, I think, in everything I said. He was a decent guy and good friend and supported me in just about everything. And just on this one subject, the Guild movement, he was very close to Ashmore and supported Ashmore. A decent compassionate man, he had this terrible experience with a Guild after he'd just been made publisher, and here the stockholders are on him.

RR: Yes. Back in '49?

BD: In '49.

RR: Yes. His wife Louise told somebody years after the fact about a family meeting that took place before the crisis of Central High in '57, and how the paper was going to handle it. Do you know anything about that?

BD: No, I don't know much about it. I know very little about the family meeting. I know that one of the big stockholders, Mrs. Georgia Heiskell, the widow of Fred Heiskell, Mr. Heiskell's brother, she was — well, let me back up. She wasn't a factor by this time. She had fallen out with the paper because she was an Eisenhower supporter in '52, and sold her stock to Witt Stephens. I hadn't touched on that by the way. That scared the hell out of everybody. It was about 25% of the stock, I think. It may have been more. I don't know. We could just see Witt trying to tell us what to do because that's what Witt does. But Hugh Patterson outmaneuvered him. Witt had to have some money to buy the gas company, which was owned then by, I think, City Service.

RR: Right.

BD: But before that Hugh made a trip. He talked to all the family members, all the stockholders, traveled to Tennessee and wherever, North Carolina, and lined them up. And they gave him the authority to call the shots and built up this solid wall

against whatever Witt might want to do on the editorial side.

RR: I gather the upshot of that was that Witt found out what Hugh had done. Witt caved in and sold his stock.

BD: That had something to do with it. He also needed the money. He needed cash to buy the gas company, so Hugh had him over the barrel on two counts.

RR: Well, Hugh saved the paper from Witt Stephens.

BD: Yes, he did.

RR: It's too bad he wasn't able to save it from . . .

BD: From his son.

RR: Well, I was going to say Gannett later on. Do you want to tell about your leaving the paper?

BD: Well, yes, I can. Carrick Patterson, who was the publisher's son, was made assistant managing editor and then later executive editor, which put him over me. We didn't get along at all in how the paper ought to be run. Our philosophies were diametrically opposed. So there was a collision right away. Actually, Carrick spent a lot of his time trying to sabotage me with his father. I never said a word against Carrick to his father, although I was given a lot of opportunities to do so. That's when Hugh threw up his hands, and Mrs. Patterson wanted — she's the one who really wanted Carrick made executive editor. I was miserable. I had been offered this job at the University. I came back and talked to Hugh about it and decided to stay, and then Hugh just threw up his hands at one point and said, well, maybe it would be better if I just left. He said he'd call the University. "Don't call anybody. Don't call the University. I don't know whether I want to go up there or not, but don't worry about me. I'm out of here." So our parting was more or less amicable.

RR: Well, it sounds like it was a very sad occasion because here are two guys who had a lot of respect for each other.

BD: He called me the day that I got the news [about the University offer]. He called me and wanted to come over. And I said, “Well, okay.” I called him right back.

RR: When was this?

BD: This was the day that I made the decision that I was leaving, and I called him back and said, “No, I don’t want to do that. I’ll just get on out of here.” But I did my best to make it as smooth as possible.

RR: Well, you’ve seen a fair amount of him in the intervening years.

BD: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, when Gannett bought the paper — and he told me this himself — he went to the Gannett headquarters and demanded that I be brought back as editor. Of course, Gannett didn’t want to do that, and I think he nearly came to blows with somebody.

RR: Yes, he told me about that.

BD: Did he tell you about that?

RR: Yes, yes. Well, so, Gannett did buy it in eighty-, well, I forget, but anyway they had it for about six years, I believe. The first editor on Gannett was a man named Walker Lundy. Tell about the time Walker Lundy came up to speak to the journalism students at the University of Arkansas.

BD: Walker Lundy was an absolute fool. But he always lands on his feet, although Gannett had to let him go. He had the most sophomoric approach to news gathering. He led the paper one day with a kid who was dying of leukemia or something. A four-column headline. Leading the paper with a two-column picture close-up of him. Of course, those stories go in the paper, but lead the paper with something like that? That was just an example. And I kept hearing these stories from horrified staff members about the decisions he would make. So bad that even Gannett fired him.

RR: What was the gist of his talk to the journalism students or the journalism department when he came?

BD: How to write. How to write a story. It was a silly — damn, if somebody — I don't know what was the example he gave, some pretty good story about an enemy of the President.

RR: I don't remember that.

BD: Well, his lead was, "So and so will no longer sit on and do this and this and that."

RR: Unfortunately, his style of lead writing is [?]

BD: His favorite reporter was one of the worst reporters that the *Gazette* ever saw. Gannett type who went to the Des Moines Gannett paper, and they couldn't believe this. He drove this frothy stuff and got nothing.

RR: I seem to recollect his advice to the journalism department was the readers ought to tell the editors what they want in the paper rather than have editors make a decision about what goes in the paper.

BD: That's right. When he went to the St. Paul paper, I had a friend up there, and he's been there for a few years as editor. He's changed the editorials. They now are either written or dictated by the readers, the editorial position in that paper. He was a fool.

RR: What, do they take a poll or . . .

BD: I think just anything they wanted to say.

RR: He was big on focus groups.

BD: Big on focus groups. Gannett was big on retreats, which really turned the stomach of most of the old *Gazette* hands. One of the old *Gazette* hands, who never was much of a newspaper man, but a good backstabber and a good — I shouldn't say this on the tape — Well, he was a toady. He was very good at that. Bootlicking, okay? He managed to sabotage Carrick Patterson. So they fired Carrick as an editor and moved him to the editorial section.

RR: Gannett did this?

BD: Gannett did.

RR: That was the end. That was the way he ended at the *Gazette* after first, I guess, being kicked upstairs.

BD: Well, kicked, not even upstairs. That's not upstairs.

RR: Sideways.

BD: No, it's kicked down.

RR: And then he quit?

BD: Then he quit. Yes.

RR: Well, what's been the effect of the death of the newspaper in 1991?

BD: Well, the biggest thing is the difference in the editorial sections. The *Gazette* was a liberal Democratic paper, and the *Democrat* is a — much of the editorial section is right wing, but the news pages of the *Democrat* are objective and neutral.

[Tape Stopped]

RR: We were talking about the impact of the paper's holding on the state of Arkansas, and you were just starting to talk about that.

BD: Oh, well, that's the big difference.

RR: The editorials?

BD: Yes. I think we would have done a better job on the Whitewater coverage than they did. I know we would have. I know I would have. A lot of what Gene Lyons is writing would have been part of the news stories. But for the most part they've done a very good job.

RR: You think that if the *Gazette* had been alive, the paper's coverage of Whitewater might have been a corrective to some of the mistaken national stories?

BD: Well, these guys like Gerth and L. J. Davis that came in here, they wouldn't have gotten away with it. On a spot basis.

RR: Has the death of the *Gazette* had any effect on the politics of the state?

BD: Oh, I think definitely.

RR: What effect?

BD: Well, we've got a lot of Republicans now.

RR: And you think there's a connection?

BD: Yes. And I think — well, there certainly was a connection between the *Gazette's* editorial policies and the atmosphere in the state.

RR: You mean, helping create a more liberal atmosphere?

BD: Oh, absolutely, yes.

RR: Which I guess would have helped people like Pryor, Bumpers, Clinton?

BD: Did help them. I doubt if Dale Bumpers would have run ever if the state had been like it is now.

RR: Well, do you think of anything else that you want to say on this record?

BD: Well, I will five minutes after you leave, but not at the moment.

RR: Okay. Well, why don't we call it quits? Thank you very much.

BD: Well, I kind of enjoyed doing it. The first time I got a lot of stuff off my chest.

[End of Interview]