

Gazette Project

Interview with

Rodney Dungan
Hot Springs, Arkansas,
13 November 2000

Interviewer: Dorothy Stuck

Dorothy Stuck: Rodney, we want to start with you telling me where you were born, date of your birth, and who your parents were.

Rodney Dungan: I was born August 2, 1936, in El Dorado, Arkansas. My dad was Wiley Alvan Dungan. My mother was Sarah Vivian Gray Dungan.

DS: What did your dad do, Rodney?

RD: Several things. He was at one time a pipe fitter, salesman and sold various things. I was kind of proud that he sold, back in the 1940s and early 1950s, when the dollar was two-foot or three-foot long, he and his little group sold a million dollars' worth of Wear Ever cooking utensils in his territory in South Arkansas, for three years in a row and led the nation in selling them. He was a pretty good salesman.

DS: Well, he really was. Where did you go to school?

RD: I started school in Pollock, Louisiana. I went through about the second or third grade there. Then we moved to Pine Bluff, and I stayed there until about the sixth grade. Then back to El Dorado. I finished high school there. I went to college for a year at Louisiana Tech. I went a semester at Henderson. It used to be State Teacher's in Arkadelphia. Five weeks in what used to be State Teacher's College

in Conway. I commuted while I was working for the *Gazette*. That turned out to be more ambitious than it was worth.

DS: You finished high school in what year then?

RD: 1954.

DS: What was your first job?

RD: I was actually working for the El Dorado paper while I was going to school in my last year. I was going to high school and working 90 hours a week at the local paper in El Dorado.

DS: What did you do on the paper?

RD: Everything but sweep up. They had a strike sometime back then. Bob Hayes, J.D. Beauchamp was the editor then too, and a guy named Winston Comer were there. We put out the morning paper and the afternoon paper. We were just about the total editorial staff except for society. Wrote the oil news at night and covered the beats and made the pictures and scanned the photographs, wrote the heads, laid out the front page, and everything else. I was still in high school.

DS: You were still in high school?

RD: Right. Of course, I was a smaller part of that, but three people putting out two papers a day was a pretty ambitious project.

DS: It was a very ambitious project. What year did you go to work for the *Gazette*?

RD: 1956.

DS: Who hired you?

RD: A. R. Nelson. I got a call while going to school at Henderson. I had gone the

second semester. I was working between semesters. I had a good recommendation from the society editor on the El Dorado paper, so I went up and did an interview for a vacation relief job in the summer of '56. I went up and tried out and liked it. I turned the job down because I could make more money at the El Dorado paper. They had offered me \$40.00 a week to work 40 hours. I told them no, that I could work 90 hours and make a lot more money, even at .75 an hour. So Mr. Nelson asked what it would take. I gave an outlandish number like \$60.00. To my amazement, they accepted it.

DS: They accepted it?

RD: So I went to work as a writer and as a photographer, just wherever I was needed. Of course, I ended up working mostly on the crap desk on weekends and some general assignment stuff during the week and doing my own pictures.

DS: When did you get interested in photography? Was it at El Dorado?

RD: Yes, it was in high school. I got in to it, and it was a natural thing. I think photography is something that you can't kind of teach. You can either do it or you can't. It was a natural thing for me. I guess that I inherited it from my mom and dad.

DS: You had a feel for it?

RD: Yes, not being immodest, but I was pretty good at it.

DS: Did you just teach yourself, or did you have any sort of instruction or any reading?

RD: I read everything I could find and still do, including cereal boxes. I learned an

awful lot from Larry Obsitnik and Gene Prescott who were the staff photographers, the original two staff photographers I knew when I came to the *Gazette*. I learned a lot of things from both of those guys.

DS: Did you work closely with Larry Obsitnik then?

RD: Yes, Larry and Gene.

DS: Tell me about them as individuals.

RD: Larry was a stubborn, hard-headed Pollock, but a fine photographer. He was the chief photographer. He had a way with a camera that was distinctly his. If you are in the photography business, you get to where you can recognize other photographers' pictures by just looking. You don't need a credit line. Larry had his own style. Gene had a different style that used different lighting. He taught me some things about lighting that I liked and still use. I liked the way he printed better. All in all, both of those guys had a love for photography. It fit me to a tee because it was all I wanted to talk about and all I wanted to do.

DS: You were mostly interested in photography when you went to the *Gazette*?

RD: Right, but I went as a writer. At the end of the summer I felt like I had learned more at the *Gazette* than I had learned in all my college. I didn't care much about cutting up frogs and that kind of thing. I decided to see if I could stay on as a full-time person. They kept me as a general assignment reporter and still doing some photography. I eventually got changed completely to photography because they couldn't rewrite photographs, like they could copy.

DS: When you were still writing, who did you work for?

RD: Bill Shelton was the city editor. I worked with him and Charlie Rixse on the weekend to what we referred to as the “crap desk.” I did rewrites and obits. I still remember the *Gazette* style. It was a definite style: “John Smith, age so and so, comma, died. . .” There was no such word as local in the *Gazette* style. It could be North Little Rock, but it couldn’t be “local.” I remember that style book. It must have been bigger than Webster’s unabridged dictionary. It was in loose-leaf form. There were tons and tons of rules, which is one of the things that made the paper read so well. It was all written in the same manner. It was written as objectively as possible. That is something that doesn’t happen today.

DS: It sure doesn’t. What about Bill Shelton? I heard he was kind of hard to work for.

RD: He was tough. He was very tough. He was thorough, and he was good. You can put up with some things if you think you are accomplishing things. The main criticism that I had with Shelton was that he didn’t understand photography. He would pick the wrong picture if you did not limit his choice. I learned how to do that pretty quick.

DS: You learned how to do that.

RD: If you give him three, he would pick the worst one. So you would give him one, and tell him that was all you had. If you told him how good it was, he might believe it.

DS: Did you ever come in contact with Nelson much after he hired you?

RD: Yes, when he fired me, rather when I quit. We used to go to dinner in kind of a

group quite a bit, different people at different times. One of the favorite spots back then was Breier's Restaurant across from where the old Marion used to stand. That was interesting.

DS: Rodney, there were several people from El Dorado that came to the *Gazette*. How many of them or who were the ones that you worked with?

RD: Right off the bat, Leroy Donald was a state editor when I left there. He was in El Dorado and worked on the El Dorado paper. Ernie Dumas was after me at the El Dorado paper and then came to the *Gazette* later. Nelson was from El Dorado. I don't know anyone that knew him when he was in El Dorado. Roy Reed, but we never worked on the *Gazette* at the same time. I did know Roy and knew his sister and his family.

DS: What was it about the El Dorado paper, you suppose, that fed into the *Gazette*? Do you think it was the connection with Nelson, maybe? That he was from El Dorado?

RD: That was part of it, but Bob Hayes and J. D. Beauchamp were probably as big a part because it was a good school. It was like a forced march because you worked so many hours, you had to learn something, unless you were a rock. I remember a rule from Mr. Hays and J.D. that was also a rule from the AP: "Get it first, but first get it right."

DS: Well, that is a good way to learn. It really is. Once you were strictly photography, who decided what your assignments would be?

RD: Obsitnik, and he would always, as chief, make the assignments every day. Of

course, you know who got the best assignments. Larry was a keenly, jealous person. He liked his credit line just as much as I liked mine. I can remember one time he came in on a Monday after I had a pretty good weekend. I got the Saturday and Sunday stuff and had credit lines everywhere. Larry came in complaining about it. I said, "Well, I would be glad to switch with you. You can work Saturday and Sunday, and I will work the other days."

DS: He decided not to do that?

RD: No, it wouldn't work that way.

DS: Was there any period or any involvement that you had at the *Gazette* that stands out in your memory as a high point or a low point?

RD: There are ten thousand! I worked at the *Gazette* at the most exciting time as far as I am concerned in the *Gazette's* entire time. We won two Pulitzers, and we had an esprit de corps around there. We probably had one of the better staffs of any paper around the country. It was all really aimed at producing the best paper that could be. I remember Mr. Heiskell when he was there.

DS: What do you remember about him?

RD: I just know that by the time I got there, you got a story from Shelton or whoever was at the city editor desk. Tom Davis worked back there then, too. Whoever gave you assignments that had a JNH on top of it, that meant you better write galleys because it was going to be fully explained and fully done in the paper. The JNH stories were usually a lot longer. After all, it was his paper, you know.

DS: Did you get some of those?

RD: Yes, everybody got some of those. I have an anecdote that I thought was a great story. Maybe Nelson told me or maybe I heard it. I think maybe Nelson told me. Mr. Heiskell did not even have a private restroom. He went with the rest of the guys. He was supposedly in the bathroom one day and some young new copy boy came in. Mr. Heiskell felt like he had to say something. He said, "Good morning, young man. How long have you been with the *Gazette*?" The guy said, "Two days." He said, "How long have you been here?" Mr. Heiskell said, "Fifty years." [Laughter]

DS: He came out even there. So you have a high regard for the *Gazette* as a newspaper?

RD: Absolutely. I worked with Joe Wirges. I missed Sam Harris by just a little bit. When I first moved there and went to work as summer help, we had three guys that lived together. We were called "the original jolly boys." We were all single, and it was Ray Moseley, who later on became UPI chief correspondent in Europe, Gene Foreman, who did very well and went to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, myself, and we were probably kicked out of most of the rooming houses or apartments in town. Later on when Moseley left, we were joined by Jerry Jones, who was the assistant city editor. Then I think some of us got married and that got rid of "the jolly boys." I can remember so many good things and so many good people. I think the whole thing was a camaraderie of people working together. All the people working together to do the best thing that you could do with whatever it took. I can remember --- I worked for *Life Magazine* some later. I liked it

because it was “Get the story.” It didn’t matter what it takes or where you have to go or how you have to do it. You go and you get it. It was a really good period in my life. I have nothing but good memories.

DS: What was your memory of the 1957 period?

RD: The most I ever went to school in my life! [Laughter] I was there from day one. In fact, I learned a lot about photography from that experience. We all went out to Central High School. We had all three photographers at that time. We all went out equipped with those wonderful speed graphics. You do one shot, and then you had to pull the film holder and change it and do this and do that. It didn’t take but one day for me to decide that it wasn’t the way to cover that situation. That afternoon when school was out, I went out and bought a 35, actually the first 35MM camera on the *Gazette*. Later on the first light meter. I got teased unmercifully about it from Obsitnik and Prescott. They wanted me to read F Stops everywhere around the whole place. Every morning we would be out there about 6 or 7 in the morning, and we would stay there until everything happened. I remember one day that I slipped into the school. I was pretty young looking back then and had a crew cut. With my 35MM camera that I hid in a girl’s books, I went in one morning as a student. I walked through the bayonets and all the troops and everything else. I got in there and the black kids were late that morning. I wanted that picture of the black kids in school. They were late that morning, and when the bell rang for classes, I didn’t have anywhere to go. I went into a restroom and, of course, they caught me and marched me promptly out.

Two soldiers down those long Central High steps and back through the lines and told me, "Don't come back!"

DS: You didn't get any pictures either inside?

RD: No, the people didn't show up until later that day. It was a good effort anyway. I remember being really close to everything that happened. I had a picture of the first time they went into the school. It was so far away that you could not really -- - anyway, it wasn't a good picture. I remember being on top of a mailbox on the corner, the higher number street on the end of Central. When the men got kicked, I was on the mailbox. I remember Johnny Jenkins, who had worked a little bit with us part-time, was out there working for UPI, and he got the best and famous picture of Elizabeth Eckford. He shot that. He later went to work in Austin for one of the papers. We were there everyday, and I got some more decent credit lines. Harry sent me to North Little Rock. So help me, all the black kids showed up at North Little Rock that day. I had a really nice series of pictures all over the high page of the progression of people going up the steps and the confrontation at the top of the steps. I had all the credit lines that day, too. That really upset Obsitnik.

DS: That was a winner.

RD: That was a lucky assignment. I remember that it was new to me. I had never really covered a breaking news story that was continuous day after day. I don't think I was frightened. I was too young and too stupid to be frightened. I don't remember being afraid at all. I was more afraid, two years later, when the police

were there, and I was behind the line, the police lines. I remember being frightened then because I could see the crowd coming. In 1957, I was on the outside with the crowd.

DS: You mean back when they resumed the school?

RD: They came back. I remember Gene Smith was police chief. I had a picture from behind those lines that --- I remember Nelson sent it out as a UPI picture. The *Post Dispatch* used it in a half-page photo. Nelson put it on the bulletin board and put "photo by Dungan." I thought that was pretty neat.

DS: Did you ever have any contact with Ashmore?

RD: He was one of the people that instilled the spirit, I think. A very smart and a very bright man. His office was not in the newsroom. I didn't deal with him as much. I got orders from him. I can say that I was never told what to say or how to say it in my writing or in my photography. The point was to get it first, but to first get it right. You're objective. I still don't applaud things to this day, because that was the way I was taught to be objective. I wish it was still that way.

DS: When the *Gazette* won the Pulitzer, did you all celebrate?

RD: No more than usual. [Laughter] It was a nice thing. I mean, what do you do to celebrate a Pulitzer? Maybe an extra beer at Breier's.

DS: No champagne?

RD: No, no champagne. It was a neat time. There were so many good people that were there. Buddy Portis and Charles Allbright, Bill Whitworth, Pat Crow, all of these people went on to bigger and better things. It was a great place to work.

DS: What about politics? Did you get political assignments? Were there any governors or senators or people like that who stood out in your memory in relation to the paper?

RD: Yes, I have a picture here on the wall of Orval Faubus carrying the pennant.

DS: Did you take that?

RD: That is my picture. How that picture was done is a pretty decent story. Leroy Donald and I were already in the car. We were going to travel through the silica mines. Faubus was coming, and we were waiting on him to get to the car. I looked out the window and saw this thing. I didn't even have time to set my camera. It is a little off angle and into the sun. I leaned over Leroy's lap and shot it through a car window because it was there.

DS: That picture has been used. . .

RD: He has used it every campaign. I don't know how many campaigns. It was my first taste of politics. Since then, I don't know how much you are interested, I work as a political consultant now. I do quite well. I worked with Fulbright, McClelland, Wilbur Mills, Edwin Edwards in Louisiana, Waller in Mississippi, and. . .

DS: Let's get to that. We want to talk about --- You went to work for the *Gazette* in 1956. How long were you there?

RD: I was gone for a little while, a short period, when I decided I was going to go back to El Dorado and open a business. I was down there a few months and didn't like it. I called Nelson to see if I could go back to work. He said, "Yes, come on

back.” I went on back. I left in November of ‘63.

DS: That was for good?

RD: Yes, that was for good.

DS: Was there a reason you left?

RD: I am not sure that you want to get into it. Yes.

DS: Well, I think that it ought to be part of the record.

RD: Well, it is. . .

DS: Unless you don’t want to.

RD: I don’t mind. I have no secrets. Basically, it began, I considered myself as the third man on the totem pole in the photography department. I went to El Dorado of all places with Leroy Donald, who was also from El Dorado, to cover the homecoming of Donna Axum from El Dorado who was Miss America at the time. Leroy and I drew the assignment because we knew the town, the people, and her. We went down to cover it. This is back when it was hard to get around in the state. We flew down on a National Guard plane. The press as a pool as they do now. We were there, and I knew how to do some better pictures because of my familiarity with the place. I got on the wrong side of the crowd. We were late getting back to the airport. The plane was taxiing to leave when we got there. We tried to stop them. They said, “No, you don’t have to worry about that. The general or somebody has his plane here, and he will be going back in a little while and you can go back with him.” So I thought, “That’s fine.” Leroy left me and he was going to stay over and cover the weekend. After an hour or two wait, the

general decided that he was going to stay over. There were no commercial flights out of El Dorado to Little Rock. There are no buses or trains. There was no way. I'm not even sure they had rent cars then. I tried to save a nickel and knew Leroy would be calling in. I called him and said, "I'm stuck. What do you want me to do? What is the plan? I need to find out what the paper wants me to do." Leroy says, "Okay." He called me later and said, "Just stay here. We are going to spend the night and shoot the things tonight. You can go back tomorrow. We will use UPI pictures tonight and run a picture page on Sunday." Well, that sounded all right to me, so I waited at the airport for Leroy to come pick me up. We went in and covered things that night and the next day. We spent the night at Leroy's fiancée's. I remember sleeping on the floor. I got up the next morning and was trying to find a way back to Little Rock. I had Saturday and Sunday to work. At least Saturday. We had a fourth guy by then named Dan Miller who was there to cover me on Saturday until I got back.

[End of Side 1 - Tape 1]

[Beginning of Side 2, Tape 1]

RD: On Saturday afternoon I had ridden back with the chaperone of Miss North Little Rock. I think her name was Carolyn, but I can't remember her last name right now. They dropped me off at the paper. When I went up, I was in a hurry because I had to process those pictures and get them ready for a picture page on Sunday, I thought. When I got there, Dan says, "Man, where have you been?" I said, "What do you mean where have I been? I have been in El Dorado shooting

the thing.” He said, “Man, they are looking for you. They didn’t know where you were. Nelson is asking and he is mad. Everybody is mad.” I said, “Leroy called in and talked to the people. As far as I am concerned, here is the story. An AP picture this morning and a picture page tomorrow.” I was processing my film as we spoke. He said, “You better go up and see Nelson right now.” So I went up to Nelson’s little cubicle in the front. If you have ever been there, it is a little glassed-off place with his name on it. He had the only TV set in the place where we could watch baseball on Sundays, or football. We had a long discussion. The point being, I explained that I was third man on the totem pole. Leroy was the state editor. I figured he was in charge. I told the story of what happened. I said, “I am sorry that I have caused confusion. I think I did right. If it came up, I would probably do the same thing again.” Nelson chastised me pretty good about it being my responsibility to get the pictures back and on and on. Again, I said, “I am sorry. I asked him if he was going to fire me.” He said, “No. But it is your responsibility to get the pictures back.” I said, “Well, I feel like I did the right thing. I will be here two more weeks unless you decide you want me to leave early.” We were at an impasse. I remember walking out of his cubicle and by Shelton’s desk and I was kind of mad at Shelton at the time anyway. I did about a 180 and went back in there and said, “No, goddamn it. I am going to leave right now.” He said, “Well, you better think about it. You’re mad. Why don’t you just go home and think about it and then come back?” I said, “No, I am out of here.” So I went back and got all my stuff. I left my film in the washer for Dan

to take care of. I went on my way and didn't have the faintest idea what I was going to do. It was a sad day, but I felt like that. I had all weekend to think about it. I went in on Monday and apologized. I went to Mr. Nelson and said, "I am sorry for the manner in which I left, not that I left. And I am gone. If it is going to put you guys in bad shape then I will stay for two weeks. I am gone and that is it." I understand later on that Mr. Patterson got kind of upset about it. That's just hearsay.

DS: But you had made your decision.

RD: Yes. There I was without a job, a new baby. . .

DS: Before we move on, is there anything else about your tenure at *Arkansas Gazette*? Any experience? What was your favorite picture? Was it that one of Orval? Or did you have any others?

RD: There were a lot. I have probably gotten more acclaim with that one. There was one that I did here at Hot Springs. I had climbed up in one of the control towers and used a really long lens and shot the horses coming down the track with the Rehab Center and the Arlington in the background. That was a really nice picture. That was the first time it had been done. I always took pleasure in what I thought was beating the other photographers. If you go out on an assignment --- it got to be where it was a game --- I would let them shoot whatever they wanted. When they got through, I would always shoot one and would beat them, or thought I did, anyway. That was a lot of pleasure. Thousands of pictures that I shot live in my memory. I can tell you who was standing on what side and

everything else. There were so many it is too hard.

DS: You were long gone Rodney, what did you feel like when you heard it was going to close?

RD: Sick. I take the *Democrat* now because you try to stay informed. That is the first thing you do in the morning is to read the newspaper. Of course, television helps some, but it doesn't nearly tell you enough. I take the *Democrat* now. I have never been able to force myself to write a check or call it the *Democrat-Gazette* because it just isn't.

DS: You're my man. I don't call it that either.

RD: It's the *Democrat* always was the *Democrat*, and it is a second-rate newspaper. As far as I am concerned, it is worse now and it is cheaper now. It is owned by the people that owned the place when I started with the C.E. Palmers' son-in-law's son. They are the cheapest, slantedest people in the world. I can remember when I worked at the *Gazette*, those people would rewrite our stories and rewrite only the lead paragraphs and get their own by-lines on things. There is an old story around that we planted a couple of stories to see if they would just pick up the stuff. Supposedly, they did. They are just so subjective over there now. It is all written from their point of view or the owner's point of view. Back when this stuff was going on, we had to have two reliable sources and checked everything. Obviously, they never checked anything. We put the stories in the paper, and they would rewrite the leads. What reliable sources did they check? It just frustrates me to no end that there isn't a decent state newspaper.

DS: We all grieved for that, and I know you did. All right then, let's go on from 1963. You have done a lot of things. Just take it, if you can, chronologically. Tell me what you have been doing.

RD: I didn't have anything to do in 1963. I had been doing pictures for Wayne Cranford and Jim Johnson. They had started a small advertising, a really small advertising agency. I had been doing their pictures. I had a dark room in the back of the building where their office was, so I could work there rather than at the paper. We called it side work back then. I was going to see if I could get on at AP or UPI or one of the papers. I wanted a similar job because I liked what I was doing. Wayne Cranford talked me into staying in Little Rock and offered me the use of the dark room. They would answer the phone for me and do my bookkeeping for me and advance me money for a draw to keep me there to do the pictures. We had a really good series. We had come from nothing to being one of the better agencies in this part of the country. We started with those two guys and mostly my pictures. Our first big account was the First National Bank, which was a great *Gazette* supporter. The only ads I can ever remember being on the front of the business page was a reward for them sticking to the *Gazette* back during the Central High mess and not pulling their advertising like other people did. I stayed there and my business was growing about as well as Cranford and Johnson, as it was called back then. I had to get another office as I was working out of the coffee room in the Pyramid Building. That was where my enlarger was. I was getting as many calls as Cranford. I called Willie Allen, whom I had

worked with during some summers at the *Gazette*. He was a good photographer, and he and I thought a lot alike. I think he was either in Dallas or Austin working for UPI. I said, "Come up and help me. I have more work than I can do. I think you will like it." He came up, and we started Dungan/Allen in 1963. We did that until '77, I guess. I did the first video or film for Cranford. That's another story. It was a thing called "Diamond in the Rough," for AIDC. Wayne and I had words about that. I guess it is pretty evident that I am Irish. He kept telling me that I could do it, and I said, "No, I have never even used a Hawkeye-looking movie camera before." He said, "Well, you can do it." He gave me two or three films to look at. He said, "See if you can't do better than this." I looked at them and said, "If I can't do better than that, I ought to get out of photography." So we did that one, and I think they still use it, but they have updated it. I worked with Bill Stover, who, back then, also had some newspaper background. That's how we got into the video and film. I think we did the first color commercial ever done in Arkansas. It was a film for Southern Equitable Life Insurance Company. We edited in the camera as we shot it. It ran on Channel 7. That was when, I had been a stringer for *Life* and *Time* for Bill Rutherford, who has recently passed on. He was stringer for *Life*, and so every time they had a story break down here, if I was available I got to shoot it until the big guys came in from New York and Chicago. That always really upset me. I had done enough free-lance for them. Since I was on my own time, I could work for them anytime. This is probably getting too long.

DS: No, go ahead.

RD: Anyway, I had really gotten tired of the people. I would be there to start and hold up until the reinforcement came. I always felt I was as good as they were. It had always been my hope to work for *Life Magazine*. They had a story, the Arkansas Prison Story, where they found all those bodies at Cummings or Tucker, I don't remember. Bill Rutherford called me, and it was in the middle of the night. He said, "You have to go." I said, "No, I am not going. I am just not going. I will go down there and be up all night, and the next morning the guys will be in from Chicago or New York. They will tell me that I can go home. I am not doing it." He said, "You have to do it. You owe me a favor." I said, "I will tell you what. Let me put it this way. I will go down there and shoot it if I am the only one who shoots it. I don't want you sending somebody in." We hassled about that for awhile. He finally said, "Okay." There was a bureau chief out of Chicago named Gerald Moore, who was originally from New Mexico, the youngest bureau chief they ever had. He said, "Gerald is coming down, but he is not bringing a photographer. You can stay." I still had my attitude. *Life Magazine* --- if you shoot a head shot, they want five 36 exposure rolls. I grew up on speed graphics and knew how to pick my shots. I was just Obsitnik enough, I guess, to do it the way I wanted to. When we got to the prison, I shot what needed to be shot. I shot it horizontally, vertically, in focus, and out of focus. With the lighting, I shot the shots that should be shot. I did it the way I had been trained and the way I knew how to do. Mr. Moore showed up. He kept

asking me, “Are you shooting enough?” I said, “Yes. I have covered it, don’t worry about it.” We put the barb wire in focus with one picture and out of focus on the other. It was a hard time. I shot some of the prisoners. Just a whole bunch of good stuff. Gerald got ready to go and wanted the film to take with him. I gave it to him. I only gave him 5-36 exposure rolls. He just about came unglued. He said, “My God, is this all that you have shot?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Oh, man, you know how we do things. We want more pictures than this.” I said, “Don’t worry about it. It’s covered.” So he sent the film to New York to the lab and went back to Chicago. It wasn’t but about a day or so that the number two guy on the mast head on *Time, Inc.* or *Life* — I think his name was Milt Orshefsky — called Gerald. He said, “Who is the guy that shot these pictures in Arkansas?” Gerald said, “I meant to tell you about that. I was going to apologize.” He said, “No, you don’t need to apologize. That guy has an eye.” Gerald said, “We just use him for a stringer down in Arkansas.” He said, “That guy has an eye. You can use him anywhere you want to and anytime you want to.” I saw the proofs. They would enlarge the photographs and blow up the 35MM contacts and mark what to print. They marked almost everything that I had shot. We had a big story going and then the Embassy in Saigon got bombed. We lost a cover. Those pictures were in *Life*, and *Time*, AP. Everyone picked them up. They were everywhere. So from that day on, every time there was an opening I got a real good choice on it. It got to the point where they would fly me from Little Rock to Chicago. I eventually turned down a contract with them

because I was tired of living out of a suitcase. I covered the James Earl Ray story, and he was on the front cover. We were all over Missouri and Illinois and had three motels in two states in one night, and I didn't get to sleep in any of them. I would buy a new toothbrush everywhere I went. We were ahead of the FBI. We had been places that they had not even been. It was good. I covered Eisenhower's funeral train, hurricane Camille, the Memphis March, all kinds of neat stories. I can remember coming back --- I had been in Chicago doing a story on the Blackstone Rangers and the Devil Disciples, when they were having their war and the priests were hiding the guns in the church. Here I was living on the south side of Chicago, a little blonde blue-eyed white guy, that talked slow with five cameras around his neck and lived to talk about it. I thanked Gerald for letting me do some things. He said, "No, you have earned it." I had an opportunity to work full time for Time, Inc. I came back, and the next day I had a place on Greer's Ferry. I went out in a boat on the lake and thought about how neat it was and how bad it was up there. That was about the time that I decided that I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to live out of a suitcase. I would rather stay here. I would make less money, but I could pick and choose what I wanted to do. That's pretty well the end of that story. I worked for *Life* and *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Fortune*, and all the magazines that I wanted to work for. I got to realize a dream. I can thank the *Gazette*, *Obsitnik*, *Prescott*, *Moseley*, *Allbright*, and all those people for teaching me what was good news and what wasn't.

DS: How long have you been in this business?

RD: We had a studio in the train station. My mom got cancer in 1976, and my dad died the next day. My brother, sister, and I had to go down to Pine Bluff and take care of her. She died three months later. She always told me I was working too hard. We had like fifteen people working for us. I felt like I was doing all the work. It was time for me to slow down. When I got back, I went through the books. I figured out it was pointless, so Willie and I gave everybody a month's notice and closed Dungan/Allen. I worked out of my house in Little Rock for about a year or two. At the time I had clients all over the country. I wasn't working much in Little Rock anymore. I was mostly in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma, or wherever. Holiday Inn was a big account. I decided I was having to travel anyway. I might as well travel where I wanted to. I liked Hot Springs and love the Ouachitas. So I moved to Hot Springs in 1980. I bought a place on Lake Hamilton when it was not so crowded. I lived there until 1986. I moved out, and I am almost a recluse now. I live out by Lake Ouachita. I didn't even have an office over here. I worked out of my house. Oil went from \$50.00 a barrel to \$13.00 a barrel overnight in 1980. I lost a lot of Louisiana clients, as you can imagine. It was financed by the oil business. I had to go back to work. I eventually opened an office. That office was too small, and then I got this office which is a little bigger. I have had two or three people working for me. I have David Conrad with me now. He worked for me twenty years ago. We are mainly in video and political consulting. I have learned a lot. Probably over the years, with my reputation and photography, I learned enough by doing enough elections.

I have probably helped in over a thousand elections. My record of taking care of folks is pretty well known. I enjoy that, it is a lot of thinking, deep thinking. It is an awesome responsibility to mold the minds of millions. I enjoy that. We usually win.

DS: That is good. Rodney, you mentioned that when you left the *Gazette* you had a child. What has your marital life been?

RD: I was married to a girl named Barbara Meek. I married her in 1956 and brought her to Little Rock. We were married for twelve years and divorced. I was single for twelve years and caught up with all the things that I thought I had missed. I married another girl named Sandra Lily in about 1980, when I moved to Hot Springs. I was married to her for ten or twelve years. Then divorced again. Now I have been single for about twelve more years. Right now, single is the way it is. I am pretty set in my ways. I live with a little dog called "Kraut." He puts up with me and doesn't mind if I am in charge of the remote.

DS: What about children? You have a daughter?

RD: I have a daughter, Leslie, who was born in 1958. She is about 42 or 43 now. She lives in Little Rock and is doing well. It seemed like it took forever for her to grow up. I think she is finally there. I am really proud of her.

DS: Is there anything else that you would like to put on the record? I think we have covered a lot of territory. You have had an interesting career.

RD: It has been fun. I tell everybody that if I go tomorrow, I don't remember anything that I have missed. I don't know. Every time I look at the thing called a "paper,"

I have the *Sentinal Record* and the *Democrat* --- they are basically the same thing. They are owned by the same company. It is the same news. We don't even get a final edition of the *Democrat* because it would keep the people working later over here. To save that, we get the first edition. Anybody in the newspaper business knows that there's nothing in it. It is the day-before rehashed. It is just a sorry state for the newspapers in the world that people get a monopoly like the Hussmans and the Palmers. You can't open another newspaper because they will freeze you out just like they did the *Gazette*. You give away your advertisements until it is so unprofitable there is no point in it or you can't go on. I think when the *Gazette* finally shut down, the *Democrat* was giving their ads away. They went up twelve times what they were charging before. It just makes me sick. I feel like it is a blow to journalism on the whole. Now, if it isn't your opinion, it is not news. We are glorifying the people who are doing the news, who are supposed to be, in my opinion, public servants and be impartial observers. They are to report what they see and what they hear, not try to make a name for yourself on rumors, no facts, and no people to back things up. I am just old and cranky. I just don't like it.

DS: We both share that view. We both share the respect we have for the *Gazette*.
You certainly were fortunate.

RD: I think so.

[End of Interview]