

Gazette Project

Interview with

Orville Henry
Little Rock, Arkansas
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Interviewer: Jim Bailey

Orville Henry: This is Orville Henry, and I grant permission for this interview to become part of the *Arkansas Gazette* Research Project.

Jim Bailey: Let's go back to the beginning. You grew up on the western edge of Little Rock when it was sort of out in the country.

OH: Right. Across the street from where the Dillard's shopping center [Park Plaza] is now. 216 North McKinley. We called it the edge of Hickory Nut Mountain, and there was not any house – you had to go two miles behind our house to where there was another house, which was a goat farm.

JB: And the street car or trolley line ended at approximately where St. Vincent Hospital is now?

OH: Where Ray Winder Field is.

JB: Where Ray Winder Field is now.

OH: That was number six Fair Park, and it [the bus stop] was 1.6 miles from our house – which we would cut through the woods, but then we would walk down Markham Street and through Fair Park [now War Memorial Park].

JB: And your father was a salesman?

OH: A traveling salesman all his life and a good one. Had to be, to raise eight kids in a

depression.

JB: And were you, then, the second, third or fourth?

OH: I was the fourth. There were five boys and three girls.

JB: And you did a lot of your growing up at the Fair Park Golf Course and at Travelers Field [later called Ray Winder Field].

OH: Right. Those were the two – I joined the Knot Hole Gang at Travelers Field in 1935, I think. That would put me at ten years. I was real little for my age. And one of my highlights was I got left behind one night, and Johnny Dickshot [a player] took me home.

JB: How did you happen to go to work for the *Gazette* when you were – just as you turned seventeen?

OH: I decided when I was in the ninth grade at Pulaski Heights Junior High that I was going to be a newspaper person, and I was on the school paper there in the ninth grade. And immediately when I went to Central, I had it arranged so that I – they had a real newspaper facsimile deal there, and you could come to work on the paper an hour before school started, and so I scheduled myself to work for it. In the tenth and eleventh grades I would be a – well, just more or less a volunteer, and then the twelfth grade I would take a credit course in journalism. Actually, I was in journalism all three years, spent two hours or more under Helen Hall. So just when I finished high school, I knew I wanted to work at the *Gazette*, so I went down there.

JB: Excuse me. Did you finish in mid-term, like January of 1942?

OH: Right. And so I went down and got an interview with Clyde Dew, who was the curmudgeon managing editor and a good one, but was really tough. But he loved Ben Epstein, and he loved boxing and horse racing. Oddly enough, those are the earliest American sports. All in the 1870s and 1880s, you had boxing and horse racing.

JB: What was A.R. Nelson then? Was he a copy reader?

OH: He was a copy reader getting ready to go to the Navy, I think it was.

JB: Well, Epstein was the sports editor and . . .

OH: Wilbur Johnson left for the Navy. [Johnson had been a young assistant to Epstein.]

JB: Also known as Sally Johnson.

OH: Sally, right. Wilbur C. Johnson. He was a golf writer, and there was no golf to speak of. He didn't have much to do. Basically, there was a two-man sports staff, and Ben was full-time, and you might say that the secondary guy was just – he was really part-time. That is about the way they paid him. He was part-time.

JB: Did you have chores other than sports when you first came on staff?

OH: When I joined the paper, I was a copy boy, and I didn't apply to be a sports writer. I applied for anything they had on the paper. I never thought anything about writing sports. My ambition was to be the editor of the *Gazette*. I mean, that's crazy, but . . .

JB: Well, you could have been if you hadn't sidetracked into sports.

OH: Well, I got locked into sports, and the thing about it was it got to be so good.

Sports after World War II jumped, jumped, jumped about the way it did when T.V. came in the late fifties.

JB: Yes.

OH: And the job got to be big and very, very nice and very good, and so I never thought about anything else.

JB: Did you have to take a turn on the switchboard?

OH: Oh, yes. I did. I would give the switchboard – Mary Grace, she was the switchboard lady and was very nice to me – I would fill in for her when she was on breaks. I would also go to the post office four or five times, back and forth, pick up papers, pick up the mail, I mean.

JB: Did you start strictly doing copy boy stuff and gradually work into helping out in sports?

OH: Ben Epstein did one thing. He was the sports editor, and he wrote a column four or five days a week. The rest of the time he just hung around and waited until it was time to get off and go to a party somewhere. And so Ben would sit around – he would come sit with me at the switchboard, which was right outside his office, and I had a flair for words or one thing or another and Ben was a Walter Winchell fan – who was a kind of a wordsmith – and Ben was interested in words, so we could play word games and so forth. And Ben kind of got interested in me and when – after about three months maybe – Sally Johnson left, then he talked Clyde Dew into letting me be in sports.

JB: That would have been in the summer of 1942?

OH: Yes, early.

JB: Well, at that time, as I understand it, the only people who had ever been *Gazette* sports editors as such were Henry “Heinie” Loesch, in the old, old days. I think he wound up as basically a business writer.

OH: News editor.

JB: Okay, and followed by Wilbur “Bill” Bentley and then by Ben Epstein, and that was all [the sports editors] up until the time you joined the paper.

OH: That’s right. And basically the reason I became sports editor after Ben left was that I was cheap. I had started out at \$14.00 a week as copy boy, and when they put me in sports, \$16.00 a week. I finally worked up pretty fast, but they gave me \$32.00 a week as my salary as sports editor.

JB: And that would have been like September of 1943?

OH: October, the 9th, 1943.

JB: Ben left, like, in September [for a job with the *New York Daily Mirror*].

OH: He left that very day or the day before. And they didn’t think there was going to be any sports during the war. And they never ever wanted much in the sports section unless there was a big fight or unless it was baseball.

JB: Well, the regular six-days-a-week sports page was like eight columns, wasn’t it?

OH: Or less. And Sunday would be parts of four pages.

JB: And they did the make up and such out on the regular news desk instead of in sports.

OH: Right. It wasn’t until about 1949 that I wrote headlines and made up pages. In

fact, nobody else was hardly allowed in the back shop. And it wasn't until really the war was over, the paper was sold by – the Allsops sold their interest to the Heiskell family for a million dollars.

JB: And that was approximately at the end of World War II?

OH: Yes. Well, it was about 1949 when they did that. And that caused Mr. J.N. [Heiskell] to be in complete charge because Fred Allsopp had been the business man and Mr. J.N. Heiskell had handled mainly the editorial pages and the news side.

JB: Yes.

OH: But Hugh Patterson, who had married Louise, Mr. Heiskell's daughter, he was from Pine Bluff, and he was in the war. He was with Harry Ashmore in Washington in some sort of administrative thing. And so he sent for Harry Ashmore to be the editor, and that is when everything started to happen. Harry was a brilliant man, and he reorganized the paper and put me in control of the whole works in sports – in other words, where I would handle the copy, write the headlines, and make up to a point. And then, eventually, we made it up entirely. And then I began to be familiar with the back shop and that sort of thing.

JB: Okay. When you were left with the sport section in 1943, you had no help?

OH: None.

JB: I know they probably didn't use the term interim in those days, but how long was your status interim before they confirmed you?

OH: There never was any interim status. I found out about it this way: everybody on

the – all the young news reporters wanted the job because – I hesitate to bring this up – but the graft.

JB: Wrestling promoters, boxing promoters.

OH: Right. And Negro Baseball as it was called then. They had to do something for you before you would put that in the paper, and the reason was that Clyde Dew, he had a rule, “Well, hell, if somebody controlled all the wrestlers, that wasn’t sport.” He said, “Make them take out an ad.” And you would bring up something, and we covered this. He said, “Well, how is it set up?” Today’s time we wouldn’t cover these things that are taking place in Alltel Arena now, where the league is controlled by one man, one man owns the entire league. We wouldn’t cover the wrestling that they have down there. He would say, “Take out an ad.”

JB: Clovis Copeland was one guy around the newsroom who was supposed to be interested in that job.

OH: Yes. He was. He was a part-time photographer. He sold pictures that he shot and so forth. Clovis was kind of a hustler, and it was known that he wanted it. But then they had a black man there named James Warren, who every Saturday night came around and shined shoes and was in the building as a sort of a handy man for various people. He had worked for Fred Heiskell, who was the managing editor until he died in 1929, and the paper just kept James on. Nobody knew it – I didn’t know it until later – but James Warren was the closest man to Elijah Muhammad. James Warren, who shined shoes and ran errands and was just a handy man at the paper, sent all his children through excellent colleges. And

when Elijah Muhammad or any prominent black man came to town, they stayed with James Warren. James Warren was a “Yes, sir, Massa” man. He played his role, but he and I had gotten to be good friends because I talked to him. I didn’t know it wasn’t – he and I talked like two friends and human beings.

JB: Yes. He was still going strong when I came to the *Gazette* in 1956.

OH: Well, at any rate, James would shine Clyde Dew’s shoes, and then he would come into my little cubical, which was up on a platform there over the stairwell – and he said, “Mr. Henry, you’re going to be the next sports editor.” I said, “What are you talking about, James?” He said, “I just heard it from the man himself.” He played the role of the old darkie, but he was very shrewd, very smart and a wonderful person and never recognized in Little Rock for the part he played on Ninth Street.

JB: He told me, of course, years after that, he was talking about his son-in-law. His daughter, apparently, had gone to some northern city and married this guy who was a big shot Muslim – and he was talking about how they would come visit and he would say, “You know who they had with them the last trip?” “No, no, James.” “Malcolm X.”

OH: Yes. James Warren, like I say, never recognized in Little Rock, was a very handy man in the black movement before it ever – while it was still underground.

JB: I have heard like in the 1940s, the war-time years, you couldn’t even make a long distance call unless the managing editor gave prior approval.

OH: That’s right. To make long distance calls, for four or five years, you had to tell him what it was for and why. The newspaper was – I don’t know why – but the

Arkansas *Gazette* never had a lot of money. Eventually, in my middle years there, they had a monopoly because the *Democrat* was down to nothing.

JB: Yes.

OH: And they still operated on a pinch-penny basis.

JB: Carrick Heiskell was going to be the heir apparent after the war, but he got killed.

OH: He was, no doubt about it. I knew Carrick.

JB: Was he the brother of Louise?

OH: Yes.

JB: Mr. Heiskell's son, brother of Louise.

OH: Yes. But Carrick, who was a kind of a – he was well-bred. They all came from [the] country club and had rich school background and everything. He was sort of a light-hearted person, a little bit waspish. And I knew then that when the war was over, he would run the paper. But then his airplane crashed in India.

JB: So Mr. Heiskell went on and on and on.

OH: Funny thing was, about a week after I joined the paper, [society reporter] Nell Cotnam took a picture of me and did a little interview written around the picture.

JB: She was still there when I got there.

OH: Yes, Nell was a bridesmaid at Mr. J.N.'s wedding back in about 1904 or something – and Nell Cotnam was ageless and perennial and was the doyenne of Little Rock society. She played bridge at 4:00 o'clock every Thursday at the Little Rock Country Club. And that was her – the fact of her tie with Mr. Heiskell. She knew everybody.

JB: I remember her name and everything, but one of the few things I remember about her, she came back to sports one day with a wedding announcement. It was Travis Jackson, the baseball hall of famer from Waldo, and his son was getting married. And she said, "Is this anybody?" Well, it was a famous baseball player, and that didn't seem to be good enough. [Laughter]

OH: When the New York Giants were World Champions in the 1920s, he was the best shortstop in baseball.

JB: Well, after the war, you gradually built a staff. You started with people like Ernie Crone and, I don't know, two or three others.

OH: My first assistant was Pat Hogan.

JB: Yes.

OH: Part-time, and he played baseball.

JB: Was he your very first? I know he lasted several years.

OH: He was the very first. I found him in Little Rock Central – and he played Legion baseball and was good, and all the Boys Club sports. He came up and, obviously, he knew sports, and he wanted to be sports writer. He was a great kid. Today he's retired as the assistant to the President at Florida State University. Then Tom Dygard – I would get . . .

JB: Well, you got several bright fellows.

OH: Jim Standard.

JB: Well, that was later. You had several bright fellows who, I guess, went to LRJC, worked at the paper, and then went on to the university, like Dygard and Standard

and Jerry Dhonau.

OH: Right, right. It's amazing what I – there was nothing in the budget for a three-, four-, five-, six-, seven-man sports department. But what they did let me do is every once in a while I could add a part-time employee. If he was any good, then we would keep him. And I really – it was a problem for me. I was so damn young, and I didn't know how to be a sports editor. I didn't know how to write sports.

JB: Bill Bentley, who had been there at the *Gazette* two or three different times in two or three jobs, came back the last time about 1950, somewhere along in there.

OH: Yes. I can't stress to you how important this thought was. They did not really want a sports department at the *Arkansas Gazette*. They spent all their money on the editorial page – three columns. There would be six men, eventually, and some of them making big money, writing editorials or doing nothing all day. So here's what I had to – if I asked for anything, I was not apt to get it except in the basis of compromise. I got part of my help [from] people like Chuck Miller and Bill Bentley, people that they had hired as reporters who did not fit the niche that they were hired for. They were not really doing well. So they said, "We can give them to sports."

JB: They did that years after that.

OH: Oh, for years and years. And the other thing was I had the Friday night extras. On Friday night we would have up to six, eight, ten high school kids who would take football games over the phone. Wally Hall was one of them once – and so that is

where I found the jewels.

JB: Even in the Gannett days, they still foisted off failed copy readers from the main rim onto sports.

OH: Exactly. I was never allowed to go out and hire somebody who was trained for the exact job that I wanted, and I always had to take their flops that they couldn't – the *Gazette* never fired anybody. Instead, they would push them off on sports. But the ones who were the best for me were the ones that I hired as beginners. Like yourself.

JB: And Dygard.

OH: Dygard. An awful lot of them.

JB: And Harry King.

OH: Yes. Harry King was the worst one I ever had, but he is, right now, the best sports writer in Arkansas.

JB: Well, you hired at least three guys, Dygard, Robert Shaw, and Bill Simmons, who became AP [Associated Press] Bureau chiefs.

OH: Okay. How about Tom Dygard, who became the number-two man in the Associated Press in this country? But he died, didn't he? How about Gene Foreman, editor of the *Philadelphia Enquirer*? How about Wes Pruden, editor of the *Washington Times*?

JB: Did Pruden work for you?

OH: Yes, I started him. He writes me all the time.

JB: And Foreman started with you?

OH: Yes. He was a part-timer, started with me. But they are people I started as Friday night extras. And then the ones who were promising and good we would talk into coming two nights a weeks and, finally, the first little opening we had. And then Ashmore helped me there. I would have a guy like that, and he'd say, "Well, just put him on the payroll. Go ahead." And Ashmore was the first person who ever really expressed a lot of interest on the paper, the first in that other people would not give me the time of day. And I think it was good for me in a way because it made me work harder to learn and learn and learn. I never had a mentor except for Epstein, who did everything he could for me. But he told me, "Don't be like me." It took me two years after he left before one day Clyde Dew came in with a long piece of copy I had written for a column, and he had cut it up and pasted it up and written down in that number two pencil – he didn't use a number-two pencil. He used a number-three, little bitty, you know – and he said, "What the bleep does this mean?" And I said, "It means this." "Why in the hell didn't you say so in the first place?" That very moment, I decided, "I'm never going to create a word or a slang or something. I am going to say exactly what it is. I will repeat it over and over." You would have to use five different words for a baseball in a column. You'd call it the pellet, the bean [laughs], and that was flowery writing. And I got that out of my system, trying to be like Epstein. And Epstein was a great person and, really, a New York sports writer. . . .

JB: Well, you mentioned he was a Winchell fan. He tried to do that kind of breezy, Broadway column sort of stuff.

OH: And everything . . .

JB: Show biz kind of stuff.

OH: And everything was to build up some chump. He enjoyed making a celebrity out of a nobody better than anybody I know. [Laughs]

JB: Al Montgomery, the Count of Cauliflower.

OH: Yes. Yes.

JB: Well, your mentors when you were first at the *Gazette* were pretty much Epstein and Henry Levy?

OH: Henry wanted to be like a Damon Runyon character. He tried to be a small-time hood, which would mean he would be a big-time hood in Arkansas. He failed, but he was still very successful at a lot of minor rackets, including promoting the biggest fight ever held in Arkansas. And Henry was a wonderful person, and he also knew his role – half Jewish, half Irish – but he knew how – what was sad about Henry [was] that he had to keep in his place. He didn't intrude at the country club. He never played in a country club golf tournament. He never dressed in the locker room. He knew what a fine Jewish boy was supposed to do. But he was one heck of a guy, and he was very good to me. I inherited him from Epstein. He was Epstein's good buddy.

JB: Yes, he was Epstein's big patron.

OH: And so he became mine. And I inherited Hazel Walker [basketball star] from Epstein, and, of course, we were very close until she died.

JB: Well, of course, she wasn't playing professional ball then. She was still playing

amateur ball, but eventually Henry became the business manager of her Arkansas Travelers basketball team.

OH: Hazel loved Henry and Henry loved Hazel. She had gotten messed up with two marriages and would not do that again, but they remained very close. And she actually buried him. I was a pallbearer, and she and I stood at the casket. And Henry, he knew this was the age where you just didn't write about certain things.

JB: He was a guy who got into something big for a couple years and then dumped it and went on.

OH: Right.

JB: He was in boxing. Then played golf for years.

OH: Whatever. Played golf every day and then, when he quit, he quit. He went from one thing – he ran slot machines. When he quit, he quit.

JB: Is it true that when he won the Oil Belt Tournament in El Dorado that Clyde Dew put a headline, something like, "NLR Gambler Wins Oil Belt"?

OH: Well, he would use words worse than that. I wrote about ten paragraphs, which is what we normally give that tournament, and I went down with Henry and played in the tournament myself. We covered the Oil Belt at that time. And the story I sent in Dew converted into four paragraphs with a snide headline on it. By this time Henry had long since given up all his gambling. He had owned a bookmaking joint on Washington Avenue in North Little Rock, and he had six or seven runners, and most of them got drafted, and when he shut it down, that was it. He never again was involved in gambling, except maybe on the golf course.

He and Joe Tennenbaum, they played for one hundred dollars a hole. And I played with them, and I thought that was really big – and Henry gave Joe Tennenbaum a stroke a hole for one hundred dollars a hole. Almost no money ever changed hands because they didn't press or didn't alter the bet.

JB: Well, in the 1940s, when Epstein was here – and I guess afterwards for a time – the *Gazette* owned – was it KLRA they owned?

OH: Yes.

JB: And somebody told me the other day that there was a time when both KLRA and KGHI were upstairs on the third floor. Is that right?

OH: Ah.

JB: KLRA for sure was upstairs, right?

OH: Yes, second floor, yes. I couldn't swear about KGHI, but KGHI was a very minor station. KLRA would be like the number-one station in Arkansas now.

JB: I wonder why they gave it up.

OH: They sold it for two hundred thousand dollars to somebody. The *Gazette*, business-wise, was as poorly managed as anything you can imagine. They had every chance for somebody to make a lot of money and do a lot of things. But Mr. J.N., for one thing, was extremely conservative when it came to getting out of his little arena. Mr. J.N. went though – from 1906 to, golly, I guess it was in the 1980s when he died [1972]. About a week after I was hired, he kind of came – he had a little loping style. It was very graceful, but [there was] almost a limp, too. But he walked down, shoulders turning, walking through. I saw him coming. He

walked in, and he kind of grinned at me. He had a newspaper in his hand – you never saw him without a newspaper – and he said, “Mr. Henry, I would like to make a deal with you. This is your first week on the job, and if I don’t have to read the sports page, you don’t have [to read the] editorial page.” And we had the greatest relationship, and maybe five times in all the years I would get a note from him, and I would go in, and I would explain to him why we couldn’t do this. And his country club pals would put him on things, and I would tell him why it didn’t fit our policy or whatever. And he said, “I’ll accept that. Okay.” So when he had his hundredth birthday, he sat on a little dais at the country club. When I got to him, I almost had tears in my eyes and he grinned, and he said, “Well, Mr. Henry, you and I have become a couple of old fogies together, haven’t we?” [Laughter] He really was . . . just a super, super person.

JB: How was the transition from Clyde Dew to Nelson? How did that happen?

OH: It was wonderful. All at once the craziest thing happened when Ashmore and Hugh got together, and they made the major changes. They had to have a new business office, and they got two people from a failed paper in Indiana, J.R. Williamson and [Leon] Reed. Leon was circulation. Williamson was advertising. We had the worst relationships with advertisers at that time, and it was pretty hard for Williamson to do anything about it because he was not really a huckster, but he fit the *Gazette*. Reed became the best mind at the paper, business-wise and everything else, and Harry was the best newspaper person. Harry would have staff meetings that we couldn’t believe. They were short, but he would – of course, he

was an eloquent man and came from the *Charlotte News* and had been in Washington. And he was the first person who ever encouraged me – I noticed on a bulletin board there was a little clipping pasted there, and he said, “This is an excellent piece of journalism by our sports editor. You should all react in this manner when something like this comes up.” What it was — because I had to learn everything, I felt that the readers ought to know what I was learning. So as I learned, it gave me a great chance to develop a style of long expositions, but I did it in detail. I stumbled into a style that was to state a fact, use an anecdote, state a fact, anecdote. And that way you could go on and on and write a long story and not bore people.

JB: Yes.

OH: Eventually I was writing stories so long it was ridiculous. I mean, any football game story would start on page one and then fill up an inside page on the jump even for . . .

JB: That was later.

OH: Later, much later. But the way I started, though, was in that way. My first idol was John Fletcher. John Fletcher wrote a Sunday column and was a reporter and part-time city editor, but he had some kind of heart problem or something else. He couldn't get out and run around.

JB: Maybe I was thinking of him instead Heinie Loesch a while ago. Did Fletcher do business stuff on Sunday?

OH: Yes. And he took on the truckers . . .

JB: But I never saw him. He was never down at the paper.

OH: Never there, by the 1950s, but previously, he would come in and say things to me and talk to me and comment on something I did. And then, I thought he wrote the best sentences. Also, I thought that he had a lot of guts. He also wrote a hard-hitting political column. He wasn't afraid of governors or anybody. Of course, I also had Spider Rowland in my office for about a year or two.

JB: Yes. The sports office and Spider Rowland's space was the same part of the newsroom?

OH: Yes. He wouldn't be there that much, but we talked a lot. And he wrote those one-liners. And, of course, he wrote the humor column, which was as good as some of the stuff that was in New York. He also was a drunk and had been shot up and everything else and was at the end of his rope really. After Harry S. Truman beat Thomas E. Dewey, the next day his one-liner in the *Gazette* editorial page [read], "Now we know what the 'S' stands for" and, of course, implied that it was Superman.

JB: Yes. Well, Nelson, though, when did he take over from Dew? Did Dew have to be ousted?

OH: It was a very difficult thing. Clyde Dew was a tyrant. It didn't make [a difference as to] who they were; he would be afraid of certain women like Nell Cotnam. He would never touch her. But anybody who didn't have any clout, I mean, he would rip them to shreds. And he set fire around the rim – he smoked a corn cob pipe, and he would tap it out into the wastebasket. Not long [after], there would be a

fire, and he didn't even take notice. The other people would have to come and jump up and down on it. [Laughter] And he never mentioned it, never referred to it. And, of course, he would cut – use his little seamstress scissors to cut up your story, and he would rewrite his own observations in there and paste them in there and in his handwriting. He didn't type. I guess he might have typed a headline. But the thing about Clyde Dew – In 1947, Carolyn and I were about to be married, and I went to see Mr. Dew. It was early September, and, of course, her mother had set the date – you don't have any choice in that – but I said, "Mr. Dew, I'm getting ready to get married." And he said, "Goddamn it. Another son-of-a-bitch doesn't know when he is well off." He said, "Go ahead, you have a week." That was the way life was with him, but you know what? Harry Ashmore was a diplomat. He could have been a president. Hell, he was really a great man. He was able to talk to Clyde Dew and let him know that he didn't have any choice. He'd come there in 1906 and had been top desk man, and then he had become managing editor in 1929. And this was about . . .

JB: So he had been at the paper since 1906?

OH: I think so. Came from Jackson, Michigan. Okay, so after he was fired, it was not generally known. They didn't just announce it right away. In fact, Heinie Loesch was also – they put Heinie on part-time, and they made Nelson the news editor, or the managing editor. No, he was the news editor first. So Clyde Dew and I had never been on a man-to-man basis. So I was standing somewhere, and he came on by me and kind of tapped on me on the shoulder and said, "Looky here," and

showed me his gold watch. And I thought, “Son-of-a-bitch.” They gave him five thousand dollars and a gold watch, and that was his – he worked six and a half days a week for all those years and long hours.

JB: That would have been somewhere around 1948 or 1949?

OH: 1949, somewhere along there, yes. Dew and Heinie Loesch used to yell, “Orville!” I could hear it all over the building. You see, I was twenty, twenty-one, and they were sixty-one, and here I was the only young person on the whole thing, and all I did was get yelled at. But that was good for me really.

JB: At what stage did the strike come? Late in 1949 or 1950?

OH: 1950, I think. Bob Douglas was on the winning – No, Bob Douglas lost that one and then . . .

JB: Douglas was on the other side in the later one [a guild movement, not a strike, in 1974].

OH: Well, the funny thing about this one – I was a bone of contention in both of them, but eventually I was excluded from both of them because I could not be covered in the union.

JB: You were a supervisor?

OH: Right. What did happen is that I was working twice as hard. I even had to do copy boy stuff during the strike. Everybody had to pitch in.

JB: Well, the back shop didn’t observe the picket lines.

OH: Right. They crossed. Well, the ruination of the *Gazette* in [my] mind started with [back shop foreman] Ernest Dodd and his brother, dominating the composing

room and getting their way. Hugh and Williamson were so afraid of the union that they let Ernest use whatever ways he could to control that union.

JB: It turned into a tame house union.

OH: Exactly, exactly. And the reason was – Ernest Dodd and A.T. Dodd, the two top men, the brothers – A.T. was just the laziest person that ever lived, and Ernest could have been very capable, but he turned into a company man. And the union – the *Gazette*'s management let that union dictate all their policies really.

JB: But then, eventually, that union had to last for years and years and years without a new contract.

OH: Yes, sir.

JB: Dodd would routinely – of course, sports copy is late because ball games happen at night and so forth – but when you're on deadline, trying to make a second edition and even the city edition, Dodd would routinely shuffle sports to the bottom of the pile and leave anything on news side on top.

OH: We protested this endlessly, and finally they put in a stamp, where you stamped the time on copy as it made various stages. And one of the happiest days of my life was when we sat down in an emergency meeting of, I guess, the department heads in Williamson's office downstairs, and . . . I said, "Mr. Dodd, isn't your philosophy that since sports happens late, we might as well put the blame on it?" He said, "Yes." He finally admitted that he was doing exactly what you said. He was just rolling our stuff over, so it would be last, and we would be standing there with a make-up page and an empty form there, not a thing in it.

JB: Oh, I have seen him take his hands and shuffle those papers.

OH: Yes. Yes. And so they could always make us the goat for everything. And, of course, they blamed us for expenses since we had to travel.

JB: Yes, we had to travel and we had to spend money.

OH: We were the ones who cost them. The news department didn't do near the travel we did. Nothing took place in Little Rock.

JB: Well, now, at the time you became sports editor and as World War II was winding down, the big sports items were, of course, the Little Rock Travelers, Little Rock High School football, and Pine Bluff and North Little Rock and so forth. The Razorbacks were just kind of a once-a-year curiosity. They came down and played a game a year at Quigley Stadium.

OH: Everybody on the city desk got free tickets, and everybody wrote their own little story, three to eight paragraphs, about the game.

JB: Well, of course, when Arkansas brought in John Barnhill, the whole thing turned around. How did you persuade the paper that the main sports story was a couple of hundred miles to the north?

OH: Okay. It dawned on me that the only thing I'd ever thought about in my life was working for the *Gazette*, and here I was working for the *Gazette*, which was home delivered in all seventy-five counties, and the only thing everybody in Arkansas agreed upon, not as much then as a little later, was the Razorbacks. And in all seventy-five counties you had people in power, who really were Arkansas, mostly University of Arkansas lawyers, so I thought it would be to my best interest, but I

wasn't the one. The one who did this, who got this going, was Gordon Campbell. Mr. J.N.'s office was right off the city room. They sent for me one day and said, "Mr. J.N. wants to see you." So I went in, and there sat this man, and he said, "Mr. Henry, this is Mr. Gordon Campbell, and he wants to visit with us about something. He thinks that, in this time of growing sports interest, we should do more to support the Razorbacks." And so I said, "Sure." And he said, "Well, he wants to take you up to Fayetteville for this last game this year."

JB: Would that have been the last game of 1945?

OH: 1943 or 1944. 1944, probably. It may have even been the last of 1943, because the way I got up there was – [assistant coach] Clyde Van Sickle had been scouting, maybe, the Little Rock Central game with North Little Rock. He was here in a state car, and he could drive me up there, and I could come back with somebody else. Well, I didn't have a car then to take a trip, so that's how they did it. It might have been 1943. This is something that occurred in the off season of 1943. I was called to Gordon Campbell's office in the Wallace Building, and he was general manager for Aetna. He was kind of a big mover and shaker around town and a big member of the Little Rock Country Club. He was head of the [game] officials' association because he had been an official in Illinois. But Gordon was a going Jesse, and almost nobody could say no to Gordon because he wouldn't leave them alone. You know, he is the person who got the stadium built [War Memorial Stadium]. Okay. So he introduced me to Glen Rose and to Gene Lambert. I would have been nineteen years old or so, whatever. He introduced –

he said, “Now, this is Coach Rose. He’s just returned from the army, and he will be our new head football coach.” [He had previously been the basketball coach.]

JB: Yes, that would have been after the 1943 season.

OH: “And this is Gene Lambert. He had been our basketball coach [while Rose was in the service], but he’s going to be the athletic director and basketball coach.” So that was the deal. It kind of put – a lot of people thought that Gene Lambert was taking advantage of Glen, the one they really wanted to stay as basketball coach. At that very time a lot of Arkansas fans said we needed a big-time football coach. And so, Glen really lasted only two years as football coach. So I didn’t really have much to do with it, except that Gordon – the craziest thing is – here Gordon was a brilliant person. Within two years he was coming to me to ask me what I thought of the football team. It is ridiculous, but it happened. And he and Herbert Thomas, Sr., were the two people who had the most to do with Barnhill coming and with the building of War Memorial Stadium and getting the program going.

JB: Well, of course, the upturn started in 1946 by going to the Cotton Bowl, but the real breakthrough came in 1954, when they went to Cotton Bowl again. It wasn’t long before the game stories started running on the front Sunday page – page one Sunday – as a matter of course.

OH: I couldn’t swear to it right this minute. When you just come off a lot of chemo and radiation therapy, your memory is a little bit – but I am pretty sure that was true.

JB: I know after 1954, it was always on the front page for about twenty-five or thirty

years.

OH: Yes. Right.

JB: I was overseas in the army in 1954, but I imagine it was in 1954, probably the Texas game down in Austin in 1954, that it went out in front to stay.

OH: Yes. That was an absolutely magnificent game and Henry Moore's greatest game.

JB: When I went to work in 1956, I replaced Charlie Rixse, who had been there a fairly short time and was going to city side. I replaced him in sports. Bill Bentley wrote a couple of columns or one column a week and did desk work and worked on the Traveler games sometimes. Chuck Miller was basically desk. And Jerry McConnell had come over from the *Democrat* the previous year. He did high school. With Rixse's spot that I filled, that was a full-time staff. Plus you.

OH: Yes, it was.

JB: And we had a couple of young part-timers, Eddie Abel and Eddie Best.

OH: Yes. From then on we had a core, and from then on we had a lot of good people come through there. And, of course, the big thing was when we added Wadie Moore.

JB: Yes. He was the first black reporter [and] the first black person on the editorial side, I guess, in the state. I don't know – certainly, at the *Gazette*.

OH: I think so. Yes. And then, of course, later we hired the first woman sportswriter. Which one was it? Brenda?

JB: Brenda Sisson worked there for about a year before she went into advertising.

OH: But the best one was Nancy Clark. She was good.

JB: Came from the *Democrat*.

OH: Yes. She was better than anybody knew and better than she let herself be. I don't think she was ever comfortable in it, but she was good.

JB: She was very talented.

OH: Yes, she was. This is a big thing to me. In 1982, I had become fully aware of what John Robert [Starr] and [Walter] Hussman were doing at the *Democrat*. They were – of course, all of this was done with tax relief from their other media assets, with the aid – they were giving sports twice as much space as we had.

JB: Oh yes, they were. – A game between Dartmouth and Fordham, if the AP ran twelve inches on it on the national wire, they had all twelve inches under a big head, like somebody in Arkansas cared.

OH: And Wally was the pseudo sports editor. The real sports editor was John Robert. He'd dictate all this stuff and brow-beat them, but gave them the space and whatever they needed to do a lot of spectacular things that we were not able to do. And this is where they hit us first, and they did because, I believe, they knew that sports was the strength of the *Gazette*.

JB: Yes, and that's the one thing the *Gazette* people never tumbled to.

OH: Never. Never. Never admitted it.

JB: Like Starr would hammer away at you: you were this, you were that. In essence, you were killing the *Gazette*. I wonder why he would have warned the opposition that they had such a weak spot?

OH: Well, it didn't fool anybody. I'd never ever had any problems with Hugh

Patterson. As you well know, if he sent out an edict around the paper, posted it, and I knew it was wrong, I ignored it because I would almost know for sure that in two days he would come back and take it off. Just like when he made us [sports] switch physical spaces with Omnibus [Features]. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't stop it, but within . . .

JB: We were rattling around that big Omnibus room like a bunch of peas in a cement mixer, and Omnibus was crowded, shoulder to shoulder, in the sports department. [The change lasted only a few months.]

OH: He was doing it to punish Carrick. But, anyway, sure enough if Hugh would make a mistake, then he would correct it when he realized it was. But he did not have much judgment, and he was very petty in most of his decisions. So I was able to talk to him about things and pretty much keep him off of our back. And like I said, if he did something that we couldn't live with and it wasn't going to hurt anybody else, we didn't do it. Now, I go in there and I tell him – he is sitting behind Mr. J.N.'s old desk, arms folded with a little smile on his face, and after thirty minutes – when I told him, I said, “We are going to lose this war if this continues. We cannot compete with them in sports if you do not let us do this, this, this.” When I was through, he kind of smiled. He said, “Orville, I'm not going to . . .” Here he had two of the most incompetent people that he was letting – he was enjoying watching his son, Carrick, his only hope for the paper's future, fight with Bill McIlwaine [an editor hired from Washington, D.C., in 1981]. Totally, he hired failed people from other – his biggest fault, he was charmed by

failed people from other newspapers. He would never hire a person that was successful and pay him more money. He would get this guy cheaper, and the guy would just finally be an albatross around his neck.

JB: Well, he [McIlwaine] came in, supposedly, to preside over the redesigning of the paper, and he got there and he spent two or three months drawing up plans: redesign this, do this different, do this different, do this different. And he showed the plans to Mr. Patterson, and apparently Mr. Patterson rejected them one by one by one by one. I guess he got there with a year's guarantee, or something about like a year's time – after about six months he did nothing. He quit trying.

OH: You just look at the people they hired. James Powell, whom he brought from someplace else, finally all he did – he and his wife – was accompany the Pattersons on their yearly rounds. For about three months of the year, they went to all the conventions, all over the world. Jack Meriwether, former city manager of Little Rock, a great guy, but absolutely powerless. They just gave him a nice office, but he just stayed there. . . . Hugh . . . had a terrific inferiority complex. The only thing he was really good at was telling anecdotes. He had a terrific inferiority complex, but he could say, "I am owner of this paper, and you're not." And so Carrick, of course, was a total failure and McIlwaine. No way they were a match for anybody who was so stubborn as Walter Hussman and such a wild animal as John Robert Starr. I said, "Mr. Patterson, you won't let us hire this person," or "you won't let us have this much space," or "you won't let us have this little money to compete with them. Do this for me then, let me go to

Fayetteville, where I don't have to wear myself out traveling and a lot of other things, and we can compete better with them if I am up there." He said, "Fine. Okay." I remained sports editor, but I went to Fayetteville for nine years and . . .

JB: That was in 1983 you went up there.

OH: Yes, 1983. And in 1989, I switched papers.

JB: Well, even there – you went to Fayetteville, and Starr started hammering, "He's occupying some office space in the athletic building."

OH: Well, of course, Eddie wanted me to come, Eddie Sutton. Eddie is the one who arranged for me to have an office in Barnhill Arena.

JB: I know, but he hammered on that, and then he hammered on, "He's supposed to be the sports editor. He's in Fayetteville. What's . . ." The *Gazette* should have simply put an announcement in the paper – which they never did – "Orville Henry is now working out of Fayetteville. He is still the sports editor, but he is not the executive every-day-assignment-making sports editor. Anything to do with that, contact James Thompson at Little Rock." Of course, that wouldn't have shut Starr up.

OH: The truth is that people on the *Gazette* staff other than in sports – well, I don't know what the sports people felt because they didn't have a choice – but they all thought it was awfully unorthodox, too. The news side didn't like it. But I knew I needed to get out of Little Rock, and I needed to get off of – I'd been in the building too long, and if I could do any good, I could do better in Fayetteville. Besides, Ann and I were still on our honeymoon, and we found a whole lot more

fun in Fayetteville than we did in Little Rock. And, of course, Fayetteville, that brings up the real newspaper war. When it got to be sordid.

JB: Well, why do you think the Pattersons had to sell out to Gannett or anybody?

OH: I can't imagine why they had no more resources than they had, but they claimed while Hussman had a private fortune and money rolling in – cash money rolling in from all these other enterprises – they had only the Arkansas *Gazette* sales and some years they didn't even make any money and that there was no way they could maintain the paper and maybe they'd have to close it eventually and maybe Gannett could save the Arkansas *Gazette*.

JB: Well, you know, they once had a radio station. They could have had any number of valuable properties if they had wanted to, but apparently they didn't want to.

OH: Poor management. Like Hugh buying the railroad depot , the Rock Island Railroad Depot. He could run down there, about ten blocks, and get in one of those railroad cars. Whereas, Walter Hussman is basically a bookkeeper at heart. He makes money, and he holds on to it. There is no question. He is not a great newspaper man, except he has taken advice from – sitting in back rows at conventions, when there was a speaker he saw who had some background in an area that he was in, he immediately looked him up.

[End of Tape One, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

OH: The first thing Carrick was going to do after I left to go to Fayetteville was cut my stories. My trademark had been long stories with full exposition on . . .

JB: Of course, everybody who was reading the *Gazette* in those days, like the 1950s on to the 1980s or whatever, remembers that if Razorbacks played football on Saturday, you had the long game story on Sunday and then you had the long rehash on Monday. And I think you told me one time that the rehashes got started back in the early 1950s – like you would go to Fort Worth or Houston for a game, and you would be on your way home Sunday, and you would be going through your notebook [where you had] collected a lot of little statistics you wanted to mention, little oddities, or some trends or something to follow up on. That was the genesis of the Monday morning rehash.

OH: Right. You see, the Texas Eagle returned to Arkansas on Sunday. No matter where you started, you wound up in Little Rock at three o'clock. And I would get into the dinning car with my Olivetti typewriter and start writing it there. I would have made notes practically – little notes of what I had seen or recalled that didn't get into the story or projections – from the time I got back to the hotel, and I was still making them as I got on the train. So by the time I hit Little Rock, then I could call Bowden Wyatt. One of the first things he did – and I don't know why, maybe Barnie [John Barnhill] told him – one of the first things he did was come see me in Little Rock after he was hired [as the Arkansas coach]. And we formed an attachment right there, and he would always talk to me and he was always available. On Sunday I made the habit of talking to him after I got home to clear up anything, so by eight or nine o'clock I was through. I had everything all done. Now that led later to the fact that Frank [Broyles] – and the big thing before was

that no sports editor worked on Sunday. I realized after that started I was never satisfied. There was always some big story left. There was more. I just felt like I had to do that, so I would work in Little Rock, or wherever, for something for Monday. They [the rehashes] became instantly a sensation.

JB: Oh, yes. Everybody in that state read it.

OH: It was as they said, "You can't tell for sure until Orville writes on Monday." And so, with Frank it got even better because when he came, one of the first things he did was come see me. Those days a sports editor had to stay in his office most times because he got the paper out. So Dana X. Bible [Texas coach] would walk down Main Street from the Albert Pike Hotel to my office, while he was waiting for the midnight Texas Eagle after a game in Little Rock on Saturday in the 1940s. He would walk down and check scores, and he would visit with me. I didn't ever write analysis from that, but I saw later on why that could be very good because nobody knew really what happened. There was always something left, and by then the coach would have seen the film, which is unusual. And Arkansas had its own – Bernie in 1947 bought facilities to process his own game film, so that he could see it Saturday night if he had to, after a home game. And he was two or three days ahead of the Texas schools that way. Anyway, that was a big thing, the Monday rehash.

JB: If you got a day off in football season, it was Monday.

OH: I finally got where I could get Monday and Thursday off, parts of them anyway. I still would have a column that day. I would have written, like, two of them on

Wednesday maybe. Anyway, you are right. It was seven days a week in football season.

JB: But there was one day a week that your column was based on the telephone interview with the coach [of the Razorbacks' upcoming opponents].

OH: I did that Wednesday for Thursday's paper with his line-ups, and they would all talk to me. I would spend maybe forty minutes with Bear Bryant or Darrell Royal. I always was able to get the other coach. They trusted me.

JB: Yes. When the Pattersons finally sold out to Gannett, what was your first impression of the new Gannett operation?

OH: I knew it was a total travesty. Total. Just like [executive sports editor] Paul Borden came in from Jackson, Mississippi, and he previously worked in Louisville, Kentucky, and he said, "Well, there is going to be change here. There is going to be an equal amount of space for Arkansas, Arkansas State and UALR. We are going to treat them all just alike." I knew then that was the end of the *Arkansas Gazette's* chance to ever come back. And he tried to do it, especially in basketball. And here Nolan [Richardson] was going to Final Fours, and the others couldn't even win half their games. Once I asked Paul, "Why did you cut my Razorback story?" He said, "I cut them all. I cut Arkansas State's, too." I said, "Nobody in this state is interested in Arkansas State. Didn't you know that? Have you ever checked? We sell 375 papers a day in Craighead County." And the *Democrat* sold none. Wally and them are trumpeting Arkansas State equality and all, and nobody in Jonesboro bought the *Democrat*.

JB: Even though they were trumpeting Arkansas State equality, they were pouring tons and tons of copy on the Razorbacks in the *Democrat*.

OH: Oh, yes. When I moved up there, they moved two people up there, added two people. For a long time in basketball, I was one man, like at a game in Fort Worth or Manhattan, Kansas, or whatever it was, and I would write three stories, and they would have one man there, and he would write one inadequate story.

JB: Well, at the height of the war, so-called war, it was all about body counts. It was, “We had four people there.” “Yes, but we had five.” Well, you were already gone to the *Democrat*, but in 1991, the last Southwest Conference basketball tournament in Dallas for Arkansas. We [the *Gazette*] had about six people down there. There wasn’t enough work for but about two of us.

OH: This happened – this gets you back to the Gannett thing – Nancy Clark stayed in sports, and they put her on the desk, but she should never have been. She should have been writing. And so, in the summertime – I loved summertime because I could go out and get an in-depth thing and make a series out of it, like on [Ken] Hatfield and on [Lou] Holtz, and Leon Reed loved them. He said, “Do some more.” He knew that they sold papers. Well, I did a piece about McKenzie Phillips, who was the son of Loyd Phillips, the most honored Arkansas athlete of all time, lineman, anyway. And he [the son] is a character. He had just signed with Arkansas, but he had died and come back to life, as they put it. And, of course, he . . .

JB: On the field?

OH: Oh the field, yes. Well, I thought, “Well, golly, Loyd – he and I are very good friends,” still are – and I had known McKenzie all his life, and McKenzie liked to talk. Well, I was in Fayetteville, and I did this seventy-inch article on Loyd and McKenzie talking. I was able to quote his daddy, his momma, McKenzie, and his coaches and all about the fact that his heart had stopped, and they called the game off, a big high school game at Springdale and so forth. And them also talking about his prospects. He was 6 foot 5 and 270 [pounds]. Arkansas didn’t get homegrown people like that. And the daddy was a superstar. So I sent it, and they cut it to thirty inches. And when I called, Nancy Clark said, “Orville, I couldn’t help it. It was a great story, but Carrick said I had to cut it to thirty inches and [that] I could just cut all those quotes out.” Like I said before, I developed a style that was state a fact, then illustrate with anecdotes and so forth. And I had all these great anecdotes and quotes, and they took them all out, and that reminded me of the fact that our city desk – we had a really good city editor except he didn’t want any interesting stories. He killed a lot of reporters with the fact that he was killing their quotes and anecdotes. And so it leaves you nothing but the dry statement of facts, one fact after another and nothing to illustrate it. And so Nancy told me, “Orville,” – this was after Gannett – she said, “nobody here, not a single soul here, cares anything about Arkansas.” She said, “That’s the way it is now.” Well, when I was at the *Gazette*, we were Arkansas.

JB: Yes.

OH: And Carrick didn’t know anything about newspapering. He picked the wrong size

type, the wrong fonts of type. He picked the wrong size of column widths and the whole thing. He had no judgment whatsoever in what a hard-hitting, good-looking newspaper ought to be, and Gannett was the same way. And Gannett succeeded only where they had monopolies.

JB: That's right, either a monopoly or they were the top . . .

OH: Creators, where they created a new venue.

JB: Where they were top dog in a joint-operating agreement.

OH: Yes. But Carrick, to me, when Carrick got to be the boss man – and, God, he must have wet his pants every day he was so scared – he had no ability whatsoever. He also hurt us because he, Carrick, determined what kind of machines we had, how we transmitted. He made them so complicated that we could hardly write. He must have read books or something, but anyway . . .

JB: I know when we got the big blue-backed, the big blue-carpeted Teleram that weighed about forty pounds, the first one, the one that you typed on a tape.

OH: Yes.

JB: “Home, home memory, set clear memory, clear memory, enable tape, read block.” He took several reporters back for a little session on the machine, and in an hour's time he hammered on about eighty things you shouldn't do. I only wanted to know about the four or five things I should do.

OH: That's right. And today, of course, – eventually, before the 1980s were over, Radio Shack put out the simplest, easiest . . .

JB: Oh, Radio Shack, the old Radio Shack was the best, by far.

OH: I still have one.

JB: When did it first cross your mind that you might go to the *Democrat*?

OH: I knew the *Gazette* was going to fail. And Ann and I – Ann couldn't believe it, of course. She is so sold on the *Gazette*. I mean, the five happiest years of her life were when she was writing for the *Gazette*. And because David Petty, her editor, let her write at great length and just trusted everything she did. And she had her fans and so forth. And, of course, the reason she quit – it was about a year after we were married – was that Carrick came in and made some snide remark about something she was writing. And there is one thing that Ann – she is tougher than nails, but she can't stand a fool. And she looked at him, turned her machine off and packed up and left and said, "I'm done. I'm through." And I was glad. We didn't have to have the money. I loved her being a writer. In fact, that is how I got to know her. I sent a little note back to her after something she wrote and said, "Ann, this is a great piece of writing. Keep it up." She asked Mike Trimble, "Who's OH?" He said, "OH!" Anyway, so that shows you the kind of judgment he had that he had to be a snide, smart aleck to people [with] put downs, and she didn't take it. Right away, they [the Pattersons] both came and said, "Oh, we will do anything [to get her back]. Just whatever." And I said, "She's not coming back. There is no way she'll come back. He should not have done it. I like her better at home and us not in the same building and working," and so forth. And I said, "She'll get over it." It took her about a month. I mean, she grieved because she loved that [job]. That was one of the greatest times of her life, and Carrick

ruined it with just one terrible statement. So the essence of why did the *Gazette* lose? They lost because of the Pattersons. Poorly run paper. Poorly run business. They never had – all this money came in, and they never had a nickel. And they cow-towed to people like Pfeifers and all those and let them dictate their policies. And they didn't have much guts. They got credit for a lot of guts, but Mr. J.N. made about two decisions that got them their reputation.

JB: Yes. He let Ashmore loose editorially on the Central High integration. Brave thing for a guy his age to do.

OH: Right.

JB: Really brave thing.

OH: Here is something about the *Gazette* that not many people realize and which probably doomed it. The family was a great family. There were three brothers, raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, who were all bright, well educated gentleman.

JB: J.N. and Fred . . .

OH: Mr. J.N., Fred, and Carrick, old C.W.– we didn't know him. He might have died in 1920. But I think he was . . .

JB: He was the original one named Carrick?

OH: Yes. Yes.

JB: And the Carrick Heiskell you knew was his nephew?

OH: Yes. Right. The *Arkansas Gazette*, when I went there, was run and dominated by J.N. Heiskell, Fred Allsopp, Clyde Dew, and some guy in the back shop, a printer that was from – they were all raised, they all went to school in the 1870s and

1880s. That was when they were raised, and they learned their newspapering a little later on. Like Clyde Dew came there in about 1905, and he was the dominant man at the paper that nobody would touch.

JB: From the 1920s on.

OH: Yes. So you had that all the way. Until Harry Ashmore came, there was not one single brilliant person. Of course, you've got managing editor A.R. Nelson. He was a totally shy, inbred – I mean, he was a guy who never went to a party. His idea of a good day was to have a quiet day at the office and then go to the Officers' Club and drink until he was mellow. So that explains – and, of course, the fact that Hugh always hired way beneath. He hired people who were beneath anybody's dignity really. And, of course, Hugh had to – he got a job at Democrat Printing and Lithograph Company, which was not much of a job. He had to sell for them, but he wasn't very successful, but he had married Louise, and that meant as soon as they bought out the Allsopps – the Allsopps had run the business end. Fred Allsopp had been the grand old man of Arkansas journalism before Mr. Heiskell came along and a very interesting person. But Bill Allsopp, the son, the second, he got his million dollars. His daddy was dead, and he moved lock, stock, and barrel to Florida. Bill was totally untrained. His daddy had never let him lift a finger on the paper. He just occupied a desk. His daddy – that's what Hugh should have done with Carrick. I always contended that they should have bought Ralph Patterson a couple of polo ponies and sent him off someplace or bought Carrick three or four strange musical instruments and sent him out to the San

Francisco opera to play. He could play those things very well. And not ever let either one of them come home except on Christmas. And then if they had hired competent people to run the paper, – but Hugh was not capable of hiring competent people. He didn't know what competency was. Hugh was amusing at a party, that was his greatest attribute.

JB: He would have probably been a sensation on old Madison Avenue.

OH: Oh, yes. As long as he owned the . . .

JB: Well, what about the situation where it was worked out that you went to the *Democrat* in 1989?

OH: Well, Ann and I, at that time and in our first four or five years in Fayetteville, we had a cocktail hour as soon as I finished work, and then she would prepare some wonderful dinner for two or more people. And every once in a while we would sit down and put on some Cole Porter or some – we had great tapes – and listen to music and sip that scotch and talk about what was happening. See, now, in the meantime I knew that I had some worth, and I knew if I was ever going to have a little extra money, it wasn't going to be from the *Gazette*. Gannett refused to give me a contract. They said they didn't sign contracts, except after I left, all at once, they signed two others to contracts.

JB: [Charles] Allbright and [Richard] Allin.

OH: The two standard columnists, both of them great. Each had a style, and they were great. They signed both of them to contracts, but not me. But now they did do this – they had me out to dinner, [publisher Bill] Malone and – what was the crazy

managing editor's name?

JB: Which one? [Laughs]

OH: The last – the one now in St. Paul?

JB: Oh, [Walker] Lundy.

OH: Lundy professed to me – he idolized me, he said. Okay. But they had me out to the country club for dinner, and I wondered. They didn't talk much, then all at once they tried to say – obviously, they weren't hungry. They wanted out of there as fast as they could. They handed me a check for a seven-thousand-dollar bonus and gave me a raise to about sixty thousand dollars. So I said, "What for?" I said, "What will I have to do?" They said, "You have to write us a note saying you do not plan to leave the *Gazette*." I said, "Well, I don't, but what if I do?"

JB: This was in about 1988?

OH: Yes. I said, "That doesn't protect me. It doesn't affect you all. That's nothing. I don't plan to leave. I'll write you that note right now, but it doesn't mean anything. What I need is a contract." They said, "We don't have contracts. Gannett doesn't offer contracts." I said, "Well, I'll do this, but it doesn't protect you." So they left. From then on there was – they had planted the seed right there. "Looky here. If I am going to ever have a windfall, it will have to be this." So things went on, and the next thing you know, they gave me a bigger bonus and raised me to sixty-five. And there was still the same thing. Here I am getting old, you know. I had been there a long time, forty-five years or so, and so I thought, "I've got to have – if I want anything, I am going to have to sell myself. I've got to

make a deal. I am not leaving any friends except my people there. The paper is going to hell. There is no way the *Democrat* won't win this," because right there they were drawing even. It was even. The *Gazette* was slightly ahead, but it was just about even. And I knew that I could make a difference. I mean, this is not something anybody else talks about, and maybe I shouldn't talk about it, but I knew it would make a difference and that I had some value. And if I had value, it would be there. Ann and I, we would talk these things over and say, "What would be fair? What would your friends say?" I'd say, "I can't help it. This is a once in a lifetime situation, but I can't just [let them] run over me," or whatever, because basically, more and more, I was being abused in the paper. So I talked to Frank [Broyles], and I said, "What do you think?" He said, "Well, I think that you would probably be smart to do it." I had that encouragement from him. I didn't tell anyone else except Ernie Dumas. I told Ernie. I said, "Ernie, I am talking to the *Democrat*." He said, "Well, I don't see how you couldn't." And true as he is, he never told anyone. And so it was just no question. Ann and I both knew that I was worth something to the *Democrat*, and I had to figure out how we could do it and do it cleanly with no bit of hassle. In the meantime, word got out. Oh, it was coming time again for the *Gazette* to do something with me, and they were having meetings down there, and David Petty – Bill Rutherford – they had Bill call me, and I would always just listen to Bill, and he didn't have anything to say except, "If you would just . . ." – And he called me two years after I had moved, still thinking that I was going to come back. – Well, Petty called, and I said, "David,

here's what Ann and I figured out." I was worth twice as much to the *Democrat* as I was to the *Gazette* because the *Democrat* would be gaining and the *Gazette* would be losing if I went there. If I stayed at the *Gazette*, they would just, it would be – the *Democrat* wouldn't gain anything. So we decided that it would work if Walter Hussman agreed without a bit of discussion, if the second it was mentioned, he'd said, "Yes." We couldn't have any middle agents or anything else. "It has to be done." So I called Jack Stephens and asked – I said, "Jack, would you do me a favor?" He said, "Why, sure." I said, "I am getting ready to move," and, of course, he didn't care. He didn't like either one of them. He didn't like the *Gazette* or the *Democrat*. And I said, "I think that I can make a deal with Walter Hussman that would be good for me, and I've got to get out from the *Gazette* because under Gannett it is going to go under." He agreed with me. And I said, "All I need is for somebody he trusts to call Walter Hussman personally and to tell him, 'If you want Orville Henry, you can get him immediately if you will pay him a fifty-thousand-dollar bonus and give him a contract. This would be a three-year – a contract, and he will sign for as long as we want.'" Of course, I said three years. I should have said five, but I didn't know that I would even work that long.

JB: Yes, because you were going to be sixty-five early the next year.

OH: Yes, I could retire. If the money hadn't turned out to be pretty good. Well, anyway, Jack said, "Yes. Well, all you have to do – if he says he is willing to talk – to get it over with, and it can be done in one day, one meeting, without any –

just cold turkey right there.” And I said, “We will draw up a contract. If he says yes, we will immediately have his lawyer and my lawyer work on a contract. And when the contract is done, I will sign it.” So I said, “Fine, it is done. If he says he wants it, there won’t be any haggling. There won’t be any change. That will be it.” So I went down to Little Rock on Sunday night and stayed in the Hilton across the river. And I remember I was jogging early the next morning, and here comes [*Gazette* wire editor] Pat Carrithers. He said, “Orville, what are you doing over here?” I said, “I am just here for a meeting,” and I just kept on jogging. So they might have gotten suspicious of something.

JB: Well, it seems like that weekend you couldn’t be reached on the phone.

OH: I forgot to tell you. I forgot to tell you. I told David Petty. He said, “They want me to meet you at Russellville this Wednesday. They want me to meet you at Russellville.” I said, “David, if they will pay twenty-five thousand dollars in cash and give me a contract, then I will do it.” And I said, “You know, I am being fair. That’s less than I will get from somebody else.” And so, David told them that, and they didn’t pay attention because I had told David. I said, “David, this is going to be done. Do exactly what I tell you and there will be no haggling.” And he called me back the next day and said, “Well, they want to make two payments for twenty-five thousand, and I am not sure they want a contract.” I said, “David, it’s over then. That’s it.”

JB: I don’t know why, but I sensed something was going to happen. I tried to call you twice that weekend and could only get your recorder.

OH: I wasn't taking any calls.

JB: And then I was gone to St. Louis that Monday morning.

OH: We didn't tell anybody. Jack knew and Frank knew something was maybe going to happen. When I told David Petty, I said, "This is it." Then I was able to call Jack and set up the meeting. They blocked off the whole floor [where the offices of Philip Anderson, the *Democrat's* lawyer, were located]. Nobody could get on. – He was president of the American Bar Association at the time, big law office – but you couldn't stop your elevator at that floor or anything, and so we went in . . .

JB: Well, did you go the *Gazette* at some point that day?

OH: Yes, I did. But let me tell . . . Anyway, it lasted this long: We sit down at ten o'clock, and I said, "Walter, did Jack make you aware?" And he said, "Yes." Best visit I ever had at the *Democrat*, ever. And it was over, and they brought in our lunch. Our lunch was brought into us later on. I called Bill Bassett at Fayetteville, and Phil Anderson was there, so they would fax things back and forth and, finally, I walked over to the *Gazette*. And I remember walking down the hall toward [publisher] Bill Malone's office. First, I went to my old desk to get two or three little things that I felt like I had to have, and Lundy saw me. He turned against the wall with his head just like that. And then I went on to my office, and then I walked down the back way to Malone's, and about that time, David was walking out of there. I saw him, and I said, "David, good-bye." He said, "The *Democrat* ought to pay twice as much."

JB: They were not only adding, but the *Gazette* was subtracting.

OH: And what I got out of it was something I needed. I got me a new Acura.

JB: Well, that was kind of the atomic bomb that speeded up the inevitable. I mean, the *Democrat* was going to win the war no matter what, but I think that hastened the end.

OH: Here is how you can tell. At that time the *Gazette* had a slight lead [in circulation]. Maybe it was twenty or thirty thousand, but that was in August. The next May it had flip-flopped. The *Democrat* had the lead. And when they announced their figures, I guess, in March, Hussman said, “Well, of course, Orville gave us credibility.” I knew at the time that the thing had been hovering. It was at a standstill. They were so close, but they couldn’t pull ahead. And I knew that if I moved, they would pull ahead, and they did immediately, and it was over.

JB: Well, they couldn’t have gotten anything that represented the *Gazette* any more [than you], unless it was the little symbol in the masthead.

OH: Yes. Well, at any rate, I am not proud of everything about it. If I’d left the old *Arkansas Gazette*, there would have been some wrenching things, and I thought those – You know what I thought about? Those marble steps to the back way of the city room, which is to our office. I ran up and down those things three at time for many years, and I always claimed that they – over fifty years they had worn, then they turned them over, and I wore them out the next.

JB: Hussman’s people at the *Democrat*, didn’t they make an approach to you through Brick Lile [several years earlier]?

OH: Yes. They did, but I didn't even consider it.

JB: That was a different time, different circumstances.

OH: Yes. Oh, yes. Right now, the *Democrat's* got – their facilities and all are pretty nice, but when I first went there – Well, I never wrote a line in there, but I did some of my best work in the next two or three years from Fayetteville. I knew – I got some great stories that none of them could touch because I knew where everything was. The best story I had was when they got the woman for embezzling from the concessions. She maybe got as much as \$800,000, and I had a great lead on it: “Frances went hog wild and Christmas crazy,” or something like that, but I got that from Ann. She said, “My God, she went hog wild and Christmas crazy, didn't she?” And so [John] Brummett wrote me a note and said, “My God, I wish I had written that story.” [Laughs] That terrible finance officer they hired from the University of Alaska and the next year had to get rid of him, he was trying to run the athletic department, too. He gave me the whole damn story, all of it. I went over at seven o'clock in the morning – I knew he would be there early on his computer – to ask him all about it. He told me stuff that you couldn't – you know, it hadn't even been in court yet.

JB: The *Gazette* sent Paul Borden up there after you switched to the *Democrat*.

OH: What a joke.

JB: Well, one reason he wanted to go up there – I guess that was a glamorous job, but I think the main reason was that he and Lundy despised each other so completely they were both happy for him to go up there.

OH: Yes. Well, it was – the worst time I had with Borden was that he got the idea that after a game everybody gathered at my house and ate and drank. But, see, in the SEC that is a big deal, the party after at somebody's house, usually the SID [Sports Information Director], you know. But it was – and then it was an exciting time with Sutton because this was the time he started going down. And we were their closest personal friends. Now, she [Patsy Sutton] was at our house all the time. But there's – golly, there is a book in all that if you can just sit down and go through all the papers and then recall the background of some things. Oh, when you think of the things that Hugh and Carrick did and that I know they did and didn't do, that was not like leaving the *Gazette*. You know how things changed.

JB: Yes.

OH: It was miserable for you all.

JB: Terrible.

OH: And I had just enough confidence that I knew there was a better way to operate and that I could do it. And at exactly the right time – Ann and I had actually talked about it for three years that, the way the Gannett people were going, we had an option. The thing that got me was that a person could work as long as I did in Arkansas and probably benefit my institutions as much as I did and have as much trouble as I did making money. I mean, I know that everybody who worked for me needed more money. There wasn't any way to get it to them. There had never – the only way I could get to them was once I got an edge and once I got to where they didn't have any choice.

JB: Well, you moved up from sixteen or so dollars to thirty-two when you became sports editor, you said. Roughly how many years did it take you to crack a hundred a week?

OH: [Laughs] Oh, I don't know. I remember when I got to fifty-five, I thought, "Boy, this is great." I remember my daddy coming home in 1937 one day and saying, "Well, I mean, fifty-five dollars is great!" That was really big in 1937.

JB: Well, even when I went to work there in 1956, a hundred dollars a week was still sort of a magic figure.

OH: Yes.

JB: I guess with a little background, anything would have been pretty generous. If you are making like fifty, sixty, seventy a week, that Travelers official scoring money was pretty important.

OH: Yes, it was. And also what I hated was how little you made out of what you wrote for magazines, freelance projects.

JB: Oh, gosh.

OH: This really got me. Here I had seven years with Lou Holtz, and the *Football* magazine people wanted to pay me – they wanted me to do a thing on Lou with all the one-liners that I actually wrote myself. I didn't write them. I honed them. I can take them right now and tell you where he – and also he and I never once discussed that. Can you believe that in seven [years] it was never mentioned between us? Well, six years, really, because I quit the one-liners his last year. They wanted me to give them his one-liners and a long, long story for six hundred

dollars. And that is one time and gone forever.

JB: Yes, well, the package Dave Campbell wanted on Arkansas football, the main story, several side bars, and everything. That was about three hundred dollars.

OH: That's right. And you know I made the magazine people mad when I said, "No way," when I finally told Dave – we are still good friends – when I told him, "I can't do that, but we have people who can." It really drove me crazy during the spring trying to get all those things done for the pre-season football magazines on top of what I was already writing.

JB: Well, the Travelers in the Southern Association played seventy-seven home games a year, and I think the league paid ten dollars a game for official scoring. That is seven hundred and seventy dollars, which is very nice if you are making like fifty or so.

OH: That's right. Very nice to give your wife.

JB: And you only got it every other year.

OH: Yes.

JB: The *Gazette* got it one year, and the *Democrat* the next.

OH: And it was very nice when the Pacific Coast League came in. And it was twenty-five dollars a game, wasn't it?

JB: No. We went to the International first, and that was fifteen, and then we went to the Coast, and they actually cut us down to twelve-fifty. [Laughs]

OH: I'll tell you what you did get, though. All of the Coast League, none of their papers sent a writer on the road, so you got five.

JB: You strung for them.

OH: You got stringer money.

JB: Just step over there and dictate it to Earle Little [Western Union operator in the press box].

OH: Yes. Well, the last few years have been different still.

JB: Oh, yes, it is a completely different industry now.

OH: Yes. The wonderful thing now is if your machine is working properly, you can [transmit] from anywhere in one second. [Laughs] You can find a telephone on a pole – not really practically – and transmit and get your copy in and so forth. But at the *Morning News* in northwest Arkansas now, no writer goes to the office. They all work at home. They all have their machines, and they work at home. It's inevitable there are going to be two newspapers up there [northwest Arkansas], one of them owned by the *Democrat* and one of them by Stephens. And right now, the Stephens paper is the dominant paper. They are worried now about how much money they are losing up there. For one thing the price of newsprint – they are just throwing that around – and the price of newsprint has gotten so high. They have made people mad up there. People don't like the *Democrat*. They don't like Wally Hall. Other *Democrat* people are doing a damn good job, and it's the best – just ignore the bad stuff in it – The *Democrat-Gazette* has the best coverage that has ever been in Arkansas. Isn't that right?

JB: Yes, most complete.

OH: From what I can tell now, like today's paper, pretty skimpy. By the time they

[are] through with all the furniture, there is nothing to read much.

[End of Interview]