

Gazette Project

Interview with

Jerry McConnell,
Greenwood, Arkansas,
22 August 2000

Interviewer: Roy Reed

Roy Reed: Okay, this is August 22, 2000, in Greenwood, Arkansas. Jerry McConnell with Roy Reed. Jerry, if I could just get you to state your name and that we have your permission to turn this over to the archives at the University of Arkansas.

Jerry McConnell: My name is Jerry McConnell, and you certainly have my permission to tape this and turn it over to the archives.

RR: Before we get down to the main business, I have been sitting here looking at the picture of you and a real good-looking young woman, arm in arm, back there on the wall. Who is that? What is going on?

JM: That is known by a lot of people as Flo Jo. That is Florence Griffin Joyner who set the world --- still holds the world's record in the 100- and 200-meter dashes. This particular occasion I was working at the *Daily Oklahoman* in 1989, and they had the U.S. sports festival, the U.S. Olympic festival in Oklahoma City. The son-in-law of the owner of the paper was executive director of the sports festival, so he cooked up this idea of having a secret runner bring the torch to bring it in to the stadium. This secret runner was Flo Jo. He asked me if I would like to go out to the airport and pick her up and bring her back downtown to the hotel. I said,

“Sure.” So just he and I went out and picked up Florence and her husband Al Joyner, who went to Arkansas State, and brought them back to the hotel room, and our photographer was there to take pictures, so he made a picture of Flo Jo and I together.

RR: Beautiful picture.

JM: I had interviewed her in Seoul after she had set the world’s record in the 1988 Olympics. I had talked to her a few times. I actually knew her husband Al better than I knew her. Al used to compete in some track meets in Oklahoma City.

RR: You had covered him there?

JM: Yes, I had covered him there.

RR: Speaking of pictures, I had noticed that a fine picture of President Bill Clinton and, apparently, a number of other prominent folks on this wall here. How did you happen to come by those?

JM: Well, let’s see, I came by those --- it probably needs a short preamble. I have been a Democrat all my life, since the first Franklin Roosevelt campaign, when I was pretty young. But I supported Clinton in his run for office and the first picture, the one with the four of us together --- on the first anniversary of his election, was in 1993. There was a group of Arkansans — about three or four hundred Arkansans went up to the White House just to celebrate the anniversary of his election, and they had a reception for us and served hors d’oeuvres in the executive dining room. You have never tasted hors d’oeuvres like those. Then he set up a receiving line. I believe that was in the Blue Room. We came through

and got to talk to him for a few minutes and get our picture made with him.

RR: That is you and Jo?

JM: That is me and Jo and Hillary and Bill. Then I had donated some money to the campaign, and I had also donated some money to the Democratic National Committee. I was a member of whatever it is --- some kind of Democratic National Committee organization, so they kept sending me memorabilia along as it went along.

RR: Norma Reed is a Democrat, and she contributed money, and about once a week she would get a letter: "Dear Norma," signed Al Gore or Bill Clinton, always wanting more money. Let's start at the beginning.

JM: Okay.

RR: If you would just kind of tell me your biography. Where and when you were born and who was who.

JM: Okay. I was born in the middle of what is now Fort Chaffee in a farmhouse. My parents were E.M., Ellis Murray "Bun" McConnell. Everybody knew him as Bun. A lot of people did not even know his name was Ellis Murray. He was a native of the area. His grandfather, my great grandfather, was one of the first settlers of the area, Robert Houston McConnell. He served in the Civil War. He was a state representative and a state senator. He settled, I believe, in the area in 1853. My mother was Thelma Davis, and her parents also settled in that area a few years later. Her father's name was Jefferson Davis. I have never been sure how closely related we were to the Jeff Davis, who was president of the

confederacy, but there was supposed to have been some relation. My dad, for most of my life, lived in Cornish, and we lived there until I was fourteen when they built Chaffee.

RR: Cornish?

JM: Cornish: C-O-R-N-I-S-H. He had ---it was right in the middle of Chaffee. It was on Highway 96, about halfway between Highway 10 and Highway 22, and he ran a country store there. It was a country store that did everything. It sold groceries and dry goods and hardware and cattle feed. At one time he had a blacksmith shop and a gristmill, and he had an icehouse. He sold gasoline, and we bought eggs and cream and so he ran that until the Army --- until the government took over the land, bought the land and forced everybody out. But that area, at that time, was in the Greenwood school system, so I went six years to school at the Cornish school and then the last six years to Greenwood---junior high and high school.

RR: What was your birth date?

JM: November 21, 1927.

RR: Go ahead with your schooling.

JM: Okay, and then I went to the University after I finished high school in 1945 at Greenwood. I had been offered a football scholarship to the University. I went to the University of Arkansas on a football scholarship. Stayed one year, played around too much and had too much fun and did not study, and decided that I was not sure if I wanted to keep playing football. I went into the Army for a year and

a half, mainly to get the GI Bill.

RR: 1940?

JM: I went into the Army in 1946. Came back out in January of 1948. Did not go back to school that semester, but went back to the University the summer term of 1948 and then finished in 1951. I majored in journalism and got a Bachelor of Science in journalism degree, which was a fairly new degree at that time rather than the Bachelor of Arts in journalism.

RR: What position did you play in football?

JM: Well, I played end in high school, and that is what I was playing when I got my scholarship. I went out when I was still in high school and worked out with the university varsity team during spring training. That apparently was legal then --- certainly not legal now. But I went up and stayed a week on the campus and worked out with the varsity, and they offered me a scholarship. I put on a lot of weight before the next fall, and they moved me to guard, which I hated---had never had any interest in---so I was not nearly as excited about playing guard as I was about playing end.

RR: I gather you did not play football when you went back after the Army.

JM: No, I did not.

RR: Where did you serve your time in the Army?

JM: Well, I went to basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I applied for and qualified for Officer's Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. I stayed about, I cannot remember how long there, about two months there, and I got a

leave. I got two weeks leave for Christmas, and all the time I was home on Christmas, I was just not ready to go back to Officer's Candidate School, and I decided I didn't want to be a career Army man. You had to agree to stay on for, I think, four more years. So I resigned as soon as I got back. Then they sent me to Germany. So I was stationed in Berlin. I was in Berlin for most of 1947.

RR: Were you married by then?

JM: No, I was not. No, I was still single.

RR: When did you and Jo get married?

JM: We did not get married until 1951, September 7. No, I am sorry, 1952.

RR: Jo's maiden name was?

JM: Was Davis.

RR: You married cousins.

JM: No, no, I didn't. Apparently, the Davises --- the two Davises are not related. Her father came from northwestern Missouri, and my mother's family all came from Georgia and Alabama.

RR: I know your family was probably in the same route as mine did. I dated one of my cousins a couple of times until our two mothers put a stop to it.

JM: Well, the same thing happened to me except that I had forgotten she was my cousin, and I dated --- I had a date with the best-looking girl in Greenwood. I came in and asked mother for the car, and she said, "Why?" I said, "I have a date." She said, "With whom?" I said, "Joy Richardson." She said, "No, you don't." I said, "Why not?" She said, "She's your cousin." I said, "Ah, I had

forgotten about that.” So I called Joy. I said, “Joy.” She said, “Yes, I know, Jerry. My mother just told me.”

RR: Where did you and Jo meet?

JM: At the University on the *Traveler*'s staff. She was a journalism student, too. Interesting thing, my last year at the school---she got sick before she finished the year. She would have been a junior. But she had a serious illness and missed about a month of school and had to drop out and went back home to Little Rock. But the first part of that year, she and Moo McCord, Bob's wife, were co-society writers for the *Traveler*.

RR: How do you spell that?

JM: Well, her actual name is Muriel. M-U-R-I-E-L, but everybody called her Moo. M-O-O---that is how I spell it if I write it. Of course, Charlie Rixse and I, we later also worked for the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*. We were co-sports editors. Bob McCord was the editor. He was the top man on the paper that year.

RR: That friendship goes back close to fifty years.

JM: Yes, at least fifty years. Through college because I think I had started working for the paper in 1949, so it goes back to 1949.

RR: You got out of school and then what?

JM: Well, actually when I was in the University, I was writing sports. When I came back from the Army, I had a lot of trouble making up my mind about what I wanted to major in. Finally, I decided I wanted to major in journalism and decided that because I love sports, I might be a sports writer. So I became a

sports writer for the *Traveler*. Then, my last year, I believe, just my last year, I was the correspondent from Fayetteville for the *Arkansas Gazette*. For Orville Henry---I was his correspondent. Orville told me at some point during that year that he would like to talk to me about a full-time job at the *Gazette* when I finished school. That was what I wanted to do. I had always read the *Gazette* a lot, and that would have been my preference. But, when I finished, he told me that he did not have an opening on the staff. So I wrote the *Democrat* and applied for a job there, and they wrote me back a letter and said, "Well, we don't have an opening in sports, but we have an opening on the news side, so if you want it, you can have it." So I wrote back and said, "Yes, I will take it." Of course, Jo was living in Little Rock then. I thought "Hey, you know, that is not a bad place to start a career right out of college," at a daily newspaper in a town the size of Little Rock. So, I thought, "Yes, that is great." So I went to the *Democrat* on the news side.

RR: That was in 1950?

JM: That was in 1951. I graduated in 1951, June of 1951.

RR: What kind of stories did you cover?

JM: Well, I started---this is very interesting, probably the best thing that ever happened to me. They worked me in the office for about two weeks helping out on the desk and just getting acclimated to style and everything else. Then they put me on the police beat. I did the police beat for about two and a half years. Then, I just wore out on the police beat and told them, "Hey . . ."

RR: Working against Joe Wirges.

JM: Well, part of the time. The first part of the time, I was not. That is an interesting story, too. Joe was still not with the paper because of the strike, and they had some replacement people. They had a replacement guy on the police beat for the *Gazette*.

RR: I did not realize that there was ever a time during the middle of that century that Joe Wirges . . .

JM: But Joe was not with the paper for a while after the strike. It was not long until he came back. The interesting thing was that, of course, the police looked on this guy who was filling in for Joe as a strikebreaker. Of course, the police were unionized. So they would get people to fake reports and put them on the blotter. This guy would come by and pick them up and report them, and they would get in the *Gazette*. So I think he got suspicious, you know, and quit. But Joe came back not long after that, so Joe and I became competitors of sorts, you know. Of course, Joe was so well known and so well liked and everything. We developed a friendship. We really got along real great while I was working for the *Democrat* and he was working for the *Gazette*. Of course, we were really going head to head one night a week, and that was on Saturday and Saturday night when we would both be working the same cycle.

RR: You were the afternoon paper and he was the morning paper.

JM: Right. But he was a very interesting guy.

RR: You remember your starting pay at that time?

JM: Yes, I do. This will tell you about what I was thinking about. I started to work at the *Democrat* for \$45.12 a week with a college degree. That is exactly what I was making. I was working a forty-eight hour a week. I did not figure out until years later that, “Hey, you are working for less than a dollar an hour.” I went to work out of college for less than a dollar and hour.

RR: Math is not our strong suit in journalism.

JM: No, true. Of course, I didn’t have any money at all. Anything was a help. But I will never forget that figure. I was working six-days a week.

RR: The *Democrat* always paid less in those years than the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes, they did.

RR: One reason everybody wanted to work at the *Gazette*.

JM: That is one reason. There were others.

RR: You were on the police beat for two and a half . . .

JM: Two and a half years. Then they moved me over to the city hall beat. I did the city hall for a while. During that time Pratt Rummel was elected governor, I mean mayor, of Little Rock. He was the first Republican mayor since Reconstruction, as I recall. Pratt, then, in 1954, decided he was going to run for governor on the Republican ticket and wound up running against Orval Faubus. It was Faubus’s first campaign. So they decided that I should cover the campaign. So they moved me onto the campaign, covering Rummel mostly on the campaign. Then after the election they moved me to the state Capitol. So I was the state Capitol reporter for a little less than a year when I switched to the *Gazette*. But I did cover the

capital for them for ten months or something like that, nine or ten months.

RR: About 1955 you . . .

JM: 1955, August of 1955 I went to the *Gazette*. Yes, what happened was that Sam Harris and Matilda Tuohey were the Capitol reporters for the *Gazette*. I had become very discouraged about the pay and working conditions and lack of fringe benefits at the *Democrat*. I had started prospecting around, looking for a job elsewhere. I had talked to the United Press, which I was not real eager about. Then I had talked to a couple of Texas papers. One of them offered me a job. The *Dallas Times Herald* offered me a job, and they only offered me five dollars more a week than the *Democrat* was paying me. I couldn't move down there for that. But, at any rate, Sam and Matilda, maybe it was Matilda first, heard that I was looking for work. Sam came up to me one day and said, "I hear you are looking for a job." I said, "Yes." And he said, "Would you be interested in talking to somebody at the *Gazette*?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, if it is all right, I will set you up an interview with A.R. Nelson," who was then the managing editor. So I went over and talked to Mr. Nelson, and he offered me a job. Actually, I was applying for a job on the news side because I had become very interested in straight news and everything. He said, "I don't have an opening on the news side, but I do have an opening in the sports. So, if you will take it, then when an opening comes up on the news side, if you want it, I will move you over there." So I said, "Okay, I will take it." Well, then I went over there and started working for them in the sports and got enamored by writing sports and

never did ask to be switched.

RR: How much did the *Gazette* start you out?

JM: Well, I don't remember the exact figure, but I remember that it was ten dollars more a week than the *Democrat* was paying me for one less day. They offered me ten dollars more a week to write high school sports for five days than the *Democrat* was paying me for covering the state capitol and the governor's office for six days. So it was not really a hard decision to move over to the *Gazette*.

RR: I guess, in all fairness, we ought to talk a little bit about why there was that differential in salary for the paper.

JM: Well, obviously, the *Democrat* was an afternoon paper. It had much smaller circulation than the *Gazette*. It was a younger newspaper, although it had been in business quite a while. By then, afternoon newspapers were beginning to struggle anyway. The morning newspapers were the most successful newspapers, for the most part, across the country. They [afternoon papers] had less circulation and, therefore, less advertising and, therefore, less money. So they did have---it was a handicap. It was not entirely just because they were penny pinchers that they were paying that money because they simply did not have as much money.

RR: Go ahead with your sports writing career at the *Gazette*.

JM: Well, I stayed with the *Gazette* for sixteen years as a sports writer. Most of it, a large part of that time, I was in charge of the high school coverage, although I did a lot of things like everybody else. I covered, sometimes covered, the Arkansas Travelers in the summer, but not very often. But I would fill in for Orville.

Orville usually---he was covering the Travelers when I started, and then Jim Bailey took over and covered it most of the time. But I would fill in for one or the other. Then Orville broke me in on the desk and wanted me to help out on the desk and lay out the paper one night a week. Then when the layout men, the desk men, were on vacation, the slot man was on vacation, then I would fill in while they were on vacation and do that. So I did all sorts of things during that time and I helped. There was a time when I went along with Orville and some others sometimes, too, to cover the Razorback games, the football games particularly. But I would go along to do the sidebar, and we might have somebody else, but not always did we have somebody else. But we might have somebody else doing the sidebar. But we would go to the football games. Orville always wrote the game story, and I did a dressing room story.

RR: That would be a sidebar, a dressing room story?

JM: Yes. Dressing room story---usually go to one or the other dressing room. It might be Arkansas's dressing room or it might be the visiting---the other team's dressing room.

RR: What did you do during the game?

JM: I sat in the press box and took notes and kept track of the game. I guess sometimes I was helping Orville funnel his copy to whatever source---when we first started, we sent our copy by Western Union. They still had Western Union operators in the press box.

RR: You mean you would actually tear off a piece of copy and give it to the operator?

JM: Right. Orville would write his or I---myself, either one, would write it on a typewriter, and then take that sheet of paper and hand it to the operator, and she would keyboard it in and send it back to the *Gazette*.

RR: What kind of typewriter did you all use?

JM: I used a little black Underwood portable. I cannot remember for sure---I think he probably used one of that nature like that, but I do not remember for sure. But he was sure fast. Orville, like I was, Orville was not a touch typist and neither was I. I was a two-fingered typist, but Orville, there is no telling how fast he could go. He was really fast. I got to where I was fairly fast. Incidentally, this may be a little side tracking, but that is the way women finally broke the barrier in the press box. For years and years there was a law. Well, not a law, but it was a common practice to bar women from the press box. Women were just not allowed in the press box. The way they finally got in the press box was they ran out of men Western Union operators. They could not send the story. They did not have enough men to punch in the stories, so they started letting women in the press box then. That is how women --- that is what finally broke the ban on women in the press box.

RR: When the history of the feminist movement is written, I wonder if they will know about that?

JM: I do not know.

RR: Do you still use the two-fingered method on your computer?

JM: Yes, I do. I always told people I could type as fast as I could think with two

fingers.

RR: Do you remember any particular sports stories that stand out in your mind from those years?

JM: I did a lot of things that I enjoyed and had fun with. I can think of a few stories that, but I probably ought---I will get to that in a minute. For some reason, I really got interested in high school sports. At that time, Little Rock Central---my main assignment was to cover Little Rock Central because they were the big story in the state. But Orville also wanted me covering the entire state, helping organize coverage of the state. I had to rank teams, do the ranking for the state. I got real interested in track and covered track real thoroughly. There were several high school stories that I still get a kick out of thinking about. But, in particular, I remember three interviews that I did, and I may think of some other stories. But there were three interviews that I did that I really had immense fun with. One of them, Ted Williams; one was Dizzy Dean, and one was Brooks Robinson. I interviewed Brooks more than once, and, of course, he was a Little Rock boy. Brooks is one of the all time great guys. I had known his mother. She worked in, I believe, the Secretary of State's office, so I had met his mother when I was covering the state capitol. So when Brooks went to the majors, she would call me and say, "Brooks is coming home. You want to talk to him?" I said, "Sure." So I would go out and talk to Brooks. Then Dizzy Dean came in one time, and that may have been the funniest interviews that I ever did. He was staying down at the --- What was the name of it? --- Coachman's Inn motel down on the interstate that

Witt and Jack Stephens owned. You know what I am talking about? At any rate, they had a big suite that they kept for friends and high rollers who came in. So I called Dizzy up and said, "Can I come interview you?" He said, "Sure." He told me where he was and I went up, and I had just got through talking to him. I went up and knocked on the door, and nobody came, and I knocked on the door, and finally Dizzy answered, and he said, "Boy, you are going to have to excuse me." He said, "I got lost in this dad gum place. This place is so big I have been lost in the bathroom twice." We sat down, and I had a great interview. I cannot remember the details of it, but he was just as funny as he could be. He was always funny. But I do remember that one of my questions was---he had given three different birthplaces when he was in the major leagues, pitching for the Cardinals. He had listed his birthplaces as Lucas, Arkansas, and Holdenville, Oklahoma and someplace in Mississippi. I think maybe it was Jackson. So somebody asked him, "Why do you give out three different birthplaces?" Dizzy said, "Well, when I first came up here, they said the press is going to be around interviewing you, and you ought to be polite and careful with them. They are always looking for something new. So I just gave them a new birthplace." I said, "Okay, where were you born?" He said, "I was actually born in Lucas, Arkansas. My family was [?] itinerant farmers. We just traveled around, you know, picking crops and working different crops. One time we took off with a couple of horses and wagons. There were quite a few of us. We took off a with couple of horses and wagons going to Texas to work in the harvest down in Texas. We got down

there and one wagon got a little ahead of us. A big train came along and it took a long time for that train to get past. When the train finally got past, the other wagon had gone on. It was not anywhere in sight. You know we did not see each other for two years?”

RR: What a lie.

JM: So who knows how --- he said they lived one time somewhere closer to Little Rock. It would be in my copy. There is some mountain down there, and he said, “You know, times were really hard. That is how I built up my arms. I used to go out and throw rocks at the squirrels in the tree trying to kill these squirrels.” He said, “Eventually, they told me I was going to have to start throwing left-handed. I was throwing so strong right-handed, I was tearing up the meat.”

RR: Where is Lucas, Arkansas?

JM: Just south of here---it is down just the other side of Mansfield off of Highway 71. You go down 71 towards Mena and Texarkana, but it is just a few miles past Mansfield. Then you turn back to the east off of 71.

RR: My uncle Ernest Graves, who grew up in Garland County, claimed that he played baseball against Dizzy Dean.

JM: Fairly close to Garland County down there, so it would not be an awfully long trip. And then Ted Williams --- I interviewed Ted with some trepidation because he had the great reputation of being tough on the newspaper guys in Boston. They just---he just did not get along with the newspapermen in Boston at all. I had, you know, really some concern. He was just as polite as he could be,

talkative and friendly. Never had a bit of trouble with him or getting any information out of him. I can remember not much about particular facts that came out of the interview except that I did ask him, at that time, about Brooks Robinson, and he said, "Oh, the greatest third baseman that I have ever seen." At that time, I believe the Oriole short stop was one of the Latin American players. I cannot remember. It might have been Aparicio. I cannot remember. He said, "There is not much sense hitting the ball on the ground to that side of their infield." He said, "You are not going to get it through there." But he was really . . .

RR: Aparicio---how do you spell that?

JM: A-P-A-R-I-C-I-O. You might have to check Jim Bailey on that. He could probably tell you who was playing short stop when Brooks was playing third base.

RR: You had some great experiences.

JM: Yes, I really enjoyed it. Brooks told me a story that I find very interesting. Later it was kind of confirmed in a way, he said that Ted Williams's last time at bat, in his career was against the Orioles. He had a home run. His last bat, he hit a home run. He said that the Oriole pitcher --- they knew that this was going to be last bat. It was toward the end of the season. He said the Oriole pitcher threw him nothing but fast balls. Said that, you know, he did not want---he wanted to at least give Ted a chance to get a hit. He was not just deliberately saying, "Here, just hit it," but he was not throwing a bunch of junk and a bunch of curves and

everything. Ted hit one out of the park, and Brooks said Ted called this pitcher up that night and thanked him. He said, "I appreciate you giving me a chance to get a hit in my last time at bat." Well, it turns out, that that is not an unprecedented thing in major league baseball. It is --- in unusual circumstances, they have been known to give a guy a chance, at any rate. That was really brought home for me when Pete Rose's consecutive game hitting spree was broken. I have forgotten how many games. He was beginning, the only guy who really got close to DiMaggio's hitting streak. It was broken with about --- I do not remember, but they were interviewing him in the dugout right after the game. I do not know whether he knew he was on the air on live TV or not. This guy was a junk-ball pitcher, who walked him and threw him, you know, threw him all kinds of junk stuff and slow pitches and never really gave him a good pitch to hit. Just trying to keep him, just desperately trying to keep him from getting a hit. They asked Pete how he felt. He said, "How do you think I feel? I am pissed off." He berated this pitcher for not giving him a chance to hit. Implying that under other circumstances other major leaguers were known at least to give the player a chance.

RR: That would be kind of a delicate question in baseball, wouldn't it?

JM: Yes, it would.

RR: Well, you worked on the desk for a while.

JM: Well, I worked a little bit on the desk. About the last four or five years I was in sports at the *Gazette*. I was sort of Orville's assistant. We never did actually give

me that title, but he asked me if I would take over the scheduling and other things like that and stay in the office. At that time I sort of quit going to the Razorback games with him and doing sidebars and stuff. Earlier, while I really [?], he was not, to be honest, he was not satisfied with the layouts he was getting and the makeups he was getting on the Razorback football game days. We had a slot man, who will be nameless, who just played stuff smaller than Orville thought it ought to be played. He, Orville, used to say, "If you decide you want a twenty-four-point head, you ought to automatically raise it to a thirty-six. You are putting every head at least one size too small." So he asked me if I would take over laying out the Sunday section on Razorback game days. So I did that. I had done that for, I do not know, a couple of years, or something like that. Then he asked me if I would take over the scheduling. So the last four or five years I was on the staff, I did that.

RR: You all had your own slot man of course.

JM: Yes, yes, we did. We had our own slot. One other incident that happened along that time---I thought it was very interesting. After the 1959 season, I guess it was, Arkansas went to the Gator Bowl. Bowl games, Bowl trips have been very few and far between. For some reason, the *Gazette* decided that as a reward they were going to send the entire sports staff to the Gator Bowl. They sent the entire sports staff to the Gator Bowl, and I think maybe, Douglas could tell you, I think maybe Douglas and Nelson and somebody else put out the sports section that day.

RR: How big was the sports staff?

JM: It was six or seven, or something like that. I do not remember. But it included the deskman. They included, you know, two or three deskmen. I remember it included Chuck Miller, who was a main slot man, and Eddie Best, who was on the desk, and Bailey and myself and Robert Shaw, I believe, and maybe Eddie Abel. I cannot remember just exactly who was there. But that was the game that Arkansas beat Georgia Tech in the Gator Bowl. The funny thing about it was we had the whole staff there, and I was the only one who did a side bar. I had to do both dressing rooms. I never have figured that out. I had to do the Razorbacks and the Georgia Tech dressing rooms, and everybody else was sitting up in the stands. That was unusual. I have never heard of another newspaper, I do not think, doing that. But the entire sports staff--they flew us down there and flew us back.

RR: Tell me about Orville Henry.

JM: Orville was really a good guy to work for. He was a good editor. He was a good idea man. He was a good newspaperman and he was, you know, easy to get along with. I mean, he didn't tolerate much horsing around or anything, but, I mean, he really was a good guy to work for. And I learned a tremendous amount of journalism from Orville. He was the hardest worker that I have ever seen. There was a time there, a lot of people will understand this, but the *Gazette* made a major effort on Friday nights to cover every high school football game in the state. We asked people to call in, and we would try to do a little rewrite on all the games in the state and everything.

RR: How many games, hundreds?

JM: Yes, well, maybe not hundreds, but maybe a hundred---up to a hundred and fifty. Orville, he worked every Friday night, you know, helping write headlines and deciding play on certain games, and stuff like that. He would work Friday night until midnight, and then he would get up and go, you know, on Saturday morning and go to a Razorback game. I mean, he did that for years. He was writing, I believe, six columns a week, and he would work the slots on Wednesday, on Wednesday night. So he would come in despite all the other stuff he was doing. He would come in to work the slot on Wednesday night, which was one of the slot men's night off. He was just working, you know, extra long hours. One reason that he developed an in with the Razorbacks was that he would do anything to cover them. I can remember a lot of times, particularly, Frank Broyles would call up and say, "Hey, I am speaking to some Razorbacks club tonight. Do you want to go along?" Orville would say, "Yes," and Orville would take off and ride down there with him and, you know, ride back. I am pretty sure that, early on at least, that Frank extended the invitation to the other paper, and they were not particularly interested in going down there and working those long hours and being gone away from home, you know, eight or ten hours and that kind of thing. Orville never turned it down. He just went all the time. When I was first there, he covered the Travelers all the time in the summertime and was still writing his column five or six days a week and working slot on Wednesday night. I guess somebody else worked the slot when the Travelers were playing,

except it is possible that he still worked the slot and sent someone else to cover the Travelers. But he used to cover those all the time. He would file for the out-of-town papers that — in those days, the Travelers were in the Southern Association, which included Atlanta and Birmingham, you know, and places like that. They wouldn't usually send in a reporter of their own. They would ask the hometown man, who was usually Orville, to call the story to them. He would also call in notes to the Associated Press. So he would go and file a story for the *Gazette*, the Associated Press and the other newspapers. In those days---this is sort of interesting---they were still using Western Union, and this was one of the times — about the only place I knew of then that were still doing the, you know, Morse Code, tap, tap, tap, tap. There was a guy there named Earl Little who had been doing it for years. He and Orville had great rapport. Orville would just dictate his story off the top of his head to Earl Little. He would compose it, word for word, and Earl would type it out. Earl knew how to, you know, and made sure he had everything right, you know, and Earl would type it out. He would do the same thing . . .

RR: He would do it on the phone or in person?

JM: No, in person. Earl was in the press box.

RR: Oh, I see.

JM: He was sitting in the press box with the Western Union. So Orville would be sitting there next to him just dictating the story, and Earl would be tapping it out on the whatever you call it. And then he would do the same thing for the other

out-of-town paper, I believe. Except maybe in some cases, if they didn't have a way to receive Western Union, he would probably call them on the phone and dictate a story to them. And then, as I say, [?].

RR: Did Orville not --- was he at all reluctant to delegate some of this to other members of the staff?

JM: I don't really --- I don't really remember him being so reluctant to delegate it as it was that we just didn't have a very big staff to begin with. Later on, the staff began to expand, but he just didn't have a lot of people. I remember that after Jim Bailey got there, you know, and Jim just established himself as a marvelous reporter and a marvelous writer, which he was. Well, Orville just decided to turn over covering the Travelers to Jim. Jim was a big baseball enthusiast anyway and really knowledgeable about baseball. So he just turned it over to Jim. He never did delegate Razorback coverage. He never did delegate game stories to anybody else. He wrote, you know, the columns, all the time. But he, in a sense, delegated high school coverage to me and AIC coverage and baseball coverage to Bailey because he had done a lot of that himself early on. He had covered all types of things --- had written a lot of high school stuff. In fact, it got to the point that he wrote so much about the Razorbacks that, you know, some of the high school coaches in the state started complaining, you know. They said, "He never writes about anything except the Razorbacks. He never writes about the high schools," you know. And I would tell Orville, and Orville would say, "Hell, I don't know as much about them as you do. Why should I jump in and start writing something

about the high schools when I don't know it and I am not going to write as accurately as you are?" But there was some animosity about that as time went on from the high school coaches.

RR: Tell me about his caps, his hats.

JM: Well, to tell you the truth, I am trying to remember. I remember him wearing one a lot, but I can't remember exactly what it was. I know later on he started wearing the caps, the little, what I would call --- I don't know what you would call them --- with the little small bill on it, like the French wear except it didn't have a bill on it. But he used to wear hats a lot, I believe. Yes, he used to wear those a lot. But, you know, he was there all the time, and he loved the *Gazette*. That was why the end of the whole thing was so tragic because he dearly loved the *Gazette*. He had started right out of high school and was still working there, as I recall, when he was going through junior college, Little Rock Junior College, and working for Ben Epstein. As I have heard, there is a story — and I hope you are able to get this from Bailey and Orville, too --- that Epstein took a job with one of the New York papers to cover the Yankees, which would have been tough to turn down. So Orville must have been only eighteen or nineteen at the time, and they thought, "Well, you know, we will hire another sports editor," and they made Orville interim sports editor until they could hire somebody else. This was during the war, WWII. They did not come up with anybody, so after about six months or so they just named Orville full-time sports editor.

RR: Did he have a physical disability that kept him from going to the Army?

JM: I do not know the answer to that. I think maybe he did, but I am not sure what it was. He was awfully light at that time. He did have some bad health along the way.

RR: I have heard he was just real thin.

JM: He was very thin at that time and, you know, not very tall and everything. One other thing I didn't mention is he covered most of the golf. You know, of course he loved golf. One of his brothers was a golf pro. He loved golf with a passion.

RR: He plays golf.

JM: Yes, he plays golf. He plays a lot of golf, and he covered a lot of golf. He eventually, to my regret, delegated some of that to me. Because I would rather cover almost anything than a golf tournament.

RR: Really?

JM: Oh, yes.

RR: Why is that?

JM: Well, I am not wild about golf anyway except I got a big kick out of watching Tiger Woods win the PGA and the big tournaments. They are hard work for one thing. But you can't see what is going on. I mean, the golf course is spread out, you know, over eighteen holes, and you may decide, "Well, I am going to follow this one guy," who is a hot guy and then, all of a sudden, he cools off, and somebody else shoots a record sixty-two, and you haven't seen a stroke of it. So you got to come back and try to piece all of that together. The way we used to cover it, you know, they would have these tournaments with a championship

flight, and they might have nine other flights. Well, Orville wanted to put all ten flights in the paper, so I had to go out there and type up the results of all ten flights. I mean, we did not double team. It was just one guy, you know. As I say, I never --- we never had a golf course in Greenwood, Arkansas, when I lived there, so I never got really very interested in golf. I just didn't care much about it and just found it a chore to cover, especially some of those tournaments where you had to do the results of nine flights or go out and get the parings for the nine flights the night before, when all these guys were sitting around the country club drinking and shooting pool. They were not real worried about whether they got through in time to help me make my deadline.

RR: Right. You mentioned Orville --- how tragic the end was. Can you talk about that some?

JM: Well . . .

RR: I know you were not there.

JM: I was not there at the time, but let me give you an example of how he felt about the *Gazette*. There was a time after I had been with them, working for him, he called me over and said, "Jerry, I want to tell you something." He said, "If you ever want to be a --- I don't want you to leave, but if you ever want to be a sports editor of your own, you better start looking for a job elsewhere." He said, "I will never leave the *Gazette*." He said, "I wouldn't leave the *Gazette* to go to *Sports Illustrated*." He said, "I love the *Gazette*. I love what I am doing. He said, "I will never leave the *Gazette*." Well, and, of course, he did wind up leaving the

Gazette after Gannett bought it. Most of the things I know about that are secondhand. I heard a lot of it from Bailey who stayed on. I had left and gone first to the *Democrat*, *Arkansas Democrat*, as a managing editor and stayed there seven years and then went to as the executive sports editor of the *Daily Oklahoman* and the *Oklahoma City Times*. So I was in Oklahoma City when Gannett bought out the *Gazette* and all of this transpired, but I know that that just had to kill Orville's soul. I heard that the Gannett people, you know, treated him pretty shabbily and they would play his column inside. So, in my view though --- and he might disagree with it --- but in my view the *Gazette* made a mistake when they let him go to Fayetteville full time. I think he would have been better off staying in Little Rock and doing what he did rather than going up there.

RR: He was being the editor from Fayetteville?

JM: Yes, for a while he was being the editor from Fayetteville. I understand that they later changed that, and I think that maybe James Thompson started sort of running the sports department, then, without a title. But I think eventually, maybe even before Orville left, they gave James the title of sports editor. This was before Gannett came in, I believe. Of course, I don't think it was too long before Gannett came in that they put their own people in there.

RR: Have you ever heard the story of what triggered his leaving the *Gazette* and going to the *Democrat*?

JM: No, well, I have heard various things . . . they did things like --- I think once they ran the same story, you know, the same column, two days in a row or something

like that, and that was after they had gone to the computerized type setting and everything. But I have heard --- I am trying to remember that I think maybe I heard that Jack Stephens --- he was good friends with Jack because they both loved golf --- I heard that he was complaining to Jack and Jack asked him if he would like for him to talk to Walter Hussman and see if Walter would be interested in hiring him. I think that Orville gave Jack the okay. Walter said yes, and so I think that is how that all transpired. What set it all off, I don't know for sure. Bailey would know that better than I would.

RR: I have heard there was something about his picture running with his column. They had a dispute over whether he would wear his cap in the picture column. Have you heard that?

JM: No, I haven't heard that.

RR: Well, I don't know if that is true or not.

JM: No, I have not heard that.

RR: We have got another couple of minutes on the . . .

JM: Yes, okay.

RR: Well, tell me about some of the other people that you worked with at the *Gazette*.

JM: Well, we had a lot of very good people work for us. That was --- one other thing --- Orville was a pretty good judge of talent and a pretty good recruiter. While I was there, we had, of course, a lot of high school kids come in and work for us on Friday nights, rewrite high school games and that sort of thing. So a lot of those people who started just on Friday night out of high school came on and went into

journalism full time and did very well. Some of the ones I can remember, of course, are Bill Simmons and Robert Shaw, both of whom went to the Associated Press and both of whom became bureau chiefs for the Associated Press. Harry King who is still the, I believe, still the AP sports editor in Little Rock. Eddie Best, who was one of our deskmen who left and went to work for Faulkner advertising agency. Among other people we had were --- and this I think came after I stepped out of the high school job and started scheduling things --- we hired Jerry Schaeffer who was later the sports information director at Arkansas State.

RR: How do you spell Schaeffer?

JM: S-C-H-A-E-F-F-E-R, I believe. Then Charlie Thornton. Charlie later became the sports information director for Bear Bryant at Alabama. Let's see, among others, Richard Allen, who later went to the *New York Times* and had a very outstanding career there and now is with the *Herald Tribune* in Paris, I believe. He worked some for us and then before, right before I came there, among other people who had worked for Orville --- and I knew nearly all these people --- was Tom Dygard, who later wound up with some of the most influential AP assignments. He was the bureau chief in Tokyo for a while. Pat Hogan later went to Florida State, and I believe he became the S.I.D. at Florida State. I replaced a guy named Dave Hacker, who left and went to the *Louisville Courier Journal*. Then Jerry Dhonau worked in sports for a while. Of course, another guy that worked for us a little while there was Collins Hemmingway. Collins, as some people may know, I

hired him again later on at the desk on the *Democrat*, but he wound up going to the *Eugene Register Guard* and then getting into the computer business and wound up getting hired by Microsoft and became one of Bill Gates's top PR guys. In fact, he wrote Gates's last book, *Business at the Speed of Thought*.

RR: *Business at the Speed of Thought*?

JM: *Business at the Speed of Thought*, which was on the bestseller list for quite a while. Of course, other people that worked, some of them a little bit after I was there, that worked in the sports department was Ron Robinson, who later became president of Crawford, Johnson and Robinson. And Brenda Scisson was there and Ralph Patterson. Ralph worked for us one summer, and Wadie Moore, of course . . .

RR: Brenda Scisson worked for the sports department?

JM: Yes, she worked in the sports department at the *Gazette*.

RR: I never knew that.

JM: Yes.

RR: S-C-I-S-S-O-N?

JM: Yes. Then Wadie, who was the first black sports writer who went to work for a white newspaper, as far as I know, in the state of Arkansas. We hired Wadie --- I sort of hired Wadie. Orville called me and said that the *Gazette* had given him the okay to hire a black sports writer. He wanted me to do it. I believe that he suggested that I call the principal at Horace Mann, and I called the principal at Horace Mann, and he recommended Wadie. So I liked Wadie and recommended

him, and we hired him.

RR: You hired him right out of high school?

JM: I believe so. I believe that he hadn't been long out of high school.

RR: Where did he end up?

JM: He is doing public relations for the Arkansas Activities Association and still working for them. Does a really good job. Did a really good job at the *Gazette*. He sort of replaced me on the high school beat after I left, at some point in time after I left for the *Democrat*.

RR: Let me ask you about a particular guy you might already have mentioned. A young guy who came there to cover bowling or who did cover bowling while he was there. Who would that have been?

JM: I don't remember us having --- we might have had briefly a guy covering bowling, but for the most part of the time we used a freelancer. We hired a freelancer who was a big bowling enthusiast, and I am trying to remember who our freelancer was, but --- what was that guy's name? It is possible that Fritz Goodbar may have done it for a while. I don't remember. Fritz worked for Worthen Bank. But there was another guy, and I can just see him, tall and slender.

RR: What I was thinking of was young, like a high school kid, and there was kind of a raunchy story about him that I won't tell on tape, but I thought you might remember him.

JM: No, if you tell me. if you give me a name, I might remember it, but I don't

remember it. I don't think we --- now that you mentioned it, I think maybe we did have a guy that they had come in to work full time and cover some bowling. But that is also possible that that might have happened after I left.

RR: Okay, we were talking about the people at the *Gazette* that you had worked with in the sports department.

JM: That pretty much covers --- well, it doesn't cover it --- Wilbur Bentley. I don't know whether anyone has mentioned him or not, Bill Bentley. Bill Bentley was an oldtimer. The first year or two or three that I was there, Bill worked for us on the desk, and he may have come back from somewhere. He was such an oldtimer that he still wore green eye shades the way they used to wear ages ago, you know. He wrote a column. I think he wrote a column once a week. I think maybe he had worked for Epstein back years earlier. He wrote a column once a week, and he nearly always wrote about racehorses. He loved racehorses and everything. I think he had maybe one other subject. I can't think of what it was now, but he wrote nearly the same thing all the time. You know, he was a character. A man of very few words, but when he did say something, you remembered it.

RR: Tell me about Jim Bailey.

JM: Jim Bailey is a great talent. Jim and I may not necessarily always remember the stories of his beginning the same way, but I think I remember a lot about him. Jim came on the paper about a year after I did. As I remember, we hired him straight out of Southern State, which at that time might have still been Magnolia A & M. He came up and went to work for us. It was obvious that he could write,

but he was very shy. So my recollection is that he had a hard time calling up people he didn't know at first and, you know, asking them questions, especially if you had to ask them a tough question. He was just so shy and everything, but he quickly began to develop. I remember the story this way and I am not sure if he does, but Orville told him he was covering the AIC and the way our deadlines were we had three deadlines. Orville said, "Now you go down and cover a basketball game." He'd say, "You go down to Southern State and cover a basketball game. They get our first edition. Our deadline for that first edition is 9:15. I want you to try to file something by then because I want us to at least get a few graphs in the paper. You are down there, we want it, and you will just have to dictate it." Bailey said, "What do you mean dictate?" He said, "I mean dictate it over the telephone. You are not going to have time to write it first. You are not going to have time to go type it up and then come back and read it. You are going to have to dictate it off the top of your head." As I recollect, Bailey said, "I am not sure I can do that." Orville said, "Well, you got to do it." Well, it wasn't a year until Bailey was a master at it. Bailey could write stories off the top of his head that were as perfectly organized, better organized, than most of the people who sat down and worked at a typewriter for three hours. They read, you know, in a proper sequence, well written. He was a basic writer, but nearly every piece he ever did, they would have one or two lines that would just sing. I mean, you know, he just had that knack. He would be pretty meat and potatoes, but there would be somewhere in there he would turn a phrase that you just stop and said,

“Boy, that is really a nice phrase.”

RR: He still has that knack.

JM: Yes. He would, you know, he just got to where he was an expert at that. I would say about Jim Bailey he probably . . .

RR: Before you go on, let's talk dictating about writing at the typewriter. For people who don't know anything about newspapers, they probably have no idea how difficult that is. Those of us who had to do it --- I had to do it just very few times in my career, and I am sure you have done it.

JM: I had to do it the same way in sports because there was so much of the sports news that was going on at night. So we were always facing deadlines, and if I were out of town or something, then I had to do it. But you would be facing, you would be out of town and facing a deadline. The only way you could get your story in was call and dictate it to somebody back in the office. You wouldn't have time to sit down and compose it and make that deadline. It is difficult to organize your thoughts. I know a lot of people who would say, “Well, I couldn't sit down at a typewriter and write, you know, fifteen paragraphs in an hour.” We have to do it in fifteen minutes sometimes, however long it takes. So you had to be practiced in it and skilled in it and had to have an organized mind. As I started to say, Jim Bailey probably had the most unorganized desk and the most organized mind of anybody I ever worked with except possibly Bobbie Forster. He just had junk stacked all over his desk. He had it in the corner for a long time. It would be maybe two feet high and just have all this stuff pitched on there, but

he could always go right to it and find whatever he was looking for. Somebody cleaned him up one time, cleaned it up while he wasn't there one time. I thought he was going to go nuts. He couldn't find anything. He was exceptional at that. He had a great memory. He knew sports backwards and forwards, and he had a great memory. He had I would guess almost a photographic memory. He could quote Stan Musial's batting average for every year he was in the major leagues in order. He would start out each year and tell you what he hit that year and probably how many home runs he hit. He could do the same thing for Joe Dimaggio. He was the same way about boxing. He knew boxing backwards and forwards.

RR: He was always writing about boxing, wasn't he?

JM: Yes, he loved boxing.

RR: Why is that? Stop a minute and talk about boxing as a sportswriter sees it.

JM: Well, I am not exactly sure why Bailey got so carried away with it, but I can see why some sportswriters do get carried away with it because it is a pretty elemental and pretty basic sport. You know, it is one on one. This sort of thing, *mano a mano*. I think there were a lot of people who got, who became, who have become, you know, dissatisfied with it because it had obviously been so much mob influence in it and such a bunch of rinky dink promoters and everything that they got, you know, five different world titles for each weight and pound and created about six more weights. You may have fifty world champions where you used to have ten, you know, ten weights or whatever or something like that. But

Bailey was very good at it and, as I say, knew it backward and forwards. I was always sort of interested in, more interested in baseball and football and track. So we used to get a million calls. You used to always get a million calls in the sports department, people calling you up and wanting to settle arguments and bets and stuff like that. So I would take the ones on football and track, and Bailey would take the ones on baseball and boxing and maybe a few other things. But I remember somebody calling up one time and I answered the phone, and he said, "How old is Floyd Patterson?" I didn't even bother to look. I said, "Hey, Jim, how old is Floyd Patterson?" He said something to the effect, "I don't know. He was born February the twenty-eighth of 1927. Figure it out for yourself." He could tell you all the facts on most of Joe Louis's heavyweight prize fights. He could tell you how many people were there and how much money they took in. So, you know, he just had a phenomenal memory for stuff like that.

RR: You recently interviewed Jim. Did he tell you about the interview that he had with Sonny Liston's mother?

JM: A little bit, yes. I asked him about that, but really I don't think he wanted it to be drawn out too much on it. But he told me a little bit about it. I think he went over there with . . .

RR: Pat Owens

JM: Pat Owens, yes. I did ask him about that, but he didn't tell me. One of my favorite stories about Jim --- I know we sent him to --- I believe it was Houston -- - to cover a Muhammad Ali fight. I am not sure. I guess maybe it was early Ali,

but we sent him down there several days ahead of time. So he was in the gym, watching him work out one day. He happened to sit down by a guy named Cus d'Amato, who was Floyd Patterson's manager. They got to talking about Floyd Patterson, and Cus D'Amato was telling Jim, said, "Well, you know, Floyd did such and such in the fourth round." Jim said, "No, it was the fifth round." This is Floyd's manager. Cus said, "No, it was the fourth round." Jim said, "No, it was the fifth round. Don't you remember such and such happened in the fourth round?" This guy said, "By God, you are right." So Bailey remembered it better than he did. They became very close friends. After the fight --- neither one of them liked to fly. Cus was going back to New York, and he took the train and Bailey took the train. So they rode from Houston together as far as Little Rock, and Cus went on to New York and got off, but Bailey got a bunch of great stories out of him. He just had a great mind and a knack for writing.

RR: Did Jim ever play any sports?

JM: Not that I am aware of.

RR: Where did he grow up?

JM: Emerson, Arkansas.

RR: Where is that?

JM: That's way down in southwest Arkansas. It's almost to the Louisiana line. It is not very many miles from the Louisiana line. That is where Duddy Waller came from. Duddy was later an outstanding basketball player and the University of Arkansas head basketball coach at one time. But Jim --- an interesting story

about Jim --- I don't know what great significance this is --- as I understand what happened, Jim's father got killed in a car wreck right in front of their house out in the country at Emerson when he was young, and his mother would never let Jim drive. She was just petrified that Jim could not drive, and she wouldn't let him drive. When he came to the *Gazette*, he could not drive. I took him --- he started taking lessons, and I took him out. I drove him out to the state police headquarters for him to take his driving test.

RR: I knew he didn't drive, but I had never heard that story.

JM: Yes, his father got killed just out on the road in front of where you turned off to go to their house. So he couldn't drive. He started learning how to drive at that time, and I will never forget, I guess it was 1961, that Arkansas and Ole Miss opened the season, the first game ever played in the new memorial stadium in Jackson, Mississippi. It was early September. It was hot. Orville flew down for the game. He said he didn't have but one more seat on the plane, and he wanted Jim and I both to go. One of us could fly with him, and the other had to drive. We said, "Well, that is not hardly fair, so we will just both drive, and we can keep each other company." So we went down, drove down. We both worked high school football on Friday night until midnight. Got up by about five o'clock in the morning, drove to Jackson, covered an afternoon game and went and got something to eat and started driving back. Well, by about Eudora --- I was doing all the driving --- I was just about to pass out. I couldn't stay awake. I said, "Jim, you are going to have to drive." He just started learning. He said, "No, Jerry, I

don't really want to take a chance." He finally said, "I will drive, but I won't drive more than thirty miles and hour." I said, "Hell, I can't wait. I'll drive, but you are going to have to talk to me to keep me awake." So we told more stories in that stretch from Eudora to Little Rock. We covered a lot of athletic and musical history and everything else in that stretch.

RR: Tell me what you remember about some of the other folks around the paper. Like do you have any particular memories of J.N. Heiskell?

JM: Just, you know, that he was --- what I remember most are the stories I knew of him, about his great dry wit and everything else --- which reminds me, I don't know whether you have ever have received this information --- the story that I heard about Orville and J.N. Heiskell was that Arkansas had been very insignificant in football for a long time. I guess after the '45 season, before the '46 season, there were a bunch of businessmen who decided they had to do something for the cause. They just had to build up the program and everything. They were going to go out and hire a big name coach. They influenced the university to do this, and they were a lot of guys, a lot of money, and a lot of influence. That is when they hired John Barnhill. They also decided that if they were going to make an inroad that they had to have some publicity and some coverage. Through most of the war, Arkansas, the *Gazette* or the *Democrat*, neither one of them staffed the Arkansas games when they went to Texas, and I don't even think they staffed all their games in Fayetteville. So they would use the AP story. So they went down to talk to Mr. Heiskell and said, "Mr. Heiskell,

we just have to have more coverage of what we are trying to do. We have got to have more coverage.” Mr. Heiskell agreed with that. So they called, and I think at some point the powers that be --- I don’t remember who all they were --- called Orville in and told him that they wanted to step up their coverage of the Razorbacks, wanted to cover the games, all their games and wanted to devote more space to them. And the story goes --- and I think it is probably true --- that Mr. Heiskell at one point told Orville, said, "Mr. Henry, I will make a deal with you. I won’t tell you how to write sports if you won’t tell me how to write editorials.” Stories like that are mostly what I remember. I remember what I always thought was a great line that Carrick came home from Duke on vacation one time.

RR: His son, Carrick.

JM: Yes, his son, his grandson.

RR: Oh, his grandson?

JM: Yes, Carrick.

RR: Carrick.

JM: Carrick Patterson. Yes, Carrick Patterson, his grandson, came home. I believe he was attending Duke. He came home on vacation, and he was standing in the newsroom, and Mr. Heiskell came out and was surprised by Carrick being there. He said, “Well, Carrick what are you doing home?” He said, “Well, I came home for Easter vacation, grandfather,” I believe he said. But, at any rate, Mr. Heiskell saw him, and he said, “You know, I don’t believe we had Easter vacation when I

was in college. Of course, Christ wasn't dead yet." But I remember, as far as I know --- of course, Orville might fill in those --- but as far I know, Orville never had much interference from higher up, particularly from him. Except one thing. This was about old houses, you know, and everything. He thought we ought to keep old houses and everything. You had to be careful how you dealt with any of that stuff. For the most part, that didn't affect sports, but I do remember one or two things that we were cautioned about. "You have to be careful about how you handle this because that is one of Mr. Heiskell's standbys."

RR: You want to move out of that sun?

JM: No, I am fine. No, I am okay. You know, mostly what I knew about him was what I heard from the people in the newsroom and everything because we did not have much dealings with him in sports.

RR: You probably didn't have a lot of dealings with Bill Shelton?

JM: No, not much. Of course, I knew Bill a lot better and . . .

RR: Did you go to school with Bill?

JM: No, he was just ahead of me. He finished the university at least before I ever got into journalism. I think he maybe --- his last year might have been '47 or '48, one of those two years, and I didn't start in journalism, I don't think, until '49.

RR: Did you deal much with A.R. Nelson?

JM: A little bit. As I say, A.R. was the one who hired me, but he did not stay around a long time after that. He stayed a while and he --- most of what I know about Nelson was what I heard also from other people, that he just had a flat rule that,

you know, that he would not hire anybody back who ever left the *Gazette*. I am sure you heard that story, but to him it was a criminal act to leave the *Gazette* and go to some other newspaper or something. If you ever left and wanted to come back, he just wouldn't take you back. I think that included, I am sure it included, Charlie Allbright. I know it included Eddie Best, for us. I think it may have included Buddy Portis.

RR: So Charlie came back after Nelson left?

JM: Yes, that's correct. My recollection is he came back after Nelson left. I believe that Douglas hired Charlie back.

RR: Did you know Allbright before [?]?

JM: Yes, Charlie and I worked on the *Traveler* together. In fact, we graduated the same year. No, I believe he was a year behind me. I think he graduated a year after I did, but he worked on the *Traveler* staff. I believe that he was one of the editors on the *Traveler* staff under McCord. He had worked at the *Democrat* while he was still in high school, and then had gone up to the university. Then he came back, and I think he worked at the *Democrat* for a while after he came back out of college.

RR: On general assignment?

JM: Yes, this is my recollection. I am not sure about that. I know he had done some sports coverage for the *Democrat* and he had also --- that is how he got involved with Jimmy Karam, I think. He might have been going to junior college at that time and had done some, I think, he had done some PR work for Jimmy Karam.

There was always a priceless story that Charlie --- Charlie told me that years after this he was walking down the street, Main Street, by Karam's clothing store, and Karam met him, saw him out front and said, "Charlie, why don't you come in and pick you out a suit." Charlie said, "I don't . . ." Karam said, "No, Charlie, you did me a million favors. I just want you to come in and pick out a suit." And he kept on harping at him, and Charlie finally went in and picked out a suit, and at the end of the month he got a bill. He told Karam about it, and Karam said, "Oh, that is all right. I will take care of it." Then the end of the next month, he got another bill. I think maybe he got --- I don't remember --- but he got two or three bills and, finally, he just went ahead and paid for it.

RR: What a guy, Karam.

JM: Yes, but, anyway, Charlie --- no, I know Charlie was working at the *Gazette* and was living in the same apartment house that we were. I mean, the *Democrat*. This was the early years. He was working at the *Democrat*, I believe, doing general assignment. We lived --- when Jo and I first got married, we moved into this big, old home that someone had converted into apartments on our street. We had an apartment upstairs, and Charlie and his wife, Carolyn, had an apartment downstairs. They sent Charlie down to interview Horace Heidt. Horace Heidt, I don't know if you remember, Horace Heidt [and his Musical Knights?].

RR: Horace who?

JM: Horace Heidt, H-E-I-D-T. He was a big [?]. He had a big band, but he also --- I think he did a lot of amateur, you know, had amateurs come on and sing with him,

too, and everything like that. He had dancers and everything else. I mean it was more than just a band and everything. But Charlie went down and interviewed him, and Horace had offered him a job. Horace Heidt liked him and liked the story he wrote so well that he just called him up and offered him a job. When Horace Heidt left town, Charlie left with him.

RR: I never knew that.

JM: He went on the road for --- I don't know how long that lasted, but he was on the road with Horace Heidt for a year or two. I don't know remember how long.

RR: That was while he at the *Democrat* assignment?

JM: Yes, he was at the *Democrat* at that time that happened, and then he left. I suppose that he came back, and I don't know at what point in time he switched to the *Gazette*.

RR: Well, he was still itching to get out of the North Little Rock beat in the middle of 1956, when he hired me to take his place. He was so glad to see me join the staff, so he would be sprung from that terrible beat.

JM: I can imagine that.

RR: What kind of a guy is Charlie?

JM: I don't know. He is a funny guy. He has got a great way about him and got a great knack for writing and everything. Charlie --- I think this has happened more so in later years --- in my opinion, has become pretty reclusive in his later years and doesn't get around and go to many functions or anything like that. You know, as I said, he was always very entertaining and charismatic. He was even

charismatic in his younger years. The girls always liked him, and he was very charming, but he always struck me as just a little bit of a loner, too. It seems to me that he has become more of a loner as time has gone on.

RR: There is a thoughtful aspect of Charlie that I have always had the feeling that I could never penetrate, never get the [beyond].

JM: Yes, I think that is true.

RR: More going on in his mind than he puts on paper.

JM: Yes, I think so, too. I always thought that Charlie had an immense amount of talent. The early years when he first --- he was doing "Our Town" when he first, his first column and everything before he left --- and he was really effective at that, I thought. He really did some outstanding stuff at that time and really built up a following. Then he left, I think, and went --- well, I guess he went --- he left and went to Rockefeller, Winthrop Rockefeller, I remember. I remember, you know Rockefeller, I am sure you knew this, but when Rockefeller was getting ready to die, he took Allbright with him. He knew he was close to death, and he went to Las Vegas, I believe, somewhere --- I believe it was Las Vegas. He went out there knowing that he was going to die. He took Charlie. Charlie went with him and stayed with him. In fact, I was the managing editor at the *Democrat* then, and I can't remember if Charlie wrote the obit or not. As a practice we had a standing obit, but Charlie called me when he died. I think maybe he dictated maybe a few paragraphs to top off the story with.

RR: He was very fond of the man, of Rockefeller.

JM: Yes, I think so, too.

RR: They were pretty close.

JM: But, he went with Rockefeller, stayed with him out there until Rockefeller died.

RR: Now, you were managing editor at the *Democrat* after you left the *Gazette*?

JM: Correct.

RR: What year?

JM: 1971 to 78?

RR: What was Bob McCord doing during that time?

JM: Bob was the head editor. He was the editor-in-chief.

RR: Talk to me some about Bob McCord.

JM: Okay. Bob is an excellent newspaperman. He is just as solid as --- and he has a great devotion to the profession, a great devotion to the truth. He has always been very active in Sigma Delta Chi, the journalism fraternity. I know that he went to editorial writers' conferences a lot when he was the editorial writer. He was just a very dedicated man who was really dedicated to the business of journalism and a great guy. Of course, we had been friends ever since, you know, we were in college together. He was a really good guy to work for and a good journalist. When I went over there as managing editor, Stanley Berry and Marcus George still owned the paper. I went over there in 1971. As I recall, the Hussmans bought it out in 1974. I stayed on as managing editor after Hussman bought it out for, I guess, another four years.

RR: Bob McCord reminds me a little bit of an old friend of mine at the *Washington*

Post who, at the age of seventy-seven or whatever he is right now, is still capable of great anger over the injustice of public affairs that seem to go wrong. I think Bob McCord has some of that quality.

JM: I think so, too. Who is this friend at the *Washington Post*?

RR: His name is Morton Mintz.

JM: I know who he is.

RR: He used to write all about the pharmaceutical companies and things like that. But Bob has that, and it is a valuable thing. Most of us when we reach a certain age start to lose the anger of our youth. Bob still hangs onto a lot of his, and it seems to guide his writing and his interests. I like that about Bob McCord.

JM: I think he is so dedicated to the profession that he is very upset about what is happening to the profession now, as are a lot of us.

RR: You bet.

JM: He is a true journalist who believed in the basics, in honesty, in accuracy, particularly accuracy, and being fair.

RR: Jerry, why don't you talk about leaving the *Democrat* and going to Oklahoma City and your time there and what you have done since then?

JM: Let me tell a couple of little things that I wanted to mention about the *Gazette*. I had always wanted to work for the *Gazette*. When I was in college and got interested in journalism and started following it, I admired the *Gazette*. I particularly admired some of their writers that they had over there, particularly, as I recall, Mort Stern and Tom Davis. They were news writers at the time, and

there were probably others, maybe even Jerry Neal, but they had some guys writing for them at that time who really could turn a phrase, who were really good writers and I enjoyed that, an entertaining writer. So I had always kind of wanted to work for the *Gazette*. When I went to the *Democrat*, I must say that there were a lot of good guys. There were a lot of good journalists at the *Democrat*, and there were a lot of guys that I really liked working with. I had some very close friends on the staff, a lot of the reporters and everything that I really enjoyed and really liked. But I had some troubles with some of the *Democrat's* policies. One of them was that we used to, you know, print divorces, and, you know, you carried the list of all the divorces and all the people that got charged with DWI and everything like that. But there were a few guys on the *Democrat* staff, on the desk particularly, that, if somebody knew them, they might get them to leave their name out of the paper. I used to complain about that, and I complained to Joe Wirges, I remember, a time or two. Joe said, "I don't have that problem. We got a rule. You run them all or you don't run any. There is no deviation from that." I always admired that. I admired that the paper that was a stickler for being fair to everybody, whether they were rich, poor or indifferent. That was one of the other things I had admired about the *Gazette*. When I went to work for the *Democrat* as managing editor, I was to the point where I was kind of tired of what I was doing. I did want to branch out, and it put me back on the news side of the business, which I had really enjoyed, too. So I guess I was beginning to get a little bit tired of sports at that time. I think sports were beginning to get a little bit seedy in

some ways, you know, so many self-serving people in it and everything. But I went back and, as I say, I stayed there seven years. The big problem I had at the *Democrat* was simply that we didn't have much money. When Walter bought the paper, we had a very small circulation. We weren't making much money, you know, and we couldn't afford to pay very big salaries. It was difficult to hire people. It was particularly difficult to keep them. You needed smart people. There were times when I simply couldn't hire an established journalist for the job that I wanted, so I had to hire somebody without much background. But I always tried to hire somebody who was smart. I would spend a lot of time interviewing people and asking them about a lot of things besides journalism. It might be philosophy or government or language or anything else, but I spent --- in particular on the copy desk. I was always a strong believer that you should have strong copy editors. I hired a lot of people on the copy desk, but, you know, they would keep leaving. I didn't blame them, if another bigger newspaper offered them twice as much money or three times as much to go to work, but it just almost wore me out. I felt bad about it. Then they sent me to school to learn about computers. When they got ready to go --- Walter was one of the first to do it --- to go to computerized type setting, they sent me to school in Easton, Pennsylvania, ANPA, American Newspaper Publisher's Association Research Institute. I went up there for a week to learn about computers. Well, I got back -- - I was supposed to come back and train everybody in the newsroom how to use computers. Well, I didn't even know how to use them at the end of the week

because at that time they were not uniform. They didn't necessarily have standardized keyboards or anything else. So they set up the system in the basement, and I worked on it another week or two myself before I ever really mastered it. Then I taught everybody how to work it. Well, it developed that we got Sunday papers, Saturday morning papers and Sunday morning papers and had so many odd shifts that at that time they didn't want to hire technicians to take care of the computer all the time. So they told me that I had to learn how to bring the computer up when it crashed. We didn't have but one computer. We didn't buy a backup computer, so if it crashed when there was nobody else there, I had to go down and bring the computer up. Not only that, but I had to take a beeper with me so if I were away at some place else and the computer crashed, I --- well, between all that, I decided --- I was getting pretty weary. I think, maybe, if I were honest about it, I think that maybe --- he never said that, but I think that Walter might have been, you know, wondering about it. If I were going to do the job as he wanted to do it, in case the *Gazette* --- I don't know for what reason, but I had an inkling or two that --- and maybe he would not be entirely upset if there was a change. There was another guy --- I forgot this guy. Jim Standard, who had worked for us in sports, was the editor of the *Daily Oklahoman* and *Oklahoma City Times*. He had been our Razorback correspondent for a while and also had worked . . .

RR: At the *Gazette*?

JM: At the *Gazette*, yes. And worked for us in sports at the *Gazette*. He was the head

editor of the *Oklahoma City Times* and the *Daily Oklahoman*. He called me and asked me about a recommendation on someone that I knew, and I told him, “No, don’t hire him.” He said he was looking for a sports editor. I said, “No, don’t hire him. He is really not that good, and you would be dissatisfied with him.” But he kept pumping me, you know, telling what he was really looking for and everything. I got to thinking about it and thinking, “Damn, I think he was really hinting that he was interested in me.” I went home and told Jo and said, “You know, I think Standard was kind of interested in talking to me.” So I called him back, and I said, “Are you wanting to talk to me about that job?” He said, “Damn right.” He said, “Can you fly out here?” I said, “Yes, I will come out.” So I went out and they hired me. So I went out. I was the executive sports editor for both newspapers, and after a few years they closed the *Times*, which was the afternoon paper. But I stayed there for thirteen years.

RR: You retired from there?

JM: Yes, I retired from there.

RR: When did Hussman hire John Robert Starr in relation to your leaving?

JM: Right after me. He was looking for somebody to replace me. You can ask McCord about this, but he asked McCord to help him find somebody, and McCord gave him some names. One of them was John Robert Starr. I think, McCord can tell you more about his, but Walter expressed an interest in talking to Starr, and Bob set it up and arranged for Starr to come in for an interview or meet him somewhere for an interview. I don’t know where they went, which was very

interesting in light of the fact that Starr used to rip McCord after he left the *Democrat*, in particular, when he went to work for the *Gazette*. Here is the guy who helped get Starr the job and yet he was ripping him in the newspaper. But I have known Starr since early on in my sports writing career at the *Gazette* when he was working for the AP. So I was not particularly surprised at that. It might not come as a great shock to anybody who knows me, but I never did care for John Robert Starr.

RR: Quite a large number of newspaper folks feel that way.

JM: Yes, but---McCord set it up for them to hire Starr.

RR: I am getting ready to interview Bob. I will get him to talk about that.

JM: But that happened. Of course, you know all about Bob's background [following] the *North Little Rock Times* and everything. One other guy that worked for us in sports at the *Gazette*, far be it from me to leave him out, is Charlie Rixse. Charlie and I were co-sports editors on the *Traveler* our senior years, and we were also roommates. We are still the best of friends. He lives in Hot Springs now. He came over --- we were both working at the *Democrat*. I think he had done a stint in the army first. I already had mine, but he did a stint in the army and came back to the *Democrat*, and we were both working at the *Democrat*. I left and went to the *Gazette*. It wasn't too long after that until Charlie left the *Democrat* and came to the *Gazette* and worked for us in sports for a while. But it wasn't too long until he switched to the news side. He went over and worked for the news side. In fact, he was Shelton's assistant for a while. I guess maybe that is what he was

doing when you were there.

RR: He was, and he held me by the hand and taught me how to cover North Little Rock.

JM: Yes.

RR: He spent seems like days of time with me teaching me how to cover that beat. He is a very patient man.

JM: That he is and a great guy, a very smart guy, a great mastery of the English language. He taught me a few things about the English language. At some point in time, I think maybe he became --- I don't know what --- unhappy to a degree at the *Gazette* and left and went into managing convention bureaus.

RR: You mentioned the language. What was the *Gazette* attitude toward use of language?

JM: The best I remember --- of course, you remember this has been a while --- but they were pretty much sticklers for the English language and pretty basic about it. I remember one thing --- of course, I am still not sure who is right about this, but Orville told me one time --- I used to try to write real flowery stories, you know, kind of colorful leads and everything. Orville said, "Jerry, only problem with your stories --- they are a really well written, really well constructed, but you always do a preamble. You always start off with a preamble. You ought to just cut your first graph and start with your second graph." So I did that. It was true that we basically got right to the nitty-gritty right away. They were very much sticklers for the language. There was one other thing that I remembered about the

Gazette. Of course, one thing we have not touched on is the *Gazette* during the integration crisis and sports in the integration crisis. As you know, the *Gazette* lost a lot of circulation, a lot of advertising because of its editorial stance and everything. I had, at that time, I had covered enough sports statewide and I used to cover conventions, you know, and meetings of all --- I didn't just cover games. I covered all their political meetings and everything else you know, sports and everything. I got to where I knew coaches all over the state in basketball and football. I had any number of people come up to me during this time and say, "Jerry," this particular one in Eastern Arkansas said, "you know, we don't agree. I don't agree with your editorial policy, but I still take the *Gazette* just because of the sports, but I think you ought to know that." I said, "I know a lot of people who do that." I had a great number of coaches come up to me and tell me that. In fact, I had one coach who told me that in Clarendon in eastern Arkansas. He said the school board actually came around and told the teachers to stop taking the *Gazette*. He said they put the pressure on the teachers not to take the *Gazette*. He said, after a while, there were only three people in Clarendon that still took the *Gazette*. He said, "You know, that paper was worn out by the time we got through passing it around to each other."

RR: Clarendon is where a gang of men stopped the *Gazette* delivery truck one day and wouldn't let him throw the papers off.

JM: That is probably true. I don't remember that particular fact, but that sounds true. I remember one time Bill Stancil told me that. Bill had --- he was coaching at

Fort Smith, but he had been an assistant coach at Blytheville. He said that he went back over to Blytheville for a visit and went into the cafe and ate in the cafe in the morning and went back up and got to looking around for a newspaper. He said there was a *Commercial Appeal* there, you know, and other papers, but there was no *Gazette*. He asked the woman behind --- said, "Don't you have a *Gazette*?" She said, "Yes, I have one." She reached underneath the counter. They had them hidden underneath the counter. She reached underneath the counter and pulled one out and handed it to him, and he bought the *Gazette*.

RR: I heard other people say that sports carried us through that time during the desegregation crisis.

JM: That's --- well, all I know is --- I can't pat my own back or say I had anything to do with it, but I have heard a lot of people say that. My recollection is that when we got into that crisis --- it was not only the sports, but the *Gazette* made the smart move to start letting out the paper. They let out the paper, and they started putting more news in the paper. By letting out the paper I mean giving us more space. I believe we also started hiring additional men in sports at that time. So we started putting more emphasis on sports coverage while this was going on.

RR: How did the *Gazette* cover black athletics?

JM: Not very much when I first started. Generally, they would call, we would call, they would call them. But we hardly ever staffed a, at that time, a black on black ball game or anything like that. I am sure, you know, at some point in time that began to change. I can't remember exactly at what time, but there was a time

there when we began to change that idea.

RR: Changed before you left the *Gazette*?

JM: Yes, I think that we had done some of that before I left. I remember a famous story about Gene Prescott going out, I believe, to Philander Smith to cover a game between Philander Smith and Arkansas AM&N. You would have to ask Gene about this and make sure, but the version I got was that there was a fight up in the stands. Gene was sitting up in the stands, and they were fighting over the top of him, you know and everything. But he was still sitting there taking pictures. He was still crouching down taking pictures. At that time we had started covering, but early on we didn't staff them very much. I think we asked them to call the games in. I remember Philander used to call in their basketball games and everything. But they got a guy named Geese Ausbie.

RR: Geese?

JM: Geese Ausbie, A-U-S-B-I-E, who was a tremendous basketball player. He was scoring thirty and forty points a game when nobody else was scoring that much. He later went on and played for the Harlem Globetrotters for a long time. He may have taken Goose Tatum's place with the Globetrotters.

RR: Geese, Goose.

JM: Geese or Goose. I have heard him called both, but I am told that they actually called him Geese Ausbie, but some people referred to him as Goose Ausbie. But he played for some time with the Harlem Globetrotters --- I think we started staffing some of their games. I think maybe Bailey went out and covered some of

the games when Ausbie was playing with them. So, before I left, it had changed.
As I say, before I left, we had hired Wadie Moore.

RR: Young people now days are just marveled at the fact that kind of tradition ever existed.

JM: Well, as I [?], but as I recall, when I first started, I knew the newspaper in Little Rock ran white and black obituaries, but they had a separate section for black obituaries. And my hazy recollection is that they did not ever call blacks Mr. or Mrs.

RR: No titles for them.

JM: But that changed also.

RR: Have we left out anything that you can think of?

JM: Let me think.

RR: What was it that made the paper special?

JM: I think that it was, in my view, it was a great desire to put out a good newspaper because I think there was a really a desire, and that must have come down from the top on down, to put out a really first-class newspaper. I think that is why other people who worked there liked the *Gazette*, and I think that is why so many people stayed there. You know, they went years and years where there was hardly any turnover. I can remember Jim Standard talking to me after I went to the *Oklahoman*. He used to just marvel at the lack of turnover at the *Gazette*. He said, "Hell, people I worked with thirty years ago are all still there." There was a great dedication to the *Gazette*. I think a lot of it simply was because they tried to

do it right. They wanted to put out a really good newspaper and to do it in the right way. They didn't particularly want to be sensational. They just wanted to cover all the bases and do it right and, you know, be fair and be accurate, and they covered the whole state. They had all these correspondents at all these little towns, and a lot of them who worked for their weekly newspaper were the correspondents for the *Gazette*, call in stories and everything. So they just tried to touch all the bases, and they really tried to do it right. I think there was a great deal of pride in the *Gazette*. For that reason they were able to hire some outstanding people. I don't know, the lack of turnover may have hurt more way later on, you know, and everything because they didn't --- it didn't seem to me like the last few years that there was a much of an influx of talent there that there had been in earlier years. I remember Ray Moseley coming through and people like that who were marvelous talents and went on to other jobs. So I just think it was the sense that that is the kind of paper I want to work for, that they really tried to do a good newspaper.

RR: Jerry, thank you very much.

JM: Yes.

[End of Interview]

[See below for additional comments.]

Upon his review of the oral history interview above, Mr. McConnell added the following thoughts on the *Gazette* that he didn't think of at the time of the interview.

Orville Henry was one of the first sports editors (the first I knew about) that recognized that sports writing would be changed by the impact of live television. Since the newspaper could no longer be first to bring the news about Razorback games to the readers, he theorized, the papers should start doing things that the TV did not, such as reporting the reactions of the coaches and players. Thus, he stepped up dressing room interviews and game sidebars. He also recognized that TV was creating increased interest in the Razorbacks and other teams and games, and he was one of the first to delve heavily in the personalities and interests of players and coaches. When a game was televised live, a lot of people thought there would be less interest in reading about it. It turned out that there was more, and Orville was one of the first to figure that out. It was said that Orville would tell you everything there was to know about the Razorbacks, including what kind of toilet paper they used.

One of the big, and difficult, jobs of the *Gazette* sports department was our effort to report on every high school football game played in the state of Arkansas. Our goal was to have at least a short story on every game played. Of course, we never came real close to accomplishing this, but we tried. The problems were threefold: finding enough extra people to take the stories over the phone and then write the story, finding people willing to call in the games, and making our deadlines. For several years, we basically relied on part-timers from outside the staff to help take the games and write them. This basically involved recruiting a bunch of high school students with an interest in

journalism or sports, or hopefully both. We would call journalism or English teachers in local high schools, ask for their recommendations and urge them to mention it to their students. This is how we came up with people like Robert Shaw, Bill Simmons, Harry King, Collins Hemingway and others who went on to exemplary careers in journalism. But we never had enough of them, and it was always a chore to teach them what kind of questions to ask and how to write a story, and [how] to do it in a hurry. Because we only staffed a few games, we had to rely on volunteers to call in the games. Since we didn't pay people to call in the games (except perhaps a few of our regular news correspondents), we had to rely on the coaches to find someone to call in the games. Our thesis was since the coaches always wanted publicity about their teams, we told them that the way they could get it was to find someone to call in the games. Many of them did. Some coaches even called in the games themselves, although they were usually a little late getting around to it. We had the biggest problem in areas of the state that got our early edition. The deadline for the first edition was around 9 or 9:15 p.m., and most games didn't get over until 9:30 to 10. Since the story about teams in first edition territory didn't make the paper until a day late, those schools were less interested in reporting their games. The second edition deadline was somewhere around 11:30, as I remember, but the few that didn't make it provoked a sometimes exasperated reaction from people calling in games. And if we missed their game a few weeks in a row, through chance, some of them were apt to think it was a conspiracy to keep their games out of the paper. We always asked that the home team be responsible for the call, since we wouldn't have to take duplicate calls and sometimes write duplicate stories. In some

cases, when the home team got beat badly, they would fail to call. Nevertheless, we had a lot of cooperation from many coaches, sometimes school principals and fans from across the state. I recall that Walker Lambert of Holly Grove used to promptly call in all their home games. I knew he was the brother-in-law of the Holly Grove coach, Sonny Gordon, but didn't discover until later that he was probably a multimillionaire with a lot of land holdings in the Delta. He never failed to call.

Of course, we sometimes had help other than from high school students. I recall that once we had a call from Norvell Plowman, who found out about our operation and said he was interested. Norvell was probably in his sixties at the time and was a successful businessman, but he loved sports and was interested in seeing how we put out the sports section, so he was a Friday-night rewrite man for several years.

As time went on, it seemed to become harder to find rewrite help. I don't remember for sure why that was, but I suspect it had something to do with prosperity (fewer students needed the money) and a change in interest of many students (prompted perhaps by TV and rock music and other factors). At any rate, the *Gazette* hierarchy finally decided that the only way to get the job done well and expeditiously was to ask or require the regular news reporters, who usually finished their day by 7 or 8 p.m., to come back at 9:30 or 10 on overtime and take calls and do the rewrites. This was not necessarily greeted with elation by everyone on the news staff. They complained, but they did it, and it did help immensely. One of the problems we had, though, was that some of them took out their aggravation with a little horseplay, like making up nicknames for some of the high school players they wrote about. I remember particularly

that Mike Trimble always seemed to have a lot of nicknames in his stories, which might read something like this, “James (Big Train) Smith scored four touchdowns to lead, etc.” They were frequently nicknames I’d never heard and was pretty sure had been made up, so we had to discourage this activity. I think we decided we’d better leave out all nicknames, right or wrong ones. One other problem was that the news staffers had differing knowledges and interests of the sport, and some of them were faster than others. At some time, I guess after I became his assistant, Orville started keeping me in the office rather than going out to cover a game, and it was my job to ferret out problems and try to solve them. Our telephone operator, Mary Grace, would try to spread the calls evenly among the rewrite people. I discovered that Bill Lewis might write, say, six stories and be caught up, while someone else had just written two and had a backlog of notes on four other games and obviously would not get them all written in time for the deadline. So I started staying in the telephone room with Mary Grace and instructing her on who to give the calls to. I knew who was fast and who was slow and who knew football and who did not, so I’d have her give more calls to people like Bill Lewis and the more important games to someone who followed football. Frequently, I’d run out into the office and check to see who was caught up.

We didn’t make the same effort in basketball because there were a lot more schools with basketball teams, regular-season games were less important and, frequently, our readers at that time were more interested in football. However, when the district tournaments started, we would try to get scores on every game, and those tournaments we didn’t hear from we’d try to run down ourselves. I remember in a couple of cases I called

an operator asking her to get somebody in a particular small town. At least twice I was told that the only phone in town listed in her directory was at the school, and it wasn't answering. I also recall that we put a lot of effort in our attempt to get all the district tourney results, and that it irritated me that the *Democrat*, an afternoon paper, would have all the same scores the next day, and I knew they were just taking them out of the *Gazette*. So one time I started making up scores and putting them in the paper. I'd make up a name of a team that sounded plausible, even though it was nonexistent, and run the score in our final edition. It was always for a tourney that was in first edition territory, and I knew those people, who would have spotted it right away, would never see the score. The *Democrat* ran the phony scores for a few days, but then they apparently discovered the subterfuge and started cutting out the phony ones. I knew they at least had scanned the list and tried to figure out which the phony scores were. I must confess, the idea was not original with me. I think I heard about it from the Kansas City papers, where the morning paper ran a college basketball story that reported: "The South 68, Will Rise Again 54," and the afternoon paper picked it up verbatim.

I mentioned in the interview that for many years Orville would work in the office on Friday night until about midnight and then go cover an Arkansas game on Saturday. I remember once we both worked until shortly before midnight and then raced down to Union Station to catch the 12:10 a.m. train for Houston to cover the 1961 Arkansas-Rice game the next day. We had a sleeper compartment (I had the upper berth), so we slept the rest of the night. We were in the dining car, eating a good breakfast, when the train pulled into Houston the next morning for an afternoon game. That was actually a pretty

pleasant way to do it, but we couldn't get such connections to many SWC points. I also recall that game in Rice Stadium. It turned off unusually cold in Houston that day. The Rice people had never expected to need it, so the press box was not heated, and we almost froze. The thing I remember best is our trouble getting back to our hotel, the Shamrock, after the game. Because he always wrote more than anyone else, Orville was usually the last writer to finish, and he and I were usually the last writers in the press box. I probably took about as long as Orville when I had to do both dressing rooms. So we were the last people in the press box that day, and it had turned dark by then. When we tried to call a taxi, none of them would send a taxi out to Rice Stadium after dark. So Orville and I had to walk back to the Shamrock (it seemed like two or three miles), carrying our typewriters, and we were not exactly warmly dressed. The only compensation was that Jack Stephens invited us up to his suite after the game (he and Orville were close), and I had a chance to visit with Bill Dickey, the Hall of Fame catcher who worked for Stephens, and Jack then took us out for oysters on the half shell, drinks and a steak dinner.

It wasn't long after that, I think, that Orville started chartering planes to fly him to the games in Texas and other distant points. That way, if he wanted, he could also take another reporter or two and a photographer. I remember someone asking Orville if he wasn't nervous about riding in the small planes because there were frequently little thunderstorms in the fall. He said no, he would ride with anyone as long as he wasn't the owner of the plane. I think his thesis was that sometimes people with a lot of money bought a plane and fancied themselves as pilots when they weren't all that good. Orville

figured if the pilot didn't own the plane, then he was a professional flying for someone else.

Orville would figure every angle for getting the maximum coverage. Sometimes he would get up at 5 or 6 a.m. to drive to Fayetteville, then have another reporter and a photographer or two fly up later. The photographer might leave just before the game was over to take the plane back to Little Rock in time to process his pictures for the first edition. The reporter would stay over and ride back with Orville.

My worst assignment was having to work Friday night football, then get up early (I hated it) to drive my own car to Fayetteville. During the time the state was building passing lanes on Highway 71 between Alma and Fayetteville, I'd frequently, to avoid the slow-moving traffic, go the back way, up the Pig Trail (Highway 23) until it hit Highway 16 and take that on into Fayetteville. Then, about worn out, I'd have to drive back to Little Rock that night. This was in the days before interstates, and it was a chore, about four hours each way on the drive and then I'd probably spend at least six hours on the game. That was a 15-hour day. I don't recall I ever got paid much overtime for it, although I may have worked some shorter days during the week.

The sports department, as I mentioned, received a lot of credit for helping keep the *Gazette* going through the integration crisis, and after that it seemed that Orville could get anything he wanted. He wasn't always in good health, and I remember the paper bought him a reclining chair and put it in the sports department, so he could take a rest during some of his long days. At his behest, they also bought us a color television set, so the people handling the Razorback copy and pictures could watch the game on

television. It helped in identifying pictures.

Orville became regarded as THE authority not only on Razorback football, but on SWC football in general. I can remember writers from other papers asking Orville in the press box to explain the theory behind some unusual formation or whatever. That included Dan Jenkins, a great writer who later became a best-selling novelist. Jenkins first worked for a paper in Fort Worth and then one in Dallas, I think.

In reference to Jim Bailey:

One time we had a young guy, who had been basically a clerk for us, and he wanted to be a sportswriter. He was having a terrible time figuring out how to organize and write a story, so we put him at a desk next to Bailey and told him to watch Bailey do it. Once he came in from a game and sat at his typewriter for 15 or 20 minutes without typing a lick. Bailey asked him what was wrong, and he said he didn't know how to get started. Bailey asked him what he was trying to say, what had happened. Then Bailey batted off two or three paragraphs in about one minute. The guy took one look at it and said, "Jesus Christ, that's exactly what I was trying to say."

As I said, Joe Wirges and I became friends and talked a lot, but I can't remember in some cases whether Joe told me a story or someone else told me. At any rate, Joe used to carry around a Speed Graphic camera, and when he actually went to a crime scene, he would take pictures. If someone called him, he would go. There was a time, they said, when the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office used Joe as their official crime photographer.

Joe had been around covering police so long and was so dependable that the police tended to look at him as one of theirs. I never saw any evidence that this kept Joe from printing bad news about the police department, although I suspect he would not print anything that would compromise a case. At any rate, he got a world of tips from the police, which made him awfully tough competition.

When he was working at the police station, Joe seldom wrote a story himself. He would call his office and dictate the information, and the rewrite person in the office would write the story.

During the integration crisis, when Eisenhower sent in the 101st Airborne, the Airborne set up some operations on the Central High football practice field. I was covering Central in those days, and I had to get a pass just to get in to watch practice. I remember for one game, at least, there was a large delegation of Airborne troops in the stands. I just wondered how distracting that had to be for the players. At any rate, Central had a winning streak of about 23 games going, and they were playing Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Istrouma, the last team to beat them. It was tied 7-7 late in the game, but Central pulled it out, winning about 16-7, I think, behind a great running back named Bruce Fullerton and a quarterback named Billy Moore, who was later an All-American at Arkansas. Central went on to finish the season with 12 straight wins to run their streak to 33.

I remember once, when I was working the police beat at the *Democrat*, a fire

broke out early on Sunday morning, and Joe Wirges and I raced up there to cover it. It was in an apartment house near the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, on Louisiana, I think. When we got there, we found that a few people had been trapped in the apartment house but were rescued. One woman had been trapped on the second floor with her baby. So she put the baby in a dresser drawer and dropped it out the window to a man who caught it. That man was George Fisher, who later became the editorial cartoonist for the *Gazette*. I think George was working for the telephone company at the time. At any rate, that was the first time I met George Fisher.

Orville pretty much let me cover what I wanted to cover and write what I wanted to write, within reason. I had the freedom to campaign for certain changes in sports. At one time Orville and I were both campaigning for the Arkansas Athletic Association, which ran high school sports, to move the state tournaments back to Barton Coliseum in Little Rock. They had started farming out the state meets to small schools across the state, where they were fairly popular, but most of the schools had gyms that wouldn't hold much more than 1,000 people, while Barton Coliseum held over 8,000. The AAA had made the move after the 1954 state tourney final between North Little Rock and Fort Smith. For the first time in history, the AAA had permitted the game to be televised, and it drew only 400 fans because everybody wanted to stay at home and see how it looked on TV. The AAA became convinced Little Rock just wouldn't draw well. I argued that they should move the tourneys to Barton Coliseum and leave them for at least three years to try to get them established. The AAA finally agreed, and it wasn't long before they

were selling out the place. There were only a few times when there were two final games on the same day and not everyone could get in, so they asked the fans of the two teams in the first game to leave after that game so the fans of the other two teams could get in. They left it there until there began to be so much crime in the area it scared fans away, and they started moving the tourneys elsewhere again. Similarly, Orville allowed me to conduct a campaign in the paper to start a Track Meet of Champions, which would match the top two finishers in each event from the four state meets. The AAA said they thought it would be a great meet, but they feared it would lose money. However, the AAA said we could hold one anyway, if I could get some school to sponsor it and absorb the costs. Little Rock Central agreed because their track coach, Clyde Hart, had helped me plan the meet. Central made about \$3,000 that first year, so the AAA has sponsored it every year since then. It's still going on.

[End]