

Gazette Project

Interview with

Jack Meriwether,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
28 November 2000

Interviewers: Ernie Dumas and Roy Reed

Jack Meriwether: Public schools, Paragould. Graduated in 1951. Matriculated at the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. There for two years. Transferred to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Completed a bachelor's in political science and economics. Went from there to duty in Korea after the cessation of hostilities. Army, United States Army, the infantry, "Queen of Battle." I was in ROTC at Fayetteville. Paid twenty-seven dollars a month. Spent a couple of years in the service. Came back to Greene County. Decided on pursuing a career in public administration and in 1958 went to University of Kansas at Lawrence to pursue a master's, which I completed, I believe, by 1963. After my campus year at University of Kansas, I interned with the city of Little Rock, where I'd previously been employed for a few months between Korea and graduate school. Went to work as an administrative assistant in the office of the City Manager [in] 1959. In 1960 I was promoted, because of a vacancy, to Assistant City Manager. Stayed until 1963. The next year, 1964, I went to work

at the city of Texarkana, Arkansas as city manager. Stayed there until 1969 and then was hired in Little Rock as city manager in 1969, serving until 1973. The latter part of 1973, I resigned my post and went back to Paragould to join the staff of the First National Bank of Commerce. I was there about a year and a half, and the *Gazette* made me an offer I couldn't refuse, to serve as assistant general manager under publisher [Hugh] Patterson and general manager Jim Williamson. Moved back to Little Rock, and I stayed with the *Gazette* a total of seven and a half years.

Roy Reed: In what year – the *Gazette*?

JM: It'd be 1975. I was only in Paragould about a year and a half. The reasons were not entirely business reasons at the *Gazette*. My wife had a health problem that made it imperative for – or much more convenient for – her to be near medical facilities here in Little Rock. Anyway, I served about three and a half years under Jim Williamson. He retired, and I became General Manager then for a period of three and a half to four years. Does it matter after that? [Laughs]

RR: No. We're going to come back to that.

JM: Yes. Did I go too fast?

RR: No. My recollection is that you knew a lot of people at the *Gazette*, or some people [inaudible].

JM: Back when I was a city of Little Rock administrative assistant, I lived with two *Gazette* people: Charles Portis and Ronnie Farrar. Ronnie and I had known each

other at the university, and he was working for the *Paragould Daily Press* when I came back from Korea. I think he had a room in the house next door to my home. At any rate, in Little Rock Ronnie and Portis and I lived together in a house on East Twenty-first Street until Ronnie's mother came up one Saturday morning, unannounced, to see her son and made him move out of those "horrible conditions." Some stranger, that none of us could identify, had come in during the night and was asleep in the bathtub. [Laughs] Anyway, so Ronnie's mother jerked him back into some more of a "Christian" surrounding. Portis and I had to scurry for something cheaper because we couldn't afford the house without Ronnie. We moved into a garage apartment behind Markham and Midland, where we lived together perfectly well because Portis stayed up all night, and I worked all day, and we rarely saw each other. At any rate, I knew those guys, and then when I was in Texarkana, Jimmy Jones and Mike Trimble both passed through. Jones was a regular there at the *Texarkana Gazette*, working for J.Q. Mehaffey, and Trimble was there until Jimmy signed him up with the National Guard so he could collect the bounty. Actually, to go back to the time when Portis and I lived together, we generally had supper together. We learned that most times we could go down to Breier's at just the right hour, and we'd be invited to sit at the table of the managing editor, A.R. Nelson. And A.R. took pity upon us enough to occasionally spring for supper, and I got to know him quite well. City Hall, at that time, was being covered by Matilda Touhey, and we became good friends. She introduced me to Sam Harris, who was a city editor

back in the early fifties before he left to go to work for Witt Stephens.

RR: Actually, Bill Shelton was city editor during the 1950s.

JM: Well, then, Sam was already at Stephens, and he had been a city editor.

RR: Right. Right.

JM: I mean, I never went to the newspaper. I didn't know what went on over there, but through those folks you kind of get a feeling for . . .

RR: Yes. What kind of roommate was Portis?

JM: Portis was a good roommate. Portis never saw a book he didn't want to read, and most of his reading was done – there were two bedrooms and a bathroom up, and a living room, dining room, bathroom down. And Portis would stay downstairs and read all night, and I'd generally hit the hay at, you know, close to a decent hour because I had to go to work in the morning. He didn't. He was doing a column then, and

RR: “Our Town.”

JM: Yes. “Our Town.” Portis was a lot of fun. He was a good roommate.

RR: You were talking about Portis being a good roommate. [He] didn't bother you any?

JM: Portis was great fun. One time he did a fantasy column talking about this crippled friend of his, who lived out behind the house at Midland and Markham, who made his living by taking old Christmas cards and clipping them and making gift labels out of them, and that it would be appreciated if folks would, instead of throwing their Christmas cards away, give them to this fellow to help out. Well,

of course, they started coming, and I had sacks and sacks and sacks of Christmas cards delivered. I had to answer the door always because they always came when Portis wasn't around. You know, stuff like that. You just had to kind of roll with the punches. [Laughter] We used to go eat supper out at Lido's at the end of Main Street. Wasn't that the name of it?

Ernie Dumas: The cafeteria was right on the . . .

JM: No. This was the restaurant. We liked table service, and you'd get the soup and the salad, a fine supper, for about three dollars. And then coming in the summer, you'd come back down Main Street, and there was generally a tent meeting going on at Twelfth and Main in a vacant lot not too far from Granoff's. And Portis was the one who always had to stop, and he would make signs from the back of the crowd that indicated that he [inaudible] thought the preaching was heretical and often draw attention to himself and then quietly slip away and let the preacher vent about – well, he was a different sort of fellow to live with. He had brothers, too, who would come and visit. His mother never visited. She apparently knew what she'd run into. But it was a fine relationship. Actually, it was better without Farrar. Farrar was very serious about his work and had little time for nonsense.

RR: Yes. How did you happen to come back to Little Rock to be city manager?

JM: Oh, just got the opportunity. I was happy in Texarkana. We were doing lots of stuff down there and had been designated as a First Generation Model City, a program under the Johnson administration. Both cities were designated, Texarkana, Arkansas, and Texarkana, Texas. And we had more going than we

could shake a stick at. We hired a crew of people that we never could have afforded and had good people like Ron Copeland and Tom McRae and hired a bunch of young kids coming back from the Peace Corps, volunteers, to try to bring democracy to Miller County. And it was an interesting experience because Miller County tends to be conservative, as much as any place in Arkansas, but we had the support of the local editor, J.Q. Mehaffey. As a matter of fact, not too long before I left, J.Q. retired as editor of the paper, and the cities of Texarkana, Texas, and Arkansas, jointly hired him to help us with our communications, so we were able to do things like pass bond issues and work out of some problems. We built the largest, I guess, Act IX plant, an industrial revenue bond issue in the state, down there for Cooper Tire. I've forgotten how many millions were spent in that endeavor back during the days of the Economic Development Administration. Of course, we had a congressman on our side of the line, who just mostly kept quiet [David Pryor]. On the other side of the line, the Texas congressman was Wright Patman, who was the ranking member of the House. And Wright told Pryor in the early days, "Don't worry about Texarkana. That's really part of my district," and Pryor wisely accepted that. It was a pleasant experience. Anyway, city managers generally attract enough hostility that they need to move on from time to time, four, five years being the average tenure. I'd been there six and [had] the opportunity to come back to Little Rock, where I knew the organization and knew the problems and knew the community. The opportunity presented itself, and I was happy to move.

ED: Tell about how that happened. The city manager of Little Rock at that time was – what was his name? The guy that they had to run off.

JM: Let's see. Clifford O'Key.

ED: Clifford O'Key.

JM: Had been hired. He was a . . .

RR: O'Key?

ED: O-apostrophe-K-E-Y.

JM: O'Key. Yes. Clifford came from up North and had a management style that just didn't seem to gel too well with the City Board at the time, a board made up of people like Martin Borchert and Vic Menifee. These boys were "Rough Riders," and O'Key was – I remember Martin telling me some years after – once, when we were having an employee strike – Blue Flu was rampant in the police department, and there was some kind of demonstration scheduled for a weekend. Turned out, Clifford left at the time to "go see his mother," and Martin couldn't understand how a guy could do that. There was no happy relationship there.

RR: Victor Menifee?

JM: Yes. Victor Menifee.

RR: M-E-N-I-F-E-E?

JM: [inaudible]

RR: And Martin Borchert is not spelled the way it sounds.

JM: B-O . . .

ED: B-O-R-C-H-E-R-T. [inaudible] last name.

JM: Yes. Good board. Good strong board. Active board. Unfortunately, they were not in a position to hire me. They interviewed me, but in the interview were persons who had just been elected to replace them but would not take office until January 1 of the next year. I was interviewed before the end of the year. We had new people like George Wimberly, who had been elected, Haco Boyd, Charles Bussey, a different kind of crowd. Frankly, I was somewhat concerned, particularly with somebody like George Wimberly, who was . . .

ED: Right-winger?

JM: Extreme right-winger, running that drugstore where the city had “ruthlessly” removed parking from Markham Street in front of his store. Let me hasten to add, in retrospect, that I could not have found a fairer man than George Wimberly. He knew that I was as far to the left as he was to the right, and he always gave me the opportunity to say my piece. And many times he came over, and many times he did not, but at least we always knew where we stood on issues. And I have great admiration for him. Haco Boyd served a term as Mayor. Haco was an insurance man with the Union Life Company and a real charming character.

RR: He tried to sell me a Rover automobile one time.

JM: Well, hey, you should’ve bought it.

RR: I still regret not getting it.

JM: Haco presided during the time of the most serious racial problems that the community had faced since 1957, which he tried to resolve. We, somehow or another – well, when I first came back, I proposed a tax on – I’m getting into too

much detail . . .

RR: No. It's okay.

JM: A tax on utility bills. Having put a sales tax in for a city for the first time in Arkansas, I had a "high-tax" reputation. We couldn't do that in Little Rock. The state legislation wouldn't permit it because it was a piece of "border city" stuff that we trotted through for model cities. Anyway, in Little Rock we taxed utility bills to help deal with the complaint of firemen and policemen on wages, pretty much. Then came the water works strike. Well, the water works was an independent agency only generally supervised by the City Board, and we had Sweet Willie Wine, an activist from Memphis, marching with a group of water works employees every Saturday down Main Street, which was the main business district. Well, of course, the merchants were unhappy. On Tuesday nights we held the City Board meeting, and the strikers would all come up there. It was pretty stressful, and Mr. Boyd, the mayor, didn't really know how to handle it. And Mr. Bussey, our black city director, was known as an Oreo: black on the outside, white on the inside, owned by the white establishment. And we used to keep a small contingent of police, hidden behind a screen, at City Board meetings in case something got out of hand, which seemed very likely. I'll never forget the evening when Chief Brians was back there, and one of the activists was addressing the board from his seat, yelling at them and shaking his fist. And he said, "Where's Brians?" He said, "Brians is out getting his pigs together. Going to whup our heads." Well, Brians started laughing at that. You could hear him in

the back, laughing at that. [Laughter] Anyway, it was a “fun, fun time,” and they were testy, and we all learned a lot.

RR: R.E.?

JM: R.E. Brians. Yes.

ED: B-R-I-E-N-S.

RR: R.E. B-R-I-E-N-S?

JM: A-N-S.

RR: I-A-N-S.

JM: [Excellent chief. Excellent chief?] Well . . .

ED: Can you get back when you were about to tell about the old board was going out and the new board was coming in and they were interviewing you?

JM: Yes.

ED: Struck some kind of deal, as I recall.

JM: Well, the deal that I agreed to – Martin Borchert asked me through Joe Kemp, the city attorney, to come up and be interviewed. I agreed to come to the interview, but I said, “You know, I really think you need to have the new board members who had been elected at that interview.” And so, I don’t know whether the whole board was there or not. I think the new board was there, and Martin was there, at least from the old board, along with people like, maybe, Alden Bowen, who would carry over. And we had a meeting and just talked about – they talked about what they considered to be the serious problems. There’s nothing quite like a garbage strike to focus attention on local government. I mean, you know, you

could dance around controversies all day long, but a garbage strike, you can't endure that too much. So they were beset with a lot of that, and city employee morale was low. And, somehow or another, they figured that I could help them with that because of my previous acquaintance with a lot of the people who were there. At any rate, I refused to accept an offer until such time as the time had run, and the new board then by themselves sat and made an offer to me, and I accepted that. That's all I remember about it. And every city manager has a honeymoon period, and if there was ever one who needed one, it was me. There was all the stuff that was going on that had been neglected. Anyway, surprisingly, I forget who – back to the newspaper business, who was there covering at the time. Jimmy Jones was removed. He had been covering City Hall until I got back, and they put somebody else from the *Gazette* in there. And Van Tyson, I think, was doing it for the *Democrat*. No, no. Roger Armbrust was doing it for the *Democrat* first. I'd be darned if I . . .

ED: Jerry Dhonau was there for a while.

JM: Dhonau was there. Excuse me. There you go.

ED: Jerry Dhonau was there for a while.

JM: Old Jerry. Jerry was a bachelor. Met his wife down at the collector's office.
Yes.

RR: How did you get along with the newspapers while you were city manager?

JM: Oh, fine. I have often said, you know, if a city manager's got a couple of competing daily newspapers, somebody's going to print that his ideas are not

totally being complete damn foolishness. I tried to work Nelson. Nelson had this – he was hung up on the idea that the Board of Directors, clearly named in the statutes of Arkansas – Nelson called it the City Manager Board, and I used to argue with him all the time about that. He wouldn't change. I was happy to note that when Bob Douglas ascended to the throne, one of the first things Bob did was change the style.

RR: That's right. It was always City Manager Board.

JM: City Manager Board. And that, of course, gave the wrong impression, and it gave people like Luke Moorman, you know, ammunition to claim that it was a dictatorship. Let's see. Who was it? Carl Keller used to come by the office on his way to and from fighting with building inspectors, and even though there'd be somebody in the office, he'd come in and click his heels and go, "Heil!" Anyway, I couldn't ask for better, fairer coverage and cooperation. Sometimes the editorial [policy?] was not happy, but that happens.

RR: Now, you went to the *Gazette* from the City Manager . . .

JM: No. I went to Paragould.

RR: Paragould, then back.

JM: Got out of town. Had to get out of town for about a year and a half.

RR: How did you happen to go to the *Gazette* now?

JM: I was invited to come and interview for the management position. The flattery of being – to me, it was a kind of a – I was told that they were preparing for a change of their senior management, which was getting on up in years, and that they

would like for me to come and interview for, possibly coming to work for, them as an understudy to be an Assistant General Manager under Jim Williamson. And it, again, coincided with my wife's needs, and . . .

RR: Peggy.

JM: Peggy. And so we decided to pack up after, well, a year and a half in Greene County.

RR: So you were Jim Williamson's assistant?

JM: Yes. Yes.

RR: For three years?

JM: Three and a half. You know, I don't remember.

RR: Then he retired?

JM: Yes.

RR: You became General Manager?

JM: Yes.

ED: Frank Duff had already left?

JM: Yes. Frank Duff was gone when I came.

RR: What was his job? Frank.

JM: I don't know.

RR: I want to say Business Manager. Is that a separate . . . ?

JM: I don't know. When I was there, the management team amounted to Jim, and under Jim, as you mentioned this morning, the accounting system, you had Glenn Barber. Glenn was the Comptroller. Glenn came over from the independent

auditor, and I can't even name the auditor now. It was one of the big ten firms that had helped to established that system you talked about.

RR: How did that accounting system work?

JM: Don't know. Oh, I know how it worked. It was a heads-up, straight up system.

RR: If you describe it a little bit. I was telling Ernie you told me about it, but I have trouble . . .

JM: Well, it was a very straightforward accounting system, which took into consideration the before and after needs, management of inventory. There were still parts of it that were not in place. I did a good deal of work on the personnel system when I was there. But this – I think listening to you this morning, I got the feeling that Hugh [Patterson] was describing for you what he found when he came to work there, which was every man for himself, and the best story on that is the “old man” – everybody knows who I'm talking about here. Write that down. “Old man.”

RR: The old man, Mr. [J.N.] Heiskell.

JM: As he'd go to lunch, he would drop by the business office in the advertising department, go to the cash register, open it up, get some money, and off he would go to eat lunch. And when they were trying to help him install a business system, this “hole in the bucket” was there. They finally got up the courage to approach him. After all, it was his paper, and it was his money, and he knew that. I think whoever it was – and it could've been Hugh or it could've been the auditor – whoever, said, “Well, Mr. Heiskell, it's quite all right for you to do this, but

would you leave a note in the drawer, because we're having trouble tracking our petty cash. Just leave a note in the drawer you know, that you've taken . . . ,” and so he said, “Well, I don't mind doing that at all.” And the next day they went down there, and there was indeed a note in the drawer. And it said, “I took it all.” [Laughter] That was the way it worked with a family business. But Jim Williamson was marvelous to watch. The way he built his budgets was fascinating to me. The city government, quite frankly, compared to the *Gazette*, was far advanced in its accounting practices. As a matter of fact, in my experience in the two or three seminars that I attended, management seminars of the newspapers with the ANPA [American Newspaper Publishers Association] or the SNPA [Southern Newspaper Publishers Association], you know, I found the management systems to be really weird because they were mostly family operations. Anyway, Williamson built a very business-like organization. The audit trails were laid with every dollar that was spent, so the business system was intact when I got there, and it was easy to work with and comfortable and very reliable, very predictable.

RR: What was your job? Tell what you did.

JM: I negotiated labor agreements. That was one thing they put me onto fairly early. I'd had a good bit of experience with that at city government with AFSCME, The American Federation of State . . .

ED: State, County, and Municipal Employees?

JM: There you go. Jeanie Lambie.

RR: Jeanie Lambie?

ED: L-A-M-B-I-E.

JM: Yes.

RR: L-A-M-B-I-E.

JM: And we had the ITU [International Typographical Union].

[End of Tape One, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

JM: In the composing room. The oldest union contract west of the Mississippi, and it was a privilege to sit with those guys. They knew what the hell negotiation was all about.

RR: Talking about the Typographical Union?

JM: I'm talking about the ITU. Right. And one of the first things that I learned about the labor people is how straight up they could be. Nobody played any games. You disagreed, and you'd sit there and hammer it out until you finally got it and got your contract. We were just getting into "cold type," which meant we were moving away from stereotyping. That's one union we had to close out, and we had to negotiate with them how we were going to do it. The contract gave . . .

RR: What was the name of that union?

JM: I don't even remember. Call Lyle Hennigan. He'd tell you.

RR: Anyway, it was stereotyping.

[ED]: Cecil, who was it? He'll tell you. Steinmetz. He was a stereotyper.

JM: Yes. But he was gone when I got there. Then you had the pressmen, which were

largely made of the Echols family from Hot Springs. But I did get to do labor. And then, Jim was very good about showing me the nuances of his accounting system. I mean, we had a standing date to go over those figures on a routine basis. Inventory control, he still did that, and he was a great help. He shared and revealed. And I guess the one area that I didn't get as much as I would've liked to have was in advertising, which was his field. And he had Louis Munos at the time, and he . . .

RR: M-U-N-O . . .

JM: M-U-N-O-S.

RR: S.

JM: And Louis was Jim's pick and came out of one of the department stores. Got a lot of work done with Leon Reed, circulation director.

RR: Is he still living here in town?

JM: Yes. He is. Just up the street. He'd be a good one. In fact, if you wanted to, I would suggest you also interview Betty, Jim's widow.

RR: I hadn't thought of that.

JM: Betty Williamson was there in the ad office. Was his secretary until they married when Jim became a widower. And, God, if there's anybody who could tell you about him and . . .

RR: Yes. Good idea.

JM: Yes.

RR: Let me back up just a minute to the budgets. To the benefit of people who know

nothing about how newspapers work, can you describe, in a rough way, how the money was parceled out among the various departments of the newspapers?

What percentage, say, went to the newsroom?

JM: Well, I couldn't without looking at one. It was never decided by parceling. You set your ad rates based upon the competition that you had. You tried to develop incentives in your advertising structures so that the large user would be encouraged to be even larger. In your circulation rates, you attempted to cover the cost of newsprint, you know. That was an old rule of thumb. You couldn't [today] because newsprint's gotten out of hand and so have the costs of circulation. And in the operation itself, you attempted to pay the wage that kept the employees there and happy, which was never enough. We had two union moves in the newsroom while I was there.

ED: That was 1974?

JM: I remember that one just about the time I came. Yes. And then there was one after that, I believe, wasn't there?

ED: All talk, not pledge.

JM: Talk. Talk. Yes.

ED: Just kind of talk about it. That's good. That was the one [inaudible] tied, as I recall. Right? The vote was tied.

JM: I don't remember. I don't remember.

RR: This was in the newsroom, the union thing.

JM: Yes. But the unions – I mean, you obviously had a package you had to produce,

and you had to produce the money to do it. What happened is that if your news – you try to manage your news hole as best you could, but the way to do that is to sell the hell out of advertising because that gave you then the space that you needed. The thing that impresses me about Hussman is that his ad count doesn't justify that news hole sometimes.

RR: Let me put this – let's see if I can come out in a different way. If the *Gazette* was spending x dollars in a year . . .

JM: Yes.

RR: And you have a rough figure, how many of those dollars would go to covering the news?

JM: I couldn't tell you. I honestly couldn't tell you. I couldn't tell you what size the budget was. My mind has never dwelled very long on a quantity figure. If you had a pie chart, how much was news, how much was ad, far and away news was the great consumer. That and newsprint costs.

RR: And neither one of them produced anything.

JM: Well, they both produced something.

RR: Well, I mean, we didn't make any money.

JM: The *Gazette* made money.

RR: Well, no, I mean, the newsroom. That's the old canard, you know that [inaudible].

JM: Well, no, that's not the case.

RR: We did spend a lot of it in the newsroom.

JM: Patterson believed – and whether Mr. Heiskell believed this or not, I don't know. He was long gone before I got there. – Patterson believed that was the strength of the newspaper, and I think he let it show. I don't think they burned it up paying salaries. I don't even recall . . .

RR: Well, I think Mr. Heiskell operated on that same – was he already dead when you came to work at the paper?

JM: Yes.

RR: Did you know him?

JM: No, but I had an encounter with him when I was at City Hall. My first project with the city in 1958 was to tend to the widening of and building University Avenue. That was my project. And the Highway 10 widening. You remember it was three lane? We [kicked?] it to four, and I had to get the right of way. Beg it off people. We didn't have any money, but the Highway Department would build it if we'd get the right of way. Well, Mr. Heiskell drove to and from work on Highway 10 every day in that old car. He called me on the telephone one time, said that he passed a spring on that hillside just before you get to the Missouri Pacific viaduct near where Dillard's [headquarters] is now. Up on the hill there, he passed by a cascade of clear, fresh water coming down that hill from a spring, and he would often carry a cup with him. And he'd stop and fill his cup and drink from that spring water and go on in to work. And he just wanted to ensure that in this widening project, as much as we needed it, that we were going to preserve access to that spring. And I said, "Well, I'm not . . .," the standard City Hall

answer, “I’ll check into it.” Well, I went out there, and nobody knew anything about a spring. Turns out that what it was is the water treatment plant, which sits up on top of that hill, and the son-of-a-bitch leaks. And so it all collects and comes down the hill. It was spillover from that.

RR: From the water works.

JM: And I told him, I called him back, and I said, “It’s taken care of. It’s all – you’re going to be okay.” [Laughter] I didn’t want to tell him it was a leak from the plant up there.

ED: Fresh spring.

JM: Cascading down the hillside. I, of course, knew a lot of stories, Heiskell stories. They always had to tell them. And I didn’t know Mrs. Heiskell. I was a pallbearer at her funeral, but I only met her two or three times. J.N. Heiskell. Character. I’d wish I’d known his brother, the other one . . .

RR: Fred.

JM: Fred. Yes.

RR: Yes. He apparently was a real newspaperman.

JM: Back to dealing with the employees and the union, it was really neat to move into that area of activity because Hugh and Jim were, I think, very bored with the union negotiation process, and they were so delighted to have somebody to dump it on. And, of course, you couldn’t ask for a better CEO than Hugh when it came to dealing with legitimate needs of employees. I mean, you know, it was just legendary how he’d dip down into the bowels of the company to come up with

money for some poor [printer?] who'd gotten waylaid down in Florida. It was really – I mean, he was that kind of guy. Had a real feeling for folks.

RR: So when you became General Manager yourself, did your job change [essentially?]?

JM: Yes. Because we were in a little bit of a tiff with the young “Boo” [Walter] Hussman, who had reared his ugly head. Jim was still on board. We all went to – we all had lunch together occasionally, like three or four times a month, at the Little Rock Club, and Boo had hired the men’s grill out one day, invited every advertiser in town. Have you not heard this story?

RR: [No. I always wanted to?]

JM: And Williamson, gutsy old Jim Williamson, marches all of us up in there, and we all took a seat in the men’s grill, where Boo had rented the whole rest of the thing out. We sat there through the meeting, you know, where he was talking about the fact that he tried every way in the world to work with the *Gazette* and couldn’t. So he was announcing that he was going to start this and start that and so forth and so on. So we heard it, they heard it, and, anyway

ED: Is this when he was going to go morning?

JM: Morning. Going morning. Free classifieds, you know, the whole – going to keep that up. He was going to do this, that, and the other, and . . .

RR: Who was there? You and Jim and anybody else?

JM: Leon Reed was there, and we could have had Louis Munos. I’m not sure.

RR: I gather Hussman did not know.

JM: Yes. He knew.

RR: He knew you were there?

JM: He looked over there and saw us, but what could he do?

RR: Yes. [Laughs]

JM: You know, and little, young Walter . . .

RR: Yes. Tell me about the [*Democrat* and *Gazette* newspaper] war, from your prospective.

JM: Well, having been in a competitive enterprise, albeit a short time [at] the bank, I had an appreciation for the fact that you must try to meet the competition. He raises his interest rates a tick. You go up a tick. If you can, you go up two to see how hardy he is. I remember the day that Walter came over to offer a joint operating agreement to Hugh, and essentially the offer was “I’ve been here for x years now,” or two years, or whatever it was, “and I’m not making any progress, and you’re a strong competitor, and I’d like to offer the community an alternative voice. Let’s combine through a standard JOA [Joint Operating Agreement],” and Hugh said, “Well, I’ll get back to you.” Well, Jim counseled against it, saying, “Hussman can’t do it. There’s no way he can. We’ve gotten our strength up now, you know. This is good and that is good and this is good, et cetera.”

JM: Yes. And the *Gazette* had, after all, spent years competing with August Engel, you know, the meanest man in the world, and then “the boys” – I never heard them refer to Stanley [Berry] and Marcus [George]. It’s always “the boys.”

RR: Yes.

- JM: So Jim counseled against the joint operating agreement. Leon, on the other hand, counseled to take it and run, and I just kept my mouth shut. I mean, why get in it? I don't know that I would have gotten in it anyway.
- ED: Did you get a feeling about how Hugh fundamentally felt about it?
- JM: Hugh felt like he had, very much had, the upper hand, and he was the strong competitor, that he had so much of the upper hand, that Hussman's was just an impossible task.
- RR: You mean a JOA would have been . . . ?
- JM: No. That he didn't have to do a JOA. That the *Democrat* wouldn't last that much longer anyway, which was a miscalculation, a legitimate, honorable miscalculation of how much money Hussman had and how his father had pretty well decided that it was time to let the boy do what he wants to.
- RR: Were the *Gazette* folks, Hugh and the rest, unaware of how much money Hussman had behind him?
- JM: It was my impression. It was my impression that they knew he had a few daily newspapers and maybe a television channel, but they really did not, I don't think, appreciate the vast resources his cable company provided. I'd already tussled with his cable people in Texarkana.
- RR: Cable was fairly new at this time, wasn't it?
- JM: Well, yes, but if it's anything, it's a license to steal. Cable company franchises are.
- RR: But did we know that at the time, generally?

JM: No. No. [There were still not as many people investigating cable. There should have been?].

ED: Their holdings were pretty widespread at that time, oddly enough.

JM: Little here, little there, so forth and so on.

ED: Scattered around over Texas and Louisiana and Arkansas.

JM: Yes. Yes. I'll tell you a story about Hussman, Sr. Owned, of course, both newspapers in Texarkana when I was down there. J.Q. Mehaffey called one day and invited me to a meeting in his office. Hussman, Sr., was coming over from Camden. Wanted to talk about this cable franchise. We had advertised for a cable company to come in and bid on a franchise, and the deciding determinant would be how much you would pay to the city for use of rights of way, and there's a privilege license and so forth and so on. Fairly straightforward, [vanilla?] type agreement, and J.Q., in his way [stuttering], "I want you to know I have no idea what to expect at this meeting." "Okay, J.Q." We came over, and Walter presented himself, drew himself up, you know, a little on the arrogant side. Reminded me and my city manager colleague for the Texas side that he owned and published two newspapers, both in the community down there, morning and afternoon, and that when he submitted his bid for the cable company franchise, that particular section would be left blank. He didn't intend to pay anything.

ED: This is Walter, Sr.?

JM: Right. Whereupon my colleague and I both darted out, and we didn't give him the bid. He didn't get it. Had to wait for some other outfit. And Hussman didn't

do anything about it. He was just that kind of a – well, people didn't know. They didn't know that cable – I mean, even when I was up here in Little Rock, when the cable company would come in the door, you know, you wanted witnesses, because those guys were something to behold. So Hugh didn't know that. He could not imagine the strength of commitment that was there. He just didn't know, and it was there, and you could see it and if you didn't meet that competition when it presented itself – we had a guy who sat down and measured the paper every day. That was his job, to have kind of a backdoor audit of our own advertising space and who was doing what. He had a guy measure the *Democrat*, knowing what his rate card said, how much money he was taking in, how much money he was spending on free classifieds in newsprint alone. “They can't last,” they reasoned.

RR: The depth of commitment. That might have been the secret right there.

JM: The depth of commitment. Right. It was there, and it was touch and go. It was touch and go for young Walter.

RR: Why would people underestimate Walter Hussman?

JM: He was an unknown. He was one of three children. His nickname was Boo.

RR: Yes.

JM: His older sister was hassling him at the time. Didn't want him to buy the *Democrat*. He hired her and sent her to Washington, you know. Walter, Sr., was not in the picture. He was in Camden. Mama was ill. Mrs. Hussman, who was the daughter of – what's his . . .

RR: Clyde Palmer.

JM: Clyde Palmer. And Hussman, Sr., was just not known all that well. Hussman – I remember one time, we were standing together in a casino at a ANPA [American National Publishers Association] meeting in Las Vegas. I'll never forget this because Hussman, Sr., was on one side of me and Don Reynolds on the other, Don the Dutchman. And Don, of course, Las Vegas was his town. That was his newspaper in Las Vegas, and Walter said to me, "Look, if it hadn't been for Hugh Patterson – Look at this crowd. We could've had this in Arkansas." Well, of course, you know the *Gazette's* decision on that.

RR: Yes. You ever hear Don Reynolds's story about how he got into the newspaper business?

JM: No.

RR: He told this to Bob Douglas when we had a cocktail party one time just a few years before he died. Said he had been a kid in World War I, and he got a job selling papers on the street. And on the day the Armistice was announced, he was out, you know, "Get your paper. The war is over." And a guy came along and gave him a twenty-dollar tip for his newspaper, and Reynolds said, "I knew right then that the newspapers were where the money was."

JM: He was something, that guy. He was something to behold.

RR: Let me turn this over.

JM: I thought we were through.

[End of Tape One, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

RR: . . . Side Two. What kind of guy was Jim Williamson?

JM: Jim was an Indiana newspaper man, advertising man for – I’m trying to think of the town in Indiana – he and Leon Reed worked together.

RR: Terre Haute?

JM: No. I always kidded Leon that it was Terre Haute, but it wasn’t. It was . . .

ED: What was the name again?

JM: Fort Wayne. He worked for a family named Kunkel that owned the newspaper. He used to talk a lot about Mr. Kunkel.

RR: What got him down here?

JM: Hugh Patterson, after the war, was looking for some help to help him change the operation, and the publisher told Jim, “This operation is yours. Take care of it.” Well, it was a morass, and Jim needed lots of help with circulation. Leon was available at the time, having lost his job as a result of a merger of newspapers, or something like that. I think he can tell you. Actually, I could if I think about it a while, but, anyway, Hugh hired him. Jim told me that when he drove down to interview, there had been high water, and he couldn’t cross the White River at Newport. And he said, “Where am I going? Coming down here to a place where I can’t even get across to get to the town.” Anyway, he and his wife and small son, I think, moved down here. Her name was Marion. I never knew her. She died before I came to work [inaudible].

RR: [inaudible] daughter?

JM: Son. He and his wife Marion . . .

RR: Oh, his wife, Marion.

JM: Had a small boy. I guess he was . . .

RR: Excuse me, I thought his wife's name was Betty. No, that was a later wife.

JM: That was his current wife when I met him. Yes.

RR: Right.

JM: Anyway, he brought Leon [Reed] down, and they were two dandies. I mean, those guys worked together. Jim set about to rebuild, or build, the advertising department. Hugh hired this accounting firm – the name escapes me, again – to work on maintaining the dollar flow, to try to get some control over that. Frank Duff was the utility man. That's what Frank Duff was. He worked with Jim. I don't know where Frank came from, but he was dead by the time I got here.

ED: I think he went to California first, then came up here.

JM: And the way the newspaper business worked is you contract with the union for your typographer services, your composing room. You contract with the union, and they furnish all the people. You provide them with the resources that they need. Same thing with the mailers, same thing with the printers, or the pressmen, and stereotypers. So that pretty well covered it, and . . .

RR: What kind of a guy was he . . .

JM: He was a . . .

RR: . . . to be around?

JM: He was very wary of my banking work. I'm not sure how Jim regarded me. I

think he had not been thinking about retirement when Hugh hired me, even though he participated in the discussions. I always had the feeling that he was not real sure that I had the kind of background that was – certainly, compared to his background, mine was entirely different. He was quiet, almost Victorian, in his outlook on life and always appropriately attired. Always serious dealing with problems. He was really – you couldn't ask for a better mentor. I could not adopt his style, but he was highly respected by everybody that he worked with. Hugh Patterson used to say, "I had very little to do with the day-to-day operation of the *Gazette*. All I did every morning was go down and find Jim Williamson and turn him on, and that was it. Jim did it from there on."

ED: He was a fastidious guy. I mean, those suits . . .

JM: Yes.

ED: He was the best dressed guy. He never went out with his suit jacket unbuttoned.

JM: Right. He was very much a gentleman. Adored Mr. Heiskell. Adored Hugh Patterson. There is a story, one time, about Hugh and Jim at the bar at the Little Rock Club, and Billy Rector was up there hassling Hugh, you know, about something Hugh had done. You know, Billy, how Billy was. And Williamson went up and punched him out. [Laughter]

RR: Really?

JM: Yes. Socked him right there on the spot. Jim didn't, he didn't, you know . . .

ED: Kind of unlike Jim Williamson [whoever it is?] punching a guy.

JM: But as we were talking [inaudible], Jim was a guy that carried [inaudible].

RR: Yes.

JM: Yes.

RR: [inaudible]. Tell that.

JM: Well, the story was that a *Democrat* reporter, Bob Trout, had prevailed in a libel action and won a judgment.

RR: A libel case.

JM: Yes, whatever the judgment was. And the *Gazette* was so shocked by the fact that the jury handed down the verdict. That just totally blew them away.

RR: One hundred thousand dollars.

JM: Did not want to pay the judgment with a *Gazette* check – I don't know if this was Jim or Hugh. It sounded like Jim – didn't want the *Gazette* check to be in Bob Trout's hands, so he went to the bank with the *Gazette* check and got a certified bank check and gave it to Trout, or to the court registry or whoever, just so he could at least control that part of it. Jim was very much a partisan. He was a strong, strong – and Jim, after all, had been a – back to his advising Hugh – Jim had worked so hard and so long and so successfully in building the *Gazette* into the strength it was at the time, going through all that 1957 stuff, you know, hanging tough, like Leon, hanging tough. And here comes this little whippersnapper out of who knows where and with little or no experience [inaudible] do that. Nobody does that, you know.

RR: [inaudible] I think the general impression around the newsroom was that Jim was stiff necked and rigid and humorless, and what you're telling us is that there was a

different personality back there that none of us knew anything about.

JM: Well, I think it was to the advantage of the newsroom to believe that everybody on the other side of the rope was, you know, somewhat stupid. It kind of helped build morale.

ED: One of the stories about Jim Williamson – we used to have a bowling writer named John Taylor, who was a big, old, dirty guy. He came to work every day, shirt tail out, shirt dirty, pants dirty, hair all messed up and greasy. He hadn't showered in days. He did our bowling column. Came in about twice a week. Brought in a little satchel, and he came in and brought his bowling column in. And one day he got on the elevator – and I forget – somebody was on the elevator with him, but he got on the elevator, and Hugh Patterson and Jim Williamson got on there, both of them impeccably dressed with their suits and the suit jackets buttoned up and freshly starched shirts. Both of their hair is done well, and they're standing there with their hands crossed in front of them. John Taylor stepped on the elevator, elevator door closed, and they're all facing each other. [inaudible] John Taylor, looking in the faces of these two fastidious men, and he says, "You fellows been getting any lately?" [Laughter]

JM: Oh, Lord.

ED: You could see Jim Williamson and Hugh Patterson just visibly melt [inaudible] seconds before they reach the first floor.

JM: Well, the Jim Williamson I knew would have just been appalled at that. The Hugh Patterson I knew would have giggled.

ED: He probably did later, but he . . .

JM: But being out of town with those guys, on the few occasions I was, they were good buds. And Jim had a terrible respect for Hugh's position, and Hugh had a terrible respect for Jim's talent and his dedication.

RR: Tell us about Hugh.

JM: Hugh is a wonderful, warm, friendly human being who loves life.

RR: I guess you didn't work for him directly. You did when you became General Manager.

JM: [Some part of me?] worked for Hugh. I was always often near his office, at least in the beginning I was, working on personnel. He made himself available all the time. I saw a lot of him.

RR: Was he an easy man to work for?

JM: Yes, he was. He sometimes would get angry and would express it, but he'd get over it. And Hugh, when I knew him, he was conflicted, like most people approaching retirement would be. He had a sense that it was time for him to build a transition to the boys, but he had a difficult time doing it, and that was part of the problem.

RR: You left what year?

JM: I don't remember. I left in eighty . . .

ED: 1981 or 1982?

JM: Peggy died in 1982, so I left a year and a half, two years before that. I was – I don't remember. 1981, maybe.

RR: How did you happen to leave?

JM: I felt like the deterioration of the product , excuse me, the books – I felt like we were in a downward spiral, and I could not seem to help turn it around. I could not seem to get my message across that we had to meet the competition. That's an oversimplification. The difficulties that I had I thought related to the fact that I was not born of the newspaper management. I had no birthright there. I was not a newspaper manager. I always just tried to manage [inaudible]. No matter what you were doing or where you were, you had essentially the same tasks and the same responsibilities. But I don't know that Hugh ever totally bought into that. Hugh always felt that I would not have given him as good advice as I would have had I been born in and raised in the newspaper business.

RR: That's interesting you should say that because Hugh Patterson told me almost the same thing about his own experience when he came to the paper. That he had not been a newspaper man. His experience was in management in several different areas.

JM: Right. Right.

RR: And it didn't slow him down, so I imagine he had more respect for your judgment than you might have thought.

JM: Well, he never did tell me that he didn't respect my judgment. The problem was I was dealing with a sort of fragmented system that I simply couldn't handle. It was not dealing just with Hugh Patterson. I was dealing with Hugh Patterson and Carrick Patterson and Ralph Patterson, and the vestiges of the past, you know,

whatever else was happening at the moment. But, mainly, you know, the one that I couldn't deal with was Louise, who turned out to be a fairly important person in the process, even though she only came to annual stockholder meetings. She had the family in for Sunday dinner, too. And my difficulty was that as I would attempt to put together a response, whatever it might be to whatever the competition was doing – I can't even remember the kinds of things we came up with. – At any rate, you had to work your way up to get approval. You had to get Ralph and Carrick the best you could on board. But the two of them, sometimes, had difficulty agreeing. And then you'd go and get Hugh and pack him up and get him off and going and launch the ship, only to have it founder back after being out two weeks, you know, without even being able to develop results. So after this had happened time and time again, the rationale that I had used in trying to deal with the organization was that I believed very strongly in *Gazette* and what the *Gazette* meant to the community and, you know, blah, blah, blah. And the best thing I thought to do was to ease out, and let Hugh get someone else, a newspaper man to come in. We had gone through the McElwain thing, and that was a painful experience. And Hugh's response was to hire an ad agency out of somewhere in Connecticut to produce a brochure. You remember the brochure? And, you know, the brochure was almost a, "How dare you raise questions about two newspapers. How dare you confront . . . !," Let's invite Harry Ashmore back and have a cocktail party. Let Randall Woods come and, you know, go through that sort of thing. And, anyway, that just wasn't responding on the street. The

Hussmans were going for the jugular, and I don't know that there ever was a commitment to turn loose of it and let somebody, you know, really go with it and see what they could do.

RR: Who took your place?

JM: I don't know. There was a succession of them.

RR: You don't remember [inaudible]?

JM: I first asked Hugh if he would release me and let me go, that I thought I had better move on. He said, "Well, you can't, you know. You can't do that now. You've got to . . .," and I said, "Well, I think the best thing is for me to go on." And he said, you know, "Well, give me some time." So he made a deal with some jasper to come whipping in here every now and again.

ED: What was Evan Ray's comment?

JM: Oh, he didn't come until after I was gone.

ED: Did he take your place?

JM: I don't think so. I don't remember.

RR: Jack, looking back on it, it's now been close to twenty years. What sort of things would work in meeting the competition?

JM: Well, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that if your competition is offering free classifieds, you offer free classifieds. If your competition is having an effort at circulation, like they throw a paper to every house, you do that. Those are the kinds of things you do, and you continue to strengthen your product. You continue to provide an excellent service to your advertisers. You can't cut your

rates. Your pockets aren't that deep, but you could borrow money if you think you're going to ruin. They had paid their debts down, and they didn't want to through that again. Jim Williamson taught me early on in the game, if the banker owns a piece of your press, you're not a free press, and you have to be careful. I think you have to test your own level of commitment. We also had coped with that problem that is not peculiar to the *Gazette* but is peculiar to transitions from generations. That's a hard, hard thing to do. With Henry Ford, it didn't work out too well with [inaudible], and you know, you can almost on the fingers of one hand count major corporations that have made successful transitions from father to son, and here in this case, we were dealing with father to sons, two very different talents, both extremely talented, extremely bright, but they were entirely different, and they saw things differently, so you had a problem there. And I think you add that onto the feeling of pride and where they had come from, the strength that they were, the refusal to recognize the assets of the challenger. You've got a perfect scenario and to add to that, a general manager who's run a couple of cities and a bank. If you weren't comfortable with that, you better get somebody that you were comfortable with. Well, he never found anybody because no person didn't seem to do any good. I had, honestly, too much respect for the institution. I was not going to sit there and ride it down. When I left, it was in the black. [inaudible] What did it take, six or seven years?

RR: Well, when Gannett came in, and then . . .

ED: 1986.

RR: What did you think when Gannett bought the paper?

JM: Hugh had put it on them. I thought Hugh had put it on them big time.

RR: You mean snookered them?

JM: Yes.

RR: Country boy'd them, or . . .

JM: No, he and Al Neuharth had a long relationship, ya-ha's across a crowded room. Hugh used to run up on him at publisher's meetings and tell him that he was thinking about making a serious offer for the chain at a time when Neuharth was buying everything that moved. And Hugh had no truck with the idea of selling the *Gazette*. The *Gazette* was a family newspaper, and it was going to stay in the family, and that was his charge. And by the time they sold it to Al, it wasn't worth what Al paid for it, but he didn't know that. Al Neuharth didn't know everything about newspapers.

RR: That's right. Amen to that.

JM: No. I mean, Al . . .

RR: How much did they pay for it?

JM: I don't remember. It was fifty-some-odd million, I guess.

ED: Fifty-two million, I think.

JM: And so Al thought he was getting a hell of a deal because the figures were showing that he was getting a hell of a deal, but Hugh did that last service for the paper. And Al, of course, just like Hugh Patterson, underestimated the Hussmans. You talk about hanging that on Hugh's neck, hang it on Al, too, because Walter

drove it right up his rear end. And it was . . .

RR: There's something about this guy, Walter Hussman, that makes people want to underestimate him. What is it?

JM: You ever watched him?

RR: Yes.

JM: Do you ask further? I sat in an airplane one time coming back from a meeting, and Walter and his daddy were behind me. Peggy and I were sitting in front of them, and Walter was laying out for me and his daddy a scheme of how he was going to take over the *Arkansas Gazette*. And he said, "What we're going to have to do, Dad, is . . ." He didn't call him "Dad," he just said, "Here's how I figure we could do it if we really want to do it." And he pointed to the profits here and the profits there, and I had no idea what he was talking about. I assumed it was the cable company, you know, this, that, and the other, plus other assets that they had, television stations or whatever. And I think what he was doing there was trying to soften the old man up for the idea, bite it one shoe at a time. "Now if we could afford to cut the family dividend back a little bit . . .". Well, about that time Gail, his older sister, sued him, you know, and it got where she couldn't find a lawyer. But that's why people underestimated him. He is the most self-effacing, nicest guy you ever met, friendly. I remember when they got that civil lawsuit going, I was deposed one day and was at the deposition with Hugh and the lawyers at the *Gazette* and Phillip Sidney Anderson and . . .

ED: Peter Kumpe?

JM: No. Peter wasn't in there. Annabel Clinton. She was a lawyer with the Wright firm at the time. And a couple of times questions would be propounded, and I would refer to young Walter as I first knew him, Boo. And Phil would kind of duck his head a little. [unintelligible] would laugh, and, finally, I said, "Am I, I mean, excuse me, doesn't everybody call you Boo still?" And he said, "You're the only one." [Laughter] I love that. But he strikes me as being the kind of guy who kept his eye on the goal, and he goes for it. And he's got the skill to do it. Ask Ralph Patterson. Ralph went to school with him at the University of North Carolina, and Ralph told me that he was just as bright. He didn't get around much at the cocktail parties like Bill Bowen can. That's B-O-W-E-N. Bill Bowen.

ED: William H. Bowen.

JM: William H. But Hussman knows what he wants. He did it down in Chattanooga [Tennessee], too, and he has built one hell of an empire, unlike his father. His father was such a butt, apparently, to old man Palmer that old man Palmer bought the Camden paper just so he'd have someplace to send Walter. That's what I've always heard. Bless his heart. "Take Betty with you, my daughter." And judging from my two or three exposures to him, he was kind of a [unintelligible].

RR: Well, there seems to be interesting difference between the young Walter Hussman and his grandfather, Clyde Palmer, and that is that Walter's willing to pay some salaries to his reporters. You were one of Clyde Palmer's reporters. I've heard you talk about . . .

ED: Everybody made minimum wage. Almost everybody at the paper.

JM: He not only is willing to pay salaries, he's willing to buy newsprint, he's willing to beef up here, there, and yonder, and he's willing to give free classifieds, and he's willing to throw the newspaper, and he's willing to go after it, and he knows how to spend the money, and he knows how to make it. The prize is to get the franchise. That's the prize. And he keeps his eye on that goal, and he goes for it.

RR: There was a general impression among those of us who worked in the newsroom that the *Gazette* was kind of a special place. Did you feel that about the paper?

JM: You bet. You bet.

RR: Why?

JM: Because of the commitment, the integrity of it, compared to anything I'd ever seen in the way of a newspaper. In the first place, television didn't matter as far as news was concerned, as far as government was concerned. The idea of having a newspaper that wouldn't just immediately castigate you, like – what was that goofy guy who . . . ? Karr Shannon, you know – That kind of trash that doesn't do anybody any good. John Robert Starr trash. A serious newspaper of record is extremely valuable, and I would not have considered any other media. I mean, you know, if I'd had an opportunity to go to someplace else, it wouldn't have mattered. But the *Gazette* was a special place because I was here in 1957. Came right after. I was driving through Little Rock, going to a job interview down in Bauxite, when the Central High thing broke out, and then I got in on it the next year when the schools closed and the mayor's office was blown up and the fire

chief – all that mess. And I saw the strength of the newspaper and the commitment that the newspaper had. To me the *Gazette* was – newspapers generally are, but particularly the *Gazette* – was as much a public enterprise as a business. And as important as city government or a bank. Banks are a mixture of public and private.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

JM: And a lot of it was special because of guys like you, even Ronnie Farrar, even after he had to move.

RR: What did you do after you left the *Gazette*?

JM: I went to work for the University of Arkansas. Jim Martin was president at the time, and he had a vacancy on his staff for a vice president of university relations and public service. And I accepted that. Jim said, “You’re going to take a salary cut, and the car’s not near as nice,” and he was right, but I never regretted it. I spent fourteen years, and principally I did the same – well, I lobbied. I was the university’s rep for the legislature until Ray Thornton got uncomfortable with me because Bill Clinton was uncomfortable with me.

RR: Why? Why was Bill uncomfortable with you?

JM: Because he was an easy target.

RR: I don’t understand.

JM: When you see him, you kick him in the knees to get what you want. No, I’m sorry. Bill Clinton was the kind of governor who put popularity above everything

else. He wanted an adoring public lying at his feet, and if you wanted to get his attention, you would simply express displeasure. And all of a sudden, you had his full and undivided attention until you got back in the boat, and he could turn his eyes away and look at something else. He was an easy mark in a legislative session, in his special session of whatever.

ED: 1983.

JM: 1983. This was the education session. He and Hillary worked this whole deal out. Unfortunately, they had failed to cut in higher ed, and the message that we sent was, "We can't propose grand plans like this, but we can sure as hell screw one up. Leave us out, and we'll piss on your petunias." Oh, he was angry, but we got cut in for it for fifty million dollars.

ED: But you kind of overrode him. You went before the joint budget committee and got the university cut in the joint budget committee without the governor's approval.

JM: Well, it doesn't work that way. You go to the joint budget committee individually from time to time, and you say, "Oh, delay it a little bit, and let's see what we can do." All you have to do is have a simple majority, and before long, you're there. You remember. He was so pissed off. Oh, he was pissed off, and the thing that was so much fun about it was that I hadn't been in higher education long enough for people to know who I really was. And the presidents and chancellors just kind of fell in behind reluctantly. Then they got all that money. They were strutting there for a while. Anyway, by the time Ray Thornton got to

the University of Arkansas, Clinton had had his belly full. Told Ray he sure would like to see me go. Bless Ray Thornton's hide, he said, "You know, I think it's time maybe we try the fed?" So we went up to Washington. Dale Bumpers said I was the first university person to ever show up at his office. There he was sitting on agriculture appropriations, so a few hundred million dollars after that, why, the UA named the Agriculture College after him.

RR: You were the one that arranged that, then?

JM: Well, this was on my watch, but there were a lot of people who played with it. At that time, the chair of that committee, the Senate Agriculture Appropriations committee, was [Quentin Burdick?], who was in fact "dead," but they'd prop him up daily. But Bumpers became fascinated with the notion that the university was perhaps the most well equipped institution as far as bringing about positive change for the economy of Arkansas, and he put his money where his mouth was. And a guy named Chuck Culver on his staff worked with us, then joined the university when he left Bumpers's office. We had a wonderful time, and I thoroughly enjoyed every day I spent with the university. Got down to the point where my health changed a little bit, and I decided that I'd try to retire. Here I am.

RR: What year did you retire?

JM: I don't remember.

RR: I don't either.

ED: Did you retire right after you had your heart surgery?

JM: Not right after. I stayed around for six or eight months.

ED: You had your heart surgery in, probably, 1985?

JM: No, it was ninety . . .

ED: 1995. 1995.

JM: Yes. Actually, Alan Sugg had joined up as president. I don't think Alan ever understood the federal money. [Alan always fretted?] when they turned it off, "What would you do?" But, anyway, it was just a good time for me to leave, and I decided to leave.

RR: What do you do now?

JM: What I damn well please, except on afternoons like this.

RR: Work on clocks?

JM: Not really. Every now and then, I'll try to help some of them, but I've got a clock man to do the heavy work.

RR: Do you eat lunch every Tuesday at . . . ?

JM: At Mayflower. Except on the third Tuesday, then I go to bank board meetings up in Greene County and throw widows and orphans out in the street for nonpayment. I thoroughly enjoy it. I've still got some interests up in Greene County. I thoroughly enjoy the banking business.

RR: Do you have a farm up . . . ?

JM: No. I've got a little piece of land that is currently leased by two different firms today, and I ultimately will subdivide it, you know, when the market's right.

RR: What else is there about the *Arkansas Gazette* that we haven't talked about that

needs to be said?

JM: The two most important people at the *Gazette*, I early on discovered, were not the publisher and the general manager. One was Romeo Gatewood, the custodian on the inside, and Ray Dukes, the parking lot attendant, on the outside. As long as you kept both those guys doing what they did best, your employee morale stayed high, and I think – that's G-A-T-E-W-O-O-D. Romeo.

RR: And he took care of the building.

JM: He took care – well, he was the principal man inside, and he was the guy that fixed it all.

ED: He could run the department [unintelligible].

JM: Well, not only that, but what I appreciated about Romeo is that he would come in in the morning and wait until J.O. Powell got there, and he'd go in and talk to him about the editorials. If he didn't agree, he would say so. And Ray Dukes could park more cars on that lot than anybody else, and parking was at a premium. And as long as you kept both those guys in – I thought they were the important ones. Now, you had people that liked the payroll clerk, Maylean Millender.

RR: Millender?

JM: Millender. She cut the checks.

RR: Maydean?

JM: Maylean. M-A-Y-L-E-A-N. Then you had Mary Nell Moseley.

RR: Moseley.

JM: Bless her heart. She was something else. She looked after Hugh's office and his

interests. It was – it is, I don't know who's down there anymore – Every now and then you run into somebody, but I never regretted a minute I spent there, not one. And I don't even regret looking back on all the failures that had to – I mean, I don't think anybody was responsible. I think it was a disharmonic convergence. Do you follow me? It was a coming together of problems and miscalculations. That sort of thing. And I'd say this: that I've been surprised at the commitment that Hussman shows to being a newspaper of record. I'm getting a little tired reading about Springdale sewer problems. It just doesn't run that far downhill, and I'm afraid what I'm getting ready to see is what he used to have when you [Ernie Dumas?] were at El Dorado. Bonnie Davis would file a story in Texarkana, and it would just rattle down through the chain, the Palmer chain, Georgia Dailey, Bonnie Davis. Except for – who's the old man in Hope that was a fifty-fifty partner with Clyde in that newspaper the *Star*?

RR: Oh, yes.

JM: Who left in his will the admonition that this paper will not be sold to any Palmer or Hussman . . .

ED: Alex Washburn.

JM: Alex Washburn.

RR: Alex Washburn. Yes.

JM: Yes. Yes.

RR: That's good. [Laughs] I don't have anything else on my mind. Ernie, you got anything else?

JM: Most of that's not even worth transcribing.

ED: Well, it's as good as any we've had.

JM: It's been fun to remember it.

RR: Thank you.

[End of Interview]