

Gazette Project

Interview with

Joe Mosby,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
28 February 2000

Interviewer: Jerol Garrison

Jerol Garrison: This is Jerol Garrison, and I'm interviewing Joe Mosby at the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, where he has worked since shortly after the Arkansas *Gazette* closed. I'm in Joe's office — we are in Joe's office, together, and it's February 28 in the year 2000. Joe, this interview is part of an oral history project, being conducted by the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas Library at Fayetteville. The center will transcribe the interview, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcription and make changes before the document goes into the archives of the Library, where it will be available for persons interested in Arkansas History. The aim of these interviews is to shed light on what kind of newspaper the Arkansas *Gazette* was. Before I go any further, Joe, I would like for you to just tell me your name, and to indicate that you are willing for the Center for Oral and Visual History to conduct this interview for the Archives. Is this ok?

Joe Mosby: Yes, yes, that's fine. My name is Joe Mosby. That's my common name,

the name I wrote under at the Arkansas *Gazette*. Formally, my name is Joseph Hobson Mosby.

JG: Hobson? H-O-B-S-O-N?

JM: H-O-B-S-O-N.

JG: And Mosby is . . .

JM: M-O-S-B-Y. I've got an old family name. There are something like eight of us in a line with the same name, going down through my son. My son has not passed on the name, at least at this time.

JG: So let the record show that Joe signed this form that consents to the interview.

JM: I signed. You have my full consent, endorsement and enthusiasm, I guess, because this is a project that needs doing.

JG: Joe, please describe the work you did for the Arkansas *Gazette* and the period of your employment. Please start from the beginning, when you went to work at the *Gazette*.

JM: I was there 22 years. I started in September 1969, as a sports-copy editor. I was on the sports desk, did copy-editing, wrote headlines, and did page layout. After I had been there a few months, I did an occasional feature sports story, not very often, and then I got to do a little more. I found it enjoyable and refreshing to get away from the desk every now and then — to get outside to do a feature. I covered a few sports events, not many. One that comes to mind was the 1971 Liberty Bowl at Memphis. The Razorbacks played Tennessee and lost by one point, I think. I was just part of the crew. There were always several people who

covered the Razorback football games, with Orville Henry as the lead player, of course. Orville took me along just to get me off the desk, as a reward or something. Some people tended to view desk work as confining. I didn't have that opinion of it. I was on the sports desk about 3 ½ years, and as part of my work I handled the Sunday outdoor page. Staff Writer John Fleming wrote the page, and I put it together Saturday evening or Saturday night. I did hunt and fish. I knew a little something about it. I didn't claim to be a great outdoorsman, and still don't, but I enjoy it, so I was handed that assignment by Orville. In '73, when John was stricken with illness, then died, I was called into Bob Douglas's office. Bob was managing editor. Bob said, "Joe, you are our new outdoor editor." He didn't say, "Do you want it? Do you want to be outdoor editor?" He just said, "You are it." We had a brief conversation; I never sat down. We both stood in his office, and he gave me the new assignment. And I was tickled-to-death to get it because, by that time, I had seen what hunting and fishing and outdoor recreation meant in Arkansas, and saw the potential there. I took the assignment and ran with it — is what it amounted to. I was outdoor editor from early '73 until the *Gazette* closed, October 18, 1991.

JG: Joe, I wonder if you would tell us what you did as outdoor editor? What did that mean?

JM: What it boiled down to is I was pretty much a one-person-stand-alone department. I was part of the sports department, on the books and on the payroll and also in spirit, I guess you would say. But I operated on my own in this outdoor field.

Nobody gave me assignments. I asked for direction two or three times from Orville Henry. Orville would smile and say, “You’re doing a fine job, Joe, just keep on.” That’s the only direction I ever got from Orville. Orville did not hunt and fish at all, but he knew the importance of it in the Arkansas community and our state’s lifestyle since there is such a large number of people here who hunt and fish and, as we later found out, just enjoy the outdoors — just get out and roam around, look at birds, maybe drive a back road with no real intention but to participate in the outdoors — I mean, go out there and picnic. At the time I became outdoor editor, I had been in newspaper work about 21 years. I started in 1952. I had experience and I had spent my first 17 years before I came to the *Gazette* on small papers, small dailies, more than on weekly newspapers.

JG: Could you take a minute to kind of describe where you worked?

JM: I bounced around quite a bit, Jerol. I dropped out of the University in 1952. I didn’t graduate, one of several incompletions in my life.

JG: That’s the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville?

JM: Right. I was floundering around somewhat. And it was more a personal situation than it was academic or anything, but I got the notion that I would drop out of school for a year to try to get a little money and go back to school. I started the summer session in ’52, withdrew, got a job at the *Log Cabin Democrat* at Conway in July ’52, working under Joe McGee.

JG: That’s Joe McG-E-E.

JM: Right. Legendary Conway newspaper editor. I was the third person on a three-

person news staff. It was a six-day-a-week paper in Conway. I did sports; I did desk work; I did anything else that came along. I wrote most of the obits — not all. I wrote the routine obits. If a prominent citizen would die, then Joe McGee would write that. I was at the Conway paper two years. I moved from there to the Natchez, Mississippi, *Democrat* as sports editor of a slightly larger paper. I was there for four years and went from there to Jennings, Louisiana, to the daily paper — the Jennings *Daily News*. I was only there a few months, and I helped start a weekly paper in partnership with a radio station owner in a small town near Jennings named Lake Arthur. Lake Arthur *Sun* was our title. Our standing joke was our weekly paper was spelled “W-E-A-K-L-Y.” We started this paper from scratch. It was a little town where the little town newspaper had folded up several years before. This town of 3,000 people wanted another paper. We gave it to them. That was in the very beginning days of offset printing; we put in a complete offset printing plant there. It was a learning experience from the ground up. I had to learn the mechanical part of offset printing because there was nobody else. We had to teach a pressman to operate the offset press — well, we had to learn it, too. After a year, the man that owned the radio station had all the fun and games he could stand. He came walking in one day and said, “Joe, I want out of this thing.” So I signed a note to buy his portion of it. I had just turned 30 years old. I didn’t do it quite that quickly; I went home and talked it over with my wife, and then I signed the note for his part. All of a sudden, I walked in the office one morning before everybody else — I say everybody else, there were two other

people that worked there — and I thought, “I got this newspaper all by myself. It’s mine. What in the world am I going to do when something goes wrong? There’s nobody to lean on. There’s nobody I can say to ‘I need some advice. I need some help. I need to borrow a little money.’” I would not take anything for the experience of owning that weekly paper. At the same time, I wouldn’t want to do it again. I was the editor and publisher of the Lake Arthur *Sun*. I was editor that first year, started in ’59, and I became sole owner in 1960, and sold the place in 1963. Turned around and did the same thing — started a newspaper from scratch — in a very small town in East Texas, called Buna, 35 miles north of Beaumont. I did that as a sole proprietorship project, but with the encouragement of a local banker. We just had a handshake and a verbal agreement. And he said, “If you’ll start this paper and operate it for six months, I’ll buy you out.” That’s what I did, except I didn’t sell it to him; I sold it to a third party. A newspaperman and his wife came along and wanted to buy the thing. It was not a town that my family and I really enjoyed. I don’t mean to sound derogatory. Anyway, we sold it. I got a job in a town in West Texas, in the town of Seminole, as the editor. I was there almost four years, West Texas. Still had this yearning to have my own weekly paper. The bug had bitten me, and I was still infected. I hadn’t gotten over the disease of owning and operating a weekly paper. So I found a very small paper in Aspermont, Texas, north of Abilene. It was for sale. The owner and I negotiated a little bit, and I ended up with a six-month lease with option to buy. I went to Aspermont and operated the paper for six months. There

was no question about the option to buy: it was not a good situation, and I turned it back to him. Got a job with the Winnsboro, Texas, *News*, in East Texas, as the editor. The owner wanted to convert the letterpress to offset printing and I had had that experience, and that was the main reason he hired me, because I knew offset, and we did convert to offset printing there. I was in Winnsboro 2½ years. The newspaper owner in Ashdown, Arkansas, heard about me, or something, and I did the same thing again. I went to Ashdown as editor and guided them through the conversion to offset printing. I made no claims to be a technical guru or anything, but I did have the experience of making these conversions, and it is an involved process that requires new skills from production people. I was at Ashdown less than a year, 8-9 months, and I was feeling pretty good. We were back in Arkansas then. My wife and I are both Arkansans even though I crossed the big river and went to high school in Memphis. We wanted to come back to Arkansas. She had especially strong family ties, and there we were in Ashdown. My wife is from Conway, by the way. Ashdown was not close to Conway, but it was Arkansas. The owner and I talked a couple of times in very general terms about the possibilities of my becoming part owner of the *Little River News*.

JG: That was the name of the paper, *Little River News*?

JM: Yes, in Ashdown. We never nailed down anything, just had some general conversations. And one day out of the blue, I got a phone call from Jerry McConnell, who was with the Arkansas *Gazette*. Jerry functioned as assistant sports editor. He didn't have a title. There weren't many formal titles at the old

Gazette there. Anyway, Jerry was the #2 man in the sports department under Orville Henry. Jerry and I had gone to school at the University of Arkansas. He was a little ahead of me, a little older than I was. And then, Jerry and I were distant kin — some kind of cousins — fourth cousins, fifth cousins, whatever it was. But, anyway, Jerry called and said, “Joe, we are looking for a sports-desk man. Would you be interested?” I was surprised to hear from him in the first place. It was 1969, and I hadn’t seen or heard from Jerry since 1953-54, when he was with the Arkansas *Democrat*. I told him, no, I didn’t think I was interested. I had never worked with a big paper. I had been with little papers for 17 years. Jerry said, “Why don’t you drive up here and talk to Orville and me? It won’t hurt anything for you to come up here and talk. We’ll pay your expenses.” I told him, “Fine.” We made an appointment, and I drove up to Little Rock. I had been in the *Gazette* probably twice. I think twice. The last time I’d been in it was in the mid to late 50s, I guess it was. I’d met Orville in my college days when I was sports editor at the Arkansas *Traveler* at the U of A, and Orville was the *Gazette* sports editor. I recall shaking his hand — and not really having a conversation --- in the press box at Razorback Stadium, probably the 1951 football season. What I’m saying is that I didn’t know him. I knew who he was, but I didn’t know him personally. We sat down one afternoon in the old *Gazette* sports department. They had an old couch over in the corner where Orville’s desk was. Jerry and Orville and I talked about 45 minutes, and it was not an interview, just a conversation. We just sat there and talked. Finally, out of the blue, Orville said,

“I’d like for you to come to work for me.” I was kind of surprised, really, because he hadn’t seen any of my work. I did sports work for these weekly papers and small dailies, but did everything else. I turned him down. I said, “No, I just don’t think this is the place for me. I believe I belong in a small town with the weekly newspapers.”

JG: Was this sometime in 1969?

JM: Yes, it was August of ’69. We shook hands, and I left. And I drove back to Ashdown and talked to my wife. I could see the disappointment in her face. She didn’t say anything, but . . .

JG: Your wife’s name is?

JM: My wife’s name is Mary Ann. She was disappointed because Little Rock was close to Conway, of course. She didn’t say anything, but I could read the disappointment. The next day, about the middle of the morning, I got a phone call at my office, a call from Orville. Orville said, “Joe, I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer.” We hadn’t even talked salary, at that point. I said, “Orville, how much can you pay me?” He named a figure. It was the same salary I was making at Ashdown. I told him, “No.” He came up a little bit. I told him, “No.” I was wavering as far as changing jobs not on the salary. I didn’t think I would like a big paper. Finally, he said, “What will it take to get you here?” And I named a figure just a little bit higher, and he said, “I’ll have to go to Mr. Nelson.” This was A.R. Nelson, the managing editor. I told him, “OK.” At the most, 30 minutes later, maybe 20 minutes, the phone rings again. It’s Orville, and he says,

“Joe, you got it. Can you come up here as soon as you can?” My stomach was really churning then. I was not tied to Ashdown. I just didn’t think I was cut out for a metropolitan newspaper. It was not the fact that I had ideas of being a big fish in a small pond down there with the weekly paper, with a chance of ownership on down the road. I just made a switch then. Drove up that weekend and worked at the *Gazette*, I believe Friday night and Saturday. I drove up Friday afternoon, worked at the *Gazette* Friday night, then the full shift Saturday, to more or less get my feet wet. I turned in my notice at Ashdown. The owner there was disappointed, and he said, “I’ll match the *Gazette* salary.” But I went ahead and gave him two weeks notice, gave him three weeks notice, really. Moved to the *Gazette*, started work there in September 1969, during football season. It was not the big transition that I thought it was. It was a full-time sports job, and I had never been in a full-time sports job before. I had done sports work all these years, but not full-time. I was the number-two person on the sports desk, under Chuck Miller. Chuck was the slot man five nights a week, and I was the slot man the other two nights. Chuck was a character and a good newsman. The *Gazette* news staff was full of characters who were good newspeople. Chuck Miller was one of them. Chuck was 10 years older than I was, exactly 10 years older than I was. A World War II veteran, Chuck was on a bomber crew, not a pilot. It took me a few weeks to make the adjustment. It was more of a mental adjustment than anything else. It was a different pace of work. Same kind of work — copy editing, headline writing, laying out pages — I’d done all of that in my previous 17 years

with the small papers. Our sports staff at that time was, I think, eight people. I may have trouble naming the eight. Eight full-time and a couple of part-time. Orville Henry, Jerry McConnell, Jim Bailey was a writer. The head high school writer was Jimmy Wilder. Chuck and I were on the desk. Wadie Moore was a part-timer.

JG: That's W-A-D-I-E.

JM: Yes. I know I'm forgetting somebody. James Thompson was away at National Guard Service, Military Service. James had been a full-timer there before I came to work and came back after six months of active service in the military a couple of months after I went to work there. As soon as I started, I was told by Orville that I would handle the Sunday outdoors page, which is made up Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. I thought it was because he knew I knew a little something about hunting and fishing. I didn't understand that it was an albatross that nobody else wanted to fool with because a lot of people in the sports department didn't know hunting and fishing. It was a "red-headed stepchild," as the cliché goes. Part of that reason was a weekly column by Jerry McKinnis, a very prominent television outdoors man. Jerry, at that time, was running the boat dock on Lake Maumelle and wrote a weekly column for the *Gazette* on fishing.

JG: I remember that.

JM: Jerry wrote it in pencil on a ruled pad and would bring it to the *Gazette*, he or his wife, and would hand it to me. I would have to type it and then send it to the composer to be set in type. Jerry was rough around the edges. His spelling and

grammar were . . .

JG: Atrocious?

JM: Below par and all. The guy is a friend of mine. Boy, I don't want to be derogatory, but I had to translate McKinnis into English. That was not a big thing except it was an office joke around there. It took maybe 30 minutes each Saturday. You would have to guess at some of his spelling, especially with brand names of fishing lures. I was all right, I think, because I knew those lures. After awhile, we just made a standard practice: when we would hire a new person or a new part-timer or a college intern—anything else in the sports department --- that was the first thing they did. When Jerry McKinnis's column came in, you handed it to them, and you stood back and watched the expression on their faces.

JG: And they had to look up the spelling on some of those lures, too, I imagine.

JM: Yes, they had to ask. The three plus years I was on the sports desk were enjoyable to me. I learned a whole lot. I knew the basic news work all right, but I learned a lot about the specialized sports news. I always considered myself a newsman assigned to the sports department. I was not a sports writer in the sense of Orville Henry and Jim Bailey, who were sports writers. The basics were there, and I had a good background in the basics of spelling and English grammar.

JG: Didn't you write a column, an outdoor column, after you took over the outdoor editor's job?

JM: Yes. The outdoor beat required a weekly column. Later on, it became twice a week for me. At one time I did three columns a week, one of which was devoted

to fishing. I'm not sure of the exact years, but I was outdoor editor 18½ years, and a good bit of that time I did three columns a week, Sunday, Tuesday, and then a Friday fishing column. I said something awhile ago about Orville not being an outdoorsman, but realizing the importance of outdoor news. He came in one morning and said, "Joe, what do you think about doing a weekly report on fishing conditions in various lakes around Arkansas." I thought it was a good idea, so we started the fishing report. I would start off with maybe six different lakes. I'd get on the phone and call the boat dock, and just have a conversation with them. Then we increased from six to eight. I don't think we ever had more than twelve.

JG: So that was the start of the weekly fishing report.

JM: That was the start of the fishing report. It was fun, but it was tedious, if that makes sense.

JG: I can understand that.

JM: I got to know these people, some of them. Telephone acquaintances, but they knew me. I made a point to visit the various boat docks when I could. When I was rambling around the state, I made it a point of stopping in, just saying, "Hi" to one of these boat dock operators, drinking a Coke with them. We built a relationship, and that relationship did not always translate to good fishing reports. It was difficult, many times, for a boat dock operator to give a fishing report. They have to find out from the fishermen, first of all, what's going on. As we all know, fishermen lie. When they would give their reports to me, they were honest. They were passing on the things that the fishermen said, but, at times, warning

flags would go off in my head, and it just didn't sound right, so I would leave some stuff out. We had a few occasions of inaccurate and dishonest reports on fishing—

JG: From the boat dock?

JM: Yes, from the boat dock.

[Phone rings]

JG: We have to turn this tape over in a minute, here.

JM: We would have boat docks that would call up and ask to give fishing reports after this thing became established, and it was a popular feature of the *Gazette*. We had boat docks call, and they wanted to give their report, and that's really why it grew from six to eight to twelve, or how many ever. This only happened a few times, but docks would give us reports about all of the great fishing—just jumping into the boats. Everybody that went out would catch the limit. Well, it just sounded too far-fetched, and I wouldn't take the report any more. One dock just raised Cain and complained. And, finally, the guy called a friend, and he called a friend, who called Hugh Patterson, the publisher. Hugh passed the information on to me, but didn't tell me what to run.

[End of Tape One, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

JM: I had no instructions on writing the outdoor columns from my superiors, Orville Henry, or Bob Douglas, the managing editor. They just said, "Do the outdoor beat." I knew my columns had to be entertaining and informative. I did not think

they had to be confrontational, though there are so many things in the outdoor world that are confrontational to some people. Lots of controversy over seemingly minor points. I never dodged controversy, but I never sought it out on this outdoor beat. It just came at times. My main thing that I tried for, in the outdoor columns, was to be timely. I tried to keep my ears open in conversation with outdoors people. And I made mistakes, of course. There was a period in my first few years as outdoor editor when I tended to have too much contact with the bureaucracy. I felt at times I placed too much importance on the actions of the Game and Fish Commission. The Game and Fish Commission played a vital role in the outdoors field, but the outdoors in Arkansas did not revolve around the Game and Fish Commission. And, gradually, I got away from this reliance on non-personal entities like the Game and Fish Commission and shifted to people for sources instead of agencies for sources. I don't know when the realization came home to me --- but it was fairly early --- that my job was telling people stories to the people. The readers wanted to know what other people were doing in the outdoors, what unusual things were taking place. Changes, techniques, fish stories, deer hunting stories, quail hunting stories, those were the backbone of my outdoor columns. I was a storyteller, so to speak. At times I wrote in the first person, but I was not the primary source of these stories. The column sometimes had a structure of Sam Smith's experience, as told to Joe Mosby. I never claimed or tried to give the impression that I was a great hunter or a great fisherman because I am not. I do enjoy it all, but I'm no expert on any aspect of hunting and

fishing. One thing I placed a whole lot of importance on was keeping my ears open, especially for feedback and comments I would get on something I wrote. And, at the same time I am saying that, I didn't wait to hear those comments. I operated a good bit on gut feeling—which is what you do in newspaper work, especially when you are a column writer. You write what you think you ought to write, what you think the readers are interested in. I probably need to turn that comment around. Column writers need to write what the readers are interested in and what comes out of their gut feeling, what they want to write or think they ought to write. I did not write columns to placate anybody, to incur favor with them. Outdoor columns were fun to write, even when they were on a serious subject, on a environmental dispute, for instance. They were fun for me to write. I wrote columns in all sorts of settings. I don't mean subjects; I mean settings. I wrote columns sitting on the tailgate of a pickup truck, for instance. I wrote them on picnic tables in state parks. Many columns I wrote in motel rooms at night.

JG: This would be on a portable typewriter?

JM: My years at the *Gazette* were in a time of technological changes. We still used portable typewriters and got into telecopiers. They were predecessors to the fax machine. They were cumbersome things you carried around. It took, I believe it was six minutes, to transmit one 8 ½" x 11" page of typed copy. Then we got into the early computers, or I guess you call them computers. They were fairly compact machines made by Texas Instruments. I can't remember the model number, but TI is what we called it. In the 80s, I'm not sure of the year, maybe

'82-'83, we got compact little Radio Shack computers, Model 100. They were light; they were portable, battery operated or AC powered. You could hook them to a phone anywhere and transmit your material to the home office. Those were very helpful to me. I transmitted stories from all kinds of strange places out in the boondocks.

JG: Using a phone line.

JM: Yes, yes, used a phone line. You'd use a pay phone, for instance — just stop on the side of the road at a pay phone. At times noise from passing 18-wheelers would interfere. These are mechanical things that we are talking about. They are all different processes for getting the words into the paper. You may write a column — I wrote columns on typewriters in the office, on computers in the office, out in the field. They are just different vehicles for the same purpose. Along with the columns, my work was producing a Sunday outdoor page at the *Gazette*, which usually was structured to have my column and a feature with a picture. I usually wrote the feature. Sometimes others wrote it. I bought some work from free-lance writers, for instance. At least 3/4 of these features with photos were my work. I did almost all the photography for the outdoor page. I don't claim to be a great photographer either, but I could operate a camera and take pictures. We always had a need for more photos. We didn't ever have enough deer pictures, turkey pictures, quail pictures, or whatever. Those are difficult to get. I mean live animals; dead ones are not that hard. Speaking of dead animals, when I became the outdoor editor, I already knew that Mr. Heiskell

had a long-standing policy of not running pictures of dead deer. Mr. Heiskell died not too long before I became outdoor editor. I thought the policy was a good one. Orville's comment, somewhere along the line was, "We just don't want people sitting down at the breakfast table, staring at a picture of a dead deer with its tongue hanging out." There is always somebody who mailed a picture in or brought a picture in, called on the phone about this photo they had of this fine 12-point buck they had killed, or their little boy had killed his first deer, and they wanted their picture in the *Arkansas Gazette*. It was convenient to cite the newspaper's policy of no dead animals. Fish were a different story. I'd be hard-pressed to rationalize, really, as to why we ran a picture of a dead large-mouth bass and would not run one of a dead deer or a dead squirrel or a dead quail. I don't know. It was that way when I started working at the *Gazette*. I didn't change the policy, and I just think it was a good policy.

JG: Well, even some vegetarians will eat fish, but not an animal.

JM: They'll eat fish, but they'll not eat — maybe it's the color of meat, white vs. red. I don't know. One mistake I made when I became the outdoor editor was that I was bamboozled by bass tournaments. I put too much emphasis on bass tournaments in the first several years I was outdoor editor. At the time, bass tournaments were the new kid on the block. They were the hottest thing going. Every time you looked around, you had a new promoter and a new circuit of bass tournaments. They were calling them "world championships," "international finals," and all this. I tried to cover as many as I could. After a few years, I

realized, and was told by the readers, that they just weren't interested in bass tournaments. I didn't quit covering them, because they were, and still are, of some news value. My shirt-tail policy became some bass tournaments are newsworthy and ought to be covered. I made those decisions on a case-by-case basis. In the last several years I was at the *Gazette*, I covered far fewer bass tournaments than I did my first years there. Not to say bass tournaments are bad, they were something that happened. They had a quick rise in the early '70s and mid-'70s and a gradual decline in the '80s, and they reached kind of a plateau situation.

JG: Let's see how we're doing.

JM: I'm certainly not the first person to do outdoor writing for the *Gazette*. I was the first full-time outdoor editor. There were few formal titles at the *Gazette*. I'm not sure on the company rolls that I was called outdoor editor or just sports writer. There were staff members who wrote outdoors before I got there. My predecessor with the title of outdoor editor was John Fleming, but John was not an outdoorsman. He was a feature writer who was involved much more with environmental subjects than he was with hunting and fishing. Over the years, as outdoor editor of the *Gazette*, I traveled a good bit. As I said awhile ago, I was on my own on my own schedule. I did not keep any kind of office hours. At one point early in my time as outdoor editor, I said something to Orville about coming in the office. And he laughed and said, "Joe, we want you out there writing about hunting and fishing. We'll mail a paycheck to you, if we have to." Easier said

than done. I had to be in the office some, but, at the start of those years, I laid out the outdoor page. I assembled it, laid it out, and went to the back shop and watched the makeup of it.

JG: This was on a Saturday, wasn't it.

JM: Yes. This was on a Saturday. Saturday night, usually. Gradually that changed, and the sports desk took over the layout and makeup of it in order to give me more time in the field. That worked out well, really. I don't think the person that writes the material should do the editing, the makeup, the layout and all that. Somebody else ought to ride herd on it and go over it. That's the way it evolved at the *Gazette*. I say I was full time outdoor editor. I never devoted 100% of my time to outdoor subjects. For several years, I worked the desk on high school football Friday nights. There was a great volume of material that came in in a short period. The sports department used all the help it could get, including the reporters from the news department who would pick up a couple of hours of overtime by taking phone calls on these high school football games. When I was outdoor editor, for several years — I'm not sure of the number, quite a few years — I would work as the high school football desk man, by myself or with somebody else. One of the people was Gerry Drury. He was on the news desk. He and I would take these football game stories, do the copy editing, put the headlines on them, and send them to the back shop as an auxiliary operation to the regular sports department. I enjoyed doing it. There was a need for it in the production process at the *Gazette*. I knew Arkansas fairly well, the geography of

the small towns. I knew the nicknames of the various football teams. I did that on Friday night during the football season during the '70s, well into the '80s. There is another need, once a year, during high school basketball tournament time. There was just not enough people to go out and staff all these various state tournaments around the state. There were five or six different classifications, and at one time they had different tournaments at different sites for girls and boys. So you had ten different tournaments going on at the same time. I would take one of them — usually the one in the most remote part of Arkansas. I would go to it, cover the tournament, still do my outdoor stuff. Usually, I would find a lake nearby and do a feature on the fishing at that lake while I was at the tournament. It was a change of pace; it was fun. I didn't mind doing it. We told stories and joked around in the office about these strange places that they would hold the state tournaments, and nobody knew where they were. Joe was the only one who knew where they were, so he would take this tournament in this remote town. One that comes to mind is a class-B tournament --- I'm not sure of the year, mid-'80s --- in the town of Sulphur Rock, which is east of Batesville. Nobody on the *Gazette* staff had ever heard of Sulphur Rock. Well, I had. I knew where Sulphur Rock was. I volunteered to take that tournament, and that particular tournament was something of a landmark for Arkansas high school basketball tournaments. The town of Sulphur Rock is a very small place, no motel, no restaurants. The townspeople of Sulphur Rock took an interest and provided food in the hospitality room. The custom then was that each tournament would have a hospitality room

[in] which would be cold cuts, chips, cookies, cold drinks for coaches, tournament workers and for the media. In Sulphur Rock, various ladies of the community prepared dishes, casseroles, and all, and absolutely provided a magnificent spread for us all week long. During the tournament, I wrote a feature on the hospitality room in Sulphur Rock, the food there, and it was outstanding. It caught on. After that, other schools started providing hospitality rooms with real food, not quick cold-cuts, chips and stuff. And they still do. I was at a basketball tournament this past week, and it had an outstanding hospitality room. The work as outdoor editor required me to cover the monthly meetings of the state Game and Fish Commission. There were several years in which we had two people covering those meetings. Carol Griffee would cover, in her terms, the political and environmental issues, and I would cover the hunting and fishing issues. And the two of us would have to decide who would take this topic and who would take that topic. There were some minor complications between Carol and me. Carol is a very forceful person, as well as being a good reporter. I usually just let Carol take the agenda, and she would check off the items that she wanted to cover, and I would take the rest of them. This would be most months. We would get the agenda ahead of time, and we would look at it. If there were no items that she was interested in, she wouldn't attend the meeting. I would attend and report on hunting and fishing. The Game and Fish Commission meetings were interesting to me. They touched on such a wide variety of topics. The commission changed complexion each year, as an old commissioner would go off his seven-year term

and a new commissioner would come on. All commissioners for many years were wealthy white males. Wealthy is not a precise term. More precise: members of the commission were self-employed people who were “comfortable.”

“Comfortable” means more than wealthy. Finally that changed when Governor Clinton appointed a black man to the Game and Fish Commission, Tommy Sproles. After Sproles’s seven-year term, Clinton appointed another black man, Dr. James Moore. Then Governor Jim Guy Tucker --- this was after the *Gazette* closed — Governor Tucker appointed a woman, Pat Peacock Stephens, to a short term, an unexpired term on the Game and Fish Commission. That was ’94, I think it was.

JG: So did you cover these Game and Fish Commission meetings just like you would cover any other news story, just figuring out what was important news and writing it up?

JM: In the years when I first became outdoor editor, the meetings lasted two days. They were long, drawn-out, tedious, many reports by staff members.

JG: Would this be like a Sunday and Monday, or Monday and Tuesday? How did that work?

JM: They were Monday and Tuesday in those days. I’m not sure when that format started. It was long before I started covering it. At least one-third of the meetings were held outside Little Rock in various towns around Arkansas. It was a lot of time devoted to inconsequential news, in my opinion. Finally, in the early ‘80s, a man became chairman of the commission, Fay Wright, from North Little Rock.

His first action as chairman was to stop the two-day meetings and make them one-day meetings. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief, especially the Game and Fish staff, including me. They became more stream-lined, more functional. As I did with bass tournaments at first, I feel I placed too much importance on these Game and Fish meetings, that they were not the end-all or the core of the outdoor world that my readers were interested in. I didn't realize that. I thought you had to cover these meetings fully. Gradually, it came home to me that these meetings had to be covered all right because they were a major public agency, but your coverage could be condensed. And my news stories on the Game and Fish meetings pertained to — each story was several paragraphs, or a number of paragraphs, on the topic I thought was the most important and at the end, I would write, "In other action, Monday, the Commission: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6." You touched the bases. You got it covered, but you didn't bog down the reader, and you didn't use up a whole lot of news space.

JG: Now these articles would appear in the sports section the day following the meeting?

JM: Most of them appeared in the sports section the day following the meeting. It depended on the topic. If the editors at the *Gazette* office felt that the topic that I wrote on was a news item, not a sports item, they would move it to the news section, the A section. It made no difference to me as long as it was in the paper. Most of them ran in the sports section.

JG: And you might have a followup story in your outdoor page in the Sunday paper if

it was something special that merited more coverage.

JM: Very often. So many times, the Game and Fish action, itself, made the next day's paper, but it needed explaining; it needed analyzing; it needed background. Why did they change this rule in deer hunting? What was the rationale? That would be a subject for a Sunday column or a Sunday feature. There was no formal structure to this operation. We just flew by the seat of our pants, really. Game and Fish meetings, sometimes, would result in two, three, even four news stories the next day, especially during those years of dual coverage by Carol Griffie and and me. She would do two in the news section; I would do two in the sports section — all from the same meeting.

JG: You mentioned back at the office, was there a clatter around the sports department? Was it a noisy place? What was it like to be in the sports room there at the *Gazette*?

JM: My first impression of the *Gazette*, when I went in to interview for the job with Orville in 1969, was the noise. I sat there on the couch in the corner of his office talking to Jerry McConnell and Orville Henry. The *Gazette* had this conveyor belt at this time—a kind of a “Rube-Goldberg” thing that ran overhead through the sports department, through the news department, and back to the composing room. And it transported copy.

JG: Was it a belt that ran overhead?

JM: Yes. This was a belt that ran overhead. It had two points that it dropped down to about chest level. You would place your news stories on that belt, your headlines

on it, and they were taken to the composing room.

JG: Just the paper, just attach the paper to the belt?

JM: Yes, just attach the paper to the belt.

JG: With a clothespin?

JM: There were two belts that ran, two on top of each other. You just stuck it in between them. And that thing was noisy. It ran all the time. Now they shut it off after the last person went home at night, but it ran during the day. It ran during. . .

JG: And where did it carry the copies to? The papers to?

JM: It would carry it to the composing room — well, to the central point in the composing room. And the composing room would send page proofs on the belt to the sports department, to the news department.

JG: Didn't they have copy boys that would do that also?

JM: Copy boys did a little bit of everything, up to and including going out and getting a sandwich for somebody that wanted to work at the desk during the supper hour. Copy boys were errand boys. This conveyor belt was the main thing that moved the news copy from the newsroom to the composing room. The sports department was in a room, more or less to itself, outside the main newsroom. There was a door that had swinging doors, and then, somewhere along the line, someone took those doors off, and then it was just open there. But the sports department was separate from the newsroom although it was right next to it. It was cluttered. The newsroom was cluttered, paper piled around. Some people had relatively clean desks, but most of them were cluttered, piled up with everything. I'm not sure

that there was such a thing as a stereotype newsroom. If there was, the *Gazette* came pretty close to it.

JG: The desks were what, metal desks or tables?

JM: Most of the desks were metal office desks. There were a few wooden ones around there. Most of them were metal office desks. The sports desk where copy editing and layout were done was a large wooden top on two pedestals. It was probably six feet wide and maybe ten feet long. It was a good-sized desk.

JG: A big table in other words.

JM: Yes, it was a large table.

JG: It didn't have drawers to it, just sitting on a pedestal on each end.

JM: Yes, right, and then there were half a dozen, regular office desks.

[End of Tape One]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

JG: Joe, tell us about the people that worked in the *Gazette* Sports Department.

JM: One of my strongest attachments to the *Gazette* was because of the people, the individuals in the sports department and in the news department, too. Talk about the sports department, you have to talk about Orville Henry first and foremost. He was the sports editor there for fifty years, more or less. Yes, nearly fifty years. Orville was an outstanding sports writer, sports editor, and an outstanding newspaperman in general, although his specialty was sports. He had a feel for the whole business, the whole newspaper business, and he was not an iron-handed boss, by any means. In fact, if anything, he was a little too loose in his

management, at times. He hired you, gave you a world of freedom in your work, but expected your finished product would be professional and a contribution to a large daily newspaper. In Orville's last years at the *Gazette*, he moved to Fayetteville and got out of the daily operation, daily management end of it. That may have been to his benefit, but it was somewhat of handicap to the newspaper. Things went downhill gradually, as far as the over all management of the sports department, and that came before the *Gazette* changed hands, was sold to the Gannett Corporation. Jim Bailey was with the *Gazette* from 1956 until it closed in 1991, and was a sports writer's sports writer. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of many of the sports: football, basketball, baseball, boxing. Bailey would interview somebody in person or on the telephone and seldom take notes. I can do that a little bit, myself, but not nearly to the extent that Bailey could. One of the enjoyable aspects of my years at the *Gazette* was being in the office, listening to Bailey tell stories. If he was in New York City, they would call him a raconteur. I am not sure what we call him in Arkansas, except a very good story teller. Bailey could write songs, too, or write lyrics to songs. He was not a musician at all, but he would come up sometimes with a song to a popular tune, but the words would be about a team of the time, a coach. For example, in the late '60s, the Razorback basketball team wasn't doing very well—late '60s, early '70s --- Bailey wrote the words to a song about the Razorback basketball team, and it included the words "the man on the left cannot go to his right; the man on the right cannot go to his left." Little things that never made the newspaper or

anything, but it is part of the *Gazette*, part of my memories of the *Gazette* sports department. In those years of 1969 well into the Gannett era, the final years of the *Gazette*, the real strong suit for the *Gazette* was the experience that they had in the sports department: Orville, Bailey, Chuck Miller, me, even younger people like James Thompson and Wadie Moore. They had years and years of experience. If you totaled it up, it would be up in the hundreds of years of newspaper experience. That was one of the *Gazette's* assets. And the same thing applied to the news department. You had people with long experience out there. All of them were elements of blocks in this Arkansas tradition known as “the old gray lady”: people like Bill Shelton, Bob Douglas, A.R. Nelson, the managing editor, Pat Carithers, the wire editor, Leroy Donald, the state editor. I’m just touching on a few. We had so much experience there; they knew the newspaper business, and they knew the English language—the use of the English language, how to write a news story to get it in the newspaper for the benefit of the reader. There is no way that you can put a price tag on that.

JG: What was it like when the *Gazette* finally closed its doors? What was that day like?

JM: The whole atmosphere had changed during the five years that Gannett owned the place, and it would take me a long time to really tell that story and explain my feelings. Unfortunately to all of us, we tend to remember the *Gazette* too much for those last five years, under the Gannett operation, when the paper changed complexion so drastically. I had the feeling the *Gazette* was in some trouble

before Gannett bought it. It was not the same paper in the early '80s even than it was in the '70s and late '60s when I went to work there—it had a different feeling; it didn't seem as solid. Gannett bought the place, and many new people came in in management positions from outside. It is a cliché, but things went downhill. I felt we were losing the war with the Arkansas *Democrat*, at least a year before then, maybe two years. The end became obvious in the summer of 1991. It was not anything that was announced to the staff. It was just a feeling I had, that Gannett was losing this newspaper war. The actual end, the end, the death rattle, or whatever you want to call it, came a few days before the *Gazette* closed. There was an attempt spearheaded by Max Brantley, a last-ditch attempt for employees to buy the newspaper. I made a personal commitment to that project and felt that it was something that we needed to do. On Wednesday, that would be October 16, 1991, I felt sure that the *Gazette* was going to close in a matter of days. I say close, I felt sure the *Gazette* was going to be sold to the *Democrat* in a matter of days. I made three phone calls on that Wednesday, October 16, 1991. I called Frank Robins, who owned and published *The Log Cabin Democrat* in Conway, and asked him if he had a job. He said, "I don't have anything, but I think I can find something for you." He said, "Is the *Gazette* going to close?" And I said, "Yes, I think it is going to close." I made a phone call to Steve Wilson, director of the Game and Fish Commission, and said, "Steve, I need a job. Do you have anything?" Steve's answer was almost the same words as Frank Robins's. "I don't know if I have anything open, but I think

I can find something.” I made a third phone call to Richard Davies, director of the Parks and Tourism Department. Rich’s answer was “I’ll see if we have anything.” On Thursday, the 17th of October, the general atmosphere was that the end was here. I went into the *Gazette*. I can’t think what I wrote — I think I wrote a Sunday outdoor column. Several of us in the sports department thought that the paper would be sold to the *Democrat*. They were going to announce it at any time. I got a cardboard box and cleaned out most of my desk, just the personal odds and ends, took it to my car and took it home. This was on Thursday. I went in on Friday morning, around 10:00 in the morning. People were standing around the newsroom with glazed expressions. There had been no announcement, but rumors were floating around. One rumor was that it was not going to be sold to the *Democrat*, that Gannett was just going to shut it down. There had already been a rumor a day or two before that it would be sold to the *Democrat* and we would become the evening paper, and the *Democrat* would be the morning paper. I’m not sure what time Friday morning, but it was before noon, the computers were turned off. It meant nothing except a little bit of personal satisfaction to me, but I had already gone into my computer file and deleted all my outdoor material. Why I did that I don’t know. There wasn’t anything in it that was very valuable. There was that Sunday column that I had written the day before; there were various notes, old stories that said this and that. I just deleted the whole thing, and an hour later, the whole computer system was shut down.

JG: You did that deletion that Friday morning?

JM: Yes. Then we just sat and waited for the announcement that word of mouth said was coming from Gannett headquarters. The word in the newsroom, the scuttlebutt, was that the paper was going to close. It was not going to be merged with the *Democrat*. The scuttlebutt turned out to be inaccurate. No announcement came from Gannett headquarters though. I started to walk out the door, go down the street to my truck and go home, before noon. I felt — I had a helpless feeling, was the main thing. There was nothing wrong with my health or anything, but I just didn't want to stay around. I got up, walked back and got a Coke or something to drink. I came back to the sports department, and one of the sports writers, Donna Lampkin, now Donna Stephens, came up to me and said — I'm not sure of the exact words --- and said to me, "What do we do?" I think my answer to her was "There is not anything we can do here, but we have to go on living." I made the decision right then to stay in the *Gazette* newsroom with my fellow workers. And we sat and we waited and we talked and we walked around. Nothing came. Finally, in mid afternoon, a one-paragraph fax came from Gannett headquarters to the publisher's office, and it was brought down to the newsroom, and somebody read it. It was just a precise one paragraph that said the newspaper was closed. I had no feeling of anger. Many people did; I did not. I did not have a feeling of anger. I had the same general feeling of loss when my father died many years before that and a couple years later, when my mother died. I had the feeling like the loss of a parent or close relative. The announcement was informal. It wasn't a case of the publisher calling a meeting in the newsroom and

announcing the newspaper is closed. The publisher didn't do anything, didn't show up, I don't think.

JG: I bet that would have been . . .

JM: Moe Hickey, he was just there a few months. I can't recall who actually read this one-paragraph fax from Gannett headquarters. I remember standing around the sports department for a few minutes, not very long. I'd already taken my personal belongings out of my desk the day before. So I just got up and left. I don't think I told anybody goodbye. I just decided it was time to go home. I walked out of the *Gazette*, to the side entrance to the alley. Reporters from other newspapers, from the *Democrat*, TV stations, and TV cameras were lined up in the parking lot right across the alley. I walked across there, and one reporter from the *Democrat* stopped me and asked if he could ask me a few questions. I believe his name was Don Johnson. He was polite. He asked my feelings, and I gave him some kind of answer. I can't recall what I really said. He asked why the *Gazette* closed. And I told him, "Because Gannett never knew the meaning of the two words at the top of the front page: 'Arkansas and *Gazette*.'" It was just off the top of my head, not anything profound, but I still think it was an accurate comment. As he and I were talking, three cars drove up in the alley, and a number of men piled out of those cars and went into the *Gazette*. They were security hired by the *Democrat*, [by] Walter Hussman. I was already outside and gone, went on to my car. They stopped employees who left behind me, searched them, searched their belongings and all. There were some confrontations. I was not part of it.

JG: You went home then, after that.

JM: I drove home. My wife met me at the door, and I'm not sure if she was crying. She may not have been crying. I wasn't crying. We sat down and talked in the living room. I will probably be a little emotional here, even though it has been nine plus years. As part of my work, my last several years at the *Gazette*, I did a high school football "Game of the Week" feature. I said awhile back that my work was never 100 percent outdoors; well, this was part of it. This was a little project that involved Wadie Moore, who was in charge of high school sports coverage. We would pick out a game each week that had some importance, old rivalry, or something, out in the state, outside of Little Rock. I would go to the town at the start of the week and talk to any number of people and write a feature on the upcoming game. They were running it on the front page of the sports section, and then I would go cover the game on Friday night, and this was the high school "Game of the Week." It was a fun thing. I enjoyed it. The last week of the *Gazette*, the high school game of the week was the Atkins Red Devils playing the Dardanelle Sand Lizards at Atkins. It was a long rivalry, and I think they were the two leading teams in their district at the time. I sat at home late that Friday afternoon after the *Gazette* had closed, talking to Mary Ann, and she asked a question, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I was supposed to cover the Atkins/Dardanelle game. I don't have anything to write it for, but I'm going to cover it." We drove to Atkins, and I sat in the top of the stands, not in the press box, with Mary Ann. I kept notes on the game, like I had done many times all

down through the years, and we went back home. I didn't write anything, but I covered the game.

JG: Very good. Your story on Atkins had already run in the *Gazette* that Friday morning, hadn't it?

JM: I think it ran either Tuesday morning or Wednesday morning, early in the week.

[End of Tape Two, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Two Side Two]

JM: I can't recall anything significant that took place with me on the following couple of days, over the weekend, Saturday and Sunday. On Monday morning, Frank Robins called me and said, "Joe, would you be interested in a part-time job in our sports department?" And I didn't hesitate. I told him, "Yes I will." I knew the worst thing for my personal situation would be for me to sit around with no job, so I told Frank I would take this part-time job. They had a two-and-a-half person sports department — well, I was the half. I started work there the following Wednesday. So I was out of a job, I guess you'd say, two days. Even though I was hurt and disappointed and felt this loss, I did not suffer financially. At that point, I didn't know what the arrangements would be at the *Gazette* as far as severance pay, vacation pay and all that. I felt we would be compensated to some extent by the Gannett Corporation. In the next week, about a week later, possibly 10 days later, I got a phone call from Game and Fish, not from Steve Wilson, but from his office asking me to come in and talk to them about work. I came in and talked to the assistant director, Scott Henderson, who explained that they were

under a hiring freeze, but would I be interested in contract work with the Game and Fish Commission? I told him yes. I knew the Conway paper part-time job would not pay me enough to live on. I wanted any kind of work. At the time the *Gazette* closed, I was 61 years old and knew I had to find a job of some kind for at least a year, until I qualified for Social Security. Here I am at 69 and still working. I came in and talked to people and talked to Scott Henderson, the assistant director, about this contract job. We reached an agreement to start November 15. I got a call from the head of the information and education division, who was also named Steve Wilson --- they were two different people --- he asked me to have lunch with him the day before I was supposed to start work. We had lunch, and he told me then, he said, "Scott Henderson talked to you about this contract assignment; it was for a specific project. We'd like to have you as a part-time writer for us." That's the way I started work, as a part-time writer, and not on a contract basis. He also said, "We'll try to work out things for a full-time job for you." And that's what happened. They had to go through a hearing at the State Capitol because of the hiring freeze. Anyway, I was part-time here for two months; then I was full-time.

JG: Your title here?

JM: My title here is "News Editor."

JG: "News Editor" for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

JM: Yes.

JG: And you've had that title since . . .

JM: I had that title when I went to work full-time, it was as news editor.

JG: In January of 1992.

JM: January 15, '92. I continued as a part-time sports writer for the Conway newspaper. I still am, nine plus years later. I still do a Sunday outdoor column and occasional game coverage story.

JG: You've been writing an outdoor column for the *Conway Log Cabin Democrat* since the *Gazette* closed?

JM: Yes, sir. I did not have a Sunday outdoor column on October 20, 1991, because of the old *Gazette*. I had a Sunday column for the Conway paper, October 27, 1991.

JG: You missed one week.

JM: As I said a minute ago, I didn't suffer for being out of work like so many people did. The severance package, when it came through, for me went into savings of various forms. Not a large amount of money, but I had very little savings at that point and was concerned about my lack of savings as I came into my 60s. Anyway, the *Gazette* severance package helped me. I'm drawing a monthly pension from the Gannett Corporation, just direct deposited into a savings account. It's kind of my rat-hole money, or rainy-day money, or whatever you want to call it.

JG: Well, this has been very interesting. We need to let the records show that you were born in Crawfordsville.

JM: I wasn't born there.

JG: Grew up there.

JM: Born in Dallas, Texas, born in 1930, the early days of the Depression. My dad was on something of a temporary job. He was a cotton buyer. He and my mother moved back to Crawfordsville just a few months after I was born. In my boyhood, I had something like a dual citizenship, weekends and summers in Crawfordsville, weekdays across the river in Memphis. The reason for that was Crawfordsville only had ten grades in its school, and my parents thought we needed to be in a 12-grade school system.

JG: So did you live in Crawfordsville at all?

JM: Technically, no.

JG: You went to school in Memphis?

JM: I went all twelve years in Memphis.

JG: But your parents lived in Crawfordsville?

JM: No, we lived in Memphis. My grandparents lived in Crawfordsville. We spent every weekend over there. And I spent most of every summer at my grandparents house in Crawfordsville. I feel I'm from Crawfordsville, not from Memphis.

JG: I understand.

JM: If that makes any sense.

JG: Is there anything else you'd like to add that you can think of?

JM: Jerol, I don't know how this applies to the project. I was involved in all sorts of memorable news assignments or news stories during my years at the *Gazette*. I'm not saying major or historical, or anything, just things that had meaning to me, and

some of those were unusual assignments, unusual events. I will kind of skip around hodge-podge here. The old *Gazette* people, me included, have a lot of negative feelings towards the five years of Gannett management. They were not all negative. One assignment I remember was that a reader called us, called me, and said there was a Little Rock woman who was going to try for the world scuba diving record. This would be in late 1987. Well, scuba diving is an outdoor topic, but it wasn't something that I covered on a regular basis at all. In fact, I'm not sure; I might have written one story on scuba diving before then. I called the woman, and she was already down in Florida in training for this. She was 43 years old, which is kind of unusual for an athletic endeavor like that. I talked to her on the phone a little while, interviewed her and all, and I wrote a story on it for the next day's paper. The sports editor at that time was Paul Borden, who had been brought in there by Gannett. Borden came to me the next day, and said, "Joe, we had a meeting this morning, and we want you and the photographer to go down to the Bahamas and cover this woman's scuba diving event." So I listened to him a little bit slack-jawed. Anyway, I got back on the phone, called the woman in Florida, got her schedule and all, which was going to be a several-day trip on a boat, in which she would make some practice dives, and then she would go for the world record, which at that time, was 330 feet. I'm not a scuba diver, but I know I don't want to go that far down in the ocean in a submarine or anything else. We made arrangements to go with the people on the charter boat out of West Palm Beach, Florida. The photographer assigned to it was Art Meripol. Art's now with

Southern Living, I think. We flew to West Palm Beach, got on a boat, went out to Bimini. We were on the boat six days. She made the practice dive.

JG: She was on another boat.

JM: No, we were on the same boat. She made the dive with two male helpers. Her companion was — the record was 330 feet; she intended to dive to 335. She went down so fast she went past that and went to 345. She tied a marker on a cable there, then came back up. She got the world record is what I'm saying. Came in, this was on a Sunday, right before Christmas, about December 20 or 21, came into Bimini that evening, that night; it was after dark, but it was early. I had already written a story on that topic on the computer, but I needed to transmit it to the *Gazette*. We tied up. I got off, and there was a fellow sitting there on the dock, and I said, "I need to find a telephone." He said, "Man, it's Sunday, no phones on Sunday, man." I said, "There's bound to be a phone." He said, "Only police have phones on Sunday." I said, "Well, where is a police station?" He said, "Right down this road, man, maybe half a mile, right down this road." Well, it was pitch dark, and the Bahamas is not the United States. No street lights or anything, and this was a little bitty town. Bimini is well-known, but it's not much town there. So I walked down this gravel road in the dark, for half a mile, towards this police station. Sure enough, I could see a bright light up there. I went in there, and there was a police sergeant sitting at the desk there in a British-type uniform with a starched white shirt and big shoulder boards. I told him what I needed. I said I needed a telephone to send a news story to my newspaper in the states. He looked

at me for a minute — he was a sergeant, had these great big wide stripes like the British military — he said, “Sure, man,” and reached under the counter, gets the phone, sets it up on the counter there. I connected my laptop to the phone and transmitted the story to the *Gazette*. Got through and had to call back in and verify the story. The way you did there, you transmitted; then you called the office and got a voice on there, and they called up the computer and checked on it, and all that. The sergeant listened to my conversation, and when I got through with the office and hung the phone up, he said, “That lady dove 345 feet?” And I said, “Yes.” And he said, “One tank or two?” Meaning air tanks. And I said, “Two tanks.” He kind of looked at me and said, “She’s some woman, man.” And, I said, “Yes, she’s some woman.” We spent the night on the boat there at the dock; the next morning we went back to Florida.

JG: Everybody on the boat went back to Florida, including the woman?

JM: Yes, including the woman. I mentioned bass tournaments and the heyday of bass tournaments was the mid-‘70s. In about ’76, maybe ’77, there was an organization called the World Bass Association. They invited me to their International Finals. I think the World Bass Association operated out of somebody’s spare bedroom, but they held their season-ending tournament at Toledo Bend Reservoir in East Texas. I drove down there, and Mary Ann, my wife, went with me, and we were to be their guests. I was already used to bass tournaments by that point, where you got an invitation, and somebody said that they had a place for you to stay, and all that. You took along a credit card and

some money, and were prepared to take care of yourself. Well, sure enough, we got down to Toledo Bend, and they couldn't find our reservation. They didn't know where it was. Well, anyway, the next day was the final day of the championship. It was storming, cold and wind blowing and rainy, and nobody could catch any fish at all. There were 25 or 30 contestants in the finals. At the weigh-in, a lot of them didn't even compete because of the weather conditions. Anyway, the ones that did come in, no fish, no fish. I think one guy had one bass that he weighed in. The last guy that came in was a big, loud-mouthed character that I'd run across the previous year, or maybe two years before. He had a heavy sack full of bass. He weighed in ten bass that weighed about 30 pounds total. It was hard to comprehend how he had caught this many fish when nobody else could catch anything. Tournament rules said any contestant was subject to a lie detector test before they would get their prize money. So the tournament director told this guy that caught all the fish that he would have to take a lie detector test, and the guy said, "All right." So they go off to a motel room, where they had a polygraph man. I went back to my hotel room and wrote my news story for the *Gazette*. Got it all finished, didn't send it, got it ready to go, walked back out there. Well, the tournament director announced that this fisherman had failed the polygraph, and he had asked to take the polygraph again. They were going to give it to him again. I waited. It was getting close to deadline time, and I needed to get my story to the *Gazette*.

JG: You'd written it, but you hadn't transmitted it?

JM: Yes, I'd written it and hadn't transmitted it. So it came out that he had failed again, and the tournament director called his committee together to figure out a course of action. There was a group of at least of a dozen people around, including my wife Mary Ann and me, just waiting. The committee decided, and the tournament director came out and told all of us that their decision was that no prize would be awarded because he had failed the polygraph test. As I said, this was a big, loud-mouthed fellow, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what decision I've made. I've got a .357 Magnum in my tackle box that says I won this prize." I looked at Mary Ann and she looked at me, and we just turned around and walked off. I walked back to my motel room, made one slight change in the story I had already written. I just took out a sentence that told about the prize, what it was, I can't think of what the prize was. I took out the sentence about the prize, sent the story into the *Gazette*, and told Mary Ann that we are going to check out of here, go down the road, and find a place to spend the night. I've always remembered that as the .357 Magnum Bass Tournament.

JG: That's an appropriate name. Your story said that he had caught the most fish?

JM: Caught the most fish; they weighed so much, and that was it.

JG: Did you ever hear what he did with the .357 Magnum?

JM: Just talk.

JG: He obviously didn't shoot anybody with it.

JM: That was it. Well, what happened after we left, everybody else did the same thing, just packed up, and they all left out of there. In my outdoor work at the

Gazette, I had occasion to meet some prominent people, some well-known people, some celebrities. And I didn't really—rubbing elbows with a few celebrities was certainly not a major part of my work at the *Gazette*. I went on a fishing trip one time with Steve Ford, Gerald Ford's son, during the time when Ford was president. It was near Eureka Springs. Steve Ford was an outdoorsman, and he was visiting over there with several other people, one of whom was Chill Wills, the old cowboy actor. Chill Wills was just a great person to sit down at supper and to listen to him tell stories. He was very interesting.

[End of Tape Two, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Three, Side One]

JG: We're continuing the interview with Joe Mosby. You were talking about Chill Wills and Steve Ford.

JM: Steve Ford was a very pleasant young man and, at that time, was trying to break into acting in Hollywood and did. I'm not sure if he's still there, but he was doing television work and became a regular on a soap opera. I didn't fish with Grandpa Jones, the man from Grand 'Ole Opry and Hee Haw, the television show, but I did a couple of interviews with Grandpa when he lived in Mountain View for several years. Fine character, good storyteller.

JG: You interviewed him about fishing?

JM: Yes, Grandpa loved to fish, loved to talk about it. Through my outdoor work with the *Gazette*, I met three presidents. None were presidents at the time, though. I met Jimmy Carter after he left office. I met George Bush when he was vice

president, before he became president. And I had any number of meetings with Bill Clinton when he was governor. I've known every governor to some extent. I've not been that close to any of them, really—Faibus, Rockefeller, Bumpers, Pryor, Clinton, White, Tucker, and Huckabee. Working for the *Gazette* was a good opening to most any person you ran across [in] most any setting. Just because you worked at the *Gazette* didn't make you a big shot or anything, but it was beneficial in almost any situation you came across. Once in a great while there was a negative reaction. I remember sometime in the '70s, I was at a gathering in Eureka Springs. It was a tour promotion of some kind in the ballroom of the Crescent Hotel. I think the year was 1976. Mary Ann remembers this young fella that came up to us in the ballroom, stuck out his hand and said, "I'm Bill Clinton. I'm running for Attorney General." On the same occasion, we were standing off to the side talking to someone, and I noticed a man a few feet away just standing and glaring at me. And I looked at him and looked away and looked back. And he was glaring, just an obvious hostile stare. I'd never met him before. Never seen him, or anything else. And, someone else noticed him, one of the hotel staff, and I finally said, "Hey, that fellow standing over there just keeps staring at me with a real hard expression on his face." And the hotel employee, whoever it was, kind of laughed, and said, "Ah, don't pay any attention. He's mad at the *Gazette* because his carrier won't throw his paper because the dog bit the carrier. That fellow just has a hate for the Arkansas *Gazette*." Well, okay, there's not anything I can do about it, the dog biting the carrier.

JG: Get a different dog.

JM: I feel --- do you want to wrap this up, wind it down, Jerol? I worked twenty-two plus years for the *Gazette*. That's a third of my life, more or less. I am proud of those years I worked there. I was on the staff of one of this country's great newspapers. It's a loss for Arkansas because of the loss of the *Gazette*. At the same time, things happen; things change. I wish we still had the *Gazette* around. I wish I was still the outdoor editor of the Arkansas *Gazette*. But that's not how it turned out. I'm a richer and more complete person because of working for the Arkansas *Gazette*.

JG: Great. Thank you very much, Joe. Do you want to end it at that point?

JM: Let's end it there, and as soon as you walk out the door, I'll think of a dozen things I should've said.

JG: You can add more to it later, or at least take a look at the transcript.

JM: And, again, I apologize for rambling and all.

JG: I thought you were very well organized.

JM: Maybe I should have prepared some notes. But I enjoyed doing this.

JG: I did too, I thought it was fun.

[End of Interview]