

Gazette Project

Interview with

Gene Prescott,
Little Rock, Arkansas
6 July 2000

Interviewer: Bob McCord

Bob McCord: This is Bob McCord, and I'm interviewing Gene Prescott. Gene, you have agreed to this interview and for it to be a part of the new Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History. Is that right?

Gene Prescott: That's correct.

BM: Tell me, how long did you work at the *Arkansas Gazette*?

GP: Thirty-eight years.

BM: Did you start there as a photographer or something else?

GP: Yes, as a photographer.

BM: Where had your photography experience come from?

GP: Fort Smith, at the *Fort Smith Times Record* and *Southwest American*.

BM: How long did you work for them?

GP: About four years, but I worked for Doc Miller at his photo shop. He had the contract from Don Reynolds for the newspapers, and then I did the work. I didn't actually work for Don Reynolds. I worked for Doc Miller. I came out of the Marines and went to work for Skinner and then Doc Miller. And I liked the news work in Fort Smith, but something happened and I got mad. I was at the Hardscrabble Country Club one day, so I called the *Democrat*, and they turned me

down. I called the *Gazette*—I don't really know who I talked to at the *Gazette*, but I am assuming it was Carroll McGaughey—and he told me to send a resume and some pictures. And a resume in those days—I didn't have a resume. What are you talking about a resume? I hadn't done anything. What are you talking about? So I sent the pictures, and they asked me to come up and have an interview. The first man I met was Gene Fretz. Do you remember him?

BM: Oh, yes, he was a friend of mine.

GP: I don't want to belittle him or anything, but I don't know if you know how his desk was. It was the first one in the room. You walked down into the newsroom before they remodeled it, and he's sitting there typewriting, and he's got his feet up on the desk. And you'll have to forgive me—I can't do it any other way— he says, “Th-th-th-that m-man, m-man you want to see is right over there.” I hadn't said anything to him. [Laughter] Hadn't said a word to him. So I walked on over there, and I assume it was Carroll McGaughey. I don't know. That's what I remember of Gene Fretz. [Laughs] One of the greatest guys who ever lived.

BM: I also remember Doc Miller. I was once a photographer, and we used to be along the football sidelines when I was in school at Fayetteville.

GP: Yes. In fact, on the TV the other night—what was that trumpeter's name with Johnny Carson?

BM: Doc Severenson?

GP: Doc Severenson. I photographed Doc Miller with Doc Severenson at a football game in Fayetteville.

BM: Where did you learn to be a photographer? Did you just pick it up yourself?

GP: Yes. After the war, I was looking for a job. I'd always wanted to be a MovieTone News photographer. And there was this man putting in a studio in Fort Smith by the name of Skinner, and Skinner hired me for about ten dollars a week, I think. [Laughs]

BM: You were born where?

GP: In Okemah, Oklahoma.

BM: As a photographer, did you have a certain specialty that you did at the *Gazette*?

GP: No, no specialty. No photographer was a specialist.

BM: Everybody did everything?

GP: Even the Chief, Larry Obsitnik. Everybody did everything for every assignment.

BM: At one time what's the largest number of photographers that the *Gazette* had?

GP: There were only two when we started, Larry Obsitnik and myself. And then—you know, Bob, I don't remember who we got next—but Rodney Dungan came in.

BM: Was he next?

GP: I'm not sure if he was next or not, but then it kept building. And I don't know how many there were, maybe eleven or twelve when I left.

BM: Tell me a little something about Larry Obsitnik. What kind of a fellow was he?

GP: No one knew Larry Obsitnik. He was a funny guy. You never knew what he was going to do. Larry was rather belligerent. I don't want to take anything from Larry, but I'm the only one who could work with him.

BM: Oh, I knew that.

GP: And I don't know why, but I was. Although we did have our . . .

BM: Ins and outs?

GP: Yes, but he treated me fair and square. I mean he didn't—it was personal and not professional for some reason or another.

BM: When you first went to work up there, was Joe Wirges still alive?

GP: Yes, yes.

BM: Now, he was the photographer that everybody knew in Little Rock, wasn't he?

GP: Well, he wasn't a photographer then. He was a writer.

BM: Yes, but he also made pictures.

GP: He did make pictures. Oh, yes, because we ran across glass negatives that he had made. Yes. But the photographer before me was Gene Wirges, Joe's son, who eventually wound up in Morrillton. The strike came along, and Gene left. And I think Larry was there at that time. I'm not certain. But I went there in 1951, and I'd been there two or three months or something and walked in the back door, and there was a guy standing there with a strike sign on. I went upstairs, and I asked Larry, "What is all this down there?" And he said the *Gazette* was still on strike. That's about as far as I can go with that. That's the only thing I know.

BM: So you had just started there when the strike happened?

GP: Well, it had already happened. It was going on a year before I got there.

BM: I think that's right. You stayed at the *Gazette* for a long time. Did you ever think about leaving and going to another newspaper?

GP: Never. Never.

BM: Was that because you liked being in Little Rock or because you liked the job?

GP: Well, I'd have to say I liked the *Gazette*. Now, I must say, when TV first came in, I did go to Channel 11 about being a photographer for them, but I think Bob Hess, or someone, was there, and he told me I was overqualified. [Laughs] So I never tried anything else after that.

BM: That's the only time you even thought about leaving?

GP: That's the only time. And I must have been [laughs] out of my mind.

BM: Well, what was it about working there that you liked?

GP: Well, I guess, first and foremost, it was the people. That's for sure. There's not one person that I worked with that I can say I didn't like. I don't think there was one. And I feel like it was the same way with me. But, mainly, it was just going out and being in the action. I mean, all what was going on. I knew I could never be "it." My first assignment for the *Gazette* was, I believe, Larry sent me to the legislature. Well, I'd never been to the legislature. And I went to the House. Nobody filled me in or anything like that. And darned if while I was in there, Paul Van Dalsem and another legislator got into a fight over the microphone. [Laughter] And I walked down the aisle, and I shot three or four pictures. I remember we were shooting 4 X 5 Speed Graphics. And I thought, "What kind of job have I got into?" [Laughter] And you know how big Van Dalsem was.

BM: Yes. Did they try to come at you or jerk the camera out of your hands?

GP: No, but they were jerking each other.

BM: Yes. Who was the other guy? Do you remember?

GP: No. I don't have any idea.

BM: Did they print any of those pictures?

GP: Oh, yes. I think Sam Harris was the editor then.

BM: When was it that you switched from 4 X 5's to the 35mm stuff?

GP: Well, actually, 1957 was what caused us to go over to the 35mm. Rodney Dungan was the one who introduced it. Now, Larry would dispute that, but Rodney Dungan was the first one to work with 35mm. And then I think Larry went out and bought some. We had Rolleflexis, too, at one time. Because Larry bought me a Rolley. Came to me and gave it to me and said, "Now, you can use it if you want to or not. I don't care." [Laughter] I was still the 4 X 5 man.

BM: When did you finally turn them loose?

GP: Well, I guess when I got the Rolley. Most of the time, I was the last photographer to take a picture on assignment. I mean, even if I'd been there an hour, and everything had happened, I didn't make my pictures until after every other photographer had finished. And then I got my pictures. So then those other guys had to come back, and they had to re-shoot because I had already set something else up. [Laughter] And I heard somebody tell a *Democrat* photographer, "Don't you shoot anything until Gene Prescott shoots something." [Laughter]

BM: Well, that's a pretty high compliment, I'd think.

GP: Well, I guess.

BM: But you were the last one to use 4 X 5's?

GP: I'm sure I was. Bill Shelton, the city editor, did not like 35mm, period.

BM: Well, he didn't like change.

GP: No. He did not like 35mm, and in my viewpoint, at that time, that was the man I was trying to please. That was the man I was working for.

BM: That was hard to do, wasn't it? [Laughs]

GP: Well no, I think I satisfied him most of the time.

BM: Really?

GP: He complained one time.

BM: What was that? Tell me about that.

GP: Really it's a joke.

BM: Tell it.

GP: I took a bunch of pictures up there and [laughs] said, "Bill," I said, "here's you some real nice, arty pictures." He jumped up out of his chair, slammed the desk, and he said, "Damn it, Gene! You missed again!" [Laughs]

BM: Well, had you?

GP: No. He was reacting to what I had said, that here were some "arty pictures."

BM: I see.

GP: He knew I didn't miss. He sent me up once in an airplane to shoot the Arkansas River. I guess it was down. Bill had told me to shoot from about five-hundred feet. And the pilot said, "Well, let's go ahead and land." So we landed on the Arkansas River. I made my pictures, and I took them to Bill. I had shot some from five hundred feet, too, because that's what Bill said. And he was an aviator, so he knew what he was doing. So I showed him the pictures, and he said, "Gene,

aren't you just a little bit low here?" I gave him those pictures first. And I said, "Well, I thought that's what you wanted." He said, "No, I wanted it at five hundred feet." And I said, "Well, that's these over here." [Laughs] He just looked at me and shook his head.

BM: When people talk about the *Gazette*, they try to explain why it lasted so long and why it was so popular with the people. Many people still say that they miss it.

GP: Oh, yes.

BM: Why was it so popular? Why do people still say they miss the *Arkansas Gazette*?

GP: Bob, I really don't know. I don't think that question can be answered because I think that's something that's underneath what somebody's thinking. Each individual, I think, would have to answer a question like that.

BM: Yes. But don't you . . . ?

GP: It got so personal with so many people. Or they took it personally.

BM: Do you ever hear or have someone come up to you and tell you that they still miss the newspaper?

GP: Oh, yes.

BM: Of course, one reason that they miss it is because the *Democrat's* quite different in a lot of ways from what the *Gazette* was. What's your opinion about the new *Democrat Gazette*? What do you think of it?

GP: Well, I still have people tell me that they miss the *Gazette* and how much they really do not like—and I'll use the word, hate—the *Democrat*, well, the *Democrat Gazette* now. What I tell them that I think is that I believe the *Democrat* has done

a better job than I thought it was going to do. And I'm just really surprised at all the stuff they do have in it when I didn't think they would have it.

BM: The color pictures?

GP: Of course, that's an improvement. Why, you don't even have to have a darkroom because the digital cameras they are using now. We used to have to go to Fayetteville and had to leave during the third quarter to get and develop our pictures to meet the deadline. [Laughs]

BM: I went out to the AP [Associated Press] bureau here a few years ago, and it doesn't even have a darkroom anymore, Gene.

GP: I understand the *Democrat* has one in reserve. Well, the last time I was up there, they had one in reserve. And I think that's if they had to have a negative or something. I don't really know.

BM: Yes, it's so different from what you and I remember.

GP: I stopped a photographer out at the Buick Company, and he had this little camera. I hadn't really seen a digital camera before, and I asked him about it. And he said he was with the *Arkansas Times*. And I said, "You mean, that's all you have to have?" I said, "You don't have to have a darkroom or anything?" And he said, "No. They put it onto reader, and that's it." Bob, have you ever heard about Larry stopping the Razorback football game?

BM: No, tell me about it.

GP: [Laughs] Well, he got into a fight with somebody. Not a fistfight. He stepped across the line or he was out of place or something. There were only three

thousand people there. That's all that ever attended a Razorback game in those days. And it stopped the whole game. And [laughs] the argument was with an umpire. Finally, the coach came up and asked them to stop so they could finish the game. [Laughter] I can tell you a lot about Larry. Oh, man. He wanted to make a picture of the president when President Truman came here. He went to the Secret Service. He wanted to make a picture of President Truman reading a funny book. [Laughter] And they turned him down. Truman came here on a train. Larry went down to the train. And he was almost on board. [Laughs] And they stopped him, "What do you want?" He said, "I want to make a picture of Mr. Truman reading this funny book." He had the funny book in his hand. [Laughs] He could think of things you wouldn't believe.

BM: Getting back to the *Democrat Gazette*, don't you think that one of the reasons some people say they hate the paper is that its editorial position is so different from the *Gazette's*?

GP: Yes, I think so, but at the same time I think most of it is that they lost the *Gazette*, and it's going to take a long time before they are going to get their heart into the *Democrat*. The way I look at it, I don't think that the editorial page is as important to 85% of the public. I don't think that they particularly care too much about that editorial page—except the people who write and send in the letters. But if you get to talking to somebody who's just average, like me, the editorial page never comes up.

BM: I see.

GP: I'm not knocking the editorial page.

BM: I understand.

GP: And maybe I'm with the wrong crowd.

BM: No.

GP: But I never hear anybody say, "Did you read the editorial in the *Democrat* today?" But I have heard, "Did you read John R. Starr today?" And I think John R. Starr dying and John Brummett leaving the *Democrat Gazette* is going to hurt very badly.

BM: Well, Starr's absence will certainly hurt them because he had a big following.

GP: Oh, yes. They hated him, but they [laughter] read what he said.

BM: Well, Brummett also has a big following.

GP: Oh, he has a big following.

BM: Well, now, you were there more than thirty years. I want you to tell me the most interesting—or the thing you'll most remember—about the work that you did. Is it desegregation at Central High School in 1957?

GP: Well, I think that would be probably true because that's a once-in-a-lifetime thing. But the one I really remember most is the Jonesboro tornado in 1968, to be honest with you.

BM: Tell me about that.

GP: Well, Mike Trimble and I went up there for two days. We didn't sleep for two days. Seeing all those people killed and all those houses wrecked—the colored man sitting on his porch with his house completely demolished—I remember it

very well. I can even remember the streets and everything in my mind's eye. Mike and I ate the biggest hamburger I ever saw in my life at some café somewhere up there. [Laughs] It was as big as a plate. He knew about the place. Remember when Mike Trimble bought his motorcycle?

BM: I remember he had one. A.R. Nelson was the managing editor. What do you remember about him?

GP: I remember a lot of times us going at night to Breier's restaurant to eat supper. Breier's would only cook your steak a certain way [laughs], raw.

BM: Was Nelson a good friend of yours?

GP: We didn't visit each other or anything like that. Well, we did, too. That's not right. In fact, he went over to the lake with me one day. And if you know A.R. Nelson, that was unusual for him to go to a lake and sit in the bottom of a boat.

BM: To go anywhere. [Laughter]

GP: But he did.

BM: Well, you had a lot of managing editors while you were over there. Who was your favorite?

GP: When I went there, it was Carroll McGaughey, who was J.N. Heiskell's grand nephew. I think Mr. Nelson was after Carroll. Nelson worked out in the city room, but I don't remember what he did because I had never paid him any attention, to be honest with you. I don't even know what he did. But I remember a meeting that Harry held with the staff, when he told me he chose Mr. Nelson to take over as managing editor.

BM: How did you and Ashmore get along?

GP: Oh, well, I was not even on his level, period. But we got along all right as far as I know. He did ask one question about me: why, at Razorback football games, did I get on the east side while all the other photographers would be on the west side? –I'd be over there by myself [laughs]–and, of course, you're shooting against the sun, but I overrode that, and I got pictures nobody else got. Now, remember, we're talking about times before TV.

BM: I understand. You filled in with flash then?

GP: No, no. I just did it in my darkroom.

BM: I see.

GP: There was one player, Claire Vandy. Do you remember him?

BM: No.

GP: Well, he was with them, and I can't remember the play, but, anyway, it was at the north end of the field, and I was down in the south end of the field. Suddenly, this guy took off, and he comes right down towards me for the touchdown, and I get him when he gets it about to the twenty. And, of course, nobody had it but me. And they made a big page out of it and everything.

BM: Page one?

GP: I don't remember if it was page one or not. Mr. Ashmore called Larry up to the office. He wanted to know, he said, "Why is Gene on the other end of the field when the play is at the other end of the field? What's he doing down there?" And Larry told him, "We don't question Gene. We just let him go wherever he

wants to.” [Laughter] So Orville Henry, as I understand it, gave his staff that same instruction, “Don’t tell Gene anything. Leave him alone.”

BM: Did you enjoy doing sports?

GP: Oh, yes. Well, some sports. Some of them I didn’t.

BM: Which ones didn’t you?

GP: Basketball. I didn’t go for it too much. That’s repetitive, and it’s all the shots you got.

BM: Yes, they all look the same.

GP: Before double flash came in, I was at a ball game at Barton Coliseum, and we were shooting strobes, which go at one thousandth of a second. And O.D. Gunter of the *Democrat* is on the other side, and I caught his flash, which is . . .

BM: A miracle. [Laughs]

GP: Which was just a flat miracle. I mean, there’s just no way you could do that.

BM: Great picture.

GP: Oh, yes. The player was up in the air.

BM: Didn’t you take a lot of your negatives home with you?

GP: No.

BM: You left them with the company?

GP: Stupid, wasn’t it? [Laughs]

BM: Yes, because a lot of photographers did that.

GP: Well, I didn’t.

BM: You said you liked shooting some sports. What else did you like? What other

kind of pictures did you like to make?

GP: I've got to say that I don't really think of any that I didn't enjoy making. For this reason—even if it was full of women, you know what you used to have to do?

BM: At the Garden Club? [Laughs]

GP: At the Garden Club. I knew most of them because I had photographed them before.

BM: [Laughs] That's right.

GP: I was accepted, and I didn't mind any of those assignments. The only assignments I really minded were at the courthouse. That was a little rough. They put all those rules and regulations on it. It was hard to do.

BM: What kind of rules and regulations?

GP: Couldn't get into the building. You can't go in the building. You had to wait outside. Well, they can get away from you outside.

BM: Yes.

GP: I had to go to Fort Smith once to photograph someone who had been arrested. I stayed with my sister-in-law in Mulberry, and I got up real early. I don't remember who the guy was, but I'm standing at the back of the courthouse when they bring this guy in. The officer goes, "Whew!" and wipes his forehead, and he said, "I thought sure I'd get here before some damn photographer got here."

[Laughter] And I said, "Well, you didn't make it." [Laughter] And at that very time a TV truck pulled in from St. Louis. That's how big the crime was. They had to stay all day, but I left and came back to Little Rock because I had my

pictures.

BM: So you really enjoyed all of your work?

GP: I can't think of anything that I didn't enjoy, except for that court thing, and I didn't like when Judge J. Smith Henley closed the courthouse. Well, you can't really blame him because it was a mess up there one morning. It was full of prison guards who had been beating convicts.

BM: What year was it when you retired?

GP: 1989.

BM: Did you begin to think even then that maybe the newspaper war was going to bring down one of the newspapers?

GP: I really didn't give it too much thought, to be honest with you, even after Gannett bought it. But I thought the *Democrat* would go down.

BM: Don't you imagine most people in Little Rock thought the same way?

GP: I think so.

BM: Were you very much surprised when it turned out the way it did?

GP: No, no. I wasn't really surprised. Because I had read a little bit about Gannett, and they don't like controversy. Even though they came in on it and knew that there was going to be a controversy, they don't care for controversy. I have been told that now they will not even admit that they owned the *Gazette* at one time. I think Gannett sent the wrong people in here. I don't think they should have sent any people, period. I think they should have left the staff as it was. Left the same people. Of course, the *Democrat* has gotten the *Gazette* employees now.

BM: A lot of them.

GP: Most of them.

BM: So you think if they had kept the staff people, the newspaper war might have turned out differently?

GP I think that the public would not have given up so many subscriptions and advertisers would have stayed. You get Mr. Dillard against you, you've got some problems.

BM: Well, that's what happened.

GP: And Mr. Sam Walton wouldn't even talk to the *Gazette*, period. I don't know what his problem was, but he wouldn't even talk to them. They tried, I have been told by advertising people.

BM: Sure.

GP: Did you hear about Mr. Heiskell, the publisher, when Kennedy came to Little Rock?

BM: No, tell me about it.

GP: He landed at Little Rock Air Force Base, and then he came out to the livestock show grounds. Larry covered him out at the air base, and I covered him at the livestock grounds. And I had given Ruby, my wife, a camera and her daughter, Marilyn, was with her. We photographers get back to the office, and Frank Duff—do you remember Frank Duff?

BM: I do, yes.

GP: He came running up the stairs and said, "Mr. Heiskell wants some of the pictures

that you all made of him with President Kennedy.” We had developed our film and everything by then, and we didn’t have any pictures like that. Oh, Lord. [Laughs] And Duff said, “Man, you all are in some trouble if you don’t come up with some pictures of Mr. Heiskell with the President.” I said, “You know, Ruby made some pictures, and she was right on the front lines. Let me run home and get her film.” I rushed home, brought it back, and developed the film. And all of her shots had Mr. Heiskell in the pictures with the president. [Laughter] I gave them to Frank, and he came up the next day and told the photographers, “You can just thank Mrs. Prescott for saving your jobs because your jobs were gone.” [Laughter]

BM: That’s a great story. So Ruby saved the day?

GP: Ruby saved my job. I had to take Mr. Heiskell home a couple of times, and I was driving a Volkswagen. The first time I went out, I said, “Mr. Heiskell, I’m sorry, but all I’m driving is just this little Volkswagen. Will that be all right?” “Oh, sure,” he says. “That’s great.” He says, “You know, my daughter has been traveling all over California in one of these things. I like them.” [Laughter]

BM: And he was, what, eighty then?

GP: He was eighty-something then. I don’t know if he was still driving then or not, but I don’t know why I had to take him home. But, anyway, I did. Oh, I want to tell you something about Joe Wirges, the police reporter and photographer. It came out in the *Reader’s Digest*. Do you know about the woman prisoner?

BM: No.

GP: [Laughs] When the prison was on Roosevelt Road, it was the men's prison. A sheriff sent a woman up there. Well, her papers were not right, so the warden wouldn't accept her. He was going to send her back because it was a men's prison. So Joe says, "I'll take care of it." He put her in his car, and he drove her around town all day long. And at eleven-thirty that night he put her on a train and sent her out of town. [Laughter] And that turned up in the *Reader's Digest*. So I asked him about it. "Now just between you and me—and it won't go anywhere else—have you ever heard from that woman?" He said, "I've never heard a word. I have no idea where she is." [Laughs]

BM: But she didn't have to go to jail?

GP: No. [Laughter] One day when I was first here, Shelton sent me up to make a picture of Detective Mackey, do you remember him?

BM: Oh, Frank Mackey. Yes, I remember him.

GP: Detective Mackey and another officer were receiving an award, so I went up there to make a picture. And Frank says, "Has this picture been cleared with Joe Wirges?"—and I really didn't know Joe Wirges at that time—and I said, "Well, I don't really know about Joe Wirges, but Joe Wirges's boss sent me up here." And they let me make my picture. [Laughter] Now, that's how he had the police tied up.

BM: Oh, there's no question about it.

GP: There was a man named Head who had killed somebody, and they caught him in Chicago. Joe came in the darkroom to get some equipment. It was winter, and it

was cold up there, and he didn't have a coat on. I said, "Joe, you're going up there where it's cold. Aren't you going to take a coat?" He said, "No. I went to Sears and bought me some long underwear." [Laughter] And he went up there with the 4 X 5 he had bought in 1899. He got up there to Chicago, and he was the only one who was allowed to photograph this man in jail, even though the Chicago press people were doing everything they could to get to him. He had blocked them and convinced the sheriff up there not to let anybody in. [Laughter] He made the picture, and then he went to the Associated Press to get them to send it back to the *Gazette*. And the AP guy called us at the paper and said, "What kind of a guy have you all sent up here?" [Laughs] I said, "Well, that's one of our photographers from down here." This AP man said, "You know what? I'm sitting here sending you this picture, and I can't get it. I can't use it. He's got it sewn up completely."

BM: Let me ask you a couple of more things, and then I'll let you go.

GP: I can tell you what started the riot in 1958 at Central High School.

BM: Yes.

GP: Two friends of mine and Ruby's were fighting in front of the police barricades. I can't tell you their names because they're still here. Police Chief Gene Smith is standing behind me, and I'm squatting down behind that barricade with a 4 X 5. Gene says, "I've had enough," and he cold-cocked these two guys. I mean with a billy club. And then his policemen started in and began cold-cocking everybody. These two guys were lying on the ground, and they were out. And then the fight

started everywhere. Later on, I saw one of them, and I asked him, “What in the world were you doing up there at Central High?” And he said, “Oh, so-and-so and I just decided we’d go up and have a fight.” [Laughs]

BM: Well, did you get a picture of them lying there?

GP: I was too close. I couldn’t do it. There was too big of a crowd. I couldn’t see a thing.

BM: And that was the first lick?

GP: As far as I know.

BM: There must be a favorite picture that you made that you are prouder of or liked out of all of the thousands of pictures that you shot. Which one is it?

GP: My favorite picture? Governor Faubus was speaking to the legislature, and the photographers were not allowed past a rope which was up in front. Well, if you’ll recall the legislature, you can go around this side, and there are some offices back behind the Speaker’s stand. So I slip around there. A *Life* photographer is there. And I don’t know how many other photographers, but they’re up in the gallery. So I slip around—I don’t really slip—I went around there, and I shot him from that doorway that’s to the left of the Speaker’s stand. And I got the whole legislature and Faubus. Well, we printed it. And I guess *Life* saw it, and then *Life* wanted it.. I sent it up there, and they paid me two hundred dollars for it. It was a split page. They made a split page out of it.

BM: Oh, boy.

GP: After this, Glenn Walther, Speaker of the House, forbid any photographer on the

floor of the House of the legislature. It never crossed my mind that I'd really done anything. Later on, Larry went out there to make a picture, and normally he just went right down on the floor. Two guys took him by the arms and escorted him out and threw him upstairs. [Laughs]

BM: Well, tell me about the Adlai Stevenson picture in El Dorado.

GP: They had a big gathering for Adlai Stevenson, Fulbright, Faubus, and I know there's one other person—I can't remember who were duck hunting. Then at night they had a big party in a tent. Dr. Rushing was the host, and one of his sons came up and wanted to know what I was doing there. "We're not supposed to have any photographers in here." And I told him I was here with Adlai Stevenson. And he said, "Where are you from?" And I told him the *Gazette*. He said, "Okay. We just wanted to know who it was because somebody could come in and make pictures and sell them. And we didn't want that." I agreed with him. Then Adlai liked the picture so much that when he left Little Rock on a plane, he signed it for me. I don't know where it is. Another picture I like was made flying into Fayetteville one morning for a football game. I'm asleep, taking a little nap, and I look out, and I see the most beautiful picture you ever saw. I get my camera real fast and snap it and lay back down. A Channel 7 photographer was with us, and somebody else asked him, "What the hell did Gene do?" And he said, "I don't know, but he made a picture of something. I don't see anything." And then the *Gazette* ran it, a big, full page. It was the mountains and the fog and it really is wonderful. So I lay back down.

BM: You just made one exposure?

GP: Yes. Well, I might have made two. I don't know.

BM: But it didn't take longer than five minutes?

GP: Yes. These guys go out here to these football games today, and they shoot five or six rolls, and if I get twenty shots, I'm lucky.

BM: That's right.

GP: And I wanted to tell you one about Faubus. He was making a big speech in the old Lafayette Hotel, and the room was full, and I hadn't gotten anything. When Faubus finished—Gunter from the *Democrat* wanted no one in a picture but Faubus, but I made a picture of both of them, and I shot it twice. The governor told the whole crowd, "Do you know why Gene always makes two pictures? Because he's afraid the first one will be good." [Laughs]

BM: That's a great story. Can you imagine anything else that you would have liked better than those thirty-eight years that you spent at the *Gazette*?

GP: No, no.

BM: You haven't even thought about it?

GP: Never crossed my mind except once.

BM: [Laughs] Oh, go ahead.

GP: Well, Larry and I had gotten into it. I came home mad, and I was going to quit. I really was mad. I left home, and I got to Asher and Roosevelt, at that "Y." And, suddenly, it dawned on me. "Wait a minute. This isn't the *Gazette*. The *Gazette* has nothing to do with this whatsoever. And I'm not going to quit." And after

that, everything was perfect. I mean nothing bothered me after that.

[End of Interview]