

Gazette Project

Interview with

Leon Reed,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
14 January 2001

Interviewer: Roy Reed

Roy Reed: Leon, do we have your permission to record this interview and turn it over to the University of Arkansas Oral and Visual History Center?

Leon Reed: Yes.

RR: Good. Start at the beginning, if you will, and tell me about your early life. Who were your people and whereabouts?

LR: Well, I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana. My mother, Roy, was the first female elected to public office in the state of Indiana.

RR: Really?

LR: This was in 1928, I think. She went before the [unintelligible]. My dad died and left five kids. The pastor of St. Patrick's Catholic Church wanted Mom to put us kids in an orphanage because she couldn't handle five kids. But she said, yes, she could. She had a job at that time with the Allied Mills, which is an outfit in Decatur, Indiana, and they had offices in Fort Wayne. She decided--she was an accountant for years or something over there. Later she decided that she would run for the office of county clerk in Allen County, which is Fort Wayne and around. It was a very interesting campaign because that was back when women were supposed to stay home and take care of the family. [Laughs] She was

elected to the office and four years later ran again and got reelected.

RR: That was county clerk?

LR: County clerk for Allen County.

RR: Allen County. A-L-L-E-N?

LR: Yes, Allen County, which is Fort Wayne and surroundings. During those years, both of my brothers were engineers. I wanted to go to law school. Lawyers—back in those days, if your family wasn't in law, you had no place to hang your shingle. They decided I ought to go to Purdue and study engineering. I did and I studied. This probably has nothing to do with your interview, but it's very cute. There used to be a Dean Young, who was dean of the engineering school at Purdue. He asked me one day to join him at the Lafayette Hotel. It scared the hell out of me. We got down there and met. Hey, I'm a freshman in college, and he's the dean of the engineering school. He says, "How's your mom doing?" He knew mother. I said, "Mom's just fine." My oldest brother, Paul, who graduated from Purdue at a very tender age and later became state engineer for the state of Indiana and, later on, became senior engineer for the United States Public Health Service at Washington—they all wanted me to be an engineer, and I didn't want to be an engineer.

RR: You didn't want to be one?

LR: Oh, no. The dean was asking me, "Whatever made you think you wanted to be an engineer?" I said, "Well, I didn't want to be an engineer. They wouldn't let me go anywhere else to study law." He said, "What do you like to do if you weren't

doing engineering?” I said, “In the summer times, I had a job at the *Fort Wayne News Sentinel* as a helper, stuff like that.” I told the dean, “I like the newspaper business.” He said, “Well, you’ll make a lot more money in the newspaper business than you will as an engineer. You’d make a fine engineer, Leon, but your math is lousy.” [Laughter] Best advice I ever got in my life. I left school and went to work in advertising for the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel* and moved on to national advertising.

RR: Did you leave school before you graduated?

LR: Oh, yes. I left school at the end of my freshman year. I went to work for the newspaper in Fort Wayne.

RR: The *News-Sentinel*?

LR: *News-Sentinel*, yes. I ended up, prior to World War II, as the national advertising manager for them, which, at that tender age, was a pretty good job.

RR: Yes.

LR: Anyhow, then I got drafted and spent the war years with a very tough job. This doesn’t have anything to do with the interview, Roy.

RR: Well, it does.

LR: I was being interviewed at Camp Perry, Ohio, after I was drafted. They had a lieutenant there who was the drafting officer or something. He asked me what I did in civilian life. I said, “Well, I’m national representative of the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*.” Now, he says, “Son,”—I’m twenty-four years old, and this guy is about twenty-two. [Laughs]—he said, “Son, everybody comes into the army with a

big job. All we want to do is find out what you really did, and we can put you in a place where you'll do the most good." I said, "That's what I really did." You know how military officers are. Next to this office was an officer and I saw the red Editors and Publishers Yearbook. I said, "The officer next door might be able to help with your question." He said, "How's that?" I said, "Just ask him to look up the *News-Sentinel*." He yelled over there, and he said, "That red book you have up there, does that tell you about newspapers?" He said, "Yes, that'll tell you about newspapers." He said, "See if you can find--what was the name of that newspaper?" I said, "*Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*." "Is the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel* in there?" He said, "Yes, I'll find it." He came back and said, "Yes, it's here." He said, "The name for national representative?" "It says Leon S. Reed." This guy says, "That's you." I said, "That's what I've been trying to tell you." "Well, that's fine. Everything changes now," he said. They gave me a spec number as reporter, editor and publisher. He didn't know that a national representative was just a space salesman. [Laughter] Because of the Field Artillery ROTC at Purdue, they put me in the Tenth Mountain Division. (You might remember that they did in days to the Taliban what the Russians couldn't do in years.)

RR: In the what?

LR: The Tenth Mountain Division at Camp Carson, Colorado, in the 605th field artillery unit. One day out there, they called me to camp headquarters and wanted me to come and work on the *Mountaineer* newspaper, the camp newspaper. I

thought, “Well, it sure beats the hell out of artillery.” I went up there, and I worked as a reporter on the newspaper about three or four months until the guy who was editor—they called him to other duty, and they made me editor of this newspaper, *Camp Carson Mountaineer*, which I ran for the next three years.

RR: You had editorial experience for three years? That’s a lot of reporting and editing.

LR: Well, everything. The thing that was unusual about that deal was, I can remember the manager of the *Gazette-Telegraph* who taught me how to publish a newspaper and all that. We had an arrangement with the *Gazette-Telegraph*, which is the newspaper in Colorado Springs.

RR: They’re still there.

LR: Oh, yes. They would print the newspapers for us.

RR: What did you say was the name of the base there?

LR: Camp Carson.

RR: Camp Carson?

LR: It still is. It’s now called Fort Carson.

RR: Yes.

LR: They handled production of the newspaper for us. Back in those days, newsprint was kind of hard to come by. They liked to print the paper, but that was a tremendous loss of newsprint. I think they liked the arrangement. They didn’t get enough newsprint, but the army could cover that. Then, when I came out of the army, I went back to my old job at the *News-Sentinel*. The guy who ran the

News-Sentinel had his nephew in my job at the *News-Sentinel*. He said, "I can't give you your old job back," he said, "but by law, we have to give you a job." I left. I said, "I'll be damned if I need a law to get me a job." Here I am, fresh out of the army, just talked myself out of my only job, so I went down to a drug store there in Fort Wayne to get a cup of coffee. The guy sitting next to me, I happened to know. His name was Clem Stiegmeyer. He ran an advertising agency in Fort Wayne.

RR: What was his name?

LR: Stiegmeyer. I was telling him my troubles. The *Journal-Gazette* was the second newspaper in town. The *News-Sentinel* was the first. He said, "Things have changed. They're coming on big. They've got a guy over there you ought to talk to who's their advertising director. His name is Jim Williamson." I went over there and talked to this guy called Jim Williamson. I can remember that we talked, and he was quite interested in my coming to work there. "What kind of money would you like to make, do you expect to make?" he asked. I said, "I think ninety dollars a week would be pretty good." [Laughs] He said, "That's more money than I make." [Laughter] You remember Jim, don't you?

RR: Yes, yes.

LR: I went to work for them. We did great.

RR: Your job, there, was what?

LR: My job, starting out there, was just selling advertising, retail advertising, which I did for about a year. We did real well, and one day Jim Williamson called me and

said, "They're having a meeting down at the *Journal-Gazette*, and you're supposed to be there." I said, "Jim, this is New Year's Day." He said, "They know that." [Laughter] We went down there and --- I don't know if you've ever heard of him or not. There was a United States District Attorney at that [point?], his name was J. R. Fleming. He was one of the owners of the *Journal-Gazette*. Skits Simons, who was one of the owners, and then became, I think, governor of the Virgin Islands. Don't quote me on that, but I think that's where it was. We were sitting there, and they're talking about how, well, advertising was good and our editorial department was excellent, but we had a big problem in our circulation department. They said, "We're going to have to do something there, get ourselves a new circulation director." The first thought in my mind was, "I wonder who that poor son of a bitch is going to be." [Laughter] He turned to me and said, "Leon, it's going to be you." I said, "Circulation? I don't know my ass from third base about circulation." He said, "Well, that's just excellent because you can enter it with an open mind." [Laughter] I became that and I was running the circulation department. The biggest kick of my life is, at the time we went there, the evening paper, the one that I did work for, was ahead of the *Journal Gazette*, the morning paper. We worked there for a while and finally made large gains. That was the biggest thrill of my life. [Laughs] Then a fellow by the name of Miller Ellingham also was part owner--they decided to merge with the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*. Still today, the two newspapers are merged. It's not like this deal. Each editorial department is independent, and circulation and

advertising are run by the capital company. They put these two newspapers together. Mr. Fleming told Jim and I both—he took us to lunch one day, and he said, “I’m sorry to tell you guys this, but we merged these papers and one of the agreements was that the executives would be chosen by their seniority.” I had about three years seniority. Jim did not have the seniority. Jim at that time was business manager—and we were both out of a job. Thank God, they offered to pay us our salary for a year, which they did. Then I got this offer from the *Shreveport Times*. I went to work for the *Shreveport Times*. The guy running the *Shreveport Times*, his name was Ewing.

RR: I know that name.

LR: He was not my kind of guy. I think the *Shreveport Times* was highly criticized for their editorials.

RR: That’s what I remember about J. R. Ewing, that he was a leader of a segregationist organization.

LR: That’s right. He also owned the *Monroe World*, which is at Monroe, Louisiana.

RR: Right.

LR: I didn’t know all this when I got the offer from them to come down there and take over their circulation department. I had a better offer that was very good from Katz, who at that time was running the *Honolulu Advertiser*. I didn’t want to go that far from home. [Laughs]

RR: Were you married at this time?

LR: Oh, yes. The girl I married, I sat behind her in grade school. [Laughter]

RR: You had your eye on her a long time. [Laughs]

LR: When I got to Shreveport, he was paying the girls—there were about six or seven girls in the circulation department—he was paying them sixteen dollars a week. I raised the salaries. He got mad. When I left the *Journal-Gazette*, we were paying the girls thirty-five, forty dollars a week.

RR: We're talking about 1949, 1950.

LR: I came to the *Gazette* in 1952, so it had to be from 1950 to the middle part of 1951. In the interim, Hugh Patterson called me one time and wanted to talk to me about going to work for the *Arkansas Gazette*. It was a very interesting proposition, but I remember telling him, "I've just been down there for a year and you can be a son of a bitch in this business so many easy ways. They fired their other guy for me to come. I don't think I ought to leave right now." He said, "We're looking for a really good advertising man." I said, "I know a really good one." He said, "Where is he?" I said, "Sitting on top of a tractor in Leo, Indiana, right outside Fort Wayne."

RR: That's what Jim was doing during the . . . ?

LR: That period between . . .

RR: I never knew that, that he was a farmer.

LR: Oh yes. Well, he wasn't a farmer. He was just working for the farmer. His wife's dad was the farmer, owned the farm. Mr. Patterson called him to come down to Little Rock and talk to him. Jim did. I talked to Jim in the meantime. I said, "Jim, it's our kind of a newspaper. It's kind of like the *Journal-Gazette*."

The people here, the way they run it, what they think about a newspaper, what it ought to be and what it ought not to do, is right down our line of thinking.” He came down there and talked to Hugh. Hugh was impressed by him, and he was impressed by Hugh. He finally decided, “Yes, sir, I think I’d like that job.” Hugh said to him, “We haven’t even discussed salaries.” Jim said, “Mr. Patterson, whatever salary you come up with, I think will be agreeable. I know you’ll do the right thing.” Jim went to work for them. I’m still down in Shreveport. On Thanksgiving, Hugh and Jim got together and told Virginia and I to come up to Little Rock and have Thanksgiving with them, which we did. That’s when Hugh said, “You’ve been down there almost eighteen months now, and that’s long enough.” To make a long story short, I decided to come work with the *Arkansas Gazette*.

RR: Let me stop you there for a second. Do you remember the names of the two people, the business manager that Jim succeeded and circulation manager that you succeeded, at the *Gazette*?

LR: I succeeded the guy --- Hugh would remember the name because he left from here and went to Oklahoma some time ago

RR: How about the business manager?

LR: I remember the business manager, Roy, but I don’t remember what the hell his name was anymore.

RR: I wouldn’t have known him, I’m sure. I thought I might have recognized the name. Jim had been at the paper four or five years when I went to work there in

1956.

LR: Then things worked out and we started rolling. When I got there, the *Democrat* was ahead by quite a bit.

RR: The *Democrat*?

LR: Oh, yes. Yes. In city circulation, I don't know total, but in city circulation.

RR: Oh, yes.

LR: We got rolling. We got everything going up. By 1957 I think we came up with the circulation lead.

RR: Total around the city?

LR: Total, yes.

RR: This was as we approached 1957?

LR: Yes, as we approached 1957. Then, when 1957 hit, we lost thousands in circulation in thirty days. People were knocking on doors. Neighbors didn't want the paper being delivered. [Laughs] We got the hell kicked out of us pretty good.

RR: They did pass us in circulation?

LR: I think so, but don't quote me on that. I think they did or almost did. I don't know which. We got the thing rolling again, got it to where we were well out in front. I remember I had a couch over here. The Pattersons were here, and the Ashmores were here. The Heiskells were here. Mr. Heiskell was sitting in the corner. I walked over there, sat along side him, and I said, "Mr. Heiskell, you're probably wondering why I'm having this party out here." He said, "Mr. Reed,"—he never called me Leon—he said, "Mr. Reed, if you're going to take

credit for bringing the *Arkansas Gazette* back to where it belongs, I want you to know that Hugh and Jim and Harry have already taken credit for that.” [Laughter]

RR: That’s a perfect J. N. Heiskell story.

LR: Later they wouldn’t let him drive anymore. They got --- what’s our black janitor’s name? Oh, a nice guy.

RR: Romeo Gatewood.

LR: Romeo Gatewood would drive him back and forth to work. On this particular day, Romeo was some place and wasn’t available until about the middle of the afternoon. Mr. Heiskell was ready to go home. They couldn’t find Gatewood. He told Hugh, and Hugh said, “I got somebody who’ll take you home. I’ll have Leon Reed take you on home. This is the time of day he usually leaves anyhow.” It was about two o’clock in the afternoon. [Laughter] I told Mr. Heiskell, as we were coming down Cantrell Road, I said, “Mr. Heiskell, this is interesting because this is my anniversary. I’ve been here”—I think I said something like fifteen years or so, whatever time it was. He didn’t say anything, and we [puttered?] on down to about where Dillard’s is now. He said, “You know, Mr. Reed, after sixty-five years as editor, fifteen years don’t really move me too much.”

RR: [Laughter] Another typical Mr. Heiskell story. When did you retire?

LR: 1982.

RR: Before Gannett bought it.

LR: It’s funny about that. I was somewhere in Mississippi. We were going to Florida, and Hugh called me and he told me. He said, “We’re selling the paper to Gannett,

and I didn't want you to read it in the paper. I wanted you to know." I got back here, and Hugh and I were talking one day about who the publisher would be. I said, "I can tell you who just might do it. It might be Bill Malone." You know him?

RR: Yes.

LR: I said, "He knows the territory. He's an old circulation director from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. He's now publisher of the *Springfield Republican* for Gannett." That's part of the story. The other side of that story was when Malone was talking to Curry—I think that was his name.

RR: Yes, yes. I want to say Bill Curry, but I don't know if that's right.

LR: I think it was him, but I don't remember for sure. They were talking about wanting Malone to come down here to Little Rock, but they said, "Keep it quiet," they said. "Just take a look around." Bill said, "I've got a friend down there who will recognize me." Bill said, "Yes, who is that?" He said, "Leon Reed," because Bill was the circulation manager over at the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. They said, "Chances are, that won't happen." Bill tells that when the elevator comes down at the *Gazette*, who do you think walked off that elevator? It was Leon Reed. [Laughter] I said, "Bill, what are you doing here?" He said, "I just was going through, and I thought I'd take a look around." I knew then who was to be publisher. After I'd left circulation and become senior vice president, Hugh moved me into the office next to him. After the sale, I was in there packing things to move out when Bill walks in and says, "What the hell are you doing?" I

said, "Bill, just take it easy. I'll be out of your way in no time. I've already retired, but Hugh has kept me on."

RR: You had already retired?

LR: Oh, yes. I'd already retired, but Hugh wanted me to stay on for a while, which I did. It's a long time ago. I hope I get this stuff right. I was sitting there, putting stuff in boxes, and Malone walks in and says, "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "Bill, I'll be out of your way in no time." He said, "No, I want you to stay." I said, "Do what?" He said, "We got to find out where all the bodies are and you probably buried them." [Laughter] I stayed on and . . .

RR: In what capacity?

LR: Consulting. I was on retirement now.

RR: Is that what you'd been doing for Hugh?

LR: Yes, I just helped him out in the advertising department. Do you remember Tom Kemp?

RR: Yes.

LR: They were having some problems in the advertising department, and I had spent enough time in advertising and Hugh wanted me to go down there. I moved down to the advertising department for a while to see what they were doing and got some things straightened up. I stayed there for, oh, I guess six months. I went into the consulting business after that. Circulation, advertising, things like that. I had a lot of fun with that. Probably, if I had known it was that easy to make money, Roy, I would have done it a lot sooner than when I got into it. Do you

know Sam Hodges?

RR: Yes.

LR: Sam lived up here on the corner. He owned the *Benton Courier* and the paper at Maumelle. His daughter, Roberta, was training to run the newspaper, and he wanted to know if I'd come down there and work for them for a while.

[End of Tape One, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

LR: I went down here and went to work for him and at the Maumelle paper, which he also owned.

RR: Yes, yes.

LR: Sam had told them what I was doing for him in Benton, so they wanted me to come up there, which I did, spend a little time. In the interim, also—what's our friend's name who owned the *Log Cabin*?

RR: Frank, Frank . . .

LR: You're half way there. [Laughter]

RR: Robbins.

LR: That's it. At the *Log Cabin*. I went down there. By that time, I was a little tired of traveling. I had a company called Reed Enterprises and stayed there a while. Getting back to the *Gazette*, it was great having as much fun as I had working at the *Gazette*. You're so proud to tell people that you're working at the *Gazette*.

RR: Yes, yes. Even in 1957, was it fun then?

LR: Oh, yes. More fun than you'd think. I mean, the challenge is what was fun.

RR: Tell me about that.

LR: You got kicked on your ass. You could lay there and crawl or you'd get up and fight. What do you do?

RR: We lost thousands?

LR: I think it was something like that.

RR: In thirty days?

LR: Yes, and we had to hire Kelly Girls to take circulation off.

RR: You mean the calls were coming in so fast?

LR: Oh, yes, because people said, "I like the paper, but my neighbor is just raising hell about me taking the *Gazette*." It was like that. Some of them had people outworking them. Door to door, they're stopping us.

RR: Was that all of the state or mainly in Little Rock? Where were we hit hardest?

LR: We were hit hardest right here in Little Rock and Pulaski County, but we were hit all over.

RR: Tell me about that incident at Clarendon.

LR: I'm going to get off base for a minute here, Roy. When I got to the *Gazette*, transportation for the *Arkansas Gazette* was done by the Film Transit Company out of Memphis. The way they were doing it, we were really late getting into places like Texarkana because trucks hauling our paper stopped all the way along the line to drop off film. I followed them one night. I wanted to find out why the hell it was taking so long. I followed this truck. Every driver was stopping, dropping film and picking up film. They're getting to Texarkana late in the

morning. They should be there at two. I told Hugh, "We can beat this. We'll start a contract hauling deal." I knew of a paper, Ernie Karams, *Cincinnati Inquirer*, Cleveland—up there somewhere. I talked to him at a convention one time about the contract haulers they use. They have a trucking system that the guy owns a truck, gets a contract and he has to drive seven days a week. He is in business for himself. Give him a contract for a given amount of money to drive from Little Rock to dealerships every night. If he's sick, if he has a problem, he gets a truck and driver. You've got to have a standby. I started thinking about, if I put all these routes we had in the *Gazette* on the contracts—again, I'm pulling these figures out of the air—I think the hauling cost that was run was way too high. I got Gene Childers a contract and had him make a test run for us to see how things worked out. Hugh was happy, and I was happy.

RR: Let me just—he would leave Little Rock about what time?

LR: See, we had three editions. The first edition, as you know, was in the outside fifty counties. Then the trade zone, the inside twenty-four counties and the city edition, that was Pulaski County. The papers at that time, Roy, were supposed to go to press at ten o'clock at night. We'd run that first edition. Around twelve, we'd run the second. We would run the third about one, one-thirty. Then to the Stuttgart area—I think it was some place like that—people crossed the road from Little Rock and blocked our trucker because of this integration thing.

RR: I'd heard Clarendon, but . . .

LR: Clarendon, that's south isn't it? That's close to Stuttgart, isn't it?

RR: Yes, yes.

LR: Yes, so he explained to these people, “Now, folks, I just got a company here that hauls papers. That’s how I make my living. I don’t know what your complaint is. I’m not interested about your complaint. All I’m going to do is I’m going to back this truck up about a block and when I come through here next time, I’m going to be going forty-five or fifty miles an hour. Please don’t be in the way.” He backed up, and he started driving the thing forward. [Laughs] Someone asked the driver, “Were you going to go all the way through with it?” He said, “We’ll never know, will we?” [Laughter]

RR: They parted like the Red Sea. [Laughter]

LR: Yes. To finish up on this driver thing, I put it together and told Hugh if we went into this commercial contract hauling, it would cost us X amount of dollars a year. I figured he was probably going to save thousands of dollars. We got it all together. We were having all these papers getting there on time. It worked out really well. We never had any problem because they all had back-ups. Then we had a deal with Hertz. Any time a guy couldn’t run his truck because something was wrong with it, Hertz had a deal for him. They would furnish the truck for him. Yes, he was expected to pay, but at a very cheap price, so Hertz was willing. That trucking system worked really well, but one of the funny deals about that, Roy, is during an ice storm—I don’t know which year it was, but something like we just had the other night—the driver, I don’t know who it was, was going to Eureka Springs, Harrison, taking a run up that way. He got to the fork at Clinton

to the Harrison Road, and the state police had the road blocked off. They wouldn't let him through.

RR: Because of the ice, you mean?

LR: Yes, yes, because of the ice, the road was impassable. He called back to the office, and they called me. At that time, our state police director was Herman Lindsey.

RR: He was Faubus's state police director.

LR: I called him and he explained to me, "Mr. Reed, that road is a mess. The only things we're allowing through are perishables." I said, "Well, sir, can you think of anything more perishable than today's newspaper?" [Laughs]. "No," he said, "I guess you're right. Well, I'll call him and lift it. You know your trucks are at their own risk." I said, "When aren't they?" They let us through. The next couple of nights later he comes through and they stop him. The cops were still there closing that road off. The driver got out and he said, "We made arrangements with the state police to go through." "Oh, we know that. We just got a couple of squad cars going to Harrison that would like to follow you," they said. "This guy knows that road like the inside of the palm of his hand." It was a big-sized van, lot of weight. It was loaded. I got a kick out of that, that they weren't stopping him. They'd been waiting on him to follow the squad car to Harrison!

RR: On Highway 65?

LR: There were the state police barracks up there. These guys were supposed to be

going up there and knew he was going there. They were kind of queasy about taking that road because the Clinton Road had a lot of sharp curves.

RR: Oh, boy, it's still bad.

LR: Yes, yes.

RR: Give me, aside from the integration problem and all that, and problems that caused, on a typical run—take the trucker to Fayetteville, what time would he deliver the *Gazette*? What would be his first stop, second stop, and on down?

LR: Let's talk about the one going to Fort Smith.

RR: Okay.

LR: He would probably leave there, the papers would be on his truck and loaded, by, I'd say, eleven-thirty. He wouldn't make any stops until he got past Russellville because Russellville was in the trade zone.

RR: This is the time, we're talking about old highway sixty-four?

LR: Yes.

RR: Before the interstate.

LR: Yes, going to Fort Smith. He would drop some of those at motor routes on the way. At Alma, he would meet the Fort Smith truck, transfer the papers, and head on up to Fayetteville.

RR: Okay.

LR: Yes. Remember that high school football in this state is crazy. [Laughs]

RR: Yes, yes.

LR: We had a big problem up in Fayetteville with the first edition paper there.

Fayetteville High School had that big game last night, they won, and they're not even in the paper. Orville [Henry] told me, "Man, we get a lot of guff on that." I went and talked to Central Flying Service to find out, on a Friday night, what it would cost us. To make a long story short, we made a deal where, on Friday nights during the football season, we'd take these papers out to Central Flying Service and they'd put them on --- at that time, they had the Beechcrafts, the old twin engine. Do you remember the old twin-engine Beechcraft?

RR: Yes.

LR: We'd load those papers on a Beechcraft, but you could only get so many on that thing and get off the ground. [Laughs]. We'd fly the papers into Fayetteville, into Jonesboro, and we'd fly papers into El Dorado. Three flights every Friday night. They'd fan out from there, but they had the football scores. I think that really picked up the circulation for us in outer limits of the state. Orville Henry was wild about the idea. We'd only do it on one night, but it gave the people the idea that we were doing it every night. [Laughs] When we started flying those papers up there, we had a tremendous increase.

RR: Oh, yes, a tremendous increase.

LR: Of course, you know how that area is growing. In time, Fayetteville will be all the way up to the border and will be one big town. [Laughter]

RR: It almost is.

LR: I can remember when you left Fayetteville heading for the border. The first thing I did when I got down here was to follow those trucks so I'd know where they

were going, where our business is, and could be.

RR: That was a good move.

LR: Yes.

RR: Take the guy who would make the second edition run to Russellville. I assume he has more than one stop there.

LR: No, he had one stop.

RR: Okay. Like a drug store or a . . .

LR: Usually, a gas station. I always liked a gas station because they were open all night and were under cover. Then the guy would buy his gas there. The motor route drivers, they would buy gas. In each of these towns, we had a dealer who would have carriers, and the dealer would get his papers there, and the motor routes would operate out of there. They would all come to that central spot.

RR: Might be half a dozen or so of those?

LR: Oh, yes, because with the trucks—they had to be loaded properly. We also had four or five motor routes running out of Pine Bluff. We practically did away with the mail delivery of the paper, but at one time that was a big deal.

RR: Back to Russellville. Now, say they dropped, let's say, at a service station. The motor route people come and get theirs. I take it they go out into the countryside and the little towns. But, there in Russellville, do you have boys?

LR: Yes, yes. Boys walking routes.

RR: Walking, whatever it takes. Door to door?

LR: Yes. Just like you used to do.

RR: Out in the country, I guess they had boxes.

LR: Yes. You've seen our box, a yellow box. It said, "*Arkansas Gazette*" on it.

Getting back to Central High School. Our circulation here in Little Rock dropped so rapidly. I had a good friend in Mobile by the name of Berkley Thompson. He owned a circulation supply service. They had just come out with what they called these new coin-operated honor boxes. I think that at that time they cost a terrible sum, something like thirty-seven dollars apiece. They now cost about two hundred. I was telling Jim and Hugh, "People aren't taking our papers because they don't want to have neighbors see it delivered. But on the way to work, I'd bet they'd stop and buy one if they just had a place they could do it." That's when we got into this box business, and I remember calling Berkley in Mobile, Alabama, who had this company that was making these honor boxes. I told him, "I'd like to buy some honor boxes." He said, "How many?" I said, "Couple of hundred." [Laughs] He said, "I thought you said hundreds." I said, "Yes, in a year's time I want that many." We covered the state with those honor boxes. Our street sales were normal, but with the new boxes, single-copy sales went way up and we were running out of boxes.

RR: Mostly box buyers had stopped their subscription?

LR: That's right. They'd stop, but box sales were doing better than the cancelling of our paper.

RR: Well, you know, we heard at the time that people were doing that.

LR: Yes, yes, but then we had to put them some place where there was a stop light or

someplace where they had to pull in. You'd be surprised the number of people who would call us, like a 7-11 store or something like that, and say, "We want one of those boxes because we've got people coming in here, wanting the newspaper, wanting to know if we've got the *Gazette*." We said, "We'll have you one in fifteen minutes." [Laughs] That took the edge off, did us a lot of business there. From then on in, after the Central High School deal, we were doing great.

RR: During that rough period, how were the carriers treated?

LR: I never heard of anybody treating the carriers badly. I think everybody realized they were just doing their job, not the *Arkansas Gazette*'s. I did have a district manager. We were having our usual district manager's meeting. It was just the city district managers—usually the city managers took care of it, but I wanted to find out what the temperature was. They were talking at this meeting about all the hell they were catching and all that stuff about integration. One man got up and said, "Some of the fellows think maybe the best thing we can do is look for another job." I said to him, "Chuck, I am not a hero. When it is time to bail out of the ship, buddy, don't get in my way. Until then, hang in there, buddy, because we're going to beat it. We're going to beat it." He was the district manager. We had fifteen districts here in the city and, I think, twelve out in the state.

RR: What was his district? Just as a curiosity, do you know what part of town? On Asher Avenue, maybe?

LR: I think Chuck had the east side. Like I said, we had fifteen of them.

RR: I would have guessed that some parts of town would have been more hostile than

other parts.

[End of Tape One, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

RR: Leon, we were talking about, in 1957, the integration crisis and the effect that it had on the paper, big losses, and how we built back and ended up stronger than you were before. How hard was that on the paper financially, losing all that circulation?

LR: Hard, I'd say. I don't know if you were in town much, around these parts. Of course, the big effect was a lot of the advertisers were just not prone to advertise with us. Our problems weren't only circulation. They were advertisers. A lot of the advertisers, they may have agreed with us but they hung back. I don't know. Hugh had a figure in his mind what the whole kaboodle cost us.

RR: He told me that figure, and I can't remember it now either. I know it was hard on the paper. Just this week, I heard two million from somebody.

LR: The loss of circulation from the standpoint of numbers is one thing, but the loss of the income from that circulation is another, too.

RR: Yes, yes. That's got to be a lot of money.

LR: Absolutely, there was the loss of advertising, but all the expenses went on just like before. I'm sure they caused Hugh a lot of sleepless nights.

RR: How about you? Did you have sleepless nights?

LR: Yes. Of course, the losses weren't coming out of my pocket. I'll tell you things that are hard to get over. I had a bad habit: if , at five o'clock in the morning, I

didn't hear that paper at the front porch, I'd be on the telephone calling them up, "What has happened? Are we running late or something?" "No, the boy's just lazy." For three or four years after I retired, I would get up at five o'clock in the morning and listen, wait for the paper to come and hit the front porch.

RR: Tell me about your relationship with Harry Ashmore.

LR: Great, just great. Harry's the first guy I met after I made this deal with Hugh and I'd just come into town. Jim Williamson rented a house for us. Do you know where Coolwood is?

RR: Yes.

LR: Jim rented a house for us in Coolwood. I came down here about a week a head of time to see what we had. When I got here, Hugh was tied up with something. He told me that I was to go with Harry Ashmore and go out to his house. Then we'd meet him later. Harry used to live off of . . .

RR: He lived on Southwood.

LR: Southwood, which is off of, what is it?

RR: Kavanaugh.

LR: Kavanaugh. Off of Kavanaugh, yes, up there. I know that he was driving me up. Harry was just great and, of course, I admired him tremendously because of his position as an editorialist. He didn't do what was popular or what wasn't popular. He did what was right. I had a great work relationship. He was always concerned about circulation, the business side of the newspaper, which had a lot to do with his business, too. I never will forget that he called me one particular morning to

find out if an editorial hurts. “Harry, I didn’t hear one word about the editorial. I guess nobody’s reading it.” [Laughter] I liked Harry. He was a nice guy.

RR: He knew his editorials were having an [adverse] effect on circulation?

LR: Oh, yes. It bothered him. He was in an area prone to segregation. The thing about it is that very few people understood Harry’s philosophy. Harry’s original philosophy was not integration. It was equal education opportunities. Equal schools, not shacks for colored folks and a brick building for whites or like that. His whole theory was equal.

RR: Of course, Harry’s editorials made your life more difficult, didn’t they?

LR: Every newspaper you’re on, if it’s any good, has got a strong editorial department. Now, both newspapers in Fort Wayne had very strong—one was Republican, one was Democrat, and, man, they came out fighting. They both did well. I admired both of them for what they did.

RR: When you think back to 1957, what would have been your own political viewpoint at that time on the issue of race?

LR: Let me tell you something about the issue of race. I went to Central Catholic High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In the study hall there, I had a guy sit right next to me who was blacker than the ace of spades. His name was Calvin Mudd. Calvin graduated from Catholic high and ended up as a professor of something or other at Emory University in Atlanta. I never had any doubt. Calvin, we would tell him when we were kids we had a lot more trouble with the Lutherans than with the blacks. [Laughter]

RR: You, being from a Northern state, my guess is that the people you tend to know around here probably think of you as a Yankee.

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, by all means.

RR: And an integrationist.

LR: I didn't preach it. If you asked me, "Do you think the integration of the high school is right?" I might say, "I'm not too happy with it, but it's right. It's going to cause a lot of trouble, but it's right." Do you know what one of the heaviest black populated communities in the country is?

RR: Gary, Indiana?

LR: Indianapolis.

RR: Indianapolis?

LR: Indianapolis. Do you know why?

RR: No.

LR: Well, I'm told that it was the end of the Underground Railroad. After they dropped them off, that's where they stayed. [Laughs] I was amazed at that, too, but to this day, it's got a very high --- and has some really good schools, good small colleges.

RR: I didn't know that. You mentioned Mr. Heiskell a while ago. Did you have any regular dealings with him at the paper?

LR: Nothing business. That's the only time. All my duties were basically with Jim Williamson and Hugh Patterson.

RR: Tell me about those two guys. Start with Jim. What kind of a guy was Jim?

LR: Jim was a very dedicated guy. When he found out that they had merged the papers in Fort Wayne, it broke his heart. Me, I'm just looking for another place to land. He went out there and got on a tractor and farmed for the hell of it. Very emotional, not much of a sense of humor, God bless him. Remember Frank Duff?

RR: Yes.

LR: Frank was something else. One time, after I'd been at the *Gazette* maybe a year or so, Frank Duff and I go have a cup of coffee. He said, "How do you get along with Jim Williamson?" I said, "I get along with him fine, Frank." He said, "How do you do that?" I said, "I let him go his way and tell him I'm going mine."
[Laughs] I said, "That's the kind of thing he understands. Jim's not the kind of guy you can razzle. You got to say what you're thinking because, if you don't, he knows what you're thinking." From an advertising standpoint, he brought the *Gazette* right up there. He was very, very good as a business manager.

RR: The thing about him not having much of a sense of humor—I sort of remember that about him, even though I didn't know him well. He was kind of a distant figure to a reporter. We had that impression. He was not an easy man to laugh and carry on with.

LR: The reason Jim and I got along so well was that we went way back together. But if you get a couple of drinks in him, you couldn't quiet him down. [Laughs]

RR: Yes, yes. I remember dark suits, always well dressed.

LR: Always strictly down to business. He knew his advertising accounts like the back of his hand. He knew what they were doing because he studied them. He didn't

work at it. He studied them.

RR: Louis Munoz came into the paper later on, didn't he?

LR: Yes. He was at Blass before that.

RR: I think so.

LR: When Jim was about to replace the retail manager because he wasn't happy with what Hugh had—and I wasn't either. He was a nice guy, but he just didn't know much about what he was doing. Jim brought in Lou to run the advertising department. A wonderful thing about Hugh Patterson, though, he'd give you a job and then he'd let you do it. I came up with a couple of ideas from time to time that were expensive, but I thought it was something we should do. I proposed them, and Jim, all the time, was concerned about the expense. Was the effort going to be worth it? Hugh's philosophy was, he brought me out here to run the circulation department and let me run it. Hugh was that way. I mean, as long as you weren't messing up the joint, why, he'd let you go. Of course, things were going really well.

RR: How many people did you have working for you?

LR: Well, in those days, we had everything off the press and once it was printed, it was ours and was part of the circulation department. We had the mail room, transportation, dealerships, district managers, office— don't know the total number, but there are a bunch of them. Well, the mail room was the whole back area of the bundling. The mail room picked the papers up off the conveyor, bundled them and got them on the right truck.

RR: How many carriers did you have? How many people, all together, did it take to get that newspaper delivered to every door that it went to?

LR: I think, at one time, we had close to four hundred carriers, boys. At that time, all the routes in town were handled by boys. There was no such thing as the motor routes in town. Out in the county, we had motor routes. Out in the Trade Zone, we had routes.

RR: And four hundred or so in the city?

LR: Carriers in Little Rock, but then in Pine Bluff, the dealer in Pine Bluff had carriers. We did business with the dealer, that's all. I made a deal with you. You had Pine Bluff. You're the Pine Bluff dealer. I sell you these papers for a given amount per copy. Then the dealer takes it from the truck the rest of the way.

RR: We're talking about hundreds of people all together?

LR: I would say, yes. I would say --- you're talking about total distribution?

RR: Yes. Some of them contracts, some of them on the payroll?

LR: Yes, contract and payroll.

RR: It's a big deal to get a newspaper out.

LR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. When did you come to the *Gazette*, Roy?

RR: 1956.

LR: Well, 1956, the pressroom was still in the back of the building. Were you there at the time we had the fire down in the basement?

RR: I think that happened after I left. I heard them talking about it when I came back for a visit.

LR: I forget about that thing. You know that the newsprint caught fire down in the basement, and I guess they never found out how. The thing about it is, the fire department, after the fire got going, had to control it—In the hallway above, when you come in off of Third Street, that hallway—all that Italian marble there—firemen were chopping the marble out. Mr. Heiskell and Hugh were shocked seeing all that beautiful Italian marble torn up.

RR: Was it a pretty bad fire as far as damage was concerned?

LR: Yes. The thing that was most seriously damaged was the loss of newsprint and damage—the fire was a damaging thing, but—I learned this later—one of the things that really worried the firemen putting it out was where it had all those newspapers stacked between those pillars downstairs. You wet that stuff and it starts to expand. That was one of the reasons why they went up stairs and broke the marble to get at the fire. They were concerned, and I thought it was just great that they were smart enough to know that.

RR: Are you saying there was a danger that they might have collapsed? If all these pillars had collapsed . . .

LR: Yes, it would've collapsed them all. Do you remember down there, there was one of those pillars about every umpteen feet?

RR: Yes.

LR: You used to stack those rolls of newsprint in between them.

RR: Who would have thought of that, that the expansion . . .

LR: I would say it was one of the fire chiefs. That would be their business. They

would know that.

RR: That was smart.

LR: Yes. The thing that I always get a kick out of now — do you remember when the new plant was opened, the new printing plant down there?

RR: I was gone.

LR: You were gone. The thing about that, it's a phenomenon. It amazes me. When they built that thing, do you know about these [roaming?] robots they have down there? Or didn't you know about those?

RR: No.

LR: When they built that place, they lined the concrete with wire. They got these robots. They're called "gopher one," I think, and "gopher two." The computer tells them, the gopher, to go to a certain place to get certain size rolls of newsprint.

RR: Of newsprint?

LR: Yes, newsprint, and put it in its place on a certain location.

RR: Isn't that something!

LR: If you're down there and hear that beep-beep-beep-beep, you better get out of the way because you knew there was a roll of paper coming your way. Back when—I can remember the days when they used to snatch, when the presses were running, and they'd grab a paper to see how the presses were doing. They'd go over and change it by hand.

RR: A little adjusting.

LR: At the plant, the foreman got that computer to correct it. Just sat there and played it like an organ. He looked at the page and said, “A little more red on that girl’s jacket.” It was state of the art. During the construction of the new plant, Hugh, Jim and I went down after lunch to watch them build the plant. Never realized it, but when they were putting in those pylons, they were about so big—what’s our friend’s name? He used to be the contractor. Jack Pickens.

RR: Jack Pickens, yes.

LR: Do you remember Jack–Pickens and Bond?

RR: Yes, yes.

LR: See, John Bond lived right next to us. They were building the plant and, man, they would drill and drill and drill. They’d go down and down, remember? They’d hit the bottom and fill that hole full of concrete. Put the rebars in, stuff like that. Someone said, “That’s a lot of concrete down there you’re using.” He said, “You know, when you get those presses in and they start running--” May, was it the May Company?

RR: I think so.

LR: They built it and they said that--these are the guys that make them—they said, “When you start turning up those presses to full speed, there’s a lot of high vibration that [you] may not feel. But that concrete feels it, and if it isn’t put in right, it’ll tear itself,” which is why you had somebody like that. That’s why you bring somebody in like that who knows how to do it. They did a beautiful job. I don’t know how. I must have had a half dozen guys from other towns who were

going through here, circulation guys, who wanted to see the new spread down there.

RR: Back to the first printing press, when I went to work there, it sat at street level or at least part of it did. This big, huge plate glass on Louisiana Street . . .

LR: On Louisiana Street.

RR: You could stand there and watch that press roll.

LR: That's why they put the glass in, so people could go by and see it.

RR: Did you ever worry about that plate-glass window on the [*Gazette?*] building.

LR: Yes, yes. During the integration period, I thought maybe we ought to board that up before somebody goes crazy and throws a brick in. I thought better of it. That would be admitting something and we aren't supposed to be afraid of anybody.

Let's don't do that.

RR: A brick or a bomb. I thought about it. Not at the time, but years later I thought, "What kept some radical from hurling something . . .?"

LR: You see, unlike today, at that time, it was a busy street. That wouldn't have been too easy. If you did that, then where would you go?

RR: And you might have killed somebody if you did it.

LR: I can remember when we'd have a roll break, or something like that, and, boy, those were close quarters they have in the reel room. That was down below. Our pressroom and mailroom people thought they died and went to heaven when we built that new plant. It was heaven compared to what they had.

RR: Tell me about the meetings of the department heads. Who all would be at those

meetings?

LR: There'd be Hugh, Jim, myself, Harry, Shelton-Bill, was he still there?

RR: He was city editor and Bob Douglas --- well, A. R. Nelson was managing editor when I came to work. Then later on, Bob Douglas was in that job. He remembers being in department head meetings with you.

LR: I think we had three or four people from the editorial department. We had the head of each different level and all that. In the circulation department, it was just me. In the advertising department, it was just Jim.

RR: What role did the circulation director have? Was it director or manager?

LR: Director. You had managers. You had a city manager, a state manager, mailroom foreman, street sales manager.

RR: Over all those was the director?

LR: Yes.

RR: When the question would come up—in meetings of the department heads—when the question would come up of what's the correlation between the news and the newsroom and how the news is played—the correlation between that on one hand, and your job, circulation, on the other? There must have been a lot of continuing discussions about that.

LR: The biggest discussion, of course, was time, press time. I can remember when there would be a certain story, sudden breaking news, [Nelson would] want to hold up the paper for it. I didn't want to hold the paper up because [if] you hold up the first edition, then your third edition is late, the city is late. We had a

couple of pretty good discussions about that. Hugh came up with the idea that if Nelson thought we should hold at press time—because I had a certain time that we had to print them if they're going to get to where they've got to go. The whole deal about that was, at any time they were going to hold the press, Nelson was to give me a call to see, from a news standpoint, what we should do or not do and whether we should get Jim involved in it. The thing about it is I had a little trouble in the newsroom making these guys realize how important that break was. Guys are sitting down there, and pretty soon you have a traffic jam because the second edition trucks are coming in and the first edition trucks haven't left yet. You got presses rolling, you got to speed up the press and chance breaks. It doesn't sound like much, but ten or fifteen minutes is a lot of time if it's ten or fifteen minutes late. Then, you got a lot of boys out on the street, waiting on their papers and they're not there. Pretty soon parents get involved. He's late for school. Earlier on, we had a big ol' con-fab about press time. Hugh got that settled down to where if there'd be a hold, hold it for the second edition. Don't hold it for the first. Let the first go. Outside zone, let it go. Then that'll give you plenty of time to complete your story. Nobody knows more than I do how important that breaking news story is to the paper, but if it doesn't get there, the story doesn't mean a thing!

RR: If it doesn't get in the paper, it's not a story. What about --- let me put it this way. Two or three years ago, I was hired to do a long, long article about the Belo Corporation, which owns the *Dallas Morning News*. It also owns the *Providence*

Journal up in Rhode Island. I visited up there, spent a week up there. While I was there, I spent some time with the circulation people and the business people.

LR: Jimmy Dark?

RR: That sounds right.

LR: Jimmy Dark was circulation director, great friend of mine.

RR: I bet that's right.

LR: His managing director, [Watkins?]-because they stuck me with a dinner bill. This is funny.

RR: We were talking about Providence. One of the things I learned there was that at a lot of papers now, it is fairly common for the newsroom to have a representative, a middle-level editor, maybe, or even a reporter, who will meet regularly with the circulation people and keep up to date on how to sell more papers in the boxes. They're talking about what's going above the fold [on page one] and where the pictures are going to be. That kind of thing. Had you all gotten into that sort of thing?

LR: Never in a meeting, but many is the time when I'd go up to talk to Nelson about a different thing. One of the best parts of the front page is that strip on the left, "In the News." It got more attention than anything else. I knew, from people we had heard that was very, very popular. Otherwise not. If this sounds funny, it is funny. That newsroom is so damn good. Even before you left, they were on top of it.

[End of Tape Two, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side Two]

LR: . . . wanting to know where in the hell the sports department did their thinking.

It's my fault. That's what got me thinking about flying them up there. I never did really think that it would increase our circulation, like it did. But the thing about flying them in on a Friday night was time!

RR: One day a week.

LR: One day a week, but people get the idea that we were doing it all the time.

RR: Bob Douglas, who really admires you, by the way, was . . .

LR: Bob and I got along great.

RR: I think he kind of wanted to come with me, but he had the flu.

LR: I don't know how long—it has been a month, couple of months ago—but I was up there staying in Fayetteville. Bob and I had lunch. . . . The thing that got me most about what he thought [about] the *Gazette* was that so many people got hurt from it, officially shaken by the fact that there was going to be no *Arkansas Gazette*. More so than you would think anywhere else. I can remember that when people I know found out there wasn't going to be a—like Ray Jouett said, “I could have sat down and cried.”

RR: Oh, yes.

LR: He said, “Ever since I was a small boy, that was the law. The *Arkansas Gazette* was the law.”

RR: Absolutely.

LR: Getting back to Jimmy Darke, with the *Providence Journal*. Jimmy Darke was

circulation director. The general manager's name was Watkins, of the *Providence Journal*.

RR: I think he may now be the president of the company.

LR: In the beginning, the son of one of the owners was running the paper and not too well. We were at the Waldorf Astoria, at an ANPA meeting. Jimmy Darke, the circulation director, [was there?] with his boss, who was general manager of the *Providence Journal*. He wanted me to have dinner with him, and I said, "Fine, fine, we'll have dinner." We went down someplace in town there, at Barkley or someplace. We had a nice dinner. Jimmy and his publisher were kind of like Jim Williamson and I. You'd tell me something and [I'd say], "We did that, and it never worked." They got into something, got into this arguing. They were just arguing. "No, you don't understand circulation. As a news man, you're great, but you just don't understand circulation." They were getting like that, and we had finished supper. They get up arguing and start leaving the restaurant. I get up to leave and the waiter taps me, "Somebody ought to take care of this bill." [Laughter] This was seventy bucks. This was back when you could eat for seventy bucks. I think all the cash I had on me was seventy-eight dollars. I gave him seventy dollars and said, "Buddy, eight is all I can leave you because that's the end of it." [Laughs] He said, "You can't do any more than that?" The next morning, bright and early, I get a telephone call. To make a long story short, Jimmy's boss called Jimmy that next morning and told him, "Put that bill on administration. Don't put that on circulation. That's not a circulation bill. I want

that to be one of mine.” Jimmy said, “You didn’t get the bill?” He said, “No, didn’t you?” He said, “No. God, no.” [Laughter] Jimmy called me and said, “You got that bill, didn’t you?” I said, “You didn’t think it was free, did you?” He said, “I’m going to send you a check.” I said, “The hell you are, Jim. I’m going to hold that over your head the rest of your damn life.” [Laughter] Jimmy ended up as president of the ICMA, which is the International Circulation Managers Association. I was ICMA president right behind him. When he was running for the presidency, he wanted me to give testimony, which I did. I told them what a great circulation director he was and what a fine newspaper the *Providence Journal* was. But I said, “Don’t go to supper with him.” [Laughter]

RR: You got even.

LR: Yes, I got even. “Don’t eat supper with him.”

RR: Talk to me about Hugh Patterson.

LR: He’s one of my favorite people.

RR: Why?

LR: Because he was the kind of publisher who would let you run the circulation department the way you thought best. Sometimes, I came kind of nose to nose with Jim Williamson, who was, in effect, on a higher echelon than I was. But Hugh always backed me up because of that theory. One of the reasons why I came down here was that Jim knew they needed a new circulation director. Jim was part of my coming here, but Hugh had already talked to me about coming here when I was in Shreveport. I got along great at the *Gazette*. I didn’t have any

trouble with people. One trouble I had down there, when I first got there, was the old auditor, before Colley . . .

RR: Before Claude Colley? I don't guess I knew him.

LR: When I got there, the first thing I did was to go down to the auditing department, and get the department books, see how much I'm paying who, what kind of expenses it cost to run the department. This auditor had all this stuff, and I kind of picked it all up and started back upstairs. He said, "Hey, you! You can't go out of here with those records." I said, "Well, I sure can't stand right here all day and read them." He said, "You're not allowed to take them." I said, "My understanding from Mr. Patterson was that I could get whatever I needed." He said, "I'll just call Mr. Patterson." He called Mr. Patterson and said, "He wants to take our records and stuff up." Hugh said, "Is it on the circulation department?" He said, "Well, yes." He said, "Well, he runs it. He ought to know. Let him alone." [Laughs] I never had a bit of trouble after that.

RR: That tells you a lot about Hugh Patterson.

LR: That's exactly right. He was great, always stood behind you.

RR: That was the kind of guy he was, just in his ordinary day-to-day doings?

LR: Always on the bright side. I never saw Hugh down. I'm sure he was from time to time. He didn't transfer it, which is a good idea because when you have people working for you, you don't need to do that because it's contagious. Hugh is still a very good friend. We get together. Hugh, Jim and I have lunch together several times a week.

RR: Your wife, again, you called Ginny?

LR: With a 'G'.

RR: With a 'G'.

LR: G-I-N-N-Y. Her name is Virginia.

RR: This is probably a good time to ask you for the names of your children.

LR: The oldest one is Lynne, L-Y-N-N-E. Ginny, how old is Lynne? Ginny? I should know. She was born in 1942.

RR: Where's she at?

LR: Syracuse, New York.

RR: She's the one in Syracuse.

LR: Then there's Steven, who was born in 1944.

RR: Steven. S-T-E-P-H or 'V'?

LR: 'V.' V-E-N.

RR: Not Stephens, with an 'S' on the end.

LR: Just plain Steven. He was born two years later than that, whenever that would come out to. Then, Julie, who lives in Florida.

RR: Sarasota, I believe.

LR: Sarasota. She was eleven years, so she was born in 1957, I think.

RR: Steven is here?

LR: Yes. I have two granddaughters, two grandsons and a great-grandson. The nicest thing ever said to me was said here last Christmas. They brought my great grandson, Gus, here, and I told Shannon, his mother, "The only thing that I don't

like about Gus is that he made me a great-grandfather.” Ryan, who is Steve’s son, said, “Grandpa, you were a great grandfather long before Gus” [Laughs]. I got that for Christmas.

RR: How many grandchildren do you have altogether?

LR: Let’s see, Lynne has two. Steven has two and Julie has one.

RR: And great-grandchildren?

LR: One.

RR: What does Steven do here in Little Rock?

LR: He has his own company. He was at the foundation for the Arkansas Children’s Hospital. Then he went on to Mount St. Mary’s.

RR: Go way back to the beginning of this and tell me the names of your parents.

LR: My dad was Luke, L-U-K-E, Reed.

RR: Your mother?

LR: Alma App Reed.

RR: A-L-M-A?

LR: A-L-M-A, A-P-P Reed, R-E-E-D.

RR: Alma App Reed?

LR: Yes.

RR: They were Indiana folks?

LR: Yes. I’m going to ask you. Do your folks go back to Ohio?

RR: We’re not even sure how they got to Arkansas.

LR: We are Hoosiers. The road running from Fort Wayne to Mansfield, Ohio, is

called the Reed Road. Half way there on a big corner is a big old farm, my father's farm. He said all the Reeds come from the eastern part of Ohio, on the Indiana side!

RR: My Reeds are Scotch-Irish Protestants.

LR: Then your name should be spelled R-E-I-D, if you're Scottish. You've got Irish in there somewhere.

RR: But yours are Catholic-Irish. In Ireland, I mean, they were Catholic. Probably came from different parts of the island.

LR: I don't know if I got this—I think I got it from my brother, Paul—if it's spelled R-E-E-D, it's Irish. If it's spelled R-E-I-D, it's Scotch. If it's spelled R-E-A-D-E, it's English.

RR: I think that's right.

LR: They all come—back before the British, the clan, the Reed clan, we just figured the Scots couldn't spell too well. [Laughter]

RR: That's probably right. Leon, I can't think of anything else that I need to ask you about, but what have I forgotten? What comes to mind that needs to be on here before we shut this off?

LR: The *Arkansas Gazette* was one of the best newspapers in the country as far as I am concerned. I never will forget a guy by the name of Mike Tynan, who worked for the *Miami Herald*. Mike took the job as business manager, or something, for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. When he was leaving the *Miami Herald*—Chapman?

RR: Yes, Alva Chapman.

LR: Yes. Alva Chapman had said that, well, at least he could make some recommendation for a replacement. He said—this is Mike’s story—he said, “Well, I’ve got three names for you. One is Virgil Facio, who is circulation director of the Wilmington, Delaware, newspaper. The other one is Ray Lancaster from someplace in Pennsylvania. The third one is Leon Reed from the *Arkansas Gazette*.” These first two companies were big companies. Mr. Chapman said—now this is Mike’s story—Mr. Chapman said, “From Arkansas, we ought to get that Reed guy. He shouldn’t be too expensive.” He said, “Mr. Chapman, he’s the reason why I’m leaving. He’s making more money there now than I am at the *Miami Herald*. [Laughter]

RR: That’s a good story.

LR: That’s his story.

RR: We’ve talked a little bit about the pride that everybody had in the *Gazette*, in working there. What do you think it was that made that paper special?

LR: One thing that made it special, I think, is the fact that it was as old as it was. You know, the oldest newspaper was not one of these things that dropped over every night. The second thing was that when you came here and talked to the people [about what] made the *Gazette* what it was—I’m talking about the subscribers—people like Dr. Jewett and everybody in this damn neighborhood that would say, “Leon, tell me it’s not true. They’re not going to take away the *Gazette*.” I think the quality of the paper. The third thing is, I think, the pride in that quality, by the people: the reporters, the advertising people, the circulation

people, the truckers. Everybody that worked for them knew that they were working for something special, and I think it just rubbed off because it was something special.

RR: You mention the subscribers. That essentially is an important element that the people who read that paper had such a special feeling for it.

LR: If you don't think so, you get down there to the circulation department at six o'clock in the morning and the paper isn't there. I mean it. Of course, we had the service department at the *Gazette*. We were one of the first newspapers in the country to use radio-controlled equipment in the circulation department for all our trucks. I went out to Phoenix—what is the little town outside of Phoenix? Littleton, or—anyhow, where the Motorola Company is. I went out there because I got a letter from them. They were going to try to get people interested in the use of radio for newspapers and were aware of the tremendous quality of the *Arkansas Gazette*. It's the Motorola Company. I went out there, and they showed me what they could do for us. Put these radios in the map room, in trucks and so on—remember we're talking in the early 1950s when radio was in its prime. Back to what people thought of the *Gazette*. These people, the subscribers, the producers, everybody that I ever came in contact with, the one thing there was absolutely no question about is quality, the quality of the product. I stand it up against anybody in the country, any newspaper, and I know a lot of them, been with a lot of them. The quality probably, in all the years, is probably more Mr. Heiskell than anything else. You knew, Roy, and you were there. He expected

nothing out of you except the best. You're sure that's what it is. I think that everybody there felt that way.

RR: I think Hugh Patterson had a lot to do with it.

LR: Oh, yes.

RR: What he did with the business end of that paper, that's not very much appreciated beyond the borders of the paper.

LR: But everybody there knew.

RR: For bringing in you and Jim Williamson, and not just that, but reorganizing the accounting system. He brought it into the modern era.

LR: Yes, and then when Hugh came there, and then later Williamson, everybody became one thousand percent receptive to the idea of being the best they can be. The thing about Hugh, he was just great to work for, and I can't ever remember him being mad. I remember him being concerned. He'd get concerned, deeply concerned, but I never saw him lose his temper, never said anything bad. He made it one great place to work.

[End of Interview]