Gazette Project

Interview with

Roy Reed,
Hogeye, Arkansas,
5 May 2000

Interviewer: Harri Baker

Harri Baker: My name is Harri Baker. It is May 5th, in the year 2000. We are at Roy's place in Hogeye. Roy, at the end of this last time, we ended with the *Gazette* years of l956 to 1964. You were talking about a whole bunch of people that made the *Gazette* the *Gazette*. So shall we continue along that line?

Roy Reed: That's fine.

HB: How about --- so that we don't mislead future scholars --- at the end of the last session, you just sat down and very quickly gave a list of names of people that you wanted to talk about. I have that list in front of me here, so why don't we just start and if you want to skip around a little, that's okay. The first one that popped into your mind was Hugh Patterson.

RR: Okay, I guess that I ought to say, since this has been on my mind a lot lately, this is the reason that I want to talk about particular people at the *Gazette*. I am sort of leading a project, an oral history project. It has to do with the *Arkansas Gazette*. It came to me very quickly, when I started that project, that what made the *Gazette* the paper that it was was the people that worked there. It ought to be obvious enough, but it might be easily overlooked. It would not have been the

same newspaper if it had not had a staff of a very particular kind of people. I talked some about J. N. Heiskell, a longtime editor. One of the people who made the *Gazette* special was Hugh Patterson.

HB: Before you do that, what you just said prompted me with a question in my own mind. When there came to be a vacancy on the news side, or you were expanding the news side in people, did the *Gazette* have a lot of people to choose from?

RR: Yes, from my very first dealings with the *Gazette*, they always had a waiting list of people who wanted to work there. Traditionally, there was a kind of pipeline from the afternoon paper, the *Arkansas Democrat*, to the *Gazette*. The *Democrat* was a smaller paper and paid quite a bit less to their reporters and editors. There was always a steady stream of reporters who wanted to work at the *Gazette*. It was after the 1957 school crisis when the paper became nationally known among newspaper folks. Bob Douglas once told me that after he became managing editor --- this was in the 1970s --- he always had a list of applications that ran, and I can't remember the figure, it was into the hundreds. That meant that the paper with the reputation of the *Gazette* could choose and hire the very best people.

HB: Who did the hiring for the news people?

RR: The managing editor traditionally did the hiring. The man who hired me was A. R. Nelson. I think I spoke about him before. He was the managing editor as long as I was there. Later on it was Bob Douglas. Harry Ashmore was the executive editor and was over A. R. Nelson. I am sure that Nelson never hired anybody without making sure that it was all right with Ashmore. It was just a matter of

courtesy to run it by him. I am sure also that he would run the names past Bill Shelton, the city editor, because in most cases the newsroom people worked under Bill Shelton. Shelton would want to have a say in the hiring. In fact, he had a very strong voice in hiring. That was the way it was done.

HB: Sports side hired independently?

RR: Yes, that was left up to Orville Henry, the long time sports editor. I am sure that there was a formality of making sure it was all right with the managing editor.

HB: You mentioned earlier that a lot of the success was due to a certain type of reporters. Can you describe generally those characteristics? What kind of person were they looking for? It may be easier to just do it in connection with individuals.

RR: I think there was a type. One thing that all of the reporters had in common was a kind of old fashioned commitment to newspapers. By that, I mean something fairly specific. At the University of Missouri, I was taught --- I was required to take a course called "The History and Principles of Journalism," taught by the great Frank Luther Mott. Old Professor Mott beat this into us, that first of all you have got to get it right. Accuracy was not just something that was tossed out as an ideal. You were given to understand that it was an absolute requirement. It was all bound up with fairness, that a newspaper's job was very much involved in being fair to the people who are written about. We were also taught some history of journalism. It gave us a little deeper appreciation of why these things were true. How the newspapers hadn't always been that way. Back in the beginning,

they were anything but fair. They were terribly partisan and inaccurate and scandalous. It took a long time to get past that. The people at the *Gazette*, that was the common thread that bound us all together. This was a serious undertaking. You had to believe in the craft because you were not going to be paid to put your time in this world. That was a common understanding also among newspaper men everywhere back in those days. You had to do it for the love of it. The *Gazette* was blessed with people who honored the craft and respected it and loved it. Bob Douglas and I have talked many times about these years. He had worked there from the late 1940s or early 1950s. He stayed until 1981. I worked there from 1956 to 1964. I have heard Bob say that these were probably the golden years of the *Gazette*. It had some glorious times in the earlier periods under Mr. Heiskell, but maybe not quite in the same way. We all know what happened at the end of the *Gazette* when the big impersonal chain took it over. They lost some of the feel for it. I think there was a type of person. The newsroom was a zoo of characters. An absolute zoo! I might have mentioned Deacon Parker the other day. I don't remember if I did or not. I never knew his first name, and I don't know of anybody that ever heard his first and real name. It was just "Deacon." Deacon Parker, when he first showed up at the *Gazette* --- I guess that I had been there two or three years --- he was this long, spindly guy, kind of ghostly looking in the face, dark hair. He walked with great deliberation, the same way that some people talk. We learned pretty quickly why that was. Deacon was drunk most of the time. He had to be careful where he stepped. One

of the rules of working at the *Gazette* was that you did not drink on the job. After a day's work was done, it was another matter. A lot of them drank to excess after work. Deacon could not function sober, so he brought a bottle to work with him. The rules being what they were, he could not keep it at his desk, which would have been the straightforward thing to do. He felt he should make some effort to keep it out of sight, so he would hide it in his little locker. That wouldn't do, so he took to hiding it in the water closet in the men's room. Just a pint of whiskey would get him through the day. Then, finally, there would come a day when Deacon would not show up and wouldn't show up the next day or the next. Nelson would learn that he had been off and was too drunk to come to work. Nelson would have to fire him. I don't know how many times this happened. Deacon would leave and get fired, and then Nelson would run short on copy editors. Of course, they are hard to find on a newspaper. Not many people wanted to do that. Nelson would get stuck for a good copy editor, and somehow he would get word to Deacon, wherever he was, and hire him back. He would stay another six months to a year, and then Nelson would have to fire him again. Unfortunately, I have asked several people about him, and no one seems to know what finally became of Deacon. He would go from one paper to another and work awhile much the same way that itinerant printers did in the old days. Remember the old typographic union rule: You didn't have to live in the town to work at the newspaper. You could just go in and flash a union card, and they would put you to work. He was sort of a newsroom variation of that.

HB: I interrupted --- I will get you back to where you were. You were talking about Hugh Patterson.

RR: It was the people who made the place special. Hugh was not one of the newsroom characters; he wasn't even in the newsroom. Hugh was a proper kind of man, a gentleman, if you will. Much like his father-in-law, J. N. Heiskell, in his bearing and attitudes.

HB: When he came to the paper, he was working on the business side, wasn't he?

RR: He was the publisher and had been for some time. He worked his way up and was hired by the paper because he was Mr. Heiskell's son-in-law. It was not quite that simple, I have since learned. Mr. Heiskell wanted him because he knew Hugh had a background in printing. It was several years of background. He had been a very successful salesman. He knew the printing business from top to bottom. When he married J. N. Heiskell's daughter, Louise, Mr. Heiskell knew this and began to talk with him about coming to work at the *Gazette*. Hugh did with the understanding that he would be given a chance to work into a position of authority. It was several years. It was not an automatic thing. He then became publisher of the paper. I still think of Hugh Patterson as one of the two or three best newspaper publishers that I have ever known anything about. I was lucky enough to work for two papers with good publishers, the *Gazette* and *The New York Times*. When I say old fashioned publishers, I mean publishers who kept hands off the newsroom. They hired an editor and left it to the editor to decide what went into the paper. The understanding, then, is that if the publisher gets

unhappy enough with what is appearing in his newspaper, he can fire the editor and hire somebody else. You don't do that lightly. Smart publishers understand that. You give an editor a lot of leeway before you run him off. Hugh was one of the smart ones. He would almost never interfere with the news coverage. Now and then on some little matter and maybe not so little. I have heard Bob Douglas talk about two or three times when he thought Hugh stepped over the line. Compared to other publishers that I have known about, that amounts to a sterling record.

HB: Do you know what kinds of things that might involve?

RR: Sometimes it would be as piddling as a friend who didn't want his name in the paper over some little piddling something or other, to a more serious matter like an investigative series. This is something that happened to me. An investigative series that touched on very delicate subject matter that could easily end up causing a libel suit or, equally serious, damaging people. Finally, he would say, "I don't think we ought to do this." That would pretty well settle it and leave me unhappy.

HB: That was very rare?

RR: Very rare, very rare. By contrast, let me tell you about a publisher one of my students went to work for in Ohio, at a newspaper in Ohio, Toledo, Ohio, the *Toledo Blade*. This student of mine, a brilliant young reporter, stayed only a year or two because he couldn't bear the publisher's constant interference in the newsroom. He would actually order editors and reporters to write damaging

stories about enemies of his, then demand that they be published. He was constantly meddling in city politics through the newspaper. He would use the newspaper as an attack organ to get back at enemies. That is an extreme case. In the middle, between Hugh Patterson, on the good end, and that guy, on the bad end, you find lots of mediocre publishers who say, "Well, you know, we need to liven up this paper. It is too serious. We need more color pictures. We need more graphics. We need more light-hearted feature stories on the front page." Hugh was a good publisher, and it never showed more than during the school crisis of 1957, when the *Gazette* lost thousands of subscribers and a lot of advertising money. It was in some serious danger financially. It was finally Mr. Heiskell's decision to keep covering the news. Ashmore would write editorials that caused this loss or set back. Hugh Patterson's role in this was important. Quietly and behind the scenes, day after day, he stuck with Ashmore. He let Ashmore know "management is behind you and you are doing a good job. You go on and keep doing what needs to be done." As it happened, Ashmore's liberal views on the race question couldn't exactly coincide with Hugh's all liberal views. It was kind of an odd thing about a publisher. He is a man who is a liberal Democrat. You don't find many of those among newspaper publishers. One anecdote to show what a talented man he was, I had been in the paper for several years, long enough to start feeling our oats. I thought I had earned some seniority. Bob Douglas, who was not the managing editor but the news editor --- who ran the copy desk --- Bob Douglas and I got to talking one day about the way

something was going at the paper. I no longer have any idea what it was, except that we felt that Hugh Patterson needed to make a change of some kind. It had something to do with how the newsroom was being handled or maybe --- I don't know what it might have been, something involving his decision making and the newsroom --- Bob and I took it upon ourselves to barge into Hugh Patterson's office one day and just more or less demand he do right and correct whatever it was that he was doing. Instead of throwing us both out of the office as he might easily have done or even fired us for being presumptuous and uppity, he very quietly sat there and listened patiently, good humoredly, heard us out and said, "Well, boys, I will look into that." I have always been grateful to him for not doing what he might well have done. [Laughter]

HB: It sounds like everybody in the newsroom had a pretty clear idea what Hugh Patterson was and was not feeling.

RR: That's right. In those days, the newsroom, we talked about a wall between the business side and the news side. We interpreted that pretty literally, maybe more at the *Gazette* than at other newspapers. In fact, I have heard Bob Douglas say he thought the editor had the right and obligation to throw the publisher out of the newsroom if he came in there meddling. That was the attitude that we all had. We had contempt for the idea that you might favor an advertiser in the news columns or give special feelings for some business in town just because they were ---- That wall had broken down in a lot of papers in the past few years. There was a case, the *Los Angeles Times*, where the publisher quite literally set out to break

it down. He got into a lot of trouble and is now gone.

HB: That was just very recently.

RR: Yes. Hugh was an old fashioned publisher who believed in the newspaper, in the old fashioned way it worked.

HB: Did he change in his view or relationship with others after Mr. Heiskell left?

RR: I can't say. I was gone from the place. Mr. Heiskell died in 1972. I left at the end of 1964, so I don't know about that. I don't have firsthand knowledge.

HB: Did Hugh ever go out on social occasions with you?

RR: No, Hugh ran with a loftier social set than anybody in the newsroom. He belonged to the country club, as did Harry Ashmore. None of us did, or could afford to even if we would have wanted to. I never saw the inside of his house while I was working there. I guess you could say there were class divisions. Not only honored, but I guess you could say, treasured. Much the same way that an English working man is proud of not being an aristocrat. [Laughter]

HB: Nice analogy there. That is pretty much the class divisions in Little Rock. The next thing that popped into your mind in your list of things to talk about was Bill Lewis. You mentioned Bill in passing in your last interview session.

RR: Bill Lewis went to work for the *Gazette*, I believe the same month, maybe the same day --- I know the same month --- that I did in l956. He was already an experienced reporter. I had less than a year of experience at the job with the *Joplin Globe* when I went to work. Bill had been working for some time as a wire service reporter for the old United Press. He was a Mississippian, and I am

not sure which bureau he was working with. It might have been at Jackson, Mississippi. He had experience, and he knew how to get a story, and he knew how to write it. In fact, he went to work as a general assignment reporter. As far as I know, he remained a general assignment reporter until he retired from the *Gazette*, many, many, years later. You used to hear stories from oldtimers about the old rewrite men at larger papers. They were all men in those days. There is the famous poster with the old reporter, cigarette dangling out of his mouth, with his hat pushed back, and the phone is stuck in his mouth, and he is saying into the phone, "Get me rewrite, sweetheart." This would have been the old police reporter or some leg man, calling in to one of these wordsmiths. Bill Lewis was that kind of guy. He could take a story on the phone, either from Joe Wirges, the old police reporter, or somebody that was out in the field who couldn't get back to write it. I can still see him. This is before we had head sets on telephones, so you had to take the receiver and cradle it between your jaw and your shoulder. I can still see Bill sitting there. And he wore glasses. His hair, even then, was thinning, and he had the telephone cradled there, making notes on his typewriter as he listened. Asking questions, always the right questions. He knew exactly how to get to the heart of the story. Then minutes after he had hung up, that story would be finished and on Shelton's desk. Shelton has been quoted as saying that he did not have to make any changes in Lewis's copy. He self-edited and most often very fast, which, you know, is a valuable thing to have in the newsroom. Nearly every day, especially in times of breaking news, disaster stories

somewhere, what you really want is a Bill Lewis who can get a story and get it right and get it fast. He always did. Bill and I were neighbors for a number of years in Little Rock. We knew each other quite well. He called me "Old Bean." That was an affectionate title that he had for his friends, "Old Bean." He called me in the newsroom one day and said, "Listen, Old Bean, would you like to have some records, music records?" Bill had gotten himself on the list with some of these record companies as a music reviewer. We didn't have a music reviewer, so he saw an opportunity and he grabbed it. He was getting records by the dozens. He would write reviews. Far more records than he could ever review. He started giving them away to friends. I ended up with, and still have, a couple dozen records that Bill Lewis gave me in the l950s. I heard him say one time that in the middle room of his house, where he stored his records, the records got so heavy that he had to have a carpenter to build some supports under the floor. They were about to crash through the floor. He also cared a lot about good food and drink. He knew a lot about foods and was a good cook. He and his wife, Mary Sue, would entertain. Chances are, it was Bill that did most of the cooking. He really enjoyed the kitchen. He had wonderful taste.

HB: Later in his career, maybe after you left the *Gazette*, he was also in book reviews. He did book reviews with a book review editor.

RR: I understand that is right. I was gone by then. Concert reviews, he did the first serious reviewing of local music groups, like the symphony orchestra. I think I have heard him say that he got under their skin from time to time with his

reviews. That is unavoidable, I guess, if you are going to do a serious job of reviewing.

HB Was he always in the newsroom . . . or out on assignments, too?

RR: He went out on assignments from time to time, but ninety percent of his work was on the telephone.

HB: What kind of deadlines did you have?

RR: We had four deadlines and four editions. The first edition deadline was 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. The reason I am vague about that first deadline is because I think it was vague in fact. I suspect the editor did it that way, so you could use that to your advantage for some slow poke, like Roy Reed. I was one of the ones that wrote long and slow. I think the first deadline was probably 7:00 or 7:30 if you had to have it. Second deadline was around 10:00. The first edition went to the far corners of the state, and it was full of typos. It was a standing joke that the *Arkansas Gazette* could get out the first edition without a staff. It would come out automatically every morning whether anybody was there or not, full of typos. The second edition was cleaned up. It went out beyond Little Rock, but in Central Arkansas, as I recall. The third edition was the home delivery edition. The fourth edition, for which the deadline was something like 2:00 a.m. for street sales at the coin boxes downtown —only the gravest break in news could get into the fourth edition. Once you make up the front page, it is a horrendous job to remake it, to make a new layout.

HB: The first edition deadline was about 6:30 or 7:00, the fourth and final edition was

about 2:00 a.m., with a couple of other deadlines in between.

RR: About 10:00 for the second and about midnight for the third. Yes. Then that last one [was] just several hundred papers together.

HB: Were most of the reporters at work to meet that first deadline? Did you have a sizeable number on into the late night and early morning?

RR: No, we were all encouraged to get our copy in for the first edition. That was not always possible because a certain percentage of the stories involved night meetings and night events, along with late breaking news from the police station. It seems to me that my hours, most of the time that I worked there, were roughly --- At some point I went to work at noon and left about 9:00 p.m. After I got put on the Capitol beat, there was no point staying that late. I would go to work about 10:00 and get my copy in by 6 or 7 and go home.

HB: The next name on the list here is Bill Whitworth.

RR: I just have one more thing with Bill Lewis that I just remembered. In interest of fairness, a lot of old *Gazette* people will remember that Bill was a white Mississippian. He was a self-proclaimed segregationist when he came to work at the *Gazette*. A year or a year and a half after I went to work there, we had the Central High crisis. It tested all of us, not just as newspaper people, but as people. It was well known to these people that Bill was [one of] just a handful in the newsroom who held to that view. The rest of us were just as openly integrationists. This did not cause much resentment or hard feelings. I remember hearing Bill complain to a fellow about what they were doing out at Central High.

It was personally offensive to him that integration was being forced. In spite of that, I never knew of a single instance where that got in the way of his stories and reporting. He helped to cover Central High.—not very much from the scene. That was covered by other reporters. --- but a lot of important reporting by telephone. His stories were right down the middle and strictly objective. You would never have guessed that he had any personal feelings on one side or the other. I think that was true. The *Gazette* got a really bum rap from some quarters from segregationists that felt we were liberal and slanting the news and that Harry Ashmore took his orders from the Communist Party and went into the newsroom and ordered stories to be written to conform to the party line. That never happened. We all made a serious attempt to be objective. I think for the most part we were. None more so than Bill Lewis. Later on, Bill changed his mind on the race issue. I have heard him tell that story himself to illustrate the absurdity of the charge that the *Gazette* was slanting news. That charge came from, among others, Governor Orval Faubus.

HB: Next on the list is Bill Whitworth.

RR: Bill Whitworth was a young guy from the University of Oklahoma, who I think possibly worked a while for the *Democrat*. I'm not sure about that, but I think he did. He then came to the *Gazette* just as a young fellow. From the earliest of days it was clear that he had a gift for writing. He could make phrases. He also loved music and had a band. He was a Little Rock boy. He had a band with some of his friends from Little Rock. I believe he played the trumpet, if I am not

mistaken. He liked jazz. He played in public, not just for his own entertainment. They actually had some concerts around. Bill stayed there for two, three, or four years. He applied for a job at the *New York Herald Tribune* and got it. He moved to New York, which turned out to be a really good fit. He was a lover of music and had sophisticated tastes. He loved New York. I remember visiting Bill once in New York before I went to work for the *Times*. He sounded a little homesick. We got to talking about food, and he said, "You know, if you are from the South, you have to have certain kinds of foods. Are you up for Harlem?" So he took me up to Harlem that night to a restaurant that he had discovered. The name of the restaurant, if I remember this right, was "Big Wilt's Small Paradise." The origin of that name, I have no idea. Bill had been going up there ever since he had come to New York to get his nourishment. Like an old Johnny Cash song, turnip greens, black-eyed peas, cornbread. He took me up there to eat. He was a perfect fit for New York. I think it was before the *Herald Tribune* went out of business, he ended up at the *New Yorker* as a staff writer first and then as an editor. While he was on the staff as a writer there, he wrote one of the stories that is still used in journalism classes to demonstrate how to write a feature story. It was about the King of the World. Do you remember Bishop Tomlinson? More about him in a minute. Bishop Homer A. Tomlinson, who had founded his own church. As part of his shtick, as they say in New York, he proclaimed himself as king of the world. Even though he was a white man, he had this church and his headquarters up in Harlem. Bill found out about it one day. He got a hold of a little weekly

newspaper that the bishop put out, and Bill went up and interviewed him. He wrote this wonderful story for the *New Yorker* about the King of the World, Bishop Tomlinson. He became an editor and stopped writing. He edited copy for the *New Yorker*. At one point when William Shawn was getting up in years, and there was a lot of speculation at the time, three or four names cropped up with some regularity as probable successors to Mr. Shawn. Bill Whitworth was one of them. But before Mr. Shawn did in fact retire, Bill got a chance to be editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* in Boston. He ended up there and stayed there as editor for about twenty years, in fact, until just a few months ago, when they had an unfortunate change in editors. The publisher replaced Bill with a guy named Michael Kelley, a former *New York Times* reporter who has since fallen into the conservative camp. I dread to see what he is going to do with the magazine. Bill was brilliant at it. He had these high standards and kept it where it had been for one hundred and fifty years.

HB: The next name on the list, Pat Crow.

RR: Pat Crow, he and Whitworth were good friends in Little Rock. They both started at the *Democrat*. A big ol' red-headed boy. I first ran into Pat when I was assigned to go up to Carlisle, to the little town of Carlisle, to cover a vote fraud trial. The *Democrat* sent Pat Crow, and he and I got acquainted up there. I liked him a lot. He was a young bachelor. Before very many months passed, he ended up at the *Gazette* as a copy editor. I have heard Bob Douglas say that he was one of the best copy editors that he ever had. Pat was one of the gay young bachelors

in Little Rock. He lived with a bunch of young reporters and editors in an old house. The parties they would give became legendary at that time.

HB: We probably ought to make it clear in this, that you are using the term "gay young bachelor" as it would be used in the 1950s and not now.

RR: That's right. He stayed at the *Gazette* for a few years and then joined Whitworth at the *Herald Tribune*. Am I getting that right? No, that is not right. He went to *The New York Times* as a copy editor and stayed there for some years. I remember hearing him say one time that he thought --- He had to edit foreign copy --- David Halberstam, the great reporter at that time, was covering Vietnam for the *Times*. That was where he really made a name for himself as a great reporter. Crow had to edit Halberstam's copy and used to complain about his sloppy copy, [about] having to rewrite Halberstam's stories. I am sure Halberstam would have something equally unkind to say about Crow as his editor. He stayed at the *Times* for a while and then went over to the *New Yorker* where Whitworth was, not as a writer, but as an editor from the start. I think he is still there, at least on a part-time basis. He is at retirement age now, as all of us are. He was another one whose name was on that short list of possible successors to William Shawn. Neither one of them actually did succeed Shawn. They got somebody else to do that. Pat got married after being a bachelor for a long time. He married a woman named Elizabeth Crow, who became a very well known magazine editor, [with] many years as editor of *Parenting* magazine. She is now at another popular magazine. I can't remember which one. They have some kids.

Among the few people that I knew who lived in Manhattan, that is, journalists who could afford an apartment in the city. It was a rather nice one. Crow, yes, I am sure that this was Crow. I heard this story from somebody else.

HB: Just a moment before you tell the story. I am afraid that I am going to have to interrupt it to change tapes. So let's just stop now.

[End of Tape 3, Side 2]

HB: This is a continuation of an interview of May 5. The next one on the list is Bob Douglas, who you have already referred to a number of times.

RR: Bob Douglas is one of my all-time favorite human beings and one of my favorite newspaper men. He was already at work when I went to work there. He had been for some years. In fact, there was a strike at the paper in which he was one of the main leaders. He had to leave the paper because of that, because he was on the losing side. They were trying to establish a chapter of the American Newspaper Guild and couldn't make it. Bob had to leave. He left on good terms, and in a year or two he was back working at the paper. He started out as a reporter. By the time that I had gotten there, he had long since gone over to the copy desk.

HB: Can I back up a moment? Did he have to leave in the sense that he felt an ethical obligation to, or that the management said, "You tried to organize a union so get out."

RR: No, I don't think it was anything like that. In fact, he was friendly with Harry Ashmore, the editor, and Hugh Patterson. I think he felt an obligation to be one of the leaders of the strike. He did not feel comfortable. He was not the only one

that left. A few others left. As far as I know, he was the only one that returned.

HB: I knew that it was before your time, but I was assuming that the other interviews that you are doing on the *Gazette* Project would cover that episode.

RR: Yes.

HB: It needs to be. It is not all that well known.

RR: Douglas, by the time that I got there, was the telegraph editor. That was in the days when we still had telegraph editors. I guess papers still do in some form. In those days it was a very noticeable job because the telegraph editor was visible to everybody in the news room. The motions he made --- He stood at a desk in the back and had to go back and forth between this stand-up desk and the teletype machines, where the news came over the wire from the Associated Press and the United Press. In those days they were about the only two with world news services. These old teletype machines --- clackety-clack, clackety-clack, all day long, just a steady drum --- poured out these reams, miles, of copy paper. It would spit them out the back end. Douglas would go over every few minutes and tear off great sheets of paper and bring them back to the stand-up desk. He would stand there with a ruler, a straight edge of some kind. He would tear the stories in two to make a separate piece of paper for each story.

HB: Younger folks may not realize that those teletype machines had continuous rolls of paper. They didn't come out as sheet paper.

RR: That's right, they were continuous. They were not perforated the way computer paper is nowadays. It was just one solid sheet. We commonly used newsprint for

our notepaper. Somebody would go down to the bowels of the paper periodically and chop up a bunch of paper and turn it into copy paper. That was what we would use in our typewriters. Anyway, Bob would tear these stories off with a great flourish. Every time he would tear one, there would be this great ripping noise. All of this activity kind of obscured the fact that he had one of the two most valuable jobs at the paper --- this meaning that it was his job to decide what went into the next day's paper from outside of Arkansas. Inside of Arkansas, that was Bill Shelton's baby. Beyond the border of Arkansas, all the news was on the wire. Enormous amounts of — a percentage of every day's paper was news, which meant that tens of thousands of words a day would come in on the wire. This one editor had to decide which few thousands or maybe just several hundred words would go into the paper. Ninety or ninety-five percent of it would be thrown away never to see the light of day in our newspaper. Our newspaper was one of the better newspapers in running national and international news. For that job, you have to know what is going on in the world. You have to have good news judgment. In those days good news judgment meant deciding on what the readers of the *Arkansas Gazette* needed to know about events beyond our borders. What do they need to know, not what would tickle their funny bone. Not what is the sexiest story, the most scandalous thing, which has become the fashion in some papers. Douglas had excellent news judgment. He held that job for a while after I came there. He then became news editor, and he ran the copy desk as editor. Except for the sports desk that sat off by itself, we had a single copy desk

to handle local, state, national, international news. Around that desk is a horseshoe-shaped desk. He was the slot man, sitting in the middle of the horseshoe. Around that desk would be, at any one time, the six to ten copy editors. They would edit the copy for style. The *Gazette* had its own style. We did not follow the AP style. [They] corrected any mistakes that they found, shortened it for space because stories were inevitably too long, and then assigned a headline for each story. Bob was in charge of parceling out the stories around the desk to various copy editors.

HB: Who did the make-up, lay out? Who decided what the lead story is, what the lead was on the first page of the second section?

RR: The managing editor had the final say in making up page one and saying what went where. The actual lay out of the page, as I recollect, was left up to the news editor, which was Douglas at that time. We had a tried-and-true page make-up. It was, by today's standards, unreadable. An eighteen-year-old kid today, trying to read an old *Arkansas Gazette* of 1950, would throw it in the trash and would not even look at it. First of all, it did not have any color. The pictures were all black and white and not many pictures on page one. The largest headline that you would normally find on page one would be three columns wide on the lead story. In was always in the upper right hand corner of the paper. There would be one or two other stories with two-column heads scattered around the paper, maybe three. There were a bunch of one-column heads. By today's standards, it was considered pretty gray, but people read it.

HB: It looked just like *The New York Times*.

RR: Very much like *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. One of my favorite people, probably because of his sense of humor --- he was one of the people in the newsroom that you could count on for a laugh --- was [Charles] Buddy Portis. He was by this time writing the "Our Town" column. It was a daily column and an impossible job. It was supposed to be humorous. Buddy Portis got some kind of a joke from Douglas one day and mentioned Douglas but not by name as the source of it. It simply said that he had heard it from the funniest man in Arkansas. Everybody in the newsroom applauded him and said, "That is exactly right." His humor kind of off-handed, seemingly with lines just thrown away. They were not. They were carefully delivered. The best story involving Douglas that I have heard also involved my hero, Bill Shelton. There was a time when a reporter named Pat Owens --- Patrick J. Owens, a great feature writer --- decided to cover the story about the King of the World. Bishop Tomlinson that I mentioned a while ago, got around to crowning himself King of the World in Little Rock one weekend out on the steps of the Capitol. That was his custom. He would go to the state Capitol and crown himself king and go off to collect the newspaper clippings the next morning and move on to the next state. Owens wrote a funny and fairly lengthy account of this. He was distressed to see the next morning that it had been cut back to six or seven paragraphs. He was pretty mad. Rather than complain directly to Bill Shelton, the city editor -- Shelton was a fairly intimidating man if you didn't know him. You didn't lightly

go and complain to Shelton about that. We were all pretty scared of him. --- Instead of complaining to Shelton, he got it off his chest with Bob Douglas, not that Douglas had any authority in the matter, but he knew that Douglas was a good listener. He needed to tell somebody about this outrage in the paper against this story about the king of the world. Douglas heard him out and Owens said something like, "Why did Shelton cut that story?" Douglas said, "Well, Pat, you have to understand, Shelton is on to him. He knows that he is not the King of the World." [Laughter]

HB: You and Bob Douglas ended up being colleagues again later on at the U of A.

RR: At the University of Arkansas Journalism Department. He might have saved my life. I got stuck with the chairmanship of the journalism department for one year shortly after I got here. I did not like it and was not good at it at all. I was not cut out to be a chairman. In fact, there were times during that miserable year, I thought of something that Douglas had told me one day in the newsroom. This was after I had been at the *Gazette* for several years and I had sensed that it was time for me to make some kind of a career change. I didn't know what. I asked Bob's advice, should I try to become an editor? --- which would mean working on a copy desk, or as an assistant to the city editor, or something like that. Or should I stay on as a reporter? He said, very candidly I thought, "You have no business being an editor. I don't think you have the personality for it." He said, "On the other hand, you are a good writer and a good reporter." He said I should stick with that. I always valued that advice and followed it, in fact. I never did stray

from reporting as long as I was in newspaper work. In fact, when I found myself talked into being chairman of journalism by the Dean of Arts and Sciences --- he was a good man, but he made a mistake there, I thought. I was miserable the whole year. While I was on a trip to Tibet, doing a chapter for a book for National Geographic, I was gone nearly all summer. While I was gone that summer, after I had been on the job as chairman for a year, the University hired Bob Douglas to be the chairman. He had been managing editor of the *Gazette*. He left the *Gazette* to come up here to be the chairman. He stayed at the job until he retired just a few years ago. He was an excellent chairman. An old managing editor would be. He knows how to deal with people. He had very little patience with academic niceties, but he got the job done.

HB: In the interest of chief advertising, is it you and he who are the co-chairs of the *Gazette* oral history project that is going on right now?

RR. Well, I wanted it to be that way, but as it turns out, Bob has not been able to do much with it because he has run into a problem with his vision. Apparently, a minor stroke that interferes with his reading. That has kind of set him back on his plans on the oral history thing.

HB: Is there more on Bob Douglas?

RR: No, but this might be a good place to mention his wife, Martha Douglas, who was at the *Gazette* when I went to work there and was still there when I left eight and a half years later. Martha Douglas of DeWitt, Arkansas, Martha Leslie Douglas, came to the *Gazette* as a reporter. By the time that I came, she was in charge of

the television news. She took care of the television listings and whatever television news we had back in those days. The church section --- I guess she was a combination of television and religion editor. She kept that job for many years. She shared an office for a good many years with a man named Charles Davis. Charlie Davis was a well known newspaper man and the son of another well known newspaper man by the same name who had been an editorial writer for Mr. J. N. Heiskell for a generation in the early years. Our Charlie came to work there as a young man. At this time he was in charge of the Sunday sections, that is to say, all the stuff that is preprinted with non-breaking news. Sunday magazines, book reviews, the editorial sections of this were separate sections. Charlie was the Sunday editor. He and Martha shared an office, which I always thought was a quaint arrangement because these two people could have not been more different from each other. Martha was a perfect lady, brisk, no nonsense, although she could be very funny in her own way. My guess would be that she would not have much patience with a person like Charlie. They were roommates for all those years. Charlie was the opposite of all that. He was careless and drank too much, sloppy, always getting into minor troubles. He was a character around the newsroom. I suspect on some days that Martha did his work for him to cover up for him because he could not get there. I don't know for sure. This odd couple shared an office back there beside the library, for years and years.

HB: That prompts another general question. Were there many women on the *Gazette* in the late 50s or early 60s?

RR: Not many. A. R. Nelson, the managing editor, said he didn't feel the newsroom was a place for a woman. You would never find that expressed out loud by any editor in America now. In those days it was a common thought. There was a woman who was a reporter at the *Gazette* after I left there, named Ginger Shiras, from a fine old newspaper family in Baxter County. She had become a reporter for the *Gazette*. I heard her laughing once about her cousin, Tom Dearmore, who was a co-owner of the *Baxter Bulletin* with her dad. Tom was her cousin. She was telling him one time that she had decided to get out of newspaper work and to go to law school. She said Tom's reaction to that was to tell her that he always thought a woman's place was in the newsroom. In the context of the 1970s that was a pretty good joke. A pretty good commentary on how far newspapers had come.

HB: There wouldn't be any female general assignment reporters at the *Gazette* when you were there?

RR: No, Matilda Tuohey was there and had been for a long time and would be there for a long time after I left. She had covered the Capitol. She and Sam Harris covered it together. At some point when I got there, she went to work on the state desk. She spent the day calling all over Arkansas dealing with stringers and part-time correspondents. She was gathering news from around the state. She was one of the fixtures in the newsroom. She would have been one of the women in the newsroom when Joe Wirges got off his unprintable line to Sam Harris. There had been others during the war. They had given way to the returning men after

the war. There was a woman on the copy desk named Georgia Dailey, copy editor. There must have been other women around, but to my recollection all the other women on the staff worked on what we called "Society," in another part of the third floor. Betty Fulkerson, the great editor, and Miss Nell Cotnam. She had been there since the beginning of the world. They were all [suckered?]. Mildred Woods, the great food editor, was at the *Gazette* for years. She worked at the back in another part of the building. She didn't have much to do in the newsroom. It was the common belief that it was not a proper place for a lady because the language got pretty blue and everybody smoked cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and an occasional drink of whiskey was taken. On Christmas Eve, for example, it was wide open. The rules were relaxed. All the free booze that had been brought in by the utility companies to bribe editors and reporters was in individual cases out and up against walls at the teletype machines. Theoretically, you were supposed to help yourself to a bottle and take it home. But on Christmas Eve, if you happened to get stuck working, those bottles would get opened and a drink would be taken. Martha told me that she was never bothered by the language in the newsroom mainly because she tuned it out. She had a way of not hearing it. It made no impression on her.

HB: I assume no African-Americans?

RR: None, the only African-American newspaper reporter during those years was at the *Democrat*, interestingly enough.

HB: He also served on the Rockefeller Administration.

RR: He is now in Atlanta for the federal agency [Regional director of Community Relations Service]. Ozell Sutton. He has visited Arkansas and made public appearances. He makes a point of saying the great liberal *Arkansas Gazette* was not the first one to hire a black reporter. It was the retrogressive *Arkansas Democrat*. He was not allowed to cover just any kind of news. He covered the black community. No, we did not have any. The only black person in the newsroom was that same James Warren that I think I might have talked about earlier. He was incidentally, Deborah Mathis's grandfather, as I understand. He was the janitor and kind of building maintenance man and all-around whatever-needed-doing man. A man of enormous dignity and humor. He was balding, trim, and had been there --- If I have told this story earlier, tell me. This was one of those legends passed down from generation to generation in the newsroom. James Warren had come to work for the *Gazette* as a boy. He was in his early teens or maybe seventeen. The story was that Mr. Fred Heiskell, Mr. [J.N.] Ned Heiskell's younger brother, had won him in a poker game. More about that in a minute. The story had it that Fred Heiskell, a man about town, a party guy who loved a good time, had this group of men that he played poker with. One night one of the men ran out of money, a business acquaintance of his, and put up his boy, James Warren, an orphan kid that he had taken in. He put him to work doing odd jobs, gave him a place to live and took care of him. When he ran out of money in the poker game, he put up James Warren, and Fred Heiskell won him on the next hand. It was a good story, but it turned out not to be true. Margaret Ross

straightened me out on that. Hugh Patterson backed her up as I recollect. The core truth in it, Margaret said that she had asked James Warren about the story, and he said, "No, it didn't happen that way. It happened this way." He was working for Mr. --- the man who owned the *Arkansas Gazette* building. It was not owned by the Heiskell family. It was owned by Mr. --- another well known family there in town. They were simply renting the place, but the owner had some space in the building somewhere and young James Warren, at a tender age, was already working for him. His duties included driving a car to run errands. He was blatantly under age, and I am sure he did not have a driver's license. This is what I have gathered. Mr. Fred Heiskell knew that James could be counted on for discretion and got to asking him to drive him to various places around town where he did not want to be seen driving himself. He wanted to hire James for himself. He went to the man for whom he really worked and said, "I would like for James Warren to come to work for me and will give you . . .," and he named a figure, "a few hundred dollars for him." The man said, "Oh, the son of a bitch is not worth anything. Let's just roll the dice and see who gets him." They rolled the dice and Fred won. Then James went to work for him. Maybe they flipped a coin. I can't really remember. It was a gamble of some kind. He continued to work for him the rest of his life and became a leading member of the community. I understand from others that he became a substantial property owner. He also became a leader in the black community.

HB: Did Fred Heiskell have anything to do with the newspaper?

RR: Fred, in fact, was the main news guy in those early years. This was long before I came to work there. He had been dead several years. Mr. J. N. ran the editorial page and was the editor, but Fred was the managing editor. As long as Fred was alive, he was the managing editor. He was a hands-on newsroom guy. He was apparently brilliant, a natural born newsman.

HB: Back to the list of names. The next one, in fact, occurs to me that there was actually an order in mind when you tossed out this list. You have already mentioned the next one in passing, Charles Portis.

RR: Charles Portis. Charles is the author of *True Grit*, *Norwood*, and some other excellent pieces of fiction. Incidentally, last night, on one of the cable channels, I was watching a l970s movie, "A Little Romance," set in Europe. This French teenage boy is a movie buff and in the opening scenes one of the movies that he is shown watching is "True Grit" with John Wayne. Instead of subtitles they had dubbed Rooster Cogburn's language in French. They showed the scene where Rooster Cogburn, the old scoundrel of a federal marshal, was shown facing down three or four guys across an open field. He is getting ready to shoot them all dead. The language hurled back and forth across the field was all in French with a kind of country accent. That originated from the fertile imagination of Charles Portis of Hamburg, Arkansas.

HB: How long did he work for the *Gazette*? It wasn't very long, was it?

RR: Not a very long time. He came there --- I read somewhere the other day that he came as a columnist. My recollection is that he came there as a general

assignment reporter. He did that for a short while, and then the "Our Town" column opened up because Allbright moved on. I can't remember if this was the time that he moved upstairs to write editorials, on which occasion his last column before he became an editorial writer said he knew a woman in his family who had a peculiar driving habit. She would always back up in order to drive forward. No matter where she was parked, she had to put the car in reverse to back up a few feet before she would put it in drive to go forward. He figured that this was what he was getting ready to do when he became an editorial writer. He did not like editorial writing. It was either that time or when he quit the paper to go work for Winthrop Rockefeller before he eventually came back. On one of those occasions the column was open, and Portis became the "Our Town" columnist. He did that for a year or two at most.

HB: It was a daily column?

RR: They wrote five days a week, I guess. In those days the *Gazette* was pretty tight fisted with the newsroom. We at least got past the day when the reporters had to share typewriters. I interviewed somebody the other day, an old timer, who had to share a typewriter. He came to work there before I did. We all had our separate typewriters and separate desks, but we had to share telephones. My desk was jammed up against the "Our Town" columnist's. I first shared a telephone with Charles Allbright and then with Buddy Portis. It wasn't hard to share a phone because these guys were thinking all day and standing at the window smoking and trying to think of the next paragraph. The phone was open for us working

reporters who needed to make a phone call.

HB: Full time assignment? The "Our Town" columnist did not do anything else?

RR: That's right. It was a full time job. It is a killing job, a five-day-a-week column is a killing job. Not many people could do it. Lydell Sims did it for generations at the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*. Richard Allin has done it for a long generation. It is a very demanding thing, and I have never understood it. Incidentally, Allbright and Allin now write three days a week, which is more civilized. Still, it is great pressure. In those days it was five days. These guys were young and vigorous and full of imagination and very creative. They pulled it off, first Allbright and then Portis, with great flair. It was obvious to anybody that read a week's worth of those columns that here were two brilliant writers, born writers, you might say. Portis had already made a name for himself at the University of Arkansas. When he got back from the Marines — he fought in Korea with the Marines — When he got back, he resumed his education. I don't know if he had already started to college or not. He went to the University and worked for the *Traveler*. He did a memorable send-up of *Time* magazine during the fall of 1957. *Time* magazine did this atrocious piece of reporting of Orval Faubus. It started out with an anecdote about a reporter going out to the Governor's Mansion, and he described how he sat there and watched Orval Faubus eat his oatmeal for breakfast. He was demanding that his wife pour more milk on it or something like that. It talked about how his food dribbled down his chin as he ate. Then it went down from there. It was a depiction of the state of

Arkansas and what a bunch of rubes we were. Portis was so inflamed by that, that he wrote a send-up of *Time* magazine. It was just a short piece, but it was reprinted in the *Gazette*, as I recall. He really poked fun of *Time*'s writing style. You remember back in those days it was all very flip. He ended the piece with something like, "And as far as New York City is concerned, the best thing they could do with it, would be to plow the whole damn place under and plant it in turnip greens." Even then, he was showing promise as a writer. He went on from the *Gazette* to the *New York Herald-Tribune*, which in those days was the newspaper to work for if you wanted to be a writing reporter.

HB: He must not have been at the *Gazette* very long.

RR: Not very long, no. He was there a year or two, I think --- long enough to become known as one of the newsroom characters. He had that. Even back then, he was known as a wit. Understated sort of, very dry, he didn't seem to smile or laugh. About four or five times a day he would kind of mumble something. It would just knock you out it would be so funny. Doug Smith, who came along in later years, had the same personality. He wouldn't say a dozen words in a day. When somebody would notice that Doug was about to open his mouth, all ears would open. He would be very funny. Buddy had that same quality.

HB: Do you see Portis nowadays?

RR: Just and now and again. He comes to Fayetteville now and then to see Douglas. He and Douglas stayed very close. I talked with him on the phone a time or two in the last year or so. He goes to Mexico a lot. He goes off on trips. He always

has a novel in progress. He'll need a quieter place to work. His own house --- he has never married, and so he really can't complain about being run over by kids or grandkids as it would be by now. It seems like he always needs a quieter place than where he happens to be in Little Rock, so he takes off on a trip. As Douglas described it, typically it will go like this. Douglas will get a phone call from Portis. Portis will say, "Well, I am off on a trip. I am heading for Arizona." Two days later he will show up in Fayetteville. Douglas says that he invariably goes in the opposite direction from where he says he is going. You never really know where he is headed. He spends a lot of time in Mexico. Two of his novels are set in Mexico.

HB: I wish that I could remember who said this, but someone described him as probably the best American novelist that you have never heard of.

RR: Yes, a guy in *Esquire* said something like that. His books are in great demand again and are being reprinted. At the *Herald-Tribune* he wrote feature stories that caught the attention of that generation of New York journalists that included Tom Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin, two or three others of names that I can't come up with. Years later, Tom Wolfe wrote a book called *The New Journalism*. It was a collection of *New Journalism Magazine* articles. He didn't include any of Portis's pieces, but in his introduction he tells how Portis gave up what many people thought was the most coveted job in newspapers, London correspondent with the *New York Herald-Tribune,* to go home to the hills of Arkansas and rent a cabin and write the great American novel. He wrote *Norwood*. Wolfe describes

this passage with great humor and flair. The unbelievability of it all. He just did it. It worked and he became a successful novelist. When he was in London, all of us were terribly envious of Portis. First, he worked for the *Herald-Tribune*. As I said, that was considered the place to work if you had ambitions as a writer. Most of us secretly did, that was part of the joy of reporting was seeing your name on a piece that was not just a straight piece of news, but that had a few well turned phrases. To walk into the newsroom the next day and have somebody say, "That was a nice piece, Roy. Nice piece, Buddy." He had that kind of reputation at the *Herald Tribune* when they sent him to London. The stories that trickled back to Little Rock from London made clear in a hurry, this was the wrong guy in the wrong place. He never liked London from day one. The weather did not suit him. It was cold, damp, and the people were pretentious and full of themselves. Even the clothes. There was one story about how he felt some obligation, now that he was in London, to go down to a tailor and get a suit made. He hated it. When he would come to work every day, somebody that worked in the office with him told the story that every morning, in one motion, he would come in and take off the suit coat with his raincoat or his topcoat so he would never be seen in the suit coat. Anyway, in about a year or a little more, he threw that over and came back to the Ozark Mountains, where somebody let him have a cabin rent free or for very little.

[End of Tape 4 - Side 1]

HB: You were going to mention Charlie Allbright.

RR: Allbright was covering North Little Rock when I went to work for the paper in 1956. He had been on the beat an unconscionable length of time in his mind.

HB: That was where they started out reporters.

RR: The idea was to get out of there as soon as you could. He had been on there for maybe a year, I don't know. He thought it was time for him to move on. He had been promised the "Our Town" column whenever they could hire someone to take his place in North Little Rock It seemed to Charlie that it was taking them an awful long time to hire anybody to take his place. When I finally showed up there, nobody was happier to see me than Charlie Allbright. He was done with North Little Rock. He felt so good about it that he gave me a personal tour of the beat. He took me over to North Little Rock and introduced me to everybody. He made sure that I got off to a good start in covering the beat.

HB: How do you get to be "Our Town" columnist? Do you try out for it by writing sample columns, or do the editors just see in you a special spark to do that?

RR: I think that is probably it, yes. I have never heard of anybody trying out for it. I can't imagine the paper ever hiring anybody from outside to do that column. When Richard Allin moved into the job, it seems to me that he did some other work first, before he was given the column. I may be wrong about that. You have to have a feel for the town. "Our Town," in the beginning, was meant to be descriptive. It has since become something else. In those days it was rather lighthearted. In fact, the closest thing that I can think of in today's *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* to the original "Our Town" as it was conceived is the "Paper

Trails" column of Carrie Rengers. As I say, as originally conceived. It just simply turned out that the "Our Town" column was a good place for a budding writer to show what he could do as a wordsmith. Allbright did it and did it beautifully. In those days, his column was a mix of humorous and serious. About once a month, it seems to me, he would write a serious column. When I say serious, [I mean] not on some earth-shaking event, but a person or an event written about with great feeling and poignancy. I can remember more than once tears in my eyes from reading a column about this or that person. That is a gift for a writer to be able to do that. Everybody in Arkansas now knows about Charlie's sense of humor. Charlie was also a dreamer. He and I in spare moments would talk about things that interested us and what we would like to do. I can remember at one point he and I decided that we would get a sailboat and cross the Atlantic Ocean. It was one of those hare-brained ideas that fortunately never got off the ground. We both understood that it was not serious. To hear us talk about it, if anybody overheard, they would not have known that it was not serious. We were restless young men, and this was one of the many forms that our restlessness took. His mind was always weaving something or another, a story, or an idea. He was always considering things, people. I think I have described before how he would stand over at the window, looking out over Third Street with one foot propped up on the window sill, smoking a cigarette, looking out on the traffic. He would stand there for a long time.

HB: I know a little about published collections of his columns. Has he ever written

anything else, a novel, or anything else?

RR: I don't think so. If he ever wrote any fiction, I never knew anything about it. He was a non-fiction man. Maybe it is fortunate that we will never know if he was good at fiction. It has been my observation that a lot people who are good non-fiction writers don't translate into fiction. A few have. Buddy Portis is one of the very few. That was one of the points that Tom Wolfe was making. That non-fiction in itself is an art form. [This is] contrary to the idea that if you are a real writer, you have to write fiction. I think that is no longer true, thanks in part to people like Tom Wolfe and Charles Portis. Gay Talese was one of the great non-fiction writers. This worked its way into newspapers. You could see it in middle-sized papers out around the country, papers like the *Gazette*. You could see these young writers who began to experiment with crafting stories in non-traditional ways. If you picked up one of Allbright's columns from those days, here was seven hundred words. A story that had a beginning, middle, and an end. You might not even think of it as a story in the traditional sense. Some days, it would just be an out and out essay. Other days it would be an actual story about a person or a happening. It told in the old traditional way the most important things at the top and then on down. Of course, column writing itself was always different. We began to do that outside of columns. We would begin to write stories with narrative structure, feature stories, not news stories, that were written in a narrative form. That was about the time that the New Journalism burst on the scene nationally. It became infamous in some places because some people never

believed --- they thought we were making it up. They thought we would make a story to fit the form instead of the form fitting the story.

HB: Dick Allin, did he come to the paper while you were still there?

RR: Yes, he did. I think he did. He and I had been friends for some years before I left. At one point, very close friends. He was a bachelor, and he would come out to the house. He enjoyed Norma's cooking. He was always interested in music and had some talent for it. I remember that he liked to play a recorder. He got me interested in trying to play the recorder. I have no talent for it at all. I never did learn anything, but he was good at it. He even, for a spell, set some poetry to music. He wrote the music. I still remember a poem that was a favorite of his from the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. It started out, "Fra bank to bank, fra wood to wood, I rin. . . ." It was in Old English. He set that to music, and it was beautiful. He played it on the recorder. Anyway, after I left, he eventually got seriously interested in music and ended up playing a tuba in the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. He liked good food, good wine, liked to travel. He brought me a jug from England from the Queen of Mary, I believe. He picked it up on a trip to England. He gave me a lead on one of my all-time favorite feature stories at *The New York Times* years later. He told me about on one of his trips to England, he had heard snatches on the radio about a man in some little town on the English Channel, a town overlooking the channel. This town was supposed to have had a man on the payroll, employed to hike up on the town bluff every morning and look out across the Channel to see if the French invasion fleet was

coming. [Laughter] Eventually, I looked into the story when I became a London correspondent and found the town and wrote a story about the man. Of course, there was a lot of make-believe in it, but it was a very funny story.

HB: Did the man really have a job of checking the Channel and the arrival of the French troops?

RR: Beginning with the Hundred Year's War, the town of Winchelsea had such a man on the payroll. And for good reason because the French had plundered the town half a dozen times. To be fair about it, the guys from Winchelsea had plundered the French coast. They had a guy, they kept him on the payroll for a few hundred years, through the Napoleonic Wars. At some point it had become a fossilized position until this old guy found out about it and kind of put himself forward as the town watcher.

HB: Kind of like the Arkansas constable.

RR: Yes. Dick was a very close friend, and I still value his friendship. He and I used to kid a lot about how different we were. I was the hillbilly, and he was the Delta guy. He talked different. He had a very different accent than I did. He was from Helena. He was more religious than I was. He was a member in good standing of the Episcopal Church — probably because his brother was the Bishop, in fact, became the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States. --- He had a very proper view of the world in spite of being a great kidder and funny, and he loved good times. He also had a — I never saw it more than the day that he took me to the airport. — In those days, Norma did not drive. I fell into this

free trip to Europe. The *Gazette* sponsored a tour, and it was my year to be the reporter to go with the tour. It was a free vacation, and I had to write a few stories. Dick drove us to the airport. — Norma and the kids went along. He was going to drive them back home. — As he saw me off, in those days you could go out to the steps of the plane. The last thing that he said to me as I started up the steps, with this mock solemnity in his voice, "Now, Reed, remember who you are!" [Laughter]

HB: Do you still get together with him?

RR: Very occasionally, very occasionally. I haven't seen him in several years now.

HB: Do you remember some of the reunions of the *Gazette* folks in the 50s and 60s and 70s?

RR: No, unfortunately not. We probably ought to do that.

HB: I know that some of them are scattered, but there are still some around the central Arkansas area. You have already mentioned Matilda Tuohey.

RR: Matilda was already at work when I went to work there. She had been a fixture in the newsroom for several years, quite a long time since the war, World War II. Matilda was not married. The *Arkansas Gazette*, I guess, was the great love of her life. She was an excellent reporter. They were still talking about her at the Capitol when I worked at the Capitol years later. A lot of the oldtimers remembered Matilda very fondly. She was a Little Rock girl. She was a woman of fierce opinions. She might have been the first woman that I ever heard utter a cuss word. We all understood that you have to hold your own in a newsroom.

Later on I heard some terrific cussers among the women at *The New York Times*. Matilda, well, it was new to me. She would let you know that she was not to be taken lightly because of being a woman in this otherwise male crowd. Sometimes she could be a little short about that. I remember one day, for some reason that I have now forgotten, I made some snide remark about the Irish. Purely uninformed, I didn't know anything at all about the Irish except for the common conventional wisdom. She erupted! After she calmed down a little bit, she gave me a quick history lesson about England and Ireland and the treacherous English. In a very few minutes, I learned more about Ireland than I had ever known.

HB: She was a general assignment reporter?

RR: She was at the time I went to work there. She was on general assignment, yes.

HB: You went to work at the state Capitol when Ernie Valachovic was there, right?

RR: That's right. Ernie had come up from the *Texarkana Gazette*, where he was an investigative reporter, which was rare on a small paper. He was a terrific digger, but a lousy writer. He couldn't write a whit. He knew how to get the facts. It really proved worthwhile. When I eventually went to the Capitol, it must have been 1958 or 1959 or 1960. — I can't remember exactly. It might have been as late as l960. --- It was a heady thing to cover the Capitol. I would have to cover the Legislative sessions when they happened every other year. That's when I first got acquainted with Val. We called him "Val" or Ernie. But later on when I went out there to work with him on the Capitol beat, he was the senior reporter on the beat. I quickly learned how valuable he was to the newspaper. This was during

the Faubus years, after Faubus had won his third term and was entrenched in power. It was never more obvious than in the various offices in the State Capitol. Even the other constitutional officers, who did not owe anything to Orval Faubus, the Land Commissioner, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Auditor, even these people lived in fear of Orval Faubus. Any hostility from the Governor's office would be the end of their career.

HB: If there are any non-Arkansans reviewing this, those people were officials.

RR: That's right. That's why these people did not owe anything to Orval Faubus. They were separately elected. But, in fact, in the political climate of that time, an all powerful Governor had great influence on everybody in state office. They understood that. That meant that a reporter covering them had to be on friendly terms with the governor, as George Douthit at the *Democrat* was. If you worked for the opposition paper, the one Faubus detested, the *Arkansas Gazette*, you had to be a very clever reporter. Valvachovic was very clever. Valvachovic had the knack of covering the beat in spite of this, you might say, institutional hostility. Everywhere he went, not just in the Capitol building, but all around the Capitol grounds, Faubus controlled that. The Game and Fish Commission, he controlled that.

HB: How did he do that? Do you cultivate sources, second and third levels?

RR: Absolutely, second and third levels and amazingly enough, at the top levels. He became friendly with all the department heads. They all understood that Valachovic was an honest reporter. His paper was giving the governor hell

everyday on the editorial page. Ernie was not above letting these people think he didn't agree with that editorial policy and he was just out there to do his job. Quite a few people appreciated that.

HB: Do you remember when you joined the State Capitol Bureau?

RR: I believe it was 1960.

HB: At that point, there were two full-time *Gazette* people year around at the State Capitol?

RR: Yes.

HB: Was it presumably more during the legislative session?

RR: Yes. One in the Senate, one in the House, in addition to special coverage.

HB: There were two of you there at your arrival?

RR: No, I don't believe so. I know that as far back as Matilda's time, she and Sam Harris were the two regular Capitol reporters. I may be wrong about extra people doing legislative sessions. I don't know. I know we did have extra help during that time. Red Moss, for example, was the man who nearly ran the Welfare Department. He did not have a title, but he had a drinking problem. They had a political appointee over him, a county judge from Perry County. Red, when he ran it, worked there and knew the ins and outs of it. Red Moss and Ernie Valachovic liked each other and got along well with each other. Ernie would find a way to work around the political problem with Faubus. You might say in shorthand that if there was a story he was working on, he would not ever frame the problem in words like, "What is the Governor doing about this touchy

situation?" Nothing that ever indicated that he was hostile with the Governor. He was very clever and a very good reporter. In addition to the human contact, he was a genius at working with the documents. Every agency has a paper trail, and he was very adept and those had to be open to reporters, by law. A lot of his stories came out of the documents. In that regard, [there is a] reason that I wanted to mention Mamie Ruth Williams in this connection, during the Faubus years. Mamie Ruth was a member of the Women's Emergency Committee. She worked against Orval Faubus. She was always looking for some kind of dirt on Faubus. She was also a genius at working the documents. She had no paying job requiring this, but as a citizen and as a member of the Women's Committee, she was at the Capitol. She would go to the Secretary of State's office, for example, and look at the papers of incorporation that businesses were required file. She would search through the Highway Department files. She would occasionally come upon something that would make a story. She also had a very good news sense. Her father had been a newspaper editor down at El Dorado. She grew up in a newspaper family. She knew what news was. She would make sure a *Gazette* reporter, usually Valachovic, would know exactly what file to look in. Ernie had some help from that source. I don't know of anybody else who took it quite as seriously as Mamie Ruth. All these people, most of them on State payroll, who did not agree with the Governor's stand thought that the truth ought to be told about this or that. Maybe some minor corruption that would be going on to make the administration look bad if it got out. If they thought it wasn't right, they

would make sure that Ernie knew where to look. He had help from the inside.

HB: I thought also a reporter could also find himself in a position of being used. "I have a personal axe to grind," if you are not careful about it.

RR: That is always a problem with reporting. Some of the best tips come from the people with an axe to grind. I guess that the real answer to that is just because a person has an axe to grind does not mean the story is not worth it. But it also means that a reporter has to have some antenna, a sixth sense about things, for what is real and what is phony. Sometimes you can tell in a matter of minutes, sometimes in days, that the guy that had an axe to grind is a nut, that this is not really a story. Ernie had that ability. He could see through things like that.

HB: What do you do in a two-part bureau? Do you take some part of state government, and he takes the other part?

RR: The senior reporter gets the choice assignments, the Governor's office, the press conferences. There were days when Ernie could not cover those for some reason, and I would fill in. I did the same thing years later covering the White House with Max Frankel. My recollection is that part of my routine coverage included the Supreme Court on a certain day of each week. The decisions would be handed down and made public, and I would go over there and rifle through those things as fast as I could and write stories about them. The Secretary of State's office incorporation filings were sometimes of interest in the news. Mainly, I spent a great amount of time at the Highway Department. On any given day, one reporter can't get around to all these places. We always talked at the beginning of

the day about any special arrangements that might need to be made during the day. Luckily, we liked each other and got along very well. That was a little bit beside the point. What Valachovic wanted to do, that was the way that we did it and that was the way it should have been. He couldn't drive, by the way. He couldn't drive a car. He had very poor eyesight and was not able to drive. He would ride the bus from the Capitol to the *Gazette*. If it worked out right, he would ride with me.

HB: Didn't he die young?

RR: Yes, he did. I think maybe in his 50s. He had a serious heart attack.

HB: Did you ever get to be the senior man at the Capitol?

RR: No, I never did. I left. I believe Ernie Dumas took my place. He worked with Valachovic for some period of time.

HB: On the list . . .

RR: I would like to say, in connection with how he got along with the Faubus people, Valachovic — Much, much later in the 80s, I began to work on a biography of Orval Faubus and ended up having seventy-some-odd interviews with the man. Every time that he spent any time talking about the *Arkansas Gazette*, almost always, Faubus would remember Valachovic. He always remembered him with considerable fondness. He truly liked Valachovic. He respected him and, of course, understood Valachovic was working for the paper that was a thorn in his side. They got along on a personal level, as I did with Faubus. I was once covering a Faubus campaign --- I have told this somewhere in print, I think. — I

would travel with him on the campaign. One night at Hazen . . .

HB: You mentioned that earlier in this series of interviews.

RR: Yes, yes. Faubus had that ability to separate the personal from the professional.

HB: That was one of those things that most people found disarming about him, including President Dwight Eisenhower.

RR: Yes, I think so.

HB: Not far down on the list is Ernie Dumas, whom you have already mentioned.

RR: Ernie is one of the treasures of the state of Arkansas and not enough people know it. He came directly, I think directly, from the University of Missouri. He worked for the *El Dorado Daily Times* when he was a kid. He got on at the *Gazette* sometime before I left the paper. I remember working with him for maybe a year.

HB: You and he were not at Missouri at the same time?

RR: No, he is considerably younger. We met each other when he came to work at the *Gazette*. Here is a young guy who was obviously cut out to be a newspaper guy. He had all the right instincts. He knew how to get the news. He knew how to dig out the facts. He knew how to write it. He wasn't as fast as Bill Lewis. Hell, nobody was. Ernie stepped in on the Capitol beat at some point. I don't think that was his first job. In fact, I am sure that it would not have been. He eventually became the Capitol reporter. He kept that job long after I left the paper. He became one of the walking encyclopedias about Arkansas state government and politics. Years after I left the paper, I would come back to

Arkansas with *The New York Times* on this or that story having to do with Arkansas Government and, generally, the first person that I would call would be Ernie Dumas. He always carried the necessary set of facts in his head. Any reporter can give you background information if he has time to go to the clips in the library, the morgue. Ernie carried it all in his head. He was invariably right. I never doubted anything that he told me. I never had reason to. Years later, he became an editorial writer. He was an excellent editorial writer. It was while he was in that job that the paper died in 1991. He and his wife, Elaine, became great friends of mine. She married Ernie before we left Little Rock. She fit in at once in the *Gazette* crowd. That is not an easy thing to do for a wife who does not work there. You almost needed to be a Martha Douglas, who worked there herself, to understand the mentality of that place and to make allowances for it. Norma did. She did it in her own way by saying, "Okay, that is your work. I have nothing to do with that. Anything you want to do in connection with your work is fine with me, including changing jobs, changing cities." Elaine's way of dealing with it was to jump right into the middle of it. The best *Gazette* parties for a period of years were at the Dumas house. That could not have been without Elaine. She loved it. She loved the people who worked there, and they all felt the same about her.

HB: Did Norma work outside of the home during those years?

RR: Not in those years, no.

HB: Your children were very young.

RR: Yes. She worked three times, as I recall. Right after we were married and I was a graduate student at the University of Missouri, she worked at an office in the University. She interrupted her own education to do that. Then later when I went to work for *The New York Times*, when we went to New Orleans, she worked at Tulane University the entire seven years that we lived there. I guess those are the only times that she worked outside of the home.

HB: Let's see where we are.

RR: No, while I have this on my mind. She worked two years in Atlanta for the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church. She really enjoyed it and made some lasting friendships there. I'm sorry, who was the next person?

HB: Orville Henry.

RR: Orville Henry was a towering figure. Orville and I were not personally friends. We were friendly. He was on a different level from me. He was not just an editor, but already kind of a legend around the state of Arkansas and the whole Southwestern Conference, I came to understand. He had become the sports editor very young. I think he was less than twenty years old. I am not sure about that. He and I were neighbors in Meadowcliff for some years. Our kids knew each other. We were not social friends. Orville was always busy. His job kept him going nights as well as days. I had great regard for him. The only professional contact that I had with him was through an arrangement that might have been unique with the *Gazette*. I don't know. The *Gazette* had made an editorial decision years before to cover high school football every Friday night. Ideally,

every football game in the state should be in the *Gazette* the next morning. That meant that they had to reach beyond the sports staff to get that done. On Friday night people all over the newsroom --- I want to say everybody, but I am sure it wasn't --- was told you would be covering high school football. Through the years we all did that on Friday nights.

HB: Did it mean going to the games or getting reports on the phone?

RR: Getting reports on the phone. Typically, the contact person would be a coach or maybe a stringer. Usually it was a coach, or a sports writer on the local paper. You would write a few notes or a story of two or three paragraphs. We all thought we were pretty smart. We had mastered all the cliches you were supposed to. It was kind of fun in a way, but none of us really had our heart in it. That was the regular newsroom people.

HB: At some newspapers the news staff kind of looks down their nose at the sports people.

RR: I know. At the *Gazette* that might have been one reason that it was different. We looked up to Orville Henry and his top people like Jim Bailey, Jerry McConnell. I never had much dealings with sub-editors like Chuck Miller. People respected those people in our paper. Jim Bailey, to this day, I think of him as one of the best newspaper writers that I have ever read. Orville, he could just turn out that copy, reams at a time, on a deadline, flawlessly. It would read beautifully. It might be worth pointing out that historically, some of the great American writers have come from the sports pages of newspapers.

HB: Believe it or not we have ended another side.

[End of Tape 4, Side 2]