

Gazette Project

Interview with

Mort Stern,
Georgetown, Colorado,
25 September 2000

Interviewer: Roy Reed

Roy Reed: If you would, just say for the benefit of the tape that we have your permission to record this interview.

Mort Stern: Yes, of course. I understand that it is being recorded.

RR: And that it will be turned over to the University of Arkansas.

MS: Right.

RR: Mort, what kind of a kid were you?

MS: What kind of a kid? Kind of a dream boat, I guess. I wanted to be a baseball player. My great love in life was to be a baseball player. My sideline was to be an artist. My hope was to be trained in art school in case I needed that skill. By that time, my mother had moved my brother and me to New York. I attended the High School of Music and Art, but the teachers said that I had no future as an artist because all my work looked like cartoons. My English teacher, Raymond Sayers, who took a liking to me, said, "Don't worry. You can write. You can always go into journalism." Really, I didn't have any idea of the future except possibly being a baseball player. That was the life! I used to go around with a baseball glove attached to my belt in case I encountered a game. That was me!

RR: Where were you born, to whom, and when?

MS: I was born in New Haven, Connecticut, February 20, 1926. My mother, Louise Eleanor Spiro, had married William Bernard Stern. My father had been a vaudeville comedian, known as “Billy Bernard.” Vaudeville was a very popular form of stage entertainment from the late 1880s to the 1920s. But by the time I was born, vaudeville had died, largely due to the advent of talking motion pictures, and my father apparently lost interest in doing any other work. Ultimately, when my brother was born, when I was six years old, either my mother ran my father off or he left voluntarily. So, for all practical purposes, I was raised by a single parent. The only good thing Mom ever said about my father to me was “he had a good act.” I believe he was what people in vaudeville called a “baggy pants comedian.” Mother worked at various jobs — first in the automobile business and later in the promotion department of King Features Syndicate (owned by William R. Hearst). The big interest in her life was the Christian Science religion. And late in life she became a full-time registered “practitioner.” It is sort of like clergy. So, in our house, the authority figures were Mother, Jesus, and Mary Baker Eddy, and more or less in that order.

RR: Your father was Jewish, but you were not raised Jewish. Were you raised under Christian Science?

MS: Yes. I attended Sunday School from the time I was about 8 years old, and both Sunday School and Church services from about 12 years on. To me it was a wonderful, gentle faith, built around the premise that “God is Love,” and that that faith diligently applied could heal all ills — including the medical kind. The

healings done by Jesus were seen as evidence of that faith. Mother talked to me a lot about what Mrs. Eddy said and about what the Lord expected of us. If anything was wrong with me or anyone we knew, she would deal with it through prayer, and it seemed to work. But after I enlisted in the Army Air Corps in World War II, I got to wondering. I still believed that God and Jesus would look out for me, but I couldn't deny that I would want medical treatment if something happened (like an air crash). I began to think of myself more as a generic Christian, especially since the Army religious services weren't denominational. It wasn't until a particular life experience later on that I became a Baptist. So I am probably the world's most unlikely Baptist: content to be a Baptist, but not uncomfortable in any church service, or even exploring religious history and ideas on my own.

RR: There's got to be a story there, but let's get into that later on.

MS: Yes.

RR: Your childhood — you said you moved to New York.

MS: Yes. Actually, we moved around a lot. But once we got to New York, my mother got a job with King Features Syndicate. Are you familiar with that?

RR: Yes.

MS: The newspaper syndicate. Years later, as an editor I bought a lot of comics and columns from them for the *Denver Post* — long after my mother had left, of course. She was a promotion manager or assistant manager, or something. Which connects in a roundabout way with my cartooning because part of her job

was promoting their cartoonists. Syndicate traveling reps would sell the features to individual newspaper editors, but Mom produced the promotion material for them. And she would often bring home a whole week's proofs of various comics, like "Blondie," "Popeye" and "Bringing Up Father." I got to where I was so conditioned to reading the comics that I began to draw that way. My art teachers didn't care for that, as I said, but by then there wasn't much I could do about it. And I did have occasion to do cartoons in the Army (and even later, some for the *Gazette*). Years later, I realized, from the work of artists I supervised, that there was indeed a future in cartooning, but I did not know it at the time.

RR: So where did you go to school?

MS: At the High School of Music and Art. I finished that at age 15.

RR: In Manhattan?

MS: Yes, at 135th Street in upper Manhattan. That was about a one-hour subway ride from where we lived in the borough of Queens.

RR: Finished at 15?

MS: I turned 16 in college, but I was still much younger than most of my classmates in college. Japan attacked the U.S. in December '41. I graduated from high school in January '42. I was so young there didn't seem to be anything else to do, so I enrolled in Queens College in the town of Flushing, New York on Long Island, in the borough where I lived. I think it is now Queens University, or a part of the City University of New York. It was a small, but good, public college then. At the time there were about 800 students in the whole college or even less.

RR: What did you study there?

MS: Kind of a general liberal arts program. I called myself a journalism major. My English teacher in high school had said that I could always major in journalism, so I put down my major as journalism. I never had a journalism course there, but I would submit cartoons and art work and some features to the college paper. I also did theatricals. I was in theater, too.

RR: Oh. Doing what?

MS: A whole range of things. I had some serious parts in good current plays. I played in the anti-Nazi drama "Watch on the Rhine," and had the male lead in the mystery, "Ladies in Retirement." I was Albert, the cockney nephew who unwittingly helps unravel the crime, as I recall dimly. I also played in what you call in college variety shows. Whether my roles were meant to be comic or not, I would throw in some lines to get a laugh because I loved doing that. I still love laughter.

RR: Do suppose you might have had some of that from your father?

MS: Maybe. If humor is genetic. Variety shows were like vaudeville, but I can't say for sure. I don't remember the man at all, not even in the first years of my life.

RR: Never saw him again, I guess.

MS: No.

RR: Do you know what became of him?

MS: No. Never heard from him. He never wrote. It never bothered me. My mother avoided making references to him. You know, she could have been like Amy

Semple McPherson or any other very strong-willed woman. She always used to get onto me about doing my homework or completing the task at hand, that sort of thing. She was a bear for doing that, but she could be kind and lighthearted, too.

RR: Did she ever get married again?

MS: Yes. Much later, after she had moved to California during World War II. After that, she married a man named Lou Newman, who was a manufacturer of machine tools. But she remained self-reliant. She set up her own business, an employment agency, first in southern California, and then in Oakland, northern California. She had a successful agency. She must have been a good promoter. By the way, I should say, as long as you've got a lot of tape, my mother seemed to have a sense of mission because of her continued role as a Christian Science counselor (practitioner). She did her best to help her poorer clients in Oakland, particularly African-American women who didn't have much experience in the workplace, not only to find job openings, but to successfully handle the job interviews. And at age 70, she was retained by the state of California as an employment consultant to do more of that. She was quite proud of it. One time when I visited her in Oakland, women clients would call out, "Hi, Louise!" and come up and embrace her.

RR: We left you in Queens College.

MS: Right. I got two and a half years of college credits in before I turned 17 and enlisted in the Air Corps.

RR: In the Air Corps?

MS: In the Army Air Corps, at the time it was called. I didn't know much about flying, but I wanted to do something, and the thought of marching in mud as an infantryman just sounded particularly terrible. I knew some friends who had enlisted in the Air Corps, so I went down to the recruitment center (at Grand Central annex) and applied to get in. I was pleasantly surprised when I was accepted. I enlisted at age 17, in 1943, but I wasn't called to active duty until April of '44.

RR: Where?

MS: In New York, but they shipped me initially to New Jersey, then to Mississippi and then to Arkansas.

RR: What would have been the base in Mississippi?

MS: Biloxi.

RR: And then where in Arkansas?

MS: Stuttgart, Arkansas.

RR: I didn't know we had Air Corps in Arkansas.

MS: Oh, yes. Stuttgart Air Force Base was a twin engine training base with an auxiliary field at Blytheville. By then, in summer of '44, the Air Corps had changed its name to the Army Air Force, or AAF. It appeared to have stockpiled a lot of young guys as air cadets for possible duty in what might have been a long and costly air war against Japan. They had so many of us that we would drill and go through a lot of cadet stuff, and maybe a little bit of training around airplanes. And they would move us from base to base. I moved from Stuttgart after about

six or seven months to Smyrna, Tennessee, outside of Nashville. That was the same kind of deal, except that, in Stuttgart, I learned I could do something different. What we were told was, “Most of you guys will want to go and work on airplanes. But if you have any special skill and there is an office on base that will accept you, then you may do that while you wait for your next assignment. So I thought, “Well, I listed myself as a journalism major. Maybe I can do that.” So I went to the little Stuttgart base newspaper — I think it was a mimeograph publication — and I found there were very amiable people working there. There were civilian girls, and the guys, mostly non-coms, sergeants and corporals, and so on, were real easy going. I thought, “This is the life. A fellow could enjoy working in a setting like that.” Then when my squadron was shipped to Smyrna, Tennessee, I just went to the *Smyrna Bomb Bay* office and offered to work there in my spare time.

RR: *Bomb Bay?*

MS: *Smyrna Bomb Bay. B-O-M-B B-A-Y*, the newspaper for this advanced multi-engine base. It was a four-page printed publication — a weekly, as I recall, and it resembled a college newspaper. They seemed glad to get the extra help. They were an offshoot of the base Public Information Office, and the people in both departments treated me like a visiting “professional,” which, of course, I wasn’t. I did cartoons. Some were good enough to be republished elsewhere. I still have some of them. I did some writing. I loved that. And I made great progress with my art work because of the instruction I got from a sergeant named John Parish,

who was their regular cartoonist. He had been on the *Nashville Banner*, as I recall. He looked like Abe Lincoln before Lincoln grew a beard. He taught me how to draw with brush and ink. My cartooning improved a lot. Most of all though, I began to think maybe if I don't turn out to be a pilot or navigator, that newspaper work might not be too bad a career. My thoughts began to shape up like that, although I had had no journalism instruction whatsoever.

But to come back to Stuttgart, Arkansas, I also volunteered to do some art work for the USO in town. Why, I have no idea, except that they needed someone to do some posters, and they heard that I did art work. One day in July, '44, I was doing some work on a poster at the USO, and some girls came into the building. One of them was Pat Freeman from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Her girlfriends had talked her into making the trip. It was Pat's first time to go to USO for anything. There was to be a dance there that evening. Well, she wandered into where I was doing the poster and started telling me how to improve it. [Laughter] I should have known right there I was in big trouble. We got into a little debate. To make up for it, she invited me to her mom's house in Pine Bluff the next Sunday for some southern fried chicken. On the way home in the GI bus, she told her girlfriends she had met the man she was going to marry. If I had heard that, I'm sure I would have fainted dead away. But I didn't hear it, and she sure was good looking — and that was great fried chicken. A year and a half later (when the war was over), we were married in Pine Bluff, and shortly after that I would find my way to the University of Arkansas.

RR: First you were sent there and now the girl . . .

MS: Forces beyond my understanding were at work.

RR: So you were headed towards flying an airplane or being a navigator or something like that?

MS: Yes. The Army had classified me — based on testing they had done — to be trained as a navigator and/or flight engineer. In later years I used to think it was hilarious to think of me as a potential navigator because I had trouble finding my way around Denver. I could have been in big trouble, but for the fact that Pat would frequently remind me that the Rocky Mountains were always west of the city. She was the one with a great sense of space. You could put her down anywhere, and she would figure out where she was. Which later on showed up in her design work. She just had the knack. She could look at any space and absolutely know what would fit and what should go where.

RR: Did you end the war in Smyrna?

MS: I was there in the fall of '45 when the atom bomb was dropped. Was it November?

RR: August.

MS: Those of us in the cadet program were offered the option of re-enlisting for five years to get flight training or being honorably discharged “for the convenience of the government.” That was the line most of us got into — to return to civilian life. I was sent to the air base at San Bernardino, California, which was great since my mother and brother had moved to Los Angeles. I was discharged at San

Bernardino on November 9, 1945.

RR: So did you come back to Arkansas then?

MS: I spent a little while in Los Angeles trying to figure out what to do with my life. But I missed Pat very much. I proposed to her by Western Union telegram, and she accepted. I hitched a ride to Pine Bluff, and we got married there. That was almost 55 years ago, January 10, 1946. I still hadn't a clue as to what to do about the future. I guess we played gin rummy for about a week. Finally, it dawned on me that I was a "family man" and that I had better hurry up and finish my education because I was going to have to earn a living. So we started looking for a school for me to go to. Indirectly, that is how I got to the University of Arkansas.

RR: Did you go somewhere else first?

MS: The most famous journalism school at the time, the only one I had ever heard of anyway, was at the University of Missouri. I got on a Trailways bus in Pine Bluff and went to St. Louis and then over to Columbia, Missouri. There they said, "You can get in. Your grades are fine, no problem there, but we have run out of University housing for married students." I was pretty down as I got back on the bus. For some reason, I headed back by way of Kansas City and then south to Arkansas. On the southern leg of the journey, I got to telling my tale of woe to the bus driver. It was one of those moments that make you think maybe someone up there is looking out for you. Well, the bus driver says to me, "Son, there's a school at this next town, Fayetteville. Why don't you get out there and ask about

getting in? You can always catch another bus and use the same ticket (to Pine Bluff).” So, acting on the counsel of this kindly bus driver, I got off at Fayetteville and walked over to the Registrar’s Office at the University of Arkansas. Until that moment, I had never heard of Fayetteville or known that the University of Arkansas was there. And the advisor at the University of Arkansas had a familiar story for me. “We could admit you. Your grades are fine. But we don’t have any more married student housing available.” This time, however, I thought to myself, “If I’m ever going to be a journalist, I have got to turn to the newspaper for help.” I asked for directions to the local paper, the *Northwest Arkansas Times*. When I got there, I didn’t know what I was going to do, but I said, “I want to talk to the editor.” They showed me into the office of Mrs. Roberta Fulbright, a nice, older lady. She was probably a lot younger than I am now. But she seemed grandmotherly to me. Anyway, I told her my problems, and she said, “There is a story in that.” I said, “What?” She got one of the reporters — Helen Hughes, I think it was, to do a story on the problem of married ex-GI’s, who were being turned away from school because of lack of housing. They used my case as an example. Years later, I thought how brilliant it was of Mrs. Fulbright to sense the existence of a good human interest story so quickly. I came back to the *Times* office that afternoon to get a copy of the paper and learned to my amazement they had already received four offers of bedrooms for us to rent. I picked one and then called Pat, who got on the next bus to Fayetteville.

RR: That's how you ended up at the university?

MS: That's how, thanks to a Continental Trailways bus driver. If I had known how it was going to turn out, I would have gotten his autograph or a picture of him or something. "There is a school at this next town." That's all he said. "Why don't you try there?" And I did, and I loved it. You know when you compare, the choice was perfect for me. Even then, the University of Missouri had about a thousand journalism majors. It was a big school. The University of Arkansas, I discovered, had barely fifty majors. And they had only two professors, W. J. Lemke and Joe Thalheimer.

RR: W. J. Lemke is a familiar name to me.

MS: We used to call Lemke "Uncle Walt." And Joe, we used to call "Smokey Joe." He had his pipe in his mouth all the time. Lemke pretended to be gruff; Thalheimer looked gentle. They were both very caring guys and very effective. I have run journalism departments late in my career with only eight or ten faculty and felt shortchanged by the universities' administrations. They made it with two. And they did a hell of a job.

RR: And advised the student paper.

MS: And besides, Uncle Walt put out regularly a very personalized, mimeographed newsletter that kept track of every former journalism student and their children and their children's children. He loved all of his students, but you might not know it until you started getting the newsletter. He put on this kind of gruff front, like some editors did. You will enjoy this, I hope. I remember one of my early

news writing classes; we were doing obituaries. There were two points to the lesson. One was to get your facts straight. There are a lot of facts thrown at you in obits and each paper has its own format for handling them. The other point to the exercise was don't assume anything. Well, Uncle Walt gave us a bunch of random details. I wrote my story and got as far as "Services will be at such and such place," but I could find nothing in my notes about burial. Well, I thought, "I better say something about that." So I wrote, "Burial will follow." [laughter]

When Uncle Walt returned my paper, his only response was a circle around those three words, and the comment: "I would certainly hope so." The message was plain: "Don't assume, dummy. Ask for the facts." Ultimately, I got on his good side. I wrote some kind of essay about individuality. He liked that. Suddenly, I could do no wrong. One time he invited me to join him on a trip around northeastern Arkansas. We went to Jonesboro, Paragould, and a lot of places I had never heard of. He took me around Washington County, too, and he told me in detail the history of every place we stopped. I think he wanted to show this Yankee that Arkansas was a pretty good place to learn about the past, the present, and oneself, as he, a former northerner himself, had done. He became a trusted one of several substitute father figures that I encountered in my career. He and Joe and Bill Good helped to push me. Bill was director of the university news bureau, a kindly and wonderful man. He had been head of the International News Service Bureau in Atlanta. Pat went to work as his secretary. So we were all in the basement of Old Main. Uncle Walt got after me, because he was advisor to

the student newspaper, to get on the *Traveler* and do some work. So I went over and said to Wanda Wassner, who was a classmate of mine and editor of the *Traveler*, “Can you use a cartoonist?” And she said, “Oh boy, can we!” But she added, “You also have to take another job. We need a sports editor.” So I thought, “Okay, I can do that.” “I also need a features editor while you are at it.” So I said, “I can do that.” So I got three jobs on that paper. Then Bill Good caught up with me in the hall in the basement of Old Main one day and said, “The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* wants a reporter to cover the University of Arkansas.” I said, “I can do that.” I had no idea what it involved. I was barely writing obituaries that were worth a damn. But I started covering the campus for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, a pretty impressive newspaper in those days. That was great because if you said to someone from eastern Arkansas, “I represent the *Commercial Appeal*,” man, they were always ready to talk to you. The *Commercial Appeal* was big over there. They paid me 25 cents per column inch that they published. I guess in that year and a half before my graduation, I must have gotten the name of every kid from eastern Arkansas in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* at least once. I learned that “names make news” (and also learned to write in a way that was damn hard to cut. Then when Bob Wimberly. . .

RR: This might be a good time . . .

MS: Do you want to stop?

RR: . . . to explain the word “stringer.”

MS: Okay, yes. I was a “stringer.” In those days regional newspapers staffed a few

bureaus in what they considered key towns, like state capitals. And they supplemented that coverage with copy from individuals like me who developed stories on our own. Officially, we were called correspondents. Internally, we were called stringers, because to collect so much per inch (twenty-five cents in my case), you pasted your published copy together from the end of one article to the start of another. Then you sent that whole string of articles to the paper, and they paid you accordingly each month. After awhile I got the hang of it, and did not do too badly moneywise.

RR: Let's get back to Bob Wimberly.

MS: Okay, Bob Wimberly was a classmate and friend of mine. And he was from eastern Arkansas — Jonesboro — so I had done a feature on him for the Memphis paper. Here I was covering the university for the *Commercial Appeal* and Wimberly was doing the news of the town of Fayetteville for a radio station. Wimberly was very entrepreneurial. He came to me and said, "The guy that ran the Fayetteville bureau of the (Fort Smith) *Southwest American* was leaving. "You and I should apply for that job because you are already covering the campus and I am covering the town. We can switch off, and swap each other's carbons and make a little extra money." I said, "Can you do that?" Wimberly said, "Watch me!" And he worked it out so we each got a regular salary from the *Southwest American*. Now we were competing with Mrs. Fulbright's paper — which bothered me a little because they had been so good to me. Fortunately, I was able to maintain my friendships with the people at the *Northwest Arkansas*

Times, like editor Ted Wiley and reporter Helen Hughes and, of course, Mrs. Fulbright.

But to get to Wimberly and how we swapped carbons: One day I am listening to the radio, and it's Bob, and he is describing a traffic accident in Fayetteville.

Bodies are all over and blood, guts, and it is making me a little ill. Then I stopped myself and said, "Wait. Something is familiar about this." I had covered that wreck. The facts are from my copy for the *Southwest American*. Then it dawned on me, Wimberly was embroidering the story — adding "color" you might say — to make it more interesting to his radio audience. It didn't bother him a bit.

Here's another Wimberly story I'll always remember: Our *Southwest American* office was on the second floor over the Oklahoma Tire & Supply Company store on the town square. Wimberly's broadcast studio was just across the street, on the first floor of the Washington Hotel. One day about noon, I was sitting there in the second floor office, typing up my stories that I had gathered that morning and setting aside the carbons to hand over to Wimberly for his local newscast, when the phone rings. It is Wimberly's voice, but he is in the midst of a newscast. I thought, "Gee. that's funny. It must be kind of a screw up with the telephone." I hung it up and went back to work. A minute later maybe, it rings again. There is more tension in Wimberly's voice, and he is going on and giving the news, so I hung up. I thought, "Gee, that's strange, that it would happen twice." The third time it is Wimberly's voice giving the news, but now I sense the sheer panic. Now it dawns on me — Oh, my God, I forgot to give him the carbons! So I

grabbed them up and whipped down the steps, through the traffic, dodging cars, and into the lobby of the Washington Hotel to Wimberly's studio. There is Wimberly, his hand wiping the top of his head, and he has *The New York Times* scattered in front of him. He has been ad-libbing from a several-days-old copy of the newspaper. He looks up, throws a pained stare at me, and says, "Now for the **late** local news as time will allow!" I thought, "Man, that is a resourceful broadcast journalist if I ever saw one!" I figured that guy was absolutely going to be the world's greatest broadcaster. To me, Wimberly was a character right out of the Hecht-MacArthur play "The Front Page." In my newspaper career, I was blessed to meet such unforgettable people. Wimberly was single then. I was married, and Pat and I were living with Harvey and Nettie Falls in a lovely old place on Washington Street. The house has a historic designation now. There is a plaque on it. Not because we lived there! Harvey and Nettie were special people. Anyway, Wimberly often came to our apartment in that house. He would make his late telephone news checks from there. We had one of these upright telephones you don't see anymore, with the receiver you would pick up off the hanger. With the receiver propped between his shoulder and his ear, he would say, "OP, this is Wimberly. Give me the undertakers." I thought, "This guy's going to be the most colorful news person I'll ever meet." Then, he graduated, got married, became respectable and went into public relations.

RR: What a loss.

MS: I thought he was born to the role. I'm sure he was good at public relations. In

fact, I recall that he teamed up with our classmate Joe Leroux at AP & L.

RR: Who else do you remember? Fellow students who went into the . . .

MS: For a time after Bob and I, the University of Arkansas journalism department kind of made the *Southwestern American* bureau office its own. One of those who used it was Bill Shelton, who later went on to be city editor of the *Gazette*. Bill had been in the Air Force longer than I had, so he must have been older. Because I had entered college before I turned sixteen, I was able to get my BA from the University of Arkansas by June of 1947.

RR: After just . . .

MS: A year and a half at the University of Arkansas. By the way, Bob McCord, who became editor of the *Democrat*, was another of my fellow students.

I remember that one day Shelton and I were working in that bureau office, and I think Wimberly was still doing his radio thing. I recall that I was late in getting our news copy for the *Southwest American* to the bus to Fort Smith. I told Shelton I didn't have time even to call the weather bureau to get the next day's forecast. Bill said, "Don't worry." He looked out the window and said, "Fair and mild." So I wrote it on a slip of paper and shipped it off, and nobody ever complained. I don't think Bill had any meteorological experience. He just winged it, like he did when he was flying a bomber in the war. He applied for the Columbia University graduate journalism school in 1949, the year after I got in. So I was able to recommend him as a real good prospect, and he was accepted. We established a University of Arkansas journalism beachhead at Columbia, too.

Let's see, who else? There were other classmates who would go on to be editors.

RR: Douglas was not in that group?

MS: Douglas, I think, must be younger than me. I don't think I met him until I went to work for the *Gazette* in 1949.

RR: He was a Navy veteran.

MS: Several fellow veterans graduated in the years 1947-1949. Jess Covington was a Navy veteran, and Jess was a classmate of mine. Jess was not as raucous as I was and Wimberly and some of the others. Let me think, who else was in my classes?

RR: Jerry McCollum?

MS: I don't think so. You know, one interesting thing though, I remember doing an interview of three law students for the Fort Smith paper, who later turned up in the Legislature when I was covering it for the *Gazette*. I enjoyed dealing with campus political figures, which sort of pointed the way to one of my fields of future journalistic interest. One guy, all I remember is his first name, We thought it would be right to invite George over to our house for dinner. Pat was learning how to cook. She was making biscuits and using a loose-leaf *Good Housekeeping* book as a guide. She had the kitchen window open and a gust of wind turned the pages while her back was turned. As a result, she put about six times as much flour into the biscuits, and they were like bullets. [Laughter] I could not eat them. George, the campus politician, tried to be polite. He choked those damn biscuits down! I thought, "My God, how did he do it?" Some politicians, we later found out, could do almost anything to achieve their objective.

RR: Oh yes, oh yes.

MS: If George could swallow those biscuits, he could probably have swallowed real bullets if she had put them on the table.

RR: Did you go directly from the University to Columbia?

MS: No, it was a roundabout trip. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* offered me a job in their Johnson City, Tennessee, bureau for forty dollars a week. United Press offered me forty-two dollars a week as a bureau night manager at Little Rock. Two dollars seemed like a measure of UP's regard for me at the time. I did not realize that the two dollars was simply the night differential. Meanwhile, while I was negotiating with those two employers, Professor Thalheimer recommended that I should apply for a master's at Columbia. I said, "Okay." So I applied and forgot about it. After I had been accepted by United Press in Little Rock, I got a letter from Columbia, saying, "You are accepted, but you have to make up three more hours of political science before fall." I was flattered and expressed my appreciation, but I had already accepted the offer from United Press, so I turned them down and figured that was the end of that. They came back, to my astonishment, and said, "We will accept you for the next class provided you get the three hours and make it up during the next summer." Well, I didn't think much about it and went down to United Press and, man, that was incredibly good fortune. It was a very stressful situation, but it was great experience. I was by myself at night, not even a teletype operator. I had to develop stories, cover breaking news, interview people, and do follow-ups on everything that was in the

local papers, and punch in stories on the teletype machines for both the news and radio wires. And I had to learn that writing for newspaper and radio clients required different approaches. I thought it was a wonderful thing that the UP bureau had wheels on its chairs. I rarely had time to get up out of the chair. I was busy swinging back and forth between telephone, typewriter and teletype machines, but I learned to write in a hell of a hurry. Sometimes I had to finish one or more stories while the teletype machine was printing them for our clients. But it stood me in good shape years later when I went to work at the *Denver Post*, and they put me on the rewrite desk at six in the morning. They had to have these stories for the first edition. The deadline was 9 a.m. They would give me a bunch of stuff to write. And we'd have reporters calling in from the police station with notes on crime or emergency stories. I would write ten or twelve stories before deadline. After the frantic pace at United Press, I thought it would be nice to go to Columbia to get my master's, so I obtained a leave from the United Press. I came back to the university in the summer and got my three hours, then went on to New York. And Pat and I would enjoy New York. It was a whole lot different than Pine Bluff.

RR: You went up there in what year?

MS: In '48.

RR: This was a one-year program?

MS: One year, that's right. An intense one year for an M.S. in Journalism.

RR: I thought so.

MS: We lived with a Texas couple across Broadway from the university. The graduate school of journalism is at 116th Street and Broadway. We were about a block and a half from there in an apartment house at 115th Street. We lived in one bedroom with a hotplate. Pat got a job in the admissions office, and she made an interesting discovery: Some 880 candidates had applied for the graduate journalism program that year and only 65 had been accepted. I said, “Gee, was I ever lucky or what?” We would usually both get home about five in the evening. One evening Pat didn’t come home at the usual time. Not at six, six-thirty, seven, so I began to get panicky. This was New York City, not Pine Bluff. She came in finally about seven. I said, “Where have you been?” She said, “I discovered the most wonderful thing. It is called a subway, and for a nickel you can ride up and down, up and down, up and down . . . all day if you want.” [Laughter] All I could say was “Please do not do that anymore!”

RR: Wonderful. Who were some of your teachers at Columbia?

MS: Oh, well, there were some great ones! The dean of instruction was a man named Roscoe Ellard, who had been one of the stars at the University of Missouri.

RR: Ellard?

MS: For some reason, he became a great booster of mine years later. He was a great storyteller. They had an adjunct faculty made up of distinguished working professionals. This is where I got the idea to use “visiting” professionals when I became a journalism dean. They used a good many of the working newspaper people in New York and Washington, DC to teach courses in their specialties.

One of my favorites was Frank Adams, who was at the time assistant city editor of *The New York Times* and later became the city editor and finally a member of the editorial board. He liked my work — it was thorough but readable — the latter traceable to my time at United Press. I dug up a story about discrimination against Chinese-Americans in New York City of all places. Frank had me offer it to the *Times* city desk. But, because I was a student, they said they would have to have their own reporters re-check every fact. But Frank said it was good enough to be printed in *The New York Times*, which pleased me. We had one adjunct teacher who taught a course on broadcast news. (Later he became managing editor of *Saturday Review of Literature*.) He thought I did a pretty good job with radio copy, again, something I had done at United Press. Then there was Ted Bernstein, who was the copy desk chief, I believe, for *The New York Times*. Was he ever a stickler for getting the language just right! Each line of a three-line, one-column head, not only did it have to come within one or two counts, but it had to be a complete thought on that line. And if you tried to write a “clever” headline, it had better be truly clever.

RR: No puns?

MS: You would have to watch your double entendres. Harold Cross taught libel and newspaper law. He later wrote some marvelous books. One of them was *The People's Right to Know*. Cross was the lawyer for the *Herald Tribune*. He was a partner in the firm of Sackett & Cross. He had this gravely voice. I remember he started his press law course by saying, “I’m not here to tell you what you can’t

print, or what you don't dare do. I'm here to tell you how to beat the rap!"

RR: Good for him! Every newspaper needs a lawyer like him.

MS: Let's go back to United Press. I was thinking about "stringers," which you asked about earlier. Since I was night manager, I dealt with a lot of people UP had lined up as local correspondents. But United Press was so tight with its money that they paid the stringers very irregularly, which I didn't know when I called one guy, our stringer in Morrilton. There had been a B-25 crash in the mountains there.

RR: Petit Jean.

MS: Yes, the plane was reported down somewhere in that area. When I heard the police call, I phoned him and asked, "Would you go up there and cover it for us? Just phone me the facts, and I will write the story." He said, "The hell with you, go up there and cover it yourself. You so and so's haven't paid me a penny in two months." But the tightness of UP meant we had to be resourceful. One day we had a report of a severe tornado. I didn't have a stringer near by. I called the telephone company in Little Rock and asked, "How do I reach the operator in that place?" When I identified myself, I found that the supervisor I was talking to was my wife's cousin Dorothy. She rang the operator in the next town in the apparent path of the storm. So I said to the operator, "I don't know who to ask to be connected to, but do you know there is a tornado coming?" She said, "Oh, yes. I am right in the middle of it." So I asked, "What's happening?" By the time I had to get off the line, I had gotten enough eyewitness stuff from the operator for a

pretty good story.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

MS: I am talking about the operator, the telephone operator. How I miss those operators now! I got that story and didn't have to spend a penny. The bureau chief loved me for that.

RR: Were you taking notes on the typewriter?

MS: Yes.

RR: From the phone?

MS: Yes. You just learned to balance the phone to your ear.

RR: And to your shoulder?

MS: Yes.

RR: Clattering away on the typewriter?

MS: Yes. You had to take your copy out and start over again to punch it into the teletype.

RR: You had to be an acrobat as well as a reporter.

MS: I would never have got off the seat, except that as the junior man in the bureau, one day a week I had to go to the Capitol and get material for a weekly hunting and fishing column. I had never been hunting and fishing! But it was part of my job to write the column "Hunting and Fishing in Arkansas." Ironically, it became the most widely used feature United Press sent out of Little Rock. Thank God for a man named Tom McAmis, who was the executive director of the Game and

Fish Commission. He was a former broadcaster. I came up and confessed that I did not know a damn thing. Tom would take me step by step through each item of information. Because I was their principal outlet, I would get all their best stuff. The column was picked up and widely used. I would see it in papers all over the state, and I would get lots of mail from it. In fact, years later, when I went down to Little Rock, as managing editor of *The Denver Post*, to cover the 1957 school integration crisis, I would introduce myself to people, and they would say, “Oh, I’ve heard of you. You do a hunting and fishing column.”

There is another thing I must say about United Press. Anybody who has worked at United Press and left it has a kind of soft spot in their heart for it. Maybe a kind of pride from having survived the experience. One time I was at a meeting of editors, and the famous broadcaster David Brinkley was the featured speaker. The introducer said that Brinkley started his career on a small paper in North Carolina, after which he had “moved on to greener pastures.” Brinkley got up and said, “That is the first time that I have ever heard anybody refer to United Press as greener pastures.” [laughter] Former United Pressers later on referred to themselves as members of the “Down Hold Club” because that had been pressed so hard to hold down expenses. One time, on an out-of-town assignment, I put in for overtime and my bureau chief at Little Rock, wonderful guy that he was, couldn’t bring himself to talk to me for several days. We had to compete with the Associated Press — which almost always had greater resources. And we took pride in our achievements, especially under those condition.

RR: Against the AP you were the underdog.

MS: Oh, absolutely. In Little Rock, it was me at night versus strong opposition. UP's only office was in the *Gazette* building, whereas, the AP had daytime offices in the *Democrat* building and a night office in the *Gazette* building — because they got the carbon copies of news stories directly from those papers. Sam Harris, later to become one of my best friends, was night manager for AP. He had eight men, including teletype operators. I was awed by that. But, as I said, we survived and even prospered. In my year, four people were assigned to the United Press bureau in Little Rock. John Haslam was the bureau chief. Bob Brown was our main Capitol correspondent and leading reporter. We also had an ex-journalist who was designated as the business rep to sell our services to clients. His name was Jim Flinchum. And, of course, there was me. The irony is, years later, in neighboring states, three of us moved up. Bob Brown became editor of the *Albuquerque Tribune* in New Mexico. I became managing editor of *The Denver Post* in Colorado. Jim Flinchum became executive editor of the *Cheyenne Tribune and Eagle*, in Wyoming. Even our division chief, Fred McCabe, eventually moved west. As head of the UP division office in Dallas, Fred was a terror. He scared the pee out of me when he raised hell over something I had screwed up. Fred eventually bought the paper in Jackson Hole, Wyoming — a great place to spend the rest of one's life. But life is full of marvelous turns. By the time I became managing editor in Denver, Fred McCabe was in charge of UP's relations with clients — including me. I enjoyed teasing

him about giving us UP's service cheaper. He was a good sport about it. And then, one time, there was a strike at AP, and we desperately needed UP's business news service — which Fred, after leading me on about getting revenge, finally extended the business wire service to us at the *Post* for no extra charge. It was like one old school friend helping another. That was part of that UP “alumni” spirit, too.

RR: Why don't we take a little break here?

MS: Okay.

RR: Before we do that, what is your full name?

MS: Mortimer. I hate it and I never use it. My mother told me she thought it was a beautiful name, but then she called me Bud. The middle initial, P., is for Philip.

RR: P? Okay, all right. I had forgotten to get that at the beginning. We like to have biographical . . . We had you up to Columbia and you were about ready for your next career move.

MS: Yes. It was a great, challenging time at Columbia. The teachers were very demanding. I remember one instance I referred to in a book celebrating the journalism school's 50th anniversary. Professor Ellard would pass out assignments on little strips of paper that told you in one or two sentences what the story was. This particular time some students were getting things like “Go to the zoo. They've got a new kangaroo.” So I very cheerfully looked at mine, and it said, “The Democrats have accused Governor Dewey” (remember, this was 1948, and he was running for President against Truman) — “of misappropriating

hundreds of millions of dollars in New York state. Check it out.” So I thought, “This is crazy. He has given some of the class easy feature stories to do, like how does the subway work, etc., and I have to find out if the Republican candidate for president (and almost certain winner) has misappropriated hundreds of millions of dollars. Doesn’t he realize I’m just a student?” Well, I am going on like this when suddenly Ellard is right over my shoulder. We are eyeball to eyeball, and the clear message was “get going!” I said, “Yes, sir. I think I better go.” Then when I am out of the building, I think, “What the hell do I do?” At least I am thinking, “I will go to the guys that started all this. I tracked down the appropriate Democratic headquarters. There were a bunch of them because there were campaigns at every level. And I asked the guy in charge, “What is all this about?” He was pleased to have someone follow up on the issue. There was a batch of papers they handed to me. Then I figured I had to go to Dewey and get his response. But “Where’s Dewey? The guy’s all over the country, running for president, and the clock is running out on my deadline.” I finally found out where Dewey’s personal headquarters was, and I went to the suite in that hotel. The secretary, she was tough. She said, “Governor Dewey is not in. You’ll just have to wait to see his assistant. And he’s very busy.” So I was in there, and this was going nowhere. Meanwhile, she pulls out a crossword puzzle. I had got to get on her good side some way or another. So I said, “Can I help?” She said, “Only on a few words.” So we worked together on the crossword puzzle. After a while, she said, “You know, I think I had better cut in on Mr. Lockwood and find out when

he can see you.” So she goes into a maze of offices, and in a couple of minutes, he pops out, takes my hand, and says, “I’m a Columbia man myself. How can I help you?” So we went in, and we talked for about an hour. I don’t remember the details, but he had a point-by-point response to those charges that had not been published yet. I rushed back to the journalism school with a ton of stuff and worked like a dog — it was like that United Press tension — and was able to turn in the story on deadline. A couple of days later when he turned back the story, Ellard said, “You did a hell of a good job on it when you finally got going. I wouldn’t have given you the assignment if I didn’t think you could handle it. But don’t ever let me hear of you ‘beefing’ again. Just remember, somebody is always watching.” I had occasion to remember that less than eight years later when I was a lowly assistant city editor at the *Denver Post*. The managing editor had announced that he was leaving to be a publisher in San Francisco, and a bunch of us lower ranking guys were sitting in the newsroom speculating as to which of the higher ups would succeed him. Then I get a phone call to come back to the office of the publisher, Palmer Hoyt. He shakes my hand and says, “Congratulations, you’re the new managing editor.” Well, I was amazed, which he could clearly see. So he added, “I know all about you. I’ve been watching you for some time.” Ellard had been right — and the message had changed my attitude and my performance not only at Columbia, but from then on.

RR: It sounds like you had a good year up there.

MS: It was great from then on. On election night, my classmates elected me as

“managing editor” for our student coverage. We put out our own in-house newspaper that night. I might have learned another lesson that night. I wrote an interpretive story, saying the only interesting thing about this election was who would be in Mr. Dewey’s cabinet. Then I went out for a few minutes to vote (my first vote in a national election). In the booth I got to feeling sorry for poor old President Truman. Everyone had dumped on him. So I voted for him. Later I told my wife what I had done, that I had “wasted’ my vote. She said, “So did I.” It was well into the next day when Harry Truman had the last laugh. And the lesson: Pay attention to what you are doing, and see if others are doing the same.

RR: Did you go from Columbia to the *Gazette*?

MS: Yes, yes.

RR: How did that happen?

MS: When I was working for the United Press, the *Gazette* looked like a pretty exciting place to be. Harry Ashmore came there as executive editor. They were doing good things. They were fighting Civil Rights battles, decent treatment for blacks, fairness to all people, and so on. I just thought, this is a pretty exciting paper. When I was ready to graduate, Rosco Ellard sent me around to certain places. He sent me to a friend of his, Ben Gilbert, who was city editor of the *Washington Post* and who said he would like to put me on when he got an opening. And Frank Adams was hoping to get me on at *The New York Times*. I did have at least three firm offers. For one thing, I could return to United Press. Then there was an offer from Barry Farris, who was head of International News

Service, to me to work in their New York bureau for seventy-five dollars a week, a grand sum of money back then. Another was from Ernie Deane, who at the time was publisher of the *Mexia Daily News* in Texas. He was offering me the city editor's job. I had no idea where Mexia was or how big the paper was, but I was flattered by Ernie's offer. I had written to Sam Harris, who was my night bureau competitor when I worked for United Press, and his response was especially warm and friendly. Sam, who had become city editor of the *Gazette*, offered me fifty dollars a week. My instinct told me it would be more satisfying to go back and work at the *Gazette*. I had seen them in operation and admired what they were doing. I thought it was pretty courageous. I turned down the International News Service. Marv Stone, who, like me, was one of the top three students in the class, took the INS job and not long afterwards became their Tokyo bureau chief. Years later, he became editor of *US News*. We remained friends over the years. I didn't want to take the INS route. I had done enough of the underdog wire service craziness. I wanted to work at a paper that I respected. That was a big factor, and so it took a lot less money to get me to go down there. Besides, I was a University of Arkansas alumnus, and I had begun to think of Arkansas as "home."

RR: So that was in '50?

MS: In '49.

RR: In '49.

MS: Right.

RR: You dealt with Sam Harris?

MS: Sam Harris, that's right. I didn't deal with J. N. Heiskell or Harry Ashmore.

RR: Or A.R. Nelson?

MS: No, I didn't know Nelson until I went to work there. He became another friend. Sam was the guy I knew, and Sam was city editor. He would be a fun city editor, too. The whole newsroom was full of bright, witty people. Besides, I think Carroll McGauhey was managing editor at the time.

RR: Tell me about going to work there. What did you do?

MS: Well, it was general assignment at first. Then, they moved me around. They had me on police beat. Then I did city government. The mayor was Sam Wassell. His brother was the bright one — Corydon Wassell, a wartime hero in the Pacific. I wrote background stories as well as news stories. Then county courts and county government was one beat. Louie Mashburn then was county judge. You know the system in Arkansas. The county judge is not really a judge, but he is in charge of the Quorum Court and was administrator of the county. In between would be more general assignments. I would write feature stories and investigations and everything you could imagine. I did district courts. . . .

RR: Federal courts or . . . ?

MS: It was district, state.

RR: State Circuit Court?

MS: Circuit Court, that's right. Circuit Court and the other, yes, Chancery Court. The court of equity, dealing with property issues, at least as I experienced it. The

Circuit Court handled criminal cases. I covered a bunch of those. I got to know the judges and was invited to sit in on discussions in chambers. How did I happen to go up to the State House? I had written a political story from a “reliable source” that caused quite a stir. It was speculation on what Sid McMath was going to do in the future. I was just fortunate in developing a lot of sources. So Sam gave me more political stories to write. The next thing I know, I am assigned to the State House. Matilda Tuohey was the regular. She was a great gal with a marvelous, dry sense of humor. I had some contacts there because of the days I had covered game and fish and other news, but Matilda introduced me to a lot of other good sources. One of those who knew everything that went on was C. G. (Crip) Hall. Crip was a University of Arkansas alum, which was one tie-in. Besides which, he loved to swap stories, some printable, some not. Matilda and I would spend as much time in Crip’s office, drinking Cokes and laughing at jokes as we did in much of the rest of the building. While I was covering the news in Fayetteville, I remember learning a very important thing from the judge of Municipal Court. His name was Jim, but I can’t remember his last name. Nice guy. Anyway, one day I saw on the record that the judge had granted a petitioner’s request for a writ of certiorari. I said to my counterpart from the *Northwest Arkansas Times*, “What is a writ of certiorari?” The other reporter said, “I don’t know. Just write it down and say the judge granted it.” I thought, “Well, that is funny. At least I should go and ask what it is.” So I went to the judge and said, “Jim, what is a writ of certiorari?” The judge replied, “You

are the first reporter that has ever asked me! It is a writ that allows that petitioner to take his records and appeal to the next level. So, in effect, I gave them the go ahead to appeal.” So I thought, “Why don’t we say it in plain English?” And that’s the way I wrote the story. The Judge seemed quite amused by the little episode.

RR: Good lesson there.

MS: Yes. A lot of reporters would say just what he said and leave it at that — never mind whether you helped the reader to understand. After a while, you learn such lessons. Ask the questions, and keep asking. I remember one time, years later, I was a *Denver Post* reporter, covering politics and just about everything else. We were interviewing Richard Nixon in a small room at the Brown Palace Hotel. Probably about twenty of us. I guess Nixon was running for President; he always was. So he was giving us the usual bunk, which had been written hundreds of times, and I was getting pretty bored. On the way out, I thought to myself, “The only dumb question is the one that doesn’t get asked.” So on the way out as we were shaking hands, I asked him, “What label fits you best? You know, Progressive, Conservative, whatever?” And Nixon says, “Liberal.” I nearly choked, but I wrote it down. It made a neat story, and Nixon never complained, and the other reporters didn’t hear it and probably swore to their editors that it never happened. Years later, during the massive media coverage of the investigation of the murder of the child beauty queen, JonBenet Ramsey, in Boulder, Colorado, the Boulder chief of police said to a reporter, “That’s a dumb

question!” I was watching the press conference on television, and I blurted out, “You dumb bastard!” That reporter should have replied, “The only dumb question, Chief, is the one that doesn’t get asked.” There were a lot of questions that should have been asked at the time — and maybe then someone might have been charged with the child’s murder.

RR: Hard thing for a young reporter to learn. You are afraid of making a fool of yourself.

MS: That’s right. I didn’t mind making a fool of myself. Despite that — or maybe because of that — I often turned up a good story. In fact, Paul Poorman, an executive with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, once said at an editors’ meeting, in jest, “The book on you is that you ain’t easily embarrassed.”

RR: Yes, yes. Tell me about the 1950 race for Governor.

MS: The *Gazette* had two of us on the race, switching back and forth. John Fletcher spent two weeks with Laney, and I spent two weeks with McMath. Then we switched off, me doing Laney and him doing McMath. The *Gazette* would often run our stories side by side.

RR: Incidentally, that was a different man from the poet John Gould Fletcher.

MS: John L. Fletcher was the *Gazette*’s man. John Gould Fletcher was the poet. They were related some way, but John L. was the reporter. He was our senior political reporter. By the way, the poet’s wife was also a famous writer. I did an article on her while I was at United Press — and she wrote a beautiful letter of thanks — which I still have. Another story about the State House, though — there was a

certain scandal. I don't want to mention the public official's name, as he was a friend, and basically a good person, with a fine record of public service. Anyway, an extramarital affair developed between this public official and a young woman who was a key punch operator at the State House. See Clinton wasn't the first. [Laughter] Something develops in that setting.

RR: That will come as a great surprise to our readers! [Laughter]

MS: Yes, I'll bet. [Laughter] We all knew this public official and liked him. We are sitting there at Crip Hall's desk one day, trying to figure out how to write the story. And Matilda says, in her droll way, "I wouldn't mind his indiscretion if he had not been so damned indiscrete about it." [Laughter] Crip could almost always see the funny side of a situation. He would sit back there and feed us anecdotes. We young reporters would just hang on his every word. He was ready with a comment for all occasions. One day, I was suffering from sinus trouble and was stopped up. Crip says, "There are only two kinds of people in Arkansas. Those with sinus trouble and those who are going to get it." [Laughter] We did have fun covering the State House and the Legislature. When I was covering the House of Representatives in February of 1951, Pat was three weeks late with our first child, Susan. Everybody behind the press row and in the chamber knew there had been so many false alarms and that I had determined that I was going to wait until the last minute — when I was certain. Then some official came to the press row and whispered, "Your wife is in labor, and it is definite this time." I jumped over the desk and headed out the main door of the chamber. The whole

House of Representatives stood up at once and cheered.

RR: Oh my gosh, that is funny.

MS: I have a mixed set of recollections. Here's one about Orval Faubus. In the race between McMath and Laney, there was a nice, quiet, unassuming, unnoticeable guy, that would always say, "Hi, Mort. How you doing?" I would say, "Hi, how you doing?" Then I would have to ask somebody, "Who is that guy?" They would say, "That is Orval Faubus." I would say, "Oh!" and then go on. I could not keep his name in my memory. Time after time it happened. It was something I forgot about after I left Arkansas. But years later, when I was managing editor of the *Post* and standing in the newsroom one day, someone handed me this wire service bulletin, which said, "Governor Orval Faubus calls out the National Guard to prevent the integration of Little Rock Central High School." I thought, "Governor Faubus! Wow, how and when did that happen?" I do remember hearing then that Faubus had had problems and had been accused of being a Communist or having attended a Communist school at one time. I couldn't believe that stuff, but what I did recall was the difficulty holding Orval Faubus's name in my mind. Then suddenly there I was trying to cover that story of Orval as an internationally known figure.

RR: Tell me how that came about.

MS: Well, as I said, I was standing in the newsroom one day in 1957 when I was handed this wire story.

RR: You were managing editor?

MS: I had been managing editor for about a year. I was in the newsroom talking to someone about something when the telegraph editor handed me the bulletin off the teletype from Little Rock. He knew I had some Arkansas connection. The story said Orval had called up the National Guard to prevent trouble arising from the planned integration of Central High. I said, "This can't be. That isn't like Little Rock. Little Rock is a pretty integrated Southern town for its day." They had an African-American doctor who was head of the local medical society, I explained to the guys standing nearby. People of different races rubbed elbows all the time, I said. There were problems, but nothing like the flash point that Faubus seemed to be talking about. I thought out loud, "Something is fishy here. What we need is somebody who understands Arkansas politics to go down and find out what is going on." When I said that, suddenly, all eyes were on me in the newsroom. Unwittingly, I just assigned myself to the story. When I did check in at Little Rock, I stopped by at the *Gazette* to say hello. Then I went to Central High School. I got to the street in front of Central High, and there were, at the time — before the black kids actually tried to go in — about a hundred people in front of the school building. I started looking around for locals to interview. Well, the first guy I tapped on the shoulder turned around, and I was amazed to see it was Jim Flinchum who had been with the United Press bureau in Little Rock when I was, and who was at this time bureau chief for the UP in Denver. I talked to Jim for a while, then approached another guy, who turned out to be a reporter from the *Detroit Free Press*. And he said, "Don't bother tapping others

on the shoulder because they are almost all newspaper people, or wire service people, or FBI.” What the hell? At that moment, we were the “mob” that was out there. The *New York Times* writer was busy interviewing the National Guardsmen, who didn’t know a damn thing. I think that was Dr. Ben Fine. Oh, there was one guy out there with radio equipment in his station wagon, and he was holding his microphone up to maybe three or four teenagers who seemed to be enjoying themselves off to one side, shouting things like , “Get the niggers!” That was all the excitement at the time. After a couple of days of this stuff, perhaps as many as 400 to 500 people had gathered at the high school — and the news people were no longer in the majority. After a few days, we heard there was something going on at federal court, so we went there. Then we heard the rumor there would be trouble in North Little Rock, so the pack of news people rushed there. Nothing going on. We news people would all rush back and forth as a mob. Finally, the focus seemed to be on federal court, and I think it was Osro Cobb, the U.S. Attorney, whom I had known as a lonely Republican Party chairman in the 1940s, who was leading the federal case. He was one of many people I kept meeting that I had known from my days in Fayetteville or Little Rock who were involved on one side or the other. And they helped me to do special background stories for the *Post*.

RR: Virgil Blossom from Fayetteville.

MS: Virgil Blossom had been school superintendent in Fayetteville. One of my former sources. Now he had the superintendent job in Little Rock. Virgil said none of

this was necessary. The integration of these children would have gone off peacefully if Faubus hadn't stirred up this "crisis." Virgil said he told this to Faubus, who replied that if he let it happen without his opposition, then Jimmy Johnson would use it to defeat him in the next election. And there was a real basis to this because Senator Jim Johnson, who was also a friend of mine, told me sometime later, over lunch in Denver, that "Orval won the jackpot on my nickel." Then there was another guy I knew named Karam.

RR: Karam . . .

MS: Jimmy Karam, a sort of dark figure in the thing. There was a rumor of him being some kind of muscle man for Faubus. I remembered I had written stories about Jimmy Karam. He had been the football coach of North Little Rock Junior College, I think before that school became a four-year school or a "university."

RR: That's right.

MS: When I talked to Harry Ashmore, who, of course, had been one of my bosses, I said, "Tell me about the line up here." He summed it up, "On our side there is one broken-down newspaper editor, one broken-down ex-Governor (McMath), a few school people and the *Gazette*." He felt that the town was against them.

RR: That was about it. You mentioned going to North Little Rock one day.

MS: Yes.

RR: Do you remember something that happened there? I was there that day. The superintendent, a man named Bruce Wright, after the dust up had happened at the schoolhouse steps, the black kids had been hustled off and things were settling

down, Bruce Wright was suddenly confronted by this mob of reporters. He was speechless. Do you remember that?

MS: I remember something turned out to be — it was so confusing. I don't know how or why, but we all rushed like a mob of lemmings. I don't know what the hell . . .

RR: Do you remember that Johnny Popham was there?

MS: Yes.

RR: *New York Times*.

MS: Yes. He was one of the *Times* people there, as I recall. That was where I met John because, later at different meetings, we would both turn up and reminisce. Didn't he then go south to become some kind of editor of . . .

RR: *Chattanooga Times*

MS: Chattanooga, Yes.

RR: He was there that day. I had never seen him before. I used to tell my classes, journalism students, about these different styles of interviewing. The most unusual was John Popham. He never took his hands out of his pockets, never showed any emotion. He just started talking. Do you remember that at all?

MS: I do remember. But not in that sort of detail. I do remember John Popham. There were a lot of people that I would encounter later in various newspaper jobs who had been in the streets there in Little Rock. Anyway, to wind up my experience with the Central High "crisis" . . . About a week went by with nothing but legal maneuvers. I couldn't stay any longer — given my management responsibilities — so I left. After I left, the real trouble exploded, as you know.

But at least the readers of the *Denver Post* had been given some special background. And our publisher, Palmer Hoyt, made use of it later.

RR: Tell me about Ashmore as you remember him from the time when you worked at the *Gazette*.

MS: Okay. He was a bright guy, and he could charm you with his wry sense of humor. When he wanted to needle me a bit, he would call me Mortimer — and stretch out the pronunciation like a sentence by itself. One instance involved my tendency to include great detail in some of my stories. Our copy paper sheets were long. They must have been about a foot and a half of newsprint paper. Because the *Gazette* was a morning paper, we didn't have to hurry and send everything in pieces to the printer, as on afternoon papers. If your article went past that first foot and a half, you pasted it onto another sheet. One day I did a story on some complicated public issue, pasted the sheets of paper together, and handed it in. After about an hour, Harry came walking into the room very slowly and dramatically from his office, trailing what looked like ten yards of newsprint. As he reeled in the copy to hand to Nelson, he remarked with a grin, "I see where Mortimer has done another long-range study," with emphasis on the word LONG. [Laughter] I must tell you this about Harry toward the end of his life. I was nearing retirement — it was either '89 or '90 that Harry came to the University of Northern Colorado where I was then the department chairman, to speak to our students. I introduced him, and his first words were, "Your chairman and I have been doing a lot of reminiscing about the good ol' days in Arkansas." Then he

paused before adding, “Some of which was true.” While at the *Gazette*, I did a series on “The City and Its Slums.” It was a six-parter. Many years later, Redding Stevenson, who had been manager of the Little Rock housing authority and then went on to a major job in Washington, came by to visit me at the *Post* and said that the slum series so embarrassed people that they got a big appropriation for public housing and got rid of those slums. They were dreadful. Some without water or sewers.

RR: That was in North Little Rock?

MS: Mostly Little Rock, but it was on both sides of the river. Obviously, most of the people living in that “crappy” stuff were black people, but not exclusively. I tried to get some of the landlords’ side in, but it wasn’t easy. The *Gazette* was editorializing to get rid of those slums. When Nelson, or Harris, showed the series to Harry to get his reaction, his response was : “I see where Mortimer has been very objective — on our side.” [Laughter] I figured I was reporting conditions as they were. It was all factual, no editorializing in the stories. But the facts spoke for themselves.

RR: You may or may not be aware that when you were at the *Gazette* in the early ‘50’s, you were known as one of the good writers on the paper. How does a newspaper man become a good writer?

MS: Nobody is born as a good writer. You have to work at it. It’s a process of evolution, at least it was with me. You become very conscious of it. You ask yourself what makes the work of other writers good. At the University of

Arkansas, and at United Press, I would see people writing better than I, and I would think, “What are they doing that I am not doing?” I would try to hear the cadences of their best lines. Writing for the radio wire also helped. When I had time, I would read aloud what I had written. I used to listen to broadcasters reading my copy as I drove home after my night shift at UP. If they stumbled over my copy, I began to realize the problem could be how I put the sentences together. I tried to write conversationally. Good writers “hear” their writing. Then at Columbia journalism school they put a lot of emphasis on clear writing. It was the period of Rudolph Flesch. His first book was called *The Art of Plain Talk*, and we all had to read it. He had invented a formula to test how hard a piece of writing would be to understand. At least it made me very conscious of the overuse of abstract big words or superfluous prefixes and suffixes and such. Also, he emphasized getting people references into the telling of the story, for human interest. He wouldn’t say, “The wall was lifted.” He would say that Roy and Mort had lifted the wall. Also, back at Arkansas, Professor Lemke made us pay special attention to the writing of Robert van Gelder, the book editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*. His book, *Writers and Writing*, was a great primer on good interviewing. Van Gelder would brief himself on the lives of his subjects and would go to the scene with an idea of what he needed — BUT he soon learned to get his subjects talking about what was on THEIR minds at the time. He would also write about what the people were doing while they were talking to “see” the people being interviewed. I tried to practice that at UP, with a bit of

success.

As overloaded as I was at UP, I was required once a week to produce what we called “profiles.” They were long stories that were based on the personalities of people in the news. So I was always looking desperately for human interest stories; I would even look among the classified ads in the Little Rock papers. One day I found an ad that read: “Wanted: Men to curry lions, funeral expenses guaranteed.” So I called the number of the advertiser, and it turned out it was a circus promotion man. Most people probably would have said the heck with that story, but I invited him to come to the office — which, being a publicity guy, he was delighted to do. And he was a very colorful character, roly poly, sort of a comic character. So we talked about his career, the ad gimmick, and how it worked. He said he always got people to respond to the ad. He never had to pay for a funeral; I guess no one was ever eaten by the lions. But the newspapers in the town where they played gave the circus plenty of publicity. I did a “profile” about him, not only on his technique, but the whole picture — including how he looked and what he said. It was widely used by our clients. Some of the best feature writers who taught at Columbia talked about the use of “color.” I had never heard the term before. “Color” writing, as you know, is not about using a bunch of adjectives. It is about using those details that create a picture. One of the points emphasized by the teachers was to take the reader to the scene; make the reader feel like he has been there. So, even now in my writing, I try to use details that illuminate the scene, even if it makes the story a little longer. During

Harry Truman's visit to Little Rock, I remember going to the places he would be and looking things over. Going over to the Marion Hotel where he would stay and seeing what sheet music was on the piano, what was the color and the pattern of the wallpaper. Not just the color, but the details. The trick is to weave the right details into the right place in the story. You don't just dump it on the reader.

RR: I want you to do something for me.

MS: Yes.

RR: You mentioned this series on the slums. I wish you would — it has been a long time. There were five or six stories in the series. — I would like for you to pick out a lead that you especially liked and just read the first two, three, or four.

MS: Let me take a look. Well, let's just take this first one in the series. "A Little Rock grade school student tried to take her own life recently because the house in which she lived was so overcrowded and run down, she was ashamed to bring home her girlfriends. One family's problem? According to official record, you could multiply that problem by at least three thousand in Little Rock."

RR: Oh, there is a picture of Matilda Tuohey, Mort Stern, and Jerry Neil. You were the legislative reporters at that time in 1951. Good-looking young people there. You were wearing horn-rimmed glasses.

MS: Yes.

RR: So was Matilda.

MS: This one says, "It is no wonder that Mrs. John Gould Fletcher, wife of a Pulitzer Prize poet, grew up with a vivid imagination. Each night when she was a little

girl in Memphis, Tennessee, she, with her sisters, Georgia, and Zula, and her brother, Abner, used to gather around one of the many fireplaces in their big sprawling house and listen to their father spin some of his hair-raising stories.

‘Although he was a big, kindly man, with the look of a dreamer, father could tell stories that would make your skin crawl.’ ” I also did drawings with some of my stuff.

RR: Oh, so these are your drawings?

MS: Yes.

RR: This is a Sunday piece obviously.

MS: Teatotalers, yes. The price of a cup of coffee was going up to a dime, so I wrote this little tongue-in-cheek piece. “A well dressed man leaned up against a Little Rock coffee bar last week, obviously trying to shake a caffeine hangover. He said, ‘I’ll take the usual, Josephine,’ as he plunked a dime on the counter, ‘And make it straight.’ ‘No cream, huh?’ was the bar attendant’s answer. ‘That’s it,’ replied the well dressed man in a hoarse tone. It was easy to see that he had something on his mind, so I emptied my saucer and moved along side of him at the bar. ‘Want to talk about it, fellow?’ I asked. He sizes me up and replies, ‘You’re a reporter, he muttered.’ He took a stiff gulp of Java. ‘All right, I will tell you something if you won’t use my name. They are playing right into the hands of the teatotalers,’ he blurted.” It went on like that. By the way, the other day I got a cup of coffee at a Starbucks’ shop. When I expressed surprise at the price (\$1.50), the guy behind the counter said, “You must still be in the 1950s.” I

said I never got out of the 1940s.

RR: Those drawings, by the way, [there are] three of them with that piece, and one of them has a tough-looking character with a pistol on the counter in front of him and the coffee pot on the counter. Coffee is five cents a cup, and he is looking like he is getting ready to shoot somebody.

MS: With each dollar donut. [Laughter] Here's a feature story with legitimate news in it. I was talking football with Johnny Nelson who was manager of the Chamber of Commerce in Hot Springs. He confided that he was the quarterback on the college team that suffered the worst football defeat ever, 222 to 0. Nelson's Cumberland College team took on a powerful team from Georgia Tech. "Our biggest gain was a five-yard loss," said Nelson. The running back was George Allen, who, at the time I did the story, was one of President Truman's political advisors. Nelson recalled that on one play, he fumbled the ball and yelled to Allen to fall on it. He said Allen looked at a huge Georgia Tech lineman running toward him and yelled back at Nelson, "Fall on it yourself, damn it. You dropped it." I also did the drawing of the football players. It ran about five columns wide and earned me \$5.00. At that point, I didn't need to be convinced that there was no future for me as an artist.

RR: Well, who else do you remember? We have talked about Harry Ashmore and Matilda and . . .

MS: Heiskell, I loved J. N.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

MS: Writing short stories, they weren't very good, but you develop a certain facility when you are doing them regularly. But it is one of these things, it is like muscle: if you don't work out for awhile, it becomes a chore to maintain. When I was editorial page editor at *The Post*, while I had a marvelous and good size staff, all good writers, I, myself, would dash off a thousand words without batting an eyelash. It wasn't hard. But now, if I have to write a hundred words, it is a chore. Anyway, let's talk about J.N. Heiskell.

RR: I should make clear to the transcriber that this is tape number 2. We are taping Mort Stern and Roy Reed. J.N. Heiskell? Owner or editor?

MS: He was kind of — I think a lot of us young staffers were in awe of J. N. He looked like the classic Southern gentleman: white hair, handsome, chiseled features, slim, dignified. He seemed taller than he probably was. His voice seemed a little thin, too, as befitting advanced age. He was probably much younger than I am now, only I don't have that dignity, as you have probably noticed. We called him, "Mr. J. N." He had a marvelous sense of humor, but it took a long time and a lot of reflection to realize it. The day after my daughter Susan was born, in February 1951, I was just getting in the elevator at the *Gazette*, and J. N. and I were the only ones there. He said, "Well, Mr. Stern, what did you name your daughter?" I said, "Sue, Mr. Heiskell." He said, "That's a terrible name for a newspaper man's daughter!" [Laughter] (The *Gazette* had just been through some legal tangle.) Another time, we had this big story about a

prison break. The chase ranged all over Little Rock, and everyone was terribly excited. We had five or six people involved in the coverage. I was interviewing two of the convicts who were wounded, and I had a hand in writing the main story, too. The editors put an eight-column, double-line headline across the front page. And there were several sidebar stories on the front page, also. When it was all over and the printed papers were in our hands, we were sitting in the newsroom, congratulating ourselves. Then out from his office comes Mr. J. N. and says, "This is all well and good. But what will we do for the Second Coming?" [Laughter] Years later, I was at an American Society of Newspaper Editors meeting. I was sitting at the table reserved for my publisher, Palmer Hoyt, when I saw J.N. come in. So I wandered over to say hello. J. N. said, "I've got a story to tell you. Do you know why bunny rabbits have shiny noses?" I said, "I don't know, Mr. J.N." He said, "Because the powder puff's on the wrong end." I said, "Mr. J. N. would you come and tell that story to my publisher?" He said, "Yes, I would regard it as a public service to raise the intellectual level of the *Denver Post*." [Laughter] But the story that most touches me about J. N. — this gets a little personal, but I might as well go at it — A lot of us young reporters had side jobs as stringers for out-of-town publications, to make a few extra bucks. One of them that I got and kept for at least a little while, was with Fairchild Publications. Among other things, Fairchild published *Women's Wear Daily*. They were interested in retail business stories. In the course of my news gathering for the *Gazette*, I ran into a person who was connected to the family that

owned a leading department store in Little Rock. He disclosed to me some gossip about internal things that were happening there. I didn't know what the heck to do with this information, so I sent my notes to Fairchild Publications. To my amazement, that led to a very sensational story in *Women's Wear Daily*. The head of this department store called and summoned me to his office where he demanded to know what the devil I thought I was doing and who the heck was my source. I said, "I can't tell you my source, sir." He said, "I am going to get you fired!" I said, "I hope not." He said, "I am going over to the *Gazette* right now, and I am going to talk to the owner and you better be there." So I figured, "Wow, I better be there." I was really worried, not only about the prospect of being fired, but of having passed along the story in the first place. I don't mind telling you, I put my head down on my desk in that almost empty newsroom and did some praying. Something like this: "Lord, if you get me out of this mess, I'll do whatever you say." Well, in stomps this very major local advertiser. J.N. met him at the door of his office. He let this big shot stand outside his office, which was always crammed with newspapers. They even filled his roll-top desk, and you couldn't have gotten a cigarette butt in. It was some scene. Heiskell standing there, propped against the office door with his arms folded, listening to the man rave. But I heard him say to the angry advertiser, "Well, let's be constructive about this." J. N. talked and listened to him for about half an hour and sent the man out talking to himself. Then he called me over and said, "Next time, Mr. Stern, let's get the news in the *Gazette* first."

RR: The advertiser left without being satisfied.

MS: Yes, with no concessions. I figured that J. N. had just toughed him out. But here's the sequel. As soon as I got back to my desk, the phone rang, and it was a man I had never met. He said, "This is Raymond Lindsey, from Second Baptist Church. Some of us down here have been concerned about your soul." I thought, "Lord, this is kind of heavy-handed, you know?" Lindsey said, "May I come over and talk to you?" I said, "Yes, sir." He came over to the *Gazette* office and we did some talking about religion and praying, and he brought a little pocket New Testament with some passages marked and handed it to me. One of the passages (John 15:7) ended with these words attributed to Jesus: "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The book bears the notation "9-16-50," beneath Mr. Lindsey's signature. Lindsey invited me to a session at the church. So I showed up, and, son of a gun, the following Sunday I felt myself walking up front with the other repentant sinners. I thought, "I can't do this," but there I was. The next thing I know, I am getting dunked. And I was a Baptist. [Laughter] It astonished my wife, who had been baptized at age 12.

RR: How I became a Baptist.

MS: It sounds odd, even to me. But I have never been uncomfortable with it. Even though in the years that followed I put in more time than I ever expected on organized church and religious activities, I never claimed to be, nor thought of myself as, holier than anybody. I am always trying to learn more and understand more; I am who I am.

RR: What had caused Mr. Lindsey and his folks to worry about your soul?

MS: I haven't the slightest idea. I was too awed and astonished at the time. It never occurred to me to ask Lindsey, "Who put you up to this?" And in the long run, does it matter?

RR: That's good! Let me mention one other thing that happened. Fast forward to 1957. You had come to Little Rock. After the Little Rock crisis got going, but before it had wound down, your publisher, Palmer Hoyt, came to Little Rock and made a speech. Can you tell about that and what happened?

MS: Yes. He was a national figure in journalism. There was an invitation to him from somebody in Little Rock to speak to the Arkansas Press Association, I believe. It may even have been Governor Faubus who signed off on the invitation. Hoyt — "Ep" was what his friends and colleagues called him — was concerned about the effect on U.S. stature abroad of the Little Rock segregation crisis and the success of the Soviet "sputnik" in the space race. He was very international minded and very close to many national figures in Washington (senators, judges and presidents among them).

RR: Ep?

MS: His initials were E. P. His full name was Edwin Palmer Hoyt. His college classmates at Oregon called him "Ep," and it stuck. But he never went with the E., as in E. Palmer Hoyt. He said to me, "I never parted my name on the left." Anyway, when he got the invitation, to my surprise, he accepted. He said, "There are some things I want to talk about because I think they are important to the

country.” He was irked with his friend, President Eisenhower, because he believed Ike ignored the significance of Sputnik. Eisenhower had said to him, “What are people afraid of, that they will fall on them?” Hoyt’s point was, “Get with it. The U.S. had better win the race.” The other issue that particularly troubled Hoyt was Little Rock because he had heard from his international sources and United Nations people that it was having a very bad effect in the Third World. Hoyt had made the *Post* a very international paper in many ways. In fact, I was told later, that our editorial page was one of five from the U.S. that was read every day in the French foreign office. He said to me, “Let’s go over this thing. Let’s review everything you know about the Little Rock crisis, everything you know about the space race. If I can’t talk about this, I won’t accept the invitation. But I want to go down there and talk.” I believe that Faubus was at the head table or was present, anyway. Keith Fuller, of the AP, who had been Little Rock bureau chief at the time, told me Faubus was very upset by it. Hoyt pointed out that these crises were really hurting America abroad. He was pretty tough in his criticism. He was in the same fighting mode as when he had taken on Joe McCarthy for his irresponsible attacks on people a few years earlier.

RR: I do remember he really got under the skin of not only Orval Faubus, but the segregationists in Arkansas, The leaders of the Citizens Council, and folks like that. They were very annoyed.

MS: Well, that wouldn’t have bothered Hoyt. He had been a rancher. His parents

were homesteaders. His father had been an underpaid but scholarly Baptist preacher. He had been a rodeo cowboy and an infantry sergeant-major in World War I. He was a man's man, with the rough, calloused hands of a cowboy. He never ran from a fight. In fact, he kind of looked for them. I think that was one of the things he liked about me. I would get him into tough situations, which he would pretend to be upset about. Then he would kind of grin. One day he called me into his office. I'll never forget this. He said, "Now sit down there." So I sat down. And he said, "Repeat after me. I will not . . ." So I said, "I will not . . ." ". . . get that nice Mr. Hoyt . . . in any trouble . . . TODAY!" One day I was called into Hoyt's office, and sitting there was an ad agency executive. — We became good friends later on, this ad man and I. Anyway, I was this brash young, thirty-year-old managing editor. So I walked into Hoyt's office and saw this man, Arthur Rippey, who was a senior partner in an advertising and public relations firm. Just an hour before that, the guys on our City Desk had told me that his agency had sent in some very inept news releases. So Mr. Hoyt had barely started to introduce me when I said, "Oh yes, Arthur, I've been meaning to talk to you." I unloaded on him all the criticism that the news department had given to me about that agency. The poor man sat there and took this. All the while I noticed Mr. Hoyt rubbing his brow and shaking his head while I was mouthing off. Arthur got up and kind of tip-toed out. That's when Hoyt looked at me with a pained expression and said, "That's okay, Stern, there is no use being nice to the owners." You see, I didn't know that Arthur was married to the sole heir to a

large portion of the ownership of the paper. [Laughter] But that's all Hoyt said, "No use being nice to the owners." [Laughter] Another time, just to show you the kind of guy I was working for — Hoyt had a friend who was running for Congress from Denver. Our general approach had been to endorse the incumbent if he or she had done a decent job. The guy who was running against the incumbent was a country club friend of Hoyt's and a generally nice guy. So Hoyt calls me into his office and says, "Bob wants to know why we are endorsing his opponent." So smart-ass Mort says, "Point one is this, point two is this, point three, point four, and so on. And, besides, Byron (the incumbent) has done a decent job." Hoyt looked at me and looked at his friend and said, "Well, I can't do anything with him," (pointing to me). "But you got my vote." Poor guy went out talking to himself. [Laughter] Another time Hoyt called me in, and by now, Lyndon Johnson is President. Lyndon Johnson was getting in touch with Hoyt a lot. They were old friends from the Franklin Roosevelt era. Hoyt would be a frequent guest at the LBJ White House, without making any financial contributions, by the way.

RR: He was a Republican?

MS: Hoyt was a Republican. Yes, he had been a long-time Republican, but of the old Nelson Rockefeller, Cabot Lodge variety. The first Democrat Hoyt supported for president was Kennedy, and then he supported Lyndon Johnson, too. Anyway, Hoyt calls me in and asks, "Where do we stand on this Public Housing bill?" He has the phone up to his ear, and he has his feet on the back of the console.

Obviously, the person on the other end of the line is waiting to hear. I said, “Well, Ep, there are several good features. Title One is slum clearance, and we’re for that. Title Two is public housing, and they are going to go for 800,000 units and we think it should be a million, but we’re okay with that. The big thing is urban renewal, Title Three.” And I go on like this to Title Four, Title Five, et cetera. Then I notice that Hoyt is getting a little restless. Finally, he turns to the person waiting on the line (who happened to be President Lyndon Johnson) and comments with heavy emphasis, “He says we are FOR it.” [Laughter] Life with Hoyt was a great adventure.

Oh, another Heiskell story. When the American Society of Newspaper Editors met at the brand new Washington Hilton — It opened up in about the ‘60s — very little was going smoothly. People were getting the wrong rooms, the wrong food. The staff and the patrons were in a real mess. Everybody seemed out of sorts. In the midst of all this, I see in the main lobby my distinguished old boss, J. N. Heiskell, leaning placidly against a marble pillar. He was kind of looking down and had his arms folded, and I’m wondering what disaster has happened to him. So I ask, “What’s the matter, Mr. J. N.?” He said, “I guess I’ve spent a million man hours waiting for my wife!”

RR: Who else do you remember from the paper?

MS: Ashmore was a lot of fun. As I say, he teased me a lot. But I got even. It was when a new book came out called *The Indoor Bird Watcher’s Guide* (by Helen Ferril). It caricatured all types of people as birds. So I did a bunch of such

sketches of people at the *Gazette*. And the bird that looked like Harry I named “The Offcolor Tailspinner” because he was a master of such tales. Then there was Stolberg, who went on to Denver.

RR: There was a Bob Stolberg. He was much younger.

MS: No. Dave Stolberg.

RR: Dave Stolberg.

MS: Dave finally retired as a Vice-President of Scripps-Howard. Dave arrived at the *Gazette* one day as a city desk clerk, looking very young and bewildered. He sat on one side of Sam Harris. He was in the army. He was kind of a military intern. They did that in those days just to give the army guys some newspaper experience. So Sam gave him nothing but obituary after obituary to write up. Dave was working frantically. We general assignment reporters were all amused because our desks were just a little bit away from Sam’s, and we realized we would not have to do those obits because Dave was doing them all. Finally, he looked up, and we heard him say, “Gee, Mr. Harris, what a night! They are just dying like flies.” [Laughter] The next time I saw Dave, years later, he turned up as city editor of *The Rocky Mountain News*, the Scripps-Howard newspaper that was the competition to the *Post* in Denver. Somewhere along the line he learned to do something more than write obits.

RR: Joe Wirges, do you remember Joe?

MS: Joe was a kind of a senior eminence when I got there. But I don’t remember much about him. His son worked there, Gene. Were they both photographers?

RR: Gene was the photographer, I think. Joe was the police reporter.

MS: Was he? Well, I forget.

RR: Who was managing editor at that time?

MS: Let me think about that. Part of the time, it was J.N.'s nephew, Carroll McGaughey, who was a friend to us younger types. Most of the time it was A. R. "Arla" Nelson. He was kind of a wry, thoughtful guy, if I have the right word here. He had a great sense of humor. He didn't say much, but he could sort of put you in your place with a couple of words. If you used the wrong word, he might hand the copy back to you. Mostly he was dealing directly with the people around the horseshoe-shaped copy desk. Then there was a fellow named Fretz, who was the telegraph editor, I think.

RR: Gene.

MS: Gene Fretz. He stuttered. He was fun because, as stutterers often did, he would stutter at just the right place. He would tell a little story and then when he would get to the punch line, you would hear it a piece at a time. Which reminds me of an Arkansas editor I got to know later, John Quincy Mehaffy from Texarkana. He was famous at ASNE meetings because of his skill at telling stories. He would say, "That ol' publisher addresses me in terms of endearment. He would say, 'Hello, St-st-st-stupid!'" [Laughter] John Quincy gave an unforgettable address at one American Society of Newspaper Editors convention on "mmmoobbb cooverage of the mmmaaasss media." It had to do with Texarkana's Phantom Killer and a Texas Ranger named M.T. "Lone Wolf"

Gonzales. You can imagine how long it took Mehaffy to spit that out.

RR: Was Count Dew still there?

MS: No. Heinie Loesch was there.

RR: Heinie Loesch?

MS: Heinie Loesch was news editor or page makeup man. He belonged to an earlier era. He wore a green eyeshade and the other stuff that the old-time copy editors wore. I don't know how to illustrate this on the tape. You see that picture on the wall over there behind you? It is a cover of the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Bulletin from the 1970s, when I was an editor at the *Denver Post*. That's me with the green eyeshades.

RR: Yes, yes.

MS: I never did that in real life, of course. But the American Society of Newspaper Editors asked me to write an article on whether copy editing was "going down the tube." Then my friend Derrick Daniels of the *Detroit Free Press*, who was head of the Bulletin committee that year, said, "Don't just send us a mug shot of you to go with the article. Send a candid picture." So I said, "I will fix you. I'll send you a 'candid' picture you won't dare use. I'll copy the look I remember from Heinie Loesch." Then I went around the newsroom of the *Post* asking, "Who's got a vest? Who's got a cigar? Who's got a green eye shade?" Well, Daniels loved the photo and used it as a full-page illustration of my article — and later still a Bulletin editor in 1977 used it again — this time as the cover of the magazine. At least the editors and educators who knew me got a laugh out of it.

But I think some of the younger members thought that was how I really looked at work.

RR: Well, there you are with a vest and a cigar in your mouth and green eye shade.

MS: Oh, here is an anecdote on Heinie — Somebody in Little Rock claimed to have found a cure for baldness. I had a little balding spot on my head in those days. (You can see it has spread now.) As we discussed the issue, Sam Harris said, “I wonder if we should do a story? Maybe send someone to investigate whether the treatment worked.” I said, “I’ll volunteer.” Another reporter said, “I’ll volunteer.” Somebody else said, “I’ll volunteer.” All the reporters were all laughing. Then Heinie took the green eye shade off his totally bald head and said with a heavy executive tone: “I’ve got the assignment if anybody has.”

[Laughter] At the desk next to mine was Bob Poteete, a great writer. Bob and I were competitors as well as friends. I think we were the only two guys in the newsroom at the time who had master’s degrees in journalism. Bob got his from Northwestern and mine was from Columbia. Like us, the two graduate schools were friendly rivals, too.

RR: He ended up at the *Herald Tribune*, didn’t he?

MS: Yes.

RR: *New York Herald Tribune*?

MS: Yes. The great irony was that in New York he met and married Frances Reynolds, a friend and classmate of mine at Columbia. She had been vice president of the school’s Press Club when I was president. They had Pat and me

and our daughter Susie as house guests when we were on our way to Harvard for my Neiman year. Sad to say, Frances died young and so did their son, I think. It chokes me up to remember it.

RR: What do you remember about Tom Davis?

MS: Tom was another classmate of mine at Columbia, and we became good friends there. He lived in New Jersey. One day, he and his wife, Jane, invited Pat and me to have dinner with them. It was quite a trip from the Columbia neighborhood where we lived to their apartment in Jersey — especially since we didn't have a car. When we got there, Tom said, "You're here a day early." [Laughter] So he and Jane, bless their hearts, made dinner and carried it off well. But I have never been so embarrassed in all my life!

RR: I can see Jane really pitching in. Marvelous woman, Jane.

MS: when I got the job in Denver, Tom said to me, "You know, we have some property in a town out there. I don't know whether it is worth anything or not." I said, "What's the name of the town?" He said, "Aspen." His father owned a piece of Aspen, which became the playground of America's rich and powerful. You know, don't you, that the average house in Aspen — not the fanciest, but the average — sells for at least a million and a half bucks right now.

RR: What became of Tom's father's property?

MS: I don't know. The significance didn't register on me at the time. We had to get to Colorado to discover it. In fact, even then I didn't imagine how Aspen would blossom.

RR: Somebody told me that Tom was a good writer and reporter in those days.

MS: Yes, I think so. At Columbia they awarded prizes at the end of the year for various things. Marv Stone and I finished up at the top of the class and got Pulitzer scholarships. Tom got the prize for the best press law class work. He was very good at that.

RR: I can see that. Tom . . .

MS: He had good attention to detail and a way with words, too.

RR: That's right.

MS: He wrote a phrase which I have always remembered. It was something like, "It was growing like ragweed in Vigaro." [Laughter] I was envious of phrase makers. Here again, to go back to good writing. I watched good writers. Whether it was Poteete or Jerry Neil, who was also a good writer, or Tom. I would try to analyze their style. "What did he do that made it so good?"

RR: Tell me about Jerry Neil.

MS: Here again, a very bright, very intelligent guy. Like some guy in a Neil Simon play, he walked around with a comic cloud over his head. You expected Jerry to say something gloomy like, "Oh, the world is going to end today," or "I think I'll open a vein." But he did it in a way that was amusing. Another guy who was fun was Carroll McGaughey. I don't know if you ever talked to Carroll. Maybe, is he still alive?

RR: I think he is dead.

MS: That is a shame. He was J.N.'s nephew, I think. He was managing editor for

awhile. Carroll had a great sense of humor. Somebody brought in a publicity handout and demanded big treatment. It was about some small achievement.

Carroll said to the person, "That's a very big toot for such a small horn!"

[Laughter] Hugh Patterson, did I mention Hugh? I didn't know Hugh at first. It was only later in my time there that I met Hugh. I remember talking to him after we ran the story about the black man who had tried to integrate a big Baptist revival at the Coliseum. There had been a near riot when this black man had tried to sit in the so-called white area. **[Note: A copy of an article by Mort Stern written for the *Post* and referring to the incident in Little Rock was donated with this interview.]**

RR: You covered that story.

MS: Yes, I covered the story. Gene Prescott, the photographer, and I were covering it. We were in some danger as developments unfolded. Then Gene handed me the film pack, which put us both in trouble.

RR: This was the state Baptist convention.

MS: No, it was a big, week-long revival meeting at the Coliseum, I believe. And the incident didn't happen on the opening night.

RR: This black minister showed up?

MS: He wasn't a minister, I don't think.

RR: Okay, a black man.

MS: A black man showed up, and he sat in a section reserved for whites. There was an uproar. Some men tried to usher him out, and then there was a mob that followed.

Then, of course, some people in the crowd obviously figured, “Uh-oh, there is a photographer and reporter here.” Poor Prescott had the camera. At least I didn’t have that burden. But then he handed me the film pack. If he died, at least I would have the film. [Laughter] People had Gene cornered. This is my recollection of the thing. My personal recollection is fuzzy, now. Fortunately, M. Ray McKay, the minister who baptized me — “If anybody is going to save us, it better be you,” I thought, and he did. He and a couple of other Baptist preachers, level-headed guys, they got things calmed down. Then they brought the black man up to the platform and gave him a seat there. Then the man left anyway. But the part involving Hugh Patterson was about a week later. I was invited to Hugh’s. Either Harry’s or Hugh’s, since I recall both of them were there. Hugh says, “I got to give you the part of the story that you did not get.” So I said, “What’s that?” He says, “That black man was my gardener!” Imagine if those people in the crowd had known that the *Gazette* was connected, even remotely, to this incident! Many were suspicious of the *Gazette* anyway.

RR: What kind of guy was Hugh?

MS: Oh, very amiable! I will tell a good one about Hugh. One time after I got to know him and after he felt comfortable with me, he said, “I have to give you a lesson in how to advance in this business. I worked hard, studied hard, improved my skills — and I married the boss’s daughter.” [Laughter] He didn’t mind telling stories on himself. Years later I learned from him that he had some property in Colorado, in Weld County, which is where the University of Northern

Colorado (my last post) is located. At the time he first visited with me in Colorado, I was Dean of Journalism at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Hugh would call me when he came to town. We would chat about what had happened or was happening at the *Gazette*. He was going to raise hogs on his land in Weld County. He was a very fine guy. I wrote to him at the time that editor and publisher carried a story, or an ad maybe, saying the *Gazette* was in danger of losing its circulation lead to the *Democrat*. I said, “This can’t be. It can’t be. I know the *Gazette*, and it is too solid for that.” He said, “Thank you for saying that. I have been trying to get this story across to people.” But when the *Gazette* ultimately was absorbed by the *Democrat*, I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t know what happened. I recalled that when I was there, the *Democrat* was way behind us in everything — circulation, prestige, national attention, whatever. Oh, I think during the worst of the Civil Rights crisis and Central High, the *Gazette* lost money. Some people pulled their ads. But many advertisers hung in, and I guess Hugh was an influence in that regard. Hugh and Harry Ashmore, they sort of stuck together and toughed it out, as I heard it. I can’t picture how that paper . . .

RR: Do you have any recollection of Mr. J. N.’s attitude on the race issue?

MS: I don’t remember him saying anything about it to me. On the other hand, he gave Harry a pretty free hand. I’m not sure. In those days I was a reporter. I covered all the beats. I was political reporter, and then my last six months at the *Gazette*, I was state editor. That is not a high ranking thing. No one would have confided in

me regarding internal business matters.

RR: You were state editor?

MS: State editor for the last six months of my stay there.

RR: Ken Parker must have taken your place as state editor.

MS: Yes, Ken was a bright guy, too. They had some mighty good people there. Ken did take my place. Nice guy.

RR: In fact, I saw Hugh about two weeks ago. I told him I was going to see you. He said to say, "Hello."

MS: Well, yes. We were friends. I think the respect for each other grew in the years after I left the *Gazette*.

RR: How did you happen to leave Little Rock and come to Denver?

MS: This friend of mine, Wayne Phillips — I think I mentioned early he was my best and wildest friend at Columbia — kept sending word to me that the *Denver Post* was the paper to work for. He just loved it. The *Post* was still boisterous and tough, but not as mean as it had been in the 1920s and '30s. There were times in the old days, before Mr. Hoyt came, when, for example, they wouldn't mention the names of people they didn't like, or of Democratic candidates. They were against foreign countries, like Great Britain, and they supported the internment of Japanese Americans. All that kind of stuff. Mr. Hoyt changed that. They became more liberal and more international. But they still had a rough and ready attitude. If they covered a beauty contest, they wanted to find out who was monkeying around with who. One of my first assignments was to join in the

investigation of Fred Ward, a big, flashy auto dealer who was swindling people. I got to investigate the wardens of the state penitentiary and the state reformatory. Some of the times when I would go out on assignment, I thought, “Whew, this is tough business.” With a chip on their shoulder, they covered the local Mafia types, and I did some of that, too.

RR: How old were you when you went to work at the *Post*?

MS: Twenty-five.

RR: And you were managing editor at . . . ?

MS: Thirty.

RR: Thirty?

MS: I had gone in there, and they put me on rewrite first. One morning, I was on police rewrite, and I came in at 6:30. By 7:30 I was caught up. I remember the city editor asking, “Doesn’t Stern have any work to do?” The assistant city editor replied, “He has done ten stories already.” There was a lot of pressure, but to me it was easier than United Press. Thank God for my experience at UP.

RR: Just the ol’ UP.

MS: Yes. And as fate would have it, the city editor was an old UP man and one of his assistants was, also. Just about everybody on the city desk and the rewrite area were delightfully bizarre characters. Oh, I didn’t tell you the story about my being hired. Wayne Phillips talked to the managing editor, Ed Dooley, and said, “You ought to get this guy.” And Wayne kept writing to me and saying, “You should be here.” Dooley brushed him off a couple of times. Finally, I figured I

had been at the *Gazette* long enough. I think I got turned down on my request for a \$5.00 raise. It was evident it was time to move on. You just did in those days. If you had been two or three years at a place, you wondered where you were going next. I had never been to Denver. In fact, I wasn't exactly sure where Denver was. But Wayne kept working on it. So, one day Dooley says, "Okay, tell him to come." So Wayne called and told me. I got to Denver by bus. I arrived on a weekend. — Wayne told me this afterwards, not at the time — that he went in to Dooley's office and said, "Stern is here." Dooley says, "Who is Stern?" "Don't you remember? You told me to tell him to come." Dooley wasn't sure, so he said they would give me a tryout on Sunday. That was really a tough thing because the *Post* was an evening paper then except that they put out the Sunday paper on Saturday. So on Sunday, all day, you were doing stories for Monday and you hoped they held up. Well, they put me on Sunday with a photographer. Said Dooley to Wayne, "If he works out fine, he can stay. If he doesn't, he's gone." Of course, I didn't know that. But it was a very busy Sunday. There was a lot of political stuff going on and some crime. I think I had five by-lines in Monday's paper. Two of them on page one, one on page three and two, somewhere else. So there wasn't anymore doubt about whether I could stay. So that's when Wayne told me. That was in the fall of '51. By the spring of '56, when Dooley left to become editor of his own business paper in San Francisco, I was appointed as Dooley's successor. A lot happened in between. I spent a year or so as a reporter, and I had many good stories. From the crazy little

features to the big page-one spreads. Then, in 1952, the night city editor job became vacant, and I applied for it. Some people said I was stupid. That job was looked on as a dead end. “You are one of the leading reporters. Why end your career that way?” The word among the staff was that they only put reporters on the night side who weren’t making it for one reason or another. Well, they were all bright kids, and I got some damn good stories out of them. I realized I was becoming a teacher. I was grooming these guys for promotion. We would have in the first edition some of the best stories of the day that my bunch had developed the previous night. A lot of them were on our own initiative. They were my ideas, or those of my team. We had a lot of fun with the photographers and came to enjoy working the lively night side. And we even developed skill at dealing with people who were aggravated by *Post* editorials and would call at night after they had read the evening paper. About that time, also, the head of the journalism department at the University of Denver called. Wayne Phillips had done some part-time teaching for them. By that time, Wayne had moved on to the rewrite desk at *The New York Times* and was doing more graduate work at the Russian Institute at Columbia University. He was hoping for an overseas assignment. So Professor Rhode at DU asked me, “Would you like to teach?” I said, “Yes, that might be nice.” So I taught in the daytime and worked at the *Post* at night. Pat and I got an apartment on the DU campus. Soon I taught two courses a quarter, which turned out to be six courses a year for about three hundred dollars per quarter. (Only much later did I realize that six courses a year

amounted to a full teaching load.)

RR: Did you ever know John Williams, the fiction writer? Remember he taught at the University of Denver?

MS: Wait a minutes, yes! But I think I met him later when I became the Chancellor's Executive Assistant.

RR: He finally moved to Fayetteville.

MS: He was in the English Department, wasn't he?

RR: Yes. He and his wife moved to Little Rock. He died, and she is part of our Sunday morning breakfast crew.

MS: We were very proud of his writing.

RR: Incredible writer!

MS: Yes. We made a big point of that when I was Executive Director of Public Affairs — and PR was one of the areas I supervised before I became Executive Assistant to the Chancellor. I had gotten my doctorate in my spare time while I was assistant to the publisher at the *Post*.

But to get back to my two years as night city editor, I had pretty much the run of the place after 5 p.m., so I thought, "Why don't I bring some of my students down each night and let them go on assignments with the professional staffers? At least they would see what they could run into." A few months later, Willard Haselbush, the city editor, wrote an article for *Quill Magazine*, about the "night school" I was running at the *Post*. He wrote about all the teaching that was going on. I was teaching my DU students and also my regular night staffers — and

having a great time, besides. The night reporters were getting a lot of by-lines, and they were getting promoted to day staff. We had some damn good DU students come through the system, too. Three of them, I think, turned out to be journalism teachers themselves. The “night school” experiment was one of the big positive factors in my application for the Neiman Fellowship at Harvard in ‘54. There was another factor. Hoyt had decided that Joe McCarthy and his false charges were damaging the country. Hoyt was plenty anti-communist himself, but he thought that McCarthy’s approach was terribly unfair. He said to Dooley, “If you have somebody on your staff with a little time, have them check and see what has become of each accusation.” Dooley decided to get the night siders on it. I said, “Okay. I don’t want to burden my regular night reporters. I will take it on myself while I’ve got them out on assignment.” So I would go to the *Post*’s library, and I would document each case in clear terms and enter the information in a loose-leaf book cross-filed and indexed for quick reference. Hoyt was impressed. He took it with him on the road. For a while it seemed that every time McCarthy hit a town and made an accusation, Hoyt was there the next week, making a speech and giving the facts. For his courageous response to the senator, Hoyt won the first John Peter Zenger Freedom of the Press Award. Years later, when I was managing editor, I looked at his shelf and was surprised to see that loose-leaf book still there. He still had it for reference. Anyway, Hoyt had Dooley write a strong letter supporting my Neiman application. Also, it didn’t hurt that I had recommendations from Harry Ashmore, class of ‘42, and Houstoun

Waring, class of '45. Waring was editor of the Littleton, Colorado, *Independent*, which the US government's Voice of America promoted as the leading small weekly in the country. He remained a friend and booster of mine for the rest of his life.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

[Off tape, apparently, the interviewer asked about the day Stern was appointed managing editor:]

MS: I was sitting there in the newsroom, speculating with several staff people as to which senior executive would be the next managing editor. The crazy thing is Pat had just that day marched me down to a clothing store, and we bought me the first blue suit I had ever owned. Later the city editor's wife said, "That's your M. E. blues, right?" like we knew ahead of time. No way did I know ahead of time. Anyway, Dooley called me from his office and said, "Come back to the Old Man's office." So I went back to Hoyt's office, where the publisher shook my hand and said, "Congratulations, you are Mr. Dooley's successor." I must have looked astonished because Hoyt added: "I've been watching you. I know all about you." Dooley shook my hand and said, "There's your desk and you have a conference in two hours." Then he left to keep an appointment. Dooley's support surprised me. I always thought of him as a taciturn person. He never smiled or laughed. At least I had never seen him laugh. I learned later he was a wonderful guy, but I never saw it at the time. A week later he comes back to town, and he

and his wife, Marge, take Pat and me out to dinner. We discuss my first week as M.E. and he says, "Are there any questions that you have to ask me?" I said, "Yes. When do you get time to read the paper?" Because any time that I opened the paper, especially when the first edition hit my desk and I needed to check it, somebody would always pop up in front of me with an "urgent" problem. Well, Dooley burst out laughing at the question. It was the first and only time that I ever saw Ed Dooley laugh. Obviously, I had discovered something that had bugged him, too.

RR: You went off to the Neiman in '54.

MS: Yes. Again, Mr. Hoyt gave strong support, but I was up against some tough competition, both around the country and in my own shop. Bob Hansen, a brilliant reporter, was endorsed by Bernard DeVoto, the famous historian and novelist. I don't know where they had met, but DeVoto was really worshiped at Harvard. He had been doing his "Easy Chair" column for *Harper's* for about 20 years. So he carried a lot of weight. When they picked me, I was surprised. I had the support of Harry Ashmore, Palmer Hoyt, Houstoun Waring, Roscoe Ellard. I can't remember who all, but it was no cinch. I was delighted to win.

RR: Why don't we stop right there?

MS: Suits me.

RR: We will pick up next week in Fayetteville, Arkansas, if everything turns out all right.

MS: Man, we are going a long ways to do this story, aren't we?

[End of Tape 2, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 3, Side 1]

RR: This is Mort Stern and Roy Reed again, second round, October 5, in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Mort was going to get an award. To do a little back tracking to the *Arkansas Gazette*. I should have asked you the other day if you remembered a *Gazette* columnist named Spider Rowland.

MS: Oh God, yes. Spider was a hell of a colorful character. Somehow or other, I met him. I guess Spider had left the *Gazette* before I went to work there. But I covered a speech he made. Somebody said that when Spider gets to drinking he is kind of interesting. I am trying to remember. As he was talking, he became more interesting. He didn't seem to be touching a bottle. He had access to something in his hand. It looked like it could have been an inhaler. He seemed to get tipsier and tipsier as the talk was going on. When it was over, I came up and asked, "How did you manage this?" He opened his coat and he had a little tank in his pocket with a tube that went up his sleeve, crossed the back of his jacket and down here hooked to whatever it was he was sniffing. He was consuming liquor on the spot through a tube. [Laughter] His writings seemed funny to me, but I can't remember anything except they were fun. I can't remember the content of them. I guess nowadays, or later in my editor years, I would have thought, "That stuff doesn't track, you know." At the time it seemed interesting.

RR: The style. How would you characterize his writing style?

MS: Very breezy as I recall. You are pressing my memory. It seemed to me it was

flippant, like some of the New York columnists. I think there was a guy named Leonard Lyons on one of the New York papers who had that breezy style. I think Rowland's was like that.

RR: One of his favorite subjects seemed to be Sid McMath. He was a popular young governor at the time.

MS: The crusading district attorney of Hot Springs had become governor. I got to cover a lot of his activities. Before I forget, when I think about Arkansas politics, I remember a man named Uncle Mac Mackrell.

RR: Uncle Mac Mackrell, right.

MS: I actually heard him say something to this effect: "All those other candidates are stealing from you. It is time you give me a chance." [Laughter] So help me. I actually heard him say that. I thought, "Did I hear that right?" I kept looking at my notes. "My God, this man tells the truth if you listen carefully." I learned more about him from Tom McAmis.

RR: Tom who?

MS: Tom McAmis. He was executive director of the Game and Fish Commission. I think I mentioned that I used to do a hunting and fishing column. McAmis was a great source for me. McAmis had been a radio broadcaster. One day I was visiting with Tom, and I said, "Gee, I just heard Uncle Mac Mackrell talking and giving his religious political message. Did you know him?" He said, "I have known Mackrell quite well. We used to be at the same radio station. He was just getting by doing colorful stuff. But one day he heard an evangelical preacher do a

broadcast, and he said, ‘Now, I would like to do that. I think I could make a success of it.’” McAmis said Mackrell disappeared off McAmis’s radar screen until some six months later, when he came back with a clerical degree. Suddenly, he was an evangelist. McAmis added, “By God, he was good at it.” [Laughter] He sold bags of flour to his audiences after his religious/political message — somehow he did this with great deftness. He was doing religious stuff and political stuff. Then to show your faith, you bought some of his flour. You can’t take anything for granted in Arkansas politics. It is a wonderful place.

RR: We have had so many interesting newspaper folks here. It’s good newspaper territory. You said something the other day that I didn’t get on the tape the first time, about Jim Johnson, Jimmy Johnson. Tell me again about that conversation that you had with him.

MS: Okay, Jimmy and I became friends. When I was covering the legislature, Jimmy was kind of starting out. He was in the state senate, I believe. He wasn’t getting much notice from the rest of the press corps. So, occasionally, he would come over to our home. Pat and I had a little tiny apartment in downtown Little Rock. He would come over and talk about some legislation he might introduce on Monday. He would draft a bill that would sort of fit my needs for a news story. Probably none of those ever became law. Anyway, after I left for Colorado, I lost track of Jimmy. But, apparently, he was growing in influence and had challenged Faubus for governor, or intended to. I had covered politics here in Arkansas, but all of this stuff about Orval Faubus and the resistance to school integration had

caught me by surprise. One day, Jimmy called me at the *Post* from the home of a relative of his in Littleton, Colorado. We got together for lunch, and I asked him, “What have you been doing?” He said he had run against Orval Faubus and lost. He said, “When I ran against Faubus, I was the segregator and he was the integrator.” He said, “That so and so (he used a stronger term) hit the jackpot on my nickel.”

RR: You know it is interesting. He used those same words with me when I interviewed him all those years later in research for the biography of Orval Faubus. I interviewed Jim Johnson, and he told me the same thing.

MS: “He was the integrator and I was the segregator.”

RR: Oh, not that, that is the first time I have heard of that. That is a good . . .

MS: It was a clear term.

RR: When you came down from the *Denver Post* in '57, we talked a little about that. If I could, let me come back to it a little bit. You had known Orval Faubus before you went out there.

MS: Slightly. Yes, slightly. I knew about him. First place, he was some sort of a minor functionary on the Sid McMath side in the McMath-Laney campaign. He was part of McMath's organization. He was a very, seemed like, a very shy, reticent guy. He would say hello to me when I would come by. I would answer, “Hi.” Then I would have to get somebody aside and say, “What's the name of that fellow?” They would say, “Faubus.” I would say, “Thank you.” And, sure enough, I would forget it. I would forget Orval because he would kind of blend in

with the crowd. The same thing would happen the next time I saw him and the very next. He seemed very pleasant, but who was he? Then when I was standing in the newsroom at the *Post* and I read that he called out the National Guard, I mean, the State Guard, called out the troops, I was equally surprised that Orval Faubus was governor. Then I found out from someone that in a campaign against Cherry . . .

RR: Francis Cherry.

MS: . . . some kind of judge, that Orval had had a close call. They had tried to label Orval a communist because he had gone, years ago during the depression, to a communal school or something. To save his campaign, I heard, he had to kind of over compensate to the Right.

RR: When you got back down here to cover that story (in 1957), do you remember any particular dealings you had with him while you were working the story?

MS: Yes. I went to a press conference he had and what struck me — I introduced myself, and I guess he sort of knew and remembered me — but what struck me was there were a few black press people in the press conference. Orval was very polite and courteous to them, and to all of us. I thought, “That doesn’t sound like the extremist he was thought to be on the national scene.” I didn’t write anything about it because many people wouldn’t know what I was talking about. But I did sense a little something. I began to think that Orval’s heart was not in this segregated, racial stuff. Then Virgil Blossom told me, “I went to see him. We had this all worked out. I thought we had an understanding with Governor

Faubus that this was going to happen quietly and we were going to go in there with the children, and it wouldn't be any problem. And then something scared him." Then Orval reportedly told somebody, "Jimmy Johnson will eat me alive" — or some words to that effect — "if I don't do something to stop this." I don't really believe his heart was in it. Later, I did go back and meet with him, in '61, to do a looking-back article for the *Denver Post*. Orval was a little more philosophical, tried to explain, to justify, his position somewhat.

I may have mentioned to you, one of the first things I did in 1957 after I stopped at the *Gazette* — and said "hello" to old friends and checked into a hotel — was to go Central High School. I got to the street in front of Central High and the first guy I tapped on the shoulder that I was going to interview was Jim Flinchum. He had been our business rep in the United Press bureau in Little Rock when I was down there, but as of 1957, Jim was the United Press bureau chief in Denver. Later, he went on to become executive editor of the Cheyenne, Wyoming, newspaper. So I tapped somebody else on the shoulder, and it turned out to be a reporter I knew from *Detroit Free Press*. I said, "I have got to find a real citizen here." The guys say to me, "Forget it, everybody here is either a newspaper reporter, radio reporter, or an FBI agent."

RR: Let's fast forward to the Neiman years. We are talking about the Neiman Fellowship. We got you off to Cambridge. This is '54, just a few months after the Supreme Court's decision in school desegregation issue, May of '54. I assume that was one of the hot items of discussion among the fellows.

MS: Yes. And another was Joe McCarthy. I spent a good deal of my Neiman year with the people in the law school. I had not planned it that way, but I took a seminar with Arthur Sutherland, the constitutional law specialist. That interested me so much that I drifted over and spent more time with the legal scholars. They focused a good deal on segregation, free speech (and press and fair trial) and other civil rights issues. The Supreme Court had just disposed of the “separate but equal” rule. And Harry Ashmore had done a book called *The Negro and the Schools*, which dealt with the Kansas Board of Education case.

RR: Timed beautifully.

MS: Oh, yes.

RR: The book came out just weeks before the Supreme Court decision.

MS: The timing is murky in my mind. But it did all link together.

RR: How do you see the Neiman year in the context of your whole life?

MS: It was absolutely wonderful. It changed me from a step-by-step guy, “we’ll deal with this as we come to it,” to one who would take on the big issues. I loved getting into these big discussions. Sometimes rather ineptly, but sometimes I would surprise myself with the way I could put the knowledge that I had to work. Also, I had fun with some of the Harvard super-intellectual types. Some were a little stuffier than I expected, but some were quite down to earth. Arthur Schlesinger Sr., just a marvelous gentleman, unlike his son, Arthur, Jr., whom our class called “Snotty.” Both Sr. and Jr., I believe, won Pulitzer Prizes in history. Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., came up to me at one party and said, “You’re from

Colorado.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “I’ve have something I have just got to ask.” I thought, “Oh, no. It is going to be some obscure piece of western history and I will flunk the conversation.” His question was, “Have you ever met Ethel Merman?” The answer was yes. She had married Robert Six of Denver, who was head of Continental Airlines. We at the *Post* gave a lot of unwanted coverage to their romance. But I got to know her because I had written a radio script for her to use in a United Way promotion. She was so gracious, so unlike the personality that you would see on the screen. She read the script and said, “Hey, that sounds just like me.” Anyway, I was able to tell Schlesinger, “She is real nice, not at all brassy, a classy lady.” He was absolutely delighted. He said, “Well, that just made my day.” I told you about Bernard DeVoto supporting a rival candidate to me. One night at dinner, I was seated between Arthur Sutherland, a pro-Eisenhower man, and Benny DeVoto, who was a historian, magazine and novel writer, and so on. He certainly was not pro-Eisenhower, and he probably wanted to let the world know it. Somehow or another, he had decided I was an acceptable character. I had written an article for Neiman Reports entitled, “The Fight for the West,” on the importance of public water rights. So DeVoto starts stating his opinions of the Eisenhower Administration to Arthur Sutherland. They just kept firing those shots at each other across my chest for about an hour and a half. I don’t think I ate any dinner, I was so entranced by this debate.

Another experience — I don’t know if you ever met David Manning White. David was head of the journalism program at Boston University. David White had us

Fellows all over to some kind of student-faculty dinner. Of course, we talked about newspapers. What I'll never forget was David saying to me, "Mort, why don't you represent the publishers? You look like a fat cat." I thought, "What have I done to deserve this?" Until I saw the class picture taken at the end of our year. Between the wine and cheese and beer they served on Thursdays, the martinis, old fashioned and so on at receptions, and tons of food on other occasions, my weight blossomed to 212 pounds. I have never weighed that before or since. But when he said that I looked like a fat cat, he was right. In the photo I looked like a giant chipmunk. Speaking of parties, a lot of the faculty members hosted parties for the twelve of us Neimans and our spouses. So the Neiman wives decided that they would do something of the kind in response. They had a party at the Signet Society building and a great many guests came. Somehow the dinner was late. We were well into our third or fourth round of martinis when I was discussing something with the economics professor, John Dunlap, who later became Secretary of Labor. I was telling him he really did not understand this, but that I would help him. Unlike me, he was being a gentleman. The next day, one of the wives, Jo Woestendiek, went back to the Signet Society to pay the bill. When Archie, the proprietor, handed it to her, Jo said "This is higher than we expected." Archie replied, "So were the guests." And he was right.

RR: I am glad we have these reminiscences, looking back on my own years to dinners.

MS: Did Louis Lyons show you the shelf in the Signet Society for "books by members"? Louis enjoyed the fact that someone had placed the New Testament

on that shelf. [Laughter]

RR: No. I don't remember that. Great character, that Louis. Well, let's get you back to Denver. What was your job when you left and what was it when you got back? When you got back to Denver, did you go back to night city editor?

MS: No, I went back to the regional desk, what was called the empire desk. I did that for a few months, and then I was assistant city editor. I was assistant city editor when I was appointed managing editor. Not only to everybody else's surprise, but to my own surprise.

RR: What year did you become managing editor?

MS: '56. I had just turned 30.

RR: You stayed in that job until . . .

MS: early '59.

RR: Is that when you went back to school to get your Ph.D.?

MS: No. In 1959, I became editorial page editor. I didn't go for the doctorate until after I was appointed assistant to the publisher at the end of 1964 or the start of '65.

I want to say that my less-than-three years as Managing Editor were exciting ones for me — and, indeed, for the newsroom. Some of the people who were my subordinates — and/or other people I would deal with regularly in my new position — were used to doing things their way and were not thrilled by the idea of changing. Some of them quit their jobs as a result, and some I put in other jobs. But most of the changes I made were promotions to new responsibilities.

One thing I won't forget, when I proposed cleaning up and modernizing the looks of the newspaper, was a comment from the news editor: "If the old man wanted these things changed he would have said so." What he didn't know was that when I settled in at what had been Ed Dooley's desk, I found a memo from Hoyt to Dooley that said, "I suggest you organize a team headed by Mort Stern to work on improvements to the paper."

I appointed a design director for the paper, one of the first in the country. His name was H. Ray Baker, who had been art director of our local magazine. He was great at page design, but he couldn't get the news desk people or the back shop people to cooperate. That's when I had to go and push people to change.

On one such change, Baker told me the print shop foreman told him, "F.G. Bonfils wouldn't let us do that!" (Bonfils was co-founder of the paper.) I reported the comment to Hoyt, who said, "Go tell them to make the change, that Mr. Bonfils has been dead for more than 20 years."

One innovation that I tried kicked back on me. I had this idea of open communication in the newsroom, so one afternoon I invited everybody — editors, reporters, copy boys, etc. — to my office (which was really an open bull pen) to say anything they felt like saying. Well, it got lively, but, I thought, constructive. So Mr. Hoyt, who had watched it all from his office doorway, said, "Next time you can hold one of those in my office." What neither of us anticipated was that in the new setting the psychological pressure on the newsroom executives was intense, and they got very defensive — and the group almost came to blows.

When it was over, Hoyt called me aside and said, “If you ever do that again, I’ll fire you.”

I put in a new assistant managing editor — a brilliant man of Japanese-American descent named Bill Hosokawa, who had been editor of our local magazine. Bill had an incredible sense of humor, but he could show a frightening expression to the staff, so I sometimes had Bill go into the newsroom and see if one of my orders was being carried out. And everybody would jump. One day I was reminiscing about how Prof. Richard Baker, the associate dean at Columbia University, had advised me never to take an executive position because, he said I was “the ulcer type.” So I said to Hosokawa, “Look at all we’ve gone through in these first couple of months, and I’ve got no ulcer. Baker must have been mistaken.” “No,” Hosokawa replied, “you are the ulcer type, but you don’t get them, you give them.”

On my first month in the new job, Hoyt had mentioned a small matter that had been called to his attention, and he wanted it put in the paper. Well, I passed the information to one of the assistant city editors and promptly forgot about it. A week later Hoyt came to my desk and asked what happened to the item. I said I was sure it had been run, but I couldn’t recall seeing it. So he told me to find out for sure since he hadn’t seen it either. He seemed pretty irritated about it. Well, I had Don Davis, the ranking assistant city editor, track it down and, sure enough, the item had run on the day after it was given to them. I went proudly in to the publisher’s office to inform him, but he wasn’t placated. “Well, the point’s the

same — and don't let it happen again.” Hosokawa heard the comment and just sat there shaking his head. But I think what the old man meant was, “Don't ever assume an order has been carried out; always follow up.” And, in any case, I took that to heart, even after I moved into academe.

For the most part in those first years, Hoyt and I got along very well. I would be treated (or tolerated) like a “genius” and even referred to that way at times. But, as a result of my brashness, I sometimes stepped on important toes — including those of the owners. While some of the changes were made too abruptly, in general, Hoyt approved of them. And as time went by, we began to discuss more the philosophical basis for what we were doing. At the end of the day, when the pressure was off, we would talk about ideas and his speeches. He did an awful lot of public speaking, which I thought was a great thing for an editor/ publisher.

RR: His title was editor and publisher?

MS: Yes. It was editor and publisher. That was his title from the start. He had been hired away from the *Portland Oregonian*, where he had been editor and publisher. He had taken a leave of absence from the *Oregonian* during World War II to head the domestic division of the Office of War Information. He became a friend of Franklin Roosevelt and just about everybody who was running the country in the 1940s. I got labeled somehow as an opinion guy. Surprisingly, we shared our views, and he decided that I should go ahead and take over the editorial page. That was in 1959. The Neiman thing may have been an influence there. When I came back, I was labeled sort of an “egghead.” He would playfully refer to my

editorial page staff as my “scrambled eggs.”

RR: Do you remember any editorial or any particular subjects . . . ?

MS: Oh, yes. Although we had supported Eisenhower, we pushed hard for him to fire Sherman Adams, his “assistant president,” who had used his influence to get favors for friends who gave Adams gifts. Then we stirred up things by saying, “Why not (diplomatically) recognize Red China? It is there.” In those days it was sacrilege to suggest there was a government controlling mainland China. There were lots of other things we stirred up. We opposed a Colorado right-to-work bill, which would create labor-management problems that we wouldn’t have otherwise. Some old-time readers complained that we were part of a communist apparatus. We ran all the nasty letters. But we made a lot of friends, too. We encouraged one and all to speak their minds. Many people we opposed praised our fairness. And we also took bites out of some office holders we had supported.

RR: Hoyt was a . . .

MS: Lifelong Republican.

RR: You are a Democrat?

MS: Well, I was . . . but in the late 1960s, I drifted toward the Republican side.

RR: These are positions that you don’t expect a Republican publisher to approve of. How do you explain it?

MS: Well, Hoyt was kind of a liberal Republican. The Eisenhower, Rockefeller, Scranton type. Hoyt liked reasonable dissent. Let me tell you a little anecdote. *Denver Post* was one of the last newspapers to run Norman Thomas’s column.

You remember Norman Thomas?

RR: A Socialist?

MS: Longtime Socialist candidate for president. He would come to Denver, and Mr. Hoyt would entertain him. I remember I was there for one dinner, and I heard Norman Thomas say — he had kind of a speech impediment, but he stammered it out — “Palmer, I think it is ironic I started life as a Republican and wound up a Socialist and you started life as a Socialist and wound up as a Republican.” I guess that was about the way it was. Ep was the son of a Baptist preacher who may have made \$1,000 a year. The minister moved to Montana to get some land and then had to have Hoyt’s mother and the kids work the ranch to establish their claim while his dad preached on the circuit. Hoyt said his father loved books and collected what he could afford. Ep read them all and also devoured reading matter from an uncle who leaned toward Socialist-type reform movements. During World War I, Hoyt left the ranch and joined the infantry, where he became a top sergeant and served in France. He struggled through college during the depths of the Depression. While he didn’t hold on to socialism, there was a strong Populist strain in him. Ultimately, Ep became a Republican in that Oregon mold. What was the name of the famous Wayne who was an independent Republican?

RR: Wayne Morse.

MS: Wayne Morse who was like that, liberal Republican. At the *Oregonian*, Hoyt supported Morse. He was also close to William O. Douglas, who became a

Supreme Court justice.

RR: Among a handful of opponents to be in that war was Wayne Morse.

MS: Dick Newberger and Dick's wife Maureen, each of whom served for a term in the U.S. Senate, worked for Hoyt on the *Oregonian* and were in that liberal social reform bunch.

RR: Hoyt was out of that . . .

MS: That's right. But you find this other side of him. He was also influenced by the Horatio Alger stories as a boy. One thing his father left with him was his love for books. Horatio Alger gave you the feeling that in America you could be anything you wanted to be if you had the guts to do it. Hoyt was out of that background, and, indirectly, he applied it to me.

RR: Were you aware of trying to shift his opinion when you were in charge of the editorial page? Were you aware of how to work on him to get him to go on to some of these positions?

MS: A little bit on some things. He could be contradictory. He could be tough and stubborn. He could scare a lot of people. He never scared me though. He would work on me with gentle needling. He was kind of a substitute father. He told me once a good boss had to have icicles around his heart. He was an ex-cowboy, and had been in rodeos. After hours we would get together in his office and have a little discussion or debate on issues of the day over coffee and crackers. He was surprisingly open-minded on some things. For example, on the right-to-work amendment, he had had his share of labor disputes, but in our discussions he

would say, “What the hell is the point of tearing up the good labor relations at this time in Colorado or Denver? What is the point of making things worse?”

RR: That had not always been the case in Colorado.

MS: No. The old *Denver Post* might regard a labor leader, a government department head, or a Democrat as a bad person — simply because of their jobs. In fact, I found when I went back and checked the 1944 election and found that when the *Post* did a story on the race for Congress from Denver, they would use the name of the Republican candidate, but only refer to the other candidate as “his Democratic opponent.” At the presidential level in 1944, I found that 80% of the *Post*’s coverage went to Thomas E. Dewey and 20% to Franklin D. Roosevelt, the incumbent President of the United States in the nation at war.

RR: Your editorial page editorship went on for how long then?

MS: Until ’65.

RR: A good long while then.

MS: Those were wonderful years. I just had more fun. Hoyt backed me in everything. He might get on my case privately about something. He called me in one day and said, “Sit there, and repeat after me: I will not . . .” I would say, “I will not . . .” “. . . get that nice Mr. Hoyt . . .” “. . . get that nice Mr. Hoyt . . .” “. . . in any trouble today.” “. . . in any trouble TODAY!”

But he did surprise me in 1960 about the Kennedy/Nixon presidential race. I thought, “Okay, we are going to find a way to support Richard Nixon.” Henry Cabot Lodge was a friend of Hoyt’s and Cabot Lodge became Nixon’s vice

presidential running mate. He came to talk to Hoyt. So did a lot of other political friends. But Hoyt kept saying things to me about what bothered him about Nixon. Each time it seemed like a different reason. I felt that was strange. But I knew Hoyt had never endorsed a Democrat for President and that the *Post* had endorsed a Democrat only once. (That was Woodrow Wilson running for his first term, because he promised to keep us out of the European conflict.) So I figured that the odds were in favor of our endorsing Nixon.

[End of Tape 3, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 3, Side 2]

MS: Finally, Ep told me to bring in my whole editorial page staff to discuss our endorsement. He asked me first, then went around the room. I said, “Kennedy is bright and I would like to support him.” My eight editorialists, they all agreed. — Make it seven, plus one cartoonist. Then Hoyt says, “All right, Stern, write an editorial endorsing Kennedy.” Everybody in the room just gasped. He didn’t bother to check with the owners or anybody so far as I could tell. Later I wondered if he had talked to his friend Lyndon Johnson. A lot of papers, including *The New York Times*, could not seem to make up their minds at the time. Now comes the *Denver Post* with a strong stand. The Kennedy people were ecstatic. They were showing our editorial everywhere. We got a letter from Barry Bingham, head of the *Louisville Courier Journal*, saying he was impressed with the stand we had taken. We got letters and calls from other pretty prominent news people. And the Kennedy people started showing up to say thanks. I would

look up and there was Sarge Shriver. Bobby came by my office. Lyndon came in. They needed us, and they used our editorials to get other support. It surprised me at times. I had a great deal of fun as editorial page editor. Sometimes people with useful, special background would come by to talk to us, and I would have them sit in with our writers — for an exchange of views. Other times graduate journalism students would be allowed in to observe an editorial conference and to see how we arrived at our decisions. One day, Hoyt came back to my office and was surprised to see fifteen or twenty people sitting there. As they started filing out, he said to me, “Mr. Stern, what are all of these people doing?” Feeling particularly cocky, I said, “Mr. Hoyt, they are making you look good.” Then I suddenly thought, “All right, big mouth, you have just fired yourself.” He looked at me and then got this funny grin on his face and turned, shook his head and walked away. Never said another word. After the election of 1964, I began to get weary of the same old issues time after time, the whole Denver city council showing up to make some point or request, the water board coming by with new plans, the people with good causes seeking endorsement. When the guy who had been the executive assistant to Palmer Hoyt left to take a job as Vice President of the Denver/Rio Grande Railroad, I asked Hoyt if he could use me as his executive assistant. So he said, “Sure.”

RR: What railroad?

MS: Denver/Rio Grande Railroad.

RR: So you went into the railroad business?

MS: No, no. Alexis McKinney, who had been assistant to the publisher of the *Post*, just decided he wanted to go to work as P.R. vice president of the Rio Grande Railroad. So I got the job as publisher's assistant that McKinney had. Then I asked Hoyt, "What are my duties?" He said, "Anything I don't want to do." I thought, "What am I getting into?" So I got in touch with Monty Curtis, who had been head of the American Press Institute at Columbia but had joined Knight-Ridder as Vice President, and I told him how Ep had explained my new duties. Monty replied, "It sounds pretty clear to me. I wouldn't press it beyond that if I were you." That's the kind of guy Ep was. He told me he hated "making the simple difficult." I walked into his office one day and heard him say, "I can't make it, but Mr. Stern will be very glad to do it." I asked, "What am I going to be glad to do?" It was a speech or a presentation. I discovered he wasn't kidding when he said whatever it was that he didn't want to do would be passed on to me. If somebody was angry with us, or had a complaint about circulation, for instance, there I was. But I had a purpose in mind.

RR: Did you ever have to fire anybody?

MS: Well . . .

RR: I mean, in that particular job?

MS: Not in that job. I was a party to, privy to, some cases. Had to be.

RR: Let's see, you were executive assistant. What year was that you were put in that job?

MS: In 1965. And on through 1970, when Hoyt retired. The hours were incredible,

any time of the day or night. If something had to be done and the boss was unavailable to do it, he would call on me to fill in. But the flexibility fit my purpose. I figured that I had done about all I was going to do in the newspaper business. I looked forward to being a journalism teacher full time. I had taught at the University of Denver, at the University of Colorado, and at Colorado Woman's College — part-time — and had great responses from the students. But I realized from my contacts in academe that I would have to have a doctorate if I was going to have a chance at a decent post. I saw the flexible hours and my close, trusting relationship with Hoyt as my chance to earn that degree. I talked to some friends at the University of Denver who said, "That's doable. You could earn a degree in organizational and mass communication, but you have to do it through the speech communication department, not journalism, as that was the doctoral level program at DU. The speech communication faculty was warmly receptive. I took the Graduate Record Exam and did very well. But I would have to get Hoyt's permission. To my surprise, Hoyt was very gracious about it. So was the General Manager, Charles Buxton, who we all knew was tabbed to be the next publisher. But I had to promise that I would put my *Denver Post* responsibilities first. So I said, "I'll take classes before breakfast and during noon hours if I'm not otherwise committed, and at night — when the *Post* doesn't require my involvement at night. Still, at 6 or 8 credit hours at a time, and using all my vacation time, it was slow going. I didn't get a lot of sleep.

RR: You had a Master's?

MS: I had a Master's from Columbia, so this was building on that. At least my graduate hours counted toward the ultimate total. But I had to do a lot more. And I had to learn, and utilize, research methods and statistics, and rebuild my skill in Spanish. And, of course, I would have to produce an acceptable dissertation. But I got straight "A" grades and was designated outstanding speech communication major.

RR: How long did it take you?

MS: Oh, about five years. But when I got the Ph.D., in 1969, Hoyt joked: "Ok, Stern. Say something in Communication."

RR: When Hoyt retired, did you leave the paper then?

MS: No. A new batch of executives took over, and the General Manager actually became both editor and publisher. Nice enough guy, but he was very wary of some more liberal writers and the cartoonist on the editorial page. He asked me to go back and take charge again — but he wanted me to clear everything with the new Executive Editor. It was tough on me because I was used to remarkable freedom under Hoyt — and it was tough on the writers and especially on the cartoonist.

RR: This was after the executive assistant's job you went back to the editorial page?

MS: Yes. But I knew it wouldn't be easy. The General Manager had said to me one time at lunch, "Why do editorials have to be controversial?" I had tried to explain that if we were going to try to tackle tough issues, our conclusions and recommendations would sometimes be controversial. I said that might be why we

got such good readership. Readership surveys of the *Post* showed that the reader attention to the editorial pages (including Op-Ed) ranked only slightly behind the front page and the comic page. For most newspapers, editorial pages readership ranked much lower. At that time I thought I had convinced him that our editorial and related pages were quite an asset. I knew that Mr. Hoyt realized we were doing well because he was getting wonderful reactions from around the country, from public figures and even other publishers. But for the long haul, I could see the handwriting on the wall.

RR: This wasn't going to work?

MS: We could, of course, give the new editor/publisher non-controversial stuff, but ultimately, I knew how it would end.

RR: When did you finally cut your ties to the paper?

MS: In '73. I had received lots of feelers from universities. I was approached by the University of Missouri, by Michigan State, by Rutgers, and by several others. By then, I hated the thought of leaving Colorado; it was such a congenial place for me and my family. Also I really wanted to be a professor. They were talking deanships. Well, finally, in 1973, Jim Brinton called me. He was dean of the University of Colorado School of Journalism. Jim said, "I'm going to step down from the deanship, and I would like to put your name in as a candidate to succeed me. I said, "Jim, that is very nice. Let's do that." Some people involved with the university and the media figured I had this sewed up. Boy, the process doesn't work that way. Anyway, the CU administration stalled and stalled and stalled.

They interviewed people that I knew who were already heads of programs. They couldn't seem to make up their minds. While this was going on, I got a telephone call from a vice president of the University of Alabama. He said they had some very strong recommendations on my behalf — which was a big surprise to me. “We are thinking of starting a school of communication. We would like for you to consider coming and being the dean.” I thought, “Alabama! Do you guys know what you are doing?” [Laughter] The *Post* had not exactly been friendly to George Wallace (although, so help me, George later was very gracious to me). I had some Southern Exposure back in Arkansas, of course. But I couldn't imagine that would make me especially favored. Still, they kept after me, and I finally gave President David Matthews a call. A wonderful guy. He later became Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in President Ford's Cabinet. David said, “Why don't you come down and talk to some of us? — No commitment necessary.” He sent an airplane. I will tell you a little anecdote. My wife went with me. At Tuscaloosa, the pilot said, “I don't know who you are, Mister, but you must be pretty important.” I said, “Why so?” He said, “This is Coach Bryant's airplane.” [Laughter] Well, after the visit with university and media people (which went very well), I called the Provost of the University of Colorado and told him I had an offer. “Have you made a decision?” He said, “No.” They had not made up their minds. And so the next call I got from Alabama, I heard myself say, “Yes.” Then I thought, “What did I just do?” But we went down there, and with considerable help from the media, and the Legislature, I was able

to launch the School of Public Communication at the University of Alabama. President Mathews and his administration were wonderful. Anything I needed. They put me in a former president's office, and they worked hard to get what I needed in terms of resources. My family, especially Pat, suffered from the humidity. But the people were wonderful. It seemed like every newspaper in the state did editorials supporting our plans for the School. Prior to this, I had known very few people in Alabama. I knew Ben Davis, the managing editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*. And quickly earned the friendship of Brandy Ayers, editor at Anniston, a Neiman Fellow from the class of 1968, and Neil Davis, Neiman class of '42, at Auburn. But as much progress as we were making on the school, the physical climate was killing us. After more than 20 years in high, dry Colorado, we couldn't handle the humidity. I was really surprised at how hard it was on Pat, who, after all, was raised in Pine Bluff, in south Arkansas, so near to the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers. When I came home from work one day, I found her totally drained, in a kind of coma. She had hardly moved from where she was when I left for work. We lived outside of Tuscaloosa, at first, on Mallard Lake, in a place called Cottdale. When we opened our car door in the mornings, there was literally a rain cloud in the automobile. It was really that humid. Some of the university administrators could sense what was happening. Then, before a year was up, University of Colorado made up their minds, and President Fred Thieme invited me to take the C.U. deanship. I felt so rotten leaving David as I did, but he and the Board of Trustees were very understanding.

Still, to this day, I feel rotten about it. But I said, “Yes.”

RR: That was to the University of Colorado?

MS: Yes, the University of Colorado, in Boulder. It was then I realized how well I was treated at Alabama. At Boulder, the Journalism School was in an old auditorium building with cramped classrooms. I spent most of my years as dean trying to get better quarters as well as more faculty and staff. Each president or chancellor would promise better things for the school: more space, more staff, more faculty. Fred Thieme, who hired me, promised he would double my faculty. But he was fired before I got to Boulder. The next chief administrator said, “Yes, you can have such and such a building,” so I started to work on plans for it, but he moved on to a different job. The successor made more promises. Then came Mary Berry, to be chancellor. I supported her appointment and felt I was getting along really well with her. She quit after seven months, to become an assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education in Washington. Too bad. She was the first woman, and first black, who was Chancellor of the Boulder campus. I was as supportive as I could be and got her to come to our faculty meetings, and to agree to help us get decent support. Then she was gone, in less than a year. But I couldn’t complain. I had done something like that at Alabama (although in recent documents, they give me credit for getting their school on the road to its present level of success). I soon moved on to the University of Denver, at first as Executive Director of Public Affairs and later as Executive Assistant to the Chancellor.

RR: You wound up your career at the University of Denver?

MS: No. I stayed there for about seven or eight years. At first, I was pretty effective helping them improve relations with the community, the legislature, the faculty, the students. I was hired by one chancellor, Maurice Mitchell, who left after a year to be an executive with the Ford Foundation in California. The next chancellor was an old friend of mine from my University of Arkansas student days. I worked hard in his behalf, and we worked together well for a while, resolving problems and conflicts of all sorts. I tried to help him to make peace with the faculty, but things kept getting worse. He just kept rubbing the faculty the wrong way. The relationship between us was becoming real strained as well. So the Lord steps in, you know. I received an invitation to fill an endowed visiting professorship in Alaska. I had been on the journalism accrediting committee of ACEJ with Stu Aubrey, a publisher in Kansas, who was at the time chairman of the accrediting board. He heard that the owner of the *Anchorage Times* had set up this endowed professorship at the University of Alaska, in Anchorage. The first of the professors was Cleve Matthews, of *The New York Times*.

RR: I saw him at your house one time.

MS: Yes. Cleve was a nice guy, very helpful to me. Anyway, he was the first Atwood Professor. Stu Aubrey nominated me to be the second Atwood Professor, and the committee, and the Journalism Department chairperson, Dr. Sylvia Broady, were happy to get me. The academic year 1981-82 was a wonderful, wonderful time in

Alaska. The oil boom was on. The money was great. And, for once, I could be a full-time teacher — and they were really shorthanded. Sylvia and I were the only full-time faculty, so we had to be really resourceful. For instance, I had to teach make up and editing with one junky, old Wang word processor and a lot of imagination. But the students told me they loved having an old newspaper pro like me to teach them — and because of my administrative experience, I was able to help Sylvia with some administrative chores and some planning for accreditation. In addition, I did important consulting for Bob Atwood, the newspaper owner and donor of the professorship endowment. At the end of the year, Bob offered me an editorship, but I felt obligated to return to the University of Denver. Bad decision. Financial problems finally got so bad at DU that the chancellor called me in and said he had to eliminate my job, that we had to part company. A week earlier, I had turned down an editorship of a good small daily in Colorado. Once again, however, a door opened for me. Florida International University in Miami was looking for someone to turn their journalism department into a school. They heard that I had achieved that in Alabama. I had great references from everywhere, so they hired me to do just that. But when I got down there, sure enough, after a few months they asked me to justify going to a school status.

RR: To school status?

MS: To expand the department to the status of a school. I figured they needed documentation for what they intended to do. So I did this elaborate justification

and presentation. Meanwhile, I was trying to administer a department where some faculty were battling with each other. Two months went by, and the next thing the administration said, “We want a new case statement for going to school status.” I thought, “Now I have to start all over! — academic bureaucracy is certainly bizarre.” Well, the third time it happened, I was visiting with friends from the University of Miami, the private university in the area. Miami had a department of journalism. A vice president there told me, “When Florida International hired you, we started to take the competition seriously.” So they converted their department to a school of journalism and communication. So the next time I addressed the Florida International media advisory board, I said, “I was brought here to start a school of communication. Such a school has now been started. Unfortunately, it is at the University of Miami.” The president and the provost of FIU were present. They were not amused. I was discussing with an old friend in Miami . . .

RR: Bill Baggs?

MS: No, I knew Bill Baggs, but it was Sylvan Meyer.

RR: Sylvan Meyer?

MS: Yes. Sylvan Meyer. Neiman Fellow, Class of ‘51, a former newspaper editor in Georgia. Sylvan was putting out a city magazine in Miami. He was a great source of moral support for me. But I told him FIU was driving me crazy. At least temporarily, the journalism department remained in the College of Arts and Sciences. But when I went to the Arts and Sciences dean and told him I needed

five or six more faculty positions if we were going to start the communication school I was hired to start, he told me he had authorization to add only 18 new faculty positions for the college. But at the next meeting of Arts and Sciences department chairpersons, it was determined that the journalism department priority for getting even one was number 34. There would be 18 new positions, and I was 34th in line for one of them. I began to think I wasn't going to live long enough to accomplish what I was hired to do. I said what amounted to goodbye to my friend Sylvan and his wife Anne. Soon I noticed in *Editor and Publisher* magazine an ad for a journalism department chairperson at the University of Northern Colorado. I applied.

RR: Where is that?

MS: That's in Greeley, Colorado.

RR: Greeley?

MS: Yes. It is named for Horace Greeley. So I spent the next five years as department chairperson at the University of Northern Colorado. It was a friendly town and good people. They had similar problems to what other journalism departments have — and then some. When I got there, I discovered that the journalism faculty were at war with the president, the other members of the administration, and to some degree with each other. I spent my first few years trying to make peace.

RR: Was that your last paying job?

MS: Yes. The last regular salary job.

RR: Then you retired?

MS: Well, of course, by that time my wife and I had started our own business. It was a consulting business. It is called P. Paty & Company. Paty is a family name from Pat's mother's side. Over the years, Pat had become a wonderful interior designer.

RR: I've seen her work. I would testify to that.

MS: She is incredible. I call her a space cadet. She has a gift for spatial space relations. Some people are born with that. I have gone into people's homes, where she has moved a lamp here, a couch or desk there, and somehow or another, it suddenly comes together as a unit. She redesigns everything. She can put a grand piano in a crowded room, and everything will fit beautifully and there will seem to be more space than before.

RR: So you all had . . .

MS: A consulting business. So, at the time I retired, I had done a little consulting. I had written some things and sold them to historic preservation and architecture publications. Up here in Clear Creek County, there was a lady who had done a manuscript on how to provide access for the handicapped to the wilderness. I edited and re-edited it before she sent it to her publishers. I was doing that kind of thing. The interesting thing is my wife is so good at what she does that she is the one who keeps getting assignments. She has clients in Alaska, in Nantucket, in Washington D.C., and Denver and so on. She has done several jobs in our hometown of Georgetown and nearby. I could have shown you some beautiful houses in Georgetown that were designed by a team of preservation architects.

They would recommend Pat to do the interiors. So she fell in love with that. Up here, we are trying to distinguish between assignments and paying assignments because this little town of 900 people always needs volunteers. I have served as the Vice Chairman of Historic Georgetown, Inc., member of the County Tourism Board, President of the Library Association, member of the Board of Selectmen (the town council). I am now on the Board of Adjustment. And Pat is one of the hard workers on the Community Center Board. We both serve at book sales to raise money for the library. And at Christmas Market, I often serve as St. Nicholas. (It's the beard, not some quality of saintliness.)

RR: So everybody has to do a job?

MS: Well, we'd like everybody to feel that way.

RR: This time next year, I predict you will be Mayor of Georgetown. [Editor's Note: Mort nearly did, but that's another story.] What year did you move to Georgetown?

MS: We bought our place in '78. That was the year I moved to the University of Denver from the University of Colorado. We had a big house in Boulder, Colorado, right there at the edge of the mountains. Since we were moving out of Boulder, we said, "Why don't we look for a retirement home in the mountains?" We looked at Breckenridge and decided against it. I have a gift for not making any money in life. I don't know if you have ever heard of Breckenridge, Colorado. Now it is a big ski town. At the time it was a moderate little Victorian place. There was this piece of property from the main street over to the next

street. The guy was asking \$200,000 for it. I couldn't imagine where I would come up with \$200,000 or why I would want that commercial property. Well, we sold our house in Boulder for more than that, and we could have owned a big commercial chunk of Breckenridge. Another time we were visiting a friend who built condos in Aspen, Colorado, at the foot of Aspen Mountain. I remember Hugh Hyder saying to me, "How do you like the condo you are staying in?" I said, "Pretty nice." He said, "Why don't you buy it?" I said, "What would it cost me?" He said, "Thirty-five thousand dollars." I said, "Why would I spend thirty-five thousand dollars for a condo in Aspen?" Now the average price of anything in Aspen is about a million and a half dollars. Anything! Another time, I was on a trip with a friend who was headmaster of Colorado Academy. We had known each other from Columbia days. He had bought ten acres on a ridge overlooking Dillon, Colorado. At the time he said, "I could sell a couple of these acres to you for \$1,000 an acre." I turned him down, but I had forgotten that only a few months earlier the whole Denver Water Board had come to the office of Palmer Hoyt, the publisher of the *Denver Post*, and shown him and me their plans to build a big storage dam and create a recreation area that would be called Lake Dillon. They wanted our editorial support for the project. They asked which we would support — a small, medium or large dam. They showed us the outline of where the lake would reach as a result of each of these alternatives. We advised them to go ahead with the big dam — which they ultimately did. So the land I could have bought would now be two acres of very valuable lakefront property.

[Laughter] My friend who bought the ridge really cleaned up. Small wonder that I realize I have no talent for making money — even with inside information.

RR: That's because you are a newspaper man. You are not born to make money. What year did you move to Georgetown?

MS: We bought in '78, but we didn't retire until '90. Then we began full time living in Georgetown. It is fun. It is a small town. A Victorian village that once was a silver mining center. You have seen it.

RR: Yes, I have seen it. It is a small town. We talked about it all the way back.

MS: Why don't you buy a place?

RR: No. . . .

MS: The crazy thing now is land is \$35,000 to \$45, 000, not for an acre, but for a lot.

RR: Mort, why don't we kind of circle back to the *Arkansas Gazette*, which is the inspiration for all these interviews. As you know, the *Gazette* folded in 1991.

MS: I was astonished. I didn't know any of the details.

RR: Have you given any thought to what kind of newspaper the *Gazette* was? What we have lost?

MS: Yes. I thought the *Gazette* was one of the greatest papers. In fact, at the time when the *Denver Post* was regarded as one of the top 20 papers in the country in that period of the 1960's, I always thought the *Gazette* belonged in that top 20 as well, or even the top 10. I considered *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Louisville Courier Journal*, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, the *Arkansas Gazette*, the *Denver Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, to be really great papers in the 1950s and

'60s. I thought the *Gazette*, not only because they had shown the courage to stand for things that were just and right, for fair treatment and dignity for all people, but also because it was well written, clear and easy to read. It was somewhat conservative in its make-up, but even there they learned to loosen up a bit. I thought it had stature. It was a good newspaper to read. I was proud to have been a part of it. When I was there, we were so far ahead of the *Democrat* it was amazing. We had maybe (it sounds puny nowadays), but we had 120,000 in circulation and the *Democrat* probably had half that. We sure had taken hold of the state, the *Gazette* did. So I had this image, the *Gazette* was thriving, in spite of having stood up to all kinds of threats. My impression was that they had survived all that and achieved national stature. I think Harry Ashmore may have left by that time. But they still had damn good people. I think the *Gazette* was a wonderful paper. It was like being hit over the head, when I heard they had collapsed. In fact, when I heard that the new owners of the *Democrat* claimed to be in first place, I wrote Hugh Patterson and said, "I just don't believe it. What in the hell is the truth?" He wrote back to me and said, "I am glad you asked. It just isn't so." I thought, "Thank God for that."

RR: Did you have any experience with Gannett other than knowing them?

MS: A little bit. They had bought some medium-size dailies in our area. I forget which they were. I think my friend, Bob Lucas, who had been editorial page editor of the *Post*, went to work for Gannett. I thought they put out pretty good papers, and that it must be fun working for such an organization. But I remember

one time when I was riding in a cab with a bunch of editors, I said, “I envy you guys who work for big organizations, you must have a lot of freedom.” There was some choking and laughing. I thought, “What is the problem?” They didn’t think it was so peachy.

RR: Well, Mort, can you think of anything that we haven’t covered? Or anything else that you want to say for the ages?

MS: I am trying to think of a quote from the ancients or something. Hoyt was in a cab in Washington with some other person, and they went by the National Archives building. It had an inscription on the front: “The Past Is Prologue,” really a quote from Shakespeare. The guy asked him what the heck that means, and he said, “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet.” That’s a pretty good last line. Oh, just one little anecdote to put a period on this. Did I tell you that toward the end of my stay at the University of Northern Colorado, I had Harry Ashmore in as a guest speaker for my students. We were yacking with each other ahead of time, and I introduced Harry. When Harry got up, he said, “Well, your chairman and I have been doing a lot reminiscing about the good old days in Arkansas. — Some of which was true.” Which was typical Harry. And typical of old editors. It has been fun talking to you.

RR: Thanks very much.

[End of interview]