

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project - Event

Roy Reed and David Pryor
2007 Ernie Deane Award
University of Arkansas
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Event Description

Before an audience of journalism students and others, the Lemke Department of Journalism at the University of Arkansas hosted a ceremony to present Roy Reed with the annual Ernie Deane Award and to commend *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* reporter Seth Blomeley for his investigative reporting on Governor Mike Huckabee's last days in office. Following speeches by journalism professor Larry Foley and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* journalist Frank Fellone and the presentation of awards, David Pryor interviewed Roy Reed on the history of the *Gazette*, his work for the *New York Times*, and the role of the journalist in society.

Transcript:

[00:00:00]

[*Introductory music*]

Hoyt Purvis: Good morning, everyone. If I could ask your—ask for your attention. We need to get started. We have a very special program today, and I want to welcome not only the students from my Media and Society class but from other classes in journalism and many special guests who are with us today. We're happy to have all of you here. And it is, I think, a very special treat, this program that is been arranged today in connection with the Ernie Deane Award. And you'll be hearing more about that in just a minute. And I'm going to turn the program over shortly to Professor Larry Foley. But I do want to welcome everybody on behalf of the journalism department, the Lemke Department of Journalism. For my students in the Media and Society class just a couple of quick notes. One, if you have your TV news analysis assignment to turn in today you can either give it to me at the end of this program or leave it in my mailbox in Kimpel 116. Don't forget also that the website analysis assignment—the deadline for that is Friday. And again, you can either turn that in in class on Thursday or leave it in my faculty mailbox in 116. Now at this point I'm going to turn the

program over to my colleague, Professor Larry Foley who will introduce the rest of the program.

[00:02:11] Larry Foley: Ernie Deane was a longtime professor of journalism here at the University of Arkansas. Ernie was an Arkansawyer, as he liked the term much better. He didn't like Arkansan. He was a professor. He was a longtime newspaper man. He was an author. He was a folklorist and sometimes activist. If not—I'm going to quote Skip Rutherford here. "If not for Ernie Deane—if not for Ernie Deane, Old Main would not be here today." And let me explain that. The latter part of the 1970s and throughout the decade of the 1980s, Old Main fell into such a state of disrepair that it was closed off. A fence was put around it. And some revisionist U of A administrators would like to tell you that there was never a plan to tear down Old Main, but I can tell you for a fact that was not the case because Willard Gatewood, retired U of A chancellor and professor of history, told me not long ago that there was great sentiment among the U of A administration and some alumni to tear down Old Main and to place a plaque over there, if you can imagine such a thing, that said, "Here once stood Old Main." Now how does Ernie Deane come into play? Because Ernie Deane, throughout his entire life, was a newspaper man, and he wrote

column after column after column and also many letters stating the significance of this building and how a building that we know is our beacon of hope, and sometimes "mother of mothers" if we want to quote our alma mater, was too significant, too important to tear it down. His journalistic writings and letter writings stirred up a spirit among the alums who refused to let that happen. Finally the administration became convinced. Money was raised. Old Main was restored, and we have it today. That was Ernie Deane. Ernie Deane was also a great mentor to many of us and a great friend. When Ernie passed away long about 1992, right Brenda? Those of us who loved Ernie, and there were many of them, decided that we needed to do something to honor his name and his spirit. [00:04:32] So we began the Ernie Deane Award, which we began presenting in the spring of 1993. And many distinguished Arkansas journalists from Bob McCord to Bob Douglas to Jim Pitcock and Steve Barnes to Charlotte Schexnayder and on and on and on have received this particular award. From time to time we have done something else in addition to the Ernie Deane Award. And we've also given out a special award of achievement for a single body of work when an Arkansas journalist, in Ernie's words, "Sounds the alarm when common sense is threatened and good judgment is

ignored, especially by elected and appointed officials." This year we are awarding such a letter of commendation to Seth Blomeley of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, for his coverage of Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee's last days in office, including the controversial destruction of computer hard drives. We honor Blomeley not only for his reporting, but also for his courage and not backing down and getting the story right while under fire from those he was covering. At this time, for more on Blomeley and his significant piece of work, I'd like to introduce the deputy editor of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Frank Fellone. Frank. [Applause]

[00:06:09] Frank Fellone: Thank you, Larry. Let me talk about—let me talk about journalism as much as Seth, same thing they—journal—Seth exemplifies journalism as we like to practice it at the *Democrat-Gazette*. But first—Jerry McConnell—are you here, Jerry?

Jerry McConnell: Yes

FF: Jerry, it's nice to see you. I got my first newspaper job at the *Democrat* when—the *Arkansas Democrat* when Jerry was the managing editor. I was—he was still the managing editor when I got laid off from the sports department, but that was not your fault, Jerry. [Laughter] I want to talk about news, journalism,

the journalist, and truth. Let me start by saying that news is hard to define, that it's easier to describe or recognize by its elements. You know those elements. They include timeliness, proximity, prominence, novelty, consequence, and conflict. Let's talk about conflict for a minute. I have the pleasure of being an adjunct faculty member at UALR and know many journalism students who—and this is an increasing trend over the years—journalism students tend to shy away from conflict. They don't want to cover stories in which there is conflict between competing parties. They don't want to cover stories in which there may be conflict between them and newsmakers. They worry very much about the potential for conflict. But there can—but in journalism, let me tell you that if you avoid conflict or avoid reporting news that has conflict in it you're not doing your job as a journalist. Journalism—many definitions—my favorite is that journalism is the chronicling of the human experience. The human element, the human experience, is what makes journalism so compelling and addictive for the people who practice it. [00:08:07] The journalist, again, many definitions. This morning I like to choose this one: The journalist—who—is someone who is willing to ask the tough questions. The journalist is someone who is willing to ask the tough questions.

Not necessarily eager but willing to ask the tough questions of people like Governor Mike Huckabee, someone who is a powerful, influential public figure. Willing to ask the tough questions of people in power to find out the truth. The truth. We hear a lot today about that which is positive and that which is negative. Is this a positive news story? Is this a negative news story? I'm here to tell you that there is no such thing as a positive or negative news story. That is the language of public relations. News stories are either true or they—or they are not. The journalist is compelled not to worry about that which is—reflects poorly or well on newsmakers, but only, "Is it the truth?" [00:09:27] I urge you to reject those terms and seek as journalists the truth, which brings us to Seth Blomeley. In the matter of Governor Huckabee and his destroyed hard drives, Seth did all these things despite the conflict inherent in this news story and the conflict that he would have with the governor and the governor's people. He was willing to ask the tough questions so that he could find the truth, no matter what it said about the people involved in those—in this news story. And so, folks, let me introduce to you now, please, a journalist who exemplifies the willingness to ask the tough questions to find the truth about news events that are important to our readers, Seth Blomeley.

[*Applause*]

Seth Blomeley: Okay. Alright. Thank you. Okay. Okay. I'm very, very much appreciative of the opportunity to be here, and it's—when I was in college, you know, one of the things they told me was if you do your—do your job right then if you work hard, and sometimes it's not always going to be fun all the time really, really hit me—it hit me several times over the years, but it really hit me this past time with this—with the Hucklebee coverage. And there were a series—series of stories that kind of culminated with the hard drive coverage, and so it was—it wasn't always fun, but that's kind of what you sign up for. And it's nice to be—be—be acknowledged by my fellow journalists for—for sticking it out. So—so I—I appreciate y'all being here and thank you.

[*Applause*]

[00:11:48] LF: You know, one of the things that Ernie taught us to do was get the story right and tell the truth even if it hacked people off. And I think Seth hacked a few people off here. Now we're going to present the 2007 Ernie Deane Award. This year's recipient is a great friend of mine, Roy Reed. Roy lives out at Hogeye, Arkansas, in a Fay Jones House. But that's not why we're honoring him today. He's also a passionate yet subpar golfer. [*Laughter*] But we're—we're not—we're not giving him

that—the award for that either. I first met Roy when he was on the faculty here when I joined in 1993. In fact I went to lunch with Phyllis Miller and Roy Reed and Bob Carey. And they were such diverse characters that I—I realized at that time that if I were fortunate enough to get an offer to come and join the faculty here I would absolutely accept it. Roy is a former national and foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*. He taught journalism here at the U of A from [19]78 until 1995. He began his journalism career at the *Joplin Globe*. And from 1956 to [19]64 he worked for a reporter for the Arkansas—*Arkansas Gazette* and attended Harvard—Harvard as a Nieman Fellow from 1963 to 1964. He joined the staff of the *New York Times* in 1965, reporting on the civil rights movement and subsequently reporting for the *Times* as its New Orleans-based national correspondent and in London for a couple years from 1976 through 1978. Roy is also an author. He continues to write, and it's interesting to me how he continues his career. And this is really the way Ernie did it also. Ernie retired from the U of A journalism department, but he continued writing newspaper stories for a long time. Roy's not only continued to write, which is significant, and he did the book on former governor Orval Faubus. But he's been heavily involved in interviewing people,

in doing oral history. Interviewing the likes of famed architect Fay Jones. He's done numerous interviews with political figures like Senator David Pryor. And we're going to get to a little more of that in a moment. But at this time I would like to present to you my friend and the recipient of the 2007 Ernie Deane Award to Roy Reed. Roy. [*Applause*] Congratulations.

Roy Reed: Thank you.

[00:14:29] LF: We're not going to let Roy say anything yet.

Because what we thought would be fun would be for us to turn the tables on the old journalist, and instead of interviewing Senator Pryor, which he's done many times, we would let the senator interview him. So at this time we're going to strike this set. And you guys come over, and we'll move this. Many of you probably know of Senator Pryor. David Pryor, from Camden, is a former state legislator, former United States representative, former governor, former United States senator, and educator, and one of the truly great Arkansans of our time. So what we're going to do now is move the senator in here so he can interview Roy, and as we all know, who—those of us who've worked in journalism, it's a heck of a lot easier to ask the question than it is to answer it. So good luck, Roy. [*Laughter*]

[00:15:30] David Pryor: Well, ladies and gentleman, we're going

to be a little bit formal today just at the beginning because we are being filmed or videoed or whatever by the oral and visual history center here at the University of Arkansas. And fifty years from now you may want to come back to Fayetteville, and you'll probably see yourselves, and you'll see the participants here. We won't be around, but you will. And you can watch yourselves on the—on the screen again fifty or so years from now should you like. And we really are grateful for our wonderful team of people who are going to be interviewing, who—who are filming for today. And Seth, we want to congratulate you. That was a remarkable series that you wrote. It did take a great deal of courage, and when we think of outstanding journalists in Arkansas, we always think of Seth Blomeley. And we thank you so much for your courage and your fortitude and your vision in writing such a remarkable piece. Brenda, I'm doing one little beginning opening here. She wanted me to mention one thing. Our friend Larry Foley left out a very integral part of my life. At one time I thought I was going to be a journalist and save the world. I graduated fifty years ago. Fifty years ago from the university, and I thought that at the—when I got my diploma and walked across the stage that every company in Arkansas would be seeking me out and trying to hire me to be at least

vice president of the company or chairman of the board or something like that. Well I didn't get one offer. And so I went back home, and I was sulking around there in Camden for a few weeks. I couldn't get a job anywhere. I even tried to get a job, Frank, with the *Democrat*. I tried with the *Gazette*. I tried with the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. I tried to get a paying job, and no one would pay me. So later in the summer I went back to all of these little newspapers, and I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll work three months for you for nothing. Zero. I'll just work for you for nothing." They wouldn't even take me at that.

[*Laughter*] [00:17:57] So I decided, well heck, if I can't get a job on a newspaper, I'll start my own. So I did. I started my own weekly paper in Camden, Arkansas, I might say in competition with the Hussmann and Palmer family at the *Camden News*. And for four years I was, in fact, a, I must say—I can say it now—a bankrupt editor of a local newspaper, the *Ouachita Citizen*. But I got to know this man right here, Roy Reed, when I became a member of the state legislature. I think I was 25 or 6 maybe. And I was a freshman member. And he was covering the state legislature for the *Arkansas Gazette*. And I became a friend with Roy and Norma, Barbara and I did. And we sort of semiraised our children together through those years.

[00:18:54] And lo and behold, when I was elected to the US Congress I looked up in the gallery of the House of Representatives and there was Roy Reed. He'd been hired by the *New York Times*, and he was covering congress, President Johnson, the White House, whatever. He went on to various—various—I must say great challenges with the *New York Times* as the head of the southern bureau in New Orleans, the London bureau, London, England, for the *New York Times* in Washington, DC, with the *New York Times*. But he came back home. He came back home. He came back home to Arkansas, to his roots, and shared with us his life's experiences and his wisdom and his wonderful reputation as one of America's premier journalists. And how fortunate Arkansas has been to have him here on this campus in various capacities in the school of journalism in many roles that he has played and in writing some of the books that he has written and some of the articles that he has crafted. So, Roy Reed, we go back a long time. And Roy, I just want you to know how honored I am to be on this side of the interviewing table today visiting with you. We're—we're not rehearsed. I made a few notes yesterday in preparation maybe for our visit today, and why don't you say a word or so. I've monopolized it so far. So.

[00:20:31] RR: [*Cameras snapping*] Well thank you for those kind words, David. I really appreciate it. We do go back a long way. I—I remember when you came to the legislature. David was one of the young Turks, we called them back then, which meant that he had—he had the courage to stand up against prevailing political winds in Arkansas at that time. [*Clears throat*] Excuse me. It's a foolhardy thing to do, but you won anyhow, and we all appreciate it. I ought to say that Ernie Deane had a lot to do with my coming home to—to Arkansas and to the university. Ernie and I had known each other at the *Arkansas Gazette*. We were there at the same time. And he was writing the *Arkansas Traveler* column for the paper at that time, traveling all over the state. He—he eventually left and came up here to teach at the university. And in the late 1970s he got in touch with me in London and—and said, "There is some sentiment in the journalism department for having you come here to teach if you're interested." Well, one thing led to another, and—and that's how I ended up here. And I'll always be grateful to old Ernie. I—I have some very fond memories of that man. He—those of you who knew him will remember his voice, I think. He had a very distinctive voice. And he would telephone me out at Hogeye where a small unproductive farm. Still have. And he

would always start the conversation the same way. He'd say, "Hello, skwar." [*Laughter*] And that's—that's—that's squire. That's the way we say it in southwest Arkansas where he and I grew up.

DP: "Skwar."

RR: "Skwar." Yeah. But I—I have a lot of fond memories of the man, and I want to share just one short story about him because it so typifies Ernie. Ernie traveled a lot in his old Buick automobile all over the state, and his main complaint on the road was rude truck drivers. He wrote a letter to the editor one time of his paper, the *Gazette*. And the first two or three paragraphs just outlined all of the outrages that he had seen on the highway from truck drivers in recent weeks. And he wound it up with this sentence. He said, "And if I ever again encounter a truck that has the names Tex and Maxine written on the driver's door, I aim to stop it and cane the hell out of Tex or Maxine, as the case may be." [*Laughter*] Anyway, Ernie was a—was a great influence on me and a lot of other people around here. And I—I cherish his memory.

[00:23:25] DP: I may have called the Ernie Deane Award the Ernie Dumas award. I—I interpose those.

RR: Oh, I in—yeah.

DP: Ernie Dumas is one of the great reporters also from Arkansas.

RR: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

DP: One of the great members of journalism fraternity that we've known for many, many years. Roy, I read an interesting thing and a little bit scary the other day. In only about 14% of young men and women under the age of 20—or 25 I believe—read a daily newspaper. To me that was—that didn't go over very well with me. What—is this—what's happening here?

[00:24:04] RR: Well you—now you—you and I grew up in a time when everybody just about read a daily paper. That's how you found out what was happening in the world and in your town and your community. And I—I'm disturbed by that too. I came across a poll figure that I think ties into that in a—in an in—interesting way. The Pew Trust did a poll that was reported on NPR a couple days ago about the how—how poorly informed the American voters are. And one of the many things they found in this poll was that 70% of the American people can name the vice president of the country.

DP: Seventy percent.

RR: Seventy percent. About the same percentage can name the governor of their state. Which, you know, that's—that means 30% of our countrymen don't know a damn thing [*laughter*]

about what's going on in the country and in the world. And I, you know, you can—you can say well one reason for that has to be that they—people don't read newspapers anymore. But of course, we also know that in the case of young people they do get information from other sources, the Internet and places that you and I have difficulty traveling in. I've just recently learned one or two new things about the Internet, and it makes me feel very pleased with myself, and my eighteen-year-old grandson scoffs at me and how—at how inept I am.

DP: And our grandchildren at us, too.

RR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:25:55] DP: But I—I think—hope y'all are getting some news on a daily basis and it may be from the Internet. Roy and I did get ours from newspapers. I'm a newspaper fiend. I—I get so disturbed, for example, in Little Rock—I have a home in Little Rock and a home here. And I get disturbed in Fayetteville because I can't get the *New York Times* on a daily basis. I like to smell and feel the newsprint and the ink.

RR: Yeah.

DP: But I do find out—I just discovered just recently Collier's Drug Store—they have the *New York Times* on a daily basis.

RR: Yeah.

DP: You go up there at 8:00 and get it.

RR: Yeah.

[00:26:37] DP: But I love to read the *New York Times*, and I read the *Democrat-Gazette* on a daily basis and other periodicals. But I hope that you will be sensitive to the—to the need of keeping up to date. Along that same line, Roy, about the number of people who know and don't know things. I think a recent poll came out and it was so depressing it was not printed. And I think it was by the Washington Post Company. A poll came out or a survey, I should say, that only about 4% of the United—of citizens in our country could name three members of the US Supreme Court. And something like 68% could name the names of the Three Stooges, Curley, Larry and Moe. [Laughs] And so that's—that presents to us, I think, a challenge that we have really, really got to do better. Part of that is the fault of—of the politicians and part of journalists and part of all of us, I guess. But we really, really have a long way to go in this field. Roy, I've always enjoyed—here we have potential, hopefully, future journalists right here. And looking in this room, this auditorium today and—Hoyt, it's wonderful that you would—you must sense a great sense of great satisfaction and excitement being with these young men and women on every week.

Knowing the potential right here in this room, the enormous potential for change and bringing about good things in our country, in our society and our world. If you could harness the power and the ideas and the energy right here in this room, boy, what a much better world it would be. And I encourage you to pursue careers in journalism. I don't think there's any higher calling. But I've always loved to watch Roy work. In the old days when he would type on his typewriter it was very methodical. Brenda, do you remember that? It was like—it was thoughtful. And he didn't—it wasn't this, you know, banging around on a bunch of keys and turning out copy. It was thoughtfully done. And—and I think I would say that in a complimentary way because I've always thought of him as a word merchant. Now how do you become someone who's fascinated with words and the written?

RR: Oh.

DP: How did you start out this way? What happened to you early on in your life?

RR: Well, I . . .

[00:29:18] DP: Did you have a teacher or something that inspired you?

RR: Oh I don't—I was a—I was a bookworm and that. But I have to

say, I had a reputation around the *Gazette* newsroom of being the slowest reporter on the staff. And—and it drove poor old Bill Shelton nuts. He was the city editor. And every day the poor guy would have to come over, look over my shoulder, and—and urge me to, you know, "Get it done, Roy. Get it done." And if you're working for a daily paper—you know, Bob Douglas used to tease another slow *Gazette* reporter. I won't name him. He'd—he'd come back there and tap on the desk a little bit and say, "How is your novel coming today?" [*Laughter*] And there is a strain of that in a lot of newspaper reporters. It's probably a—a flaw, but we come to—we come to like the writing as much as the—as the reporting, which it not necessarily a good thing. If—if we would—we would not have as many Seth Blomeleys who were exposing what needs to be exposed if all the reporters just sat down every day and thought, "Now, what beautiful prose can I turn out today?" But—but every paper seems to have one or two who—who like to go that route, and they finally just gave in and let me write and—and work at my own pace pretty much, and it was a blessing. But I always enjoyed my newspaper work, maybe because of that.

[00:31:00] DP: What—you probably had at one time a crossroads that you—that you had to choose one fork in the road and a lot

of these people right here are—are—these students are at that fork. They're going to have to make a decision here pretty soon which fork they're going to take. And that's not to mean that you can't take several forks in life, but you're about to—you're approaching a major fork right now. This is a big thing in your life and a big time. How did you choose newspapers versus say going off and writing the great American novel as a lot of writers do? Where did newspapers enter in to your psyche?

[00:31:38] RR: At some point some wise older person told me, "You know, if you want to make a living writing you really need steady work and to think about newspapers. You got to put food on the table." You know, I wanted to write books. A lot of us bookish kids, that's what we wanted to do. But if you get some wise council, you'll be told, "Well that's fine." And incidentally, some of the best books being published nowadays are by journalists. Newspaper people, television people of various kinds, and the journalistic book has become a very important part of—of the journalism trade. It's no longer just daily journalism or even monthly magazines journalism. But there must be in a year's time there would be several dozen books written and published by journalists about current events. How many books have been written, for example, about the Iraq War in the past three or

four years? So that's—you can—you can tie the two together. You can work in daily journalism and save your string, as we used to say, and then, you know, take a couple weeks off or something and—or maybe haggle for a six months leave of absence from the paper, and—and write the book and get it in print. And that's important journalism.

[00:33:18] DP: Well, speaking of important journalism by journalists, two of your friends—just this week, two of your close friends, it was just announced, won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism. Tell them about that book.

RR: I—I'm awfully pleased.

DP: Gerald, and I want to thank you again for sending me a copy of that book, too, Gerald. Thank you.

RR: Can you get a close-up of this necktie? I want you to see what it says on here. There's some lettering. What it says is *N-Y-T*. That stands for *New York Times*. Now I'm wearing this tie today for a special reason. A man named Gene Roberts, who's one of my oldest friends from the *New York Times*, and a young friend of his named Hank Klibanoff have written a book called *The Race Beat*. And it's about press coverage of the civil rights movement. Just yesterday it was announced that they had won the Pulitzer Prize for history this year for that book. And I, in

honor of Gene Roberts, in particular—I'm wearing this *New York Times* tie. He and I covered the South together for two years, two long years during the [19]60s. And went through the wars together and had wonderful times together. So . . .

[00:34:34] DP: So what's this book about? It's about what?

RR: It's—it's about how the press covered civil rights. And it was—it's the most detailed and thorough analysis of press coverage of civil rights beginning in the [19]40s with the mainly black newspapers from Chicago and New York and Atlanta and other—and Mem—Memphis who were way ahead of the mainstream so-called press in covering this very important story that finally, after many years, exploded into the national consciousness in the [19]50s and [19]60s. Roberts and Klibinoff traced that whole story and tell—and tell the story beautifully as only trained storytellers can do it. And that's—I think that's why they got the prize.

DP: Do they—was there an area in the book about Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957 as—I hope it was and well treated.

RR: Oh a big—a big part. Yeah. Yeah, there's a couple of—couple of long chapters about the coverage of Central High and the desegregation crisis there in 1957 in which my journalism hero, Harry Ashmore, who was editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, is

painted as a hero in coverage of the civil rights story.

[00:35:59] DP: Well, that particular era, I might say, is going to be brought back to life if we can remember it in its right context in September throughout the state, especially in Little Rock at Central High School. And I might say this, and I assume it's still the plan. And I get chill bumps when I think about this. To Little Rock, Arkansas, at the Clinton Library in September in honor of the 1957 Little Rock Nine and the crisis that we ultimately and finally weathered—I hope we've weathered it. I hope we're beyond it. They're bringing the Emancipation Proclamation from the National Archives to Little Rock. And it will be there four days. And the Emancipation Proclamation will be viewed—have an opportunity to be viewed for those four days and nights, twenty-four hours a day during that four-day period. And I hope you'll all be there and all see that, and I—I, like I say, I get chill bumps when I—when I think about it. Also there will be certain reenactments of the Central Crisis, and I'm sure there will be a lot of periodicals and stories and the *Democrat-Gazette* has been very, very favorably inclined to make us remember not only the bad, yes, but also some of the good that came out of the Central High School Crisis. But congratulations to your friends for winning this wonderful prize. Do y'all

remember—do y'all when I mention the word—the name "Molly Ivins," does that ring a bell with you all? Molly Ivins started off in Texas, I guess. And she was this kind of a rambunctious, wonderful writer, and she passed away back in January, if I'm not mistaken, or maybe February. And she wrote for the *Texas Monthly*, and she covered—she wrote for the *New York Times* actually for a period. I think she had a big fight with some of the editors or publishers. She, from time to time, would go way out there. But Molly was at the Harvard University at the Shorenstein Center back right after the election, November 16th. And she and E.J. Dionne from the *Washington Post* did a joint appearance there, and Molly was so irreverent I can't help but quote one little thing she said. I know this is partisan, but one of the students there in—at the Kennedy School said, "Well, Mrs. Ivins, you've covered the Bush Family for many, many years back in Texas politics, George Bush Sr. and George W. Bush. What—what's going on in George W. Bush's mind right now?" And she says, "Absolutely nothing." [Laughter] So, you know, she was—she kind of cut to the bone oftentimes. Did you know Molly Ivins?

[00:39:00] RR: I knew Molly. Yeah. I—I the first time I ever laid eyes on Molly was in the *New York Times* newsroom. And I

guess I was working in Atlanta. No, maybe New Or—I don't know, some bureau out in the country. But I was in New York. And here came this big, jolly woman walking toward me with a big smile on her face and introduced herself. And the first thing I noticed about her was that she was not wearing any shoes. [Laughter] And come to find out that's—that was Molly. She went barefoot in the *New York Times* newsroom.

DP: Wow.

RR: Probably the only person in the history of that very, in some ways, self-congratulatory, dignified newspaper. I—I—I could tell the story of how she parted company with the *Times*, but it's a naughty story, and I'd rather not get into it.

DP: Well, feel free to.

RR: No, I don't think I will. [Laughter] But she was one of a kind.

[00:39:59] DP: She—she comments on newspapering. Within two years—she was talking about Rupert Murdoch—within two years of Rupert Murdoch's taking over this, that, and the other paper—showing up that they had certain number of words, four on—no three: stab, rape, kill. They were almost four-letter words. But they had to be used in a huge front-page headline at least ten times a month or the editor was fired. [RR laughs] So, and she also maintains here in a statement that for a number of years—

it's her opinion, and I'd like to get your opinion on what she said. It's her opinion and belief that newspapers were in the act of committing suicide. What did she mean by that?

[00:40:50] RR: Well, I think I know what she meant, and I agree with it if I—if I'm guessing right. It meant that newspapers had decided that in their panic over losing readers, especially young readers, we've got to be more attractive. And they interpreted that to mean not just relatively good ideas like color pictures and more pleasing graphics and better designs, not just that. All of that's—that's—you can't argue with that. But mainly, let's dumb down our content. And it was a, I hope, not fatal misreading of what the public wants from newspapers. In my opinion newspaper readers want serious information. That's why they bother. That's why they go out to the doorstep every day and pick the thing up and unfold it. They want to know what happened in the world yesterday. Not about some two-headed gorilla baby [*laughter*] or—what was the famous example that Gannette did to the *Arkansas Gazette* after it bought the paper in [19]90—[19]86 or [19]87—[19]84? They—one day on the front page above the fold there was a picture of some cheerleaders wearing spandex. It caused such outrage among old *Gazette* readers that they actually had cancellations of

subscriptions over that because this was not the *Arkansas Gazette* that they had known and loved, and not the *Arkansas Gazette* that had—that had informed Arkansas since 1819. And I think that's what Molly was talking about in a general way was that Gannettization of American newspapers, which meant print more fluff, less serious content. And she saw that as—as—as suicidal, and I think she's right. And there were signs that newspapers are beginning to catch on and move away from that kind of silly coverage.

[00:43:02] DP: I'm glad you brought up Gannette. I watched you on television the other night on Arkansas Educational Television work—Network, AETN. And you were, by the way, very, very good in your comments, I thought. I was interested that you really, really were harsh on Gannette and the people who took over the *Arkansas Gazette* before the—Mr. Hussman and the *Democrat* bought the *Arkansas Gazette* and merged, basically . . .

RR: Yeah, yeah.

DP: . . . their titles. What was it about the Gannette people when they took over the *Gazette* from the Patterson family, bought the *Gazette*—what was it that you thought was so obnoxious?

RR: I don't know if we ought to get into this or not. [DP laughs] I

mean, I . . .

DP: By the way, Hoyt, what is our time situation?

HP: We have until 12:20.

RR: Okay.

DP: Okay.

[00:44:02] RR: At—at the risk of getting mad all over again, I—I'll try to abbreviate it. The problem with the Gannette's handling of the *Arkansas Gazette*, which, let me remind you, was the oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi River. And they bought it in, I believe [19]86—I might have the year wrong—from the Patterson family [*clears throat*] and immediately began to show these dumb Arkansawyers how to put out a newspaper. They took the view that they—they—they had this large chain, I think at that time the largest newspaper chain in the country, had more newspapers than any other. And it was very successful financially. And their—and in other cities they would typically buy a paper and—and smooth out the rough edges. If a newspaper was truly awful as the newspaper in Jackson, Mississippi, was, they would improve it. And if it was very good, as it was in Louisville, they would—they would lower the standards. And—and they aimed for a certain kind of midlevel of excellence or nonexcellence. It was okay. It was, you know,

nothing great, but it got by until they bought the *Arkansas Gazette*. And for one of the very few times in their cooperate history, they bought a newspaper that—that had a competitor. There were two very active newspapers in Little Rock, and Gannette set out to run the competition out of business. And they made no bones about it. "We've got deep pockets," is the way they put it, and, "We were going to win this newspaper war," meaning there would be one newspaper survive. And—and they thought the way to do that was to print more fluff, more spandex [*DP laughs*], more silly pictures. One day the lead story in the *Gazette* if I'm not—and I hope I'm not remembering it—I mean, it's bad enough without misremembering. But the lead story one day was the death of the old lady who had become momentarily famous for a television commercial about some hamburger.

Unknown speaker: Clara Peller.

RR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. "Where's the beef?" Can—y'all are too young to remember. You remember that? Yeah. "Where's the beef?" Well this old lady died, and they—they put that on the front page of the *Arkansas Gazette*. And really built it up as—well, the lead story is supposed to be the most important thing that happened in the world over the last twenty-four hours. I think you get my

point. That's what they did to the *Gazette* day after day after day. They never understood the *Gazette's* historical readership. They never understood Arkansas. They knew nothing about the history of the state and apparently did not really want to know it. Didn't matter to them. All that mattered to them was running the *Arkansas Democrat* out of business so that they could have the monopoly paper and keep funneling money back into their cooperate headquarters in the East. Well we know the outcome. They overreached.

[00:47:35] DP: A—and the man they sent down to sort of takeover was a man named Walker Lundy, as I—what's ever . . .

RR: Yeah. Up from Fort Worth, actually. And he's done very well since then. He's gone from one major newspaper to another. And—but he—yeah, they brought him up from Fort Worth. And the story they tell about his first day in the newsroom when he was introduced as the new editor—he met the reporters, editors in the newsroom, and someone said, "Can you say a word about your management style?" And Walker said, "Yes, I can sum it up very succ—succinctly. I know how to fire people, and I'm not afraid to do it." Well, a chill went over that newsroom, as you can imagine. And—and he—he did succeed in running off some of the old hands.

DP: Now I learned something from that show. That's a great show. Y'all all—it's the history of the *Gazette* and it's—and Roy and his colleagues in his time played such an integral role in the *Gazette* and in Arkansas journalism, per se. But he—he lived at the Capital Hotel, Walker Lundy, I think for—or the maybe the Excelsior. I'm not sure, which was just two or three blocks from the *Gazette* building. And I think that you told . . .

[00:49:02] RR: I think the story was—and this was told by Deborah Mathis, I believe.

DP: Okay.

RR: Who was the star of this documentary you're talking about. A fiery woman who's still very angry. And she tells that on either the first day or the second day that they—that Gannette owned the *Gazette*, the then-CEO of the company was in town, and to get from the *Gazette* building at Third and Louisiana to the—to the Capital Hotel a block and half away, he had a limousine drive him over there. And she said . . .

DP: That goes over big.

RR: . . . she said that we knew then that we were in trouble.

DP: You know someone approached me. I was still in the Senate at the time. Someone approached me. They said, "You know, we've got this new man named Lundy in town, and he's just

moving here, and he wants to get to know the feel of Arkansas people and the, really, the grassroots discussion about things and issues." Said "We'd like for you to take him out to lunch." And I said, "Well, where would like for me?" He says, "Well, you can take him to the Little Rock Country Club." I said, "Well, I'm not a member of the Little Rock Country Club [*laughter*], and I don't have a way to get in there." "No, we'll put"—I said, "Well, let me—I tell you what. You let me find a spot." So I remember that I took Walker Lundy out to Scott, Arkansas, to Cotham's. Y'all remember Cothams? Do y'all know Cotham's? It's still out there, and it's about as country an old place as you can find. It's in an old store, an old general merchandise store, and they have what they call—what is that big cheeseburger called?

DP: The Hubcap.

DP: The Hubcap. I ate too many of them and had a heart attack.

But [*laughter*]*—*but I took Walker Lundy out there and introduced him to all these old farmers in overalls and whatever, and I don't think he said anything, and I don't—I hate to say this about him. I know he's a distinguished journalist. I don't think he got it. And I don't think they got it about what was going on in our state.

RR: Yeah.

DP: And certainly one visit to Cotham's wouldn't . . .

[00:51:12] RR: I—I don't want to be too hard on Walker. I mean, I'm hard enough. But he was not the main problem. It was the people who ran the company back in . . .

DP: Right, right. Wherever. Yeah.

RR: . . . Virginia who were sending orders everyday about how—how they wanted that newspaper to be run. And over and over the corporate managers disregarded all the advice that they got from people on the ground. Now I don't know what Walker was telling them, but I know that Hugh Patterson, the previous owner and publisher, went to the trouble to fly up there one day to tell them, "Boys, you've got—you've got it all wrong. You don't know what you're doing down there," and they essentially threw him out of the office. His son, Carrick Patterson—they let Carrick stay on after the—after Gannette bought the paper. He tried to warn them that, you know, "You're not understanding the readership. You don't really know this paper." They ignored all that kind of advice, and they were not the only ones. They had a lot of advice, and they chose—and Walker, you know, he was—in essence he was just a hired hand doing what they told him to do. So it was . . .

[00:52:29] DP: So it was corporate decisions that were driving

things and balance sheet profit loss statement.

RR: That's right. That's right, that's right. Yeah.

DP: I'm going—I'm going to switch gears a little bit, Roy, and go back to your . . .

RR: Yeah, I'll be in a better humor . . .

DP: . . . to journalism issues, a discussion about your *New York Times* experience. If any of you happen to have the privilege of being invited by Norma Reed, who's here. We'll call on Norma in a moment to—raise your hand, Norma. Where are you? Right out here. Thank you. If Norma ever invites you to Hogeye to eat supper, [RR laughs] well, go out there and have a wonderful supper at Hogeye, Arkansas. I hope all of you don't show up at the same time. [RR laughs] But Roy and Norma have this wonderful place, a Fay Jones Home. You can't see anything that's man made from their house and whatever. But there's something interesting in their house that I've always been enamored with. It's a big Coca-Cola bottle about this big. A blig—a big plastic Coca-Cola bottle, and it's set on sort of a beautiful walnut base. And there's an inscription there in gold. And it says, on this walnut base at the bottom of the Coca-Cola bottle, quote "Where in the hell is Roy Reed?" [Laughter] Question mark. [Laughter] Tell them that story, Roy.

[00:53:52] RR: That's one of life's most embarrassing moments is what that was. But first let me say about your invitation to come out and eat Norma's cooking. Our—that reminds me of Governor Jeff Davis used to travel around the state of Arkansas in horse and buggy, and everywhere he went he invited the whole crowd down to the governor's house in Little Rock to have dinner. He said, "If you get there and I'm not there, just go around and tell my wife that I said come." And he said, "She may be in the backyard washing clothes, but that's all right. She can put something on right quick." Y'all all come down there and eat. *[Laughter]*

DP: That's how he got elected three times as governor.

RR: That's right. That's right. That's right.

DP: He was our first three-term governor, by the way.

[00:54:35] RR: But this thing about the Coke bottle goes back to the day in 1966 in Mississippi when James Meredith—do you all know the name James Meredith? James Meredith integrated the University of Mississippi in 1962, was it David?

DP: Mh-hmm.

RR: As a consequence two people were killed. About a hundred were seriously wounded. There was a huge riot, and it was an awful scene. And it took—it took federal troops to—marshalls to come

and—anyway. He went on to become the first black graduate of the University of Mississippi. And then went on to become a kind of a minor figure in the civil rights movement. In 1966 four years after he had been admitted to Ole Miss, he came back to Mississippi to lead a march, by himself, right across the state of Mississippi. He started out, in fact, at the Memphis—in Memphis and went just a few miles to the Mississippi line. And he had not—he had not gone half a day in Mississippi when some—some guy with a shotgun shot him down in the middle of the road. And there he was lying in the middle of the road. Now at the moment that happened, I—I had one of the few automobiles, a rental car, following the march along with several dozen other reporters and photographers. It was a hot, hot day. And I'd offered a ride to a couple of photographers and another reporter. And we had all stopped in this little old country store for a soft drink. You can see where this is headed. [*Laughter*] And there we were in there having this Coca-Cola when James Meredith got shot down. And the first picture that came in to the newsroom in New York after this event, just minutes after it happened, showed Meredith lying uncon—lying, well, apparently dead, in the middle of the road. And, in fact, there was an erroneous news story sent out by one of the wire services saying, "James

Meredith killed in Mississippi." And that was all the editors in New York knew for a good long while because there were no telephones nearby. Well I—when I saw people running and the rest of us went—we got down there, and I went up to where James Meredith was lying and heard him groaning and trying to say something. It was obvious that he was not really seriously hurt, but he was, you know, he was—that's not a pleasant thing being shot in the back. But he was not dead. So when I finally got to a telephone call and got Claude Sitton, the national editor, on the line, he said, "Is he dead or alive?" And I said, "He's alive." And he said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah, I just heard him trying to say something. He said, "Hold the phone," and I heard him holler to some of the other editors, "That's a wrong story from the so-and-so." He said "He's alive." And that's all I knew at the moment. But then when I finally left the Atlanta bureau to go up to Washington over a year later. They had a going-away party for me. And this fellow, Gene Roberts, that we talked about earlier and Jack Nelson and two or three other old tra—reporters that I traveled with had this going-away party. And they presented me with this. Somewhere they had gone out to the Coca-Cola company in Atlanta and got this bottle in white plastic, in clear plastic, and with this smart-aleck message,

"Where's Roy Reed?" because the story that went around and that was repeated in Gay Talese's book about the *New York Times* was that Claude Sitton, when he—when he got the word on the wire that James Meredith had been shot down, he went to the wire machine and saw that picture, and he was scanning the picture looking for me. [*Laughter*] And that's when he said, "Where's Roy Reed?" And so that was the inspiration . . .

DP: Or "Where in the hell is Roy Reed?"

RR: Yeah, yeah, yeah,

DP: That's a great story.

RR: But I've still got the thing, and I treasure it in spite of that.

[*Laughs*]

[00:59:06] DP: One other little bit of a story from Hogeye. Nineteen eighty, in the fall Roy, Norma, myself were at Hogeye having dinner, one of our wonderful dinners with Norma. And Roy and I were out on the deck, and Norma was in the kitchen, and—and Roy asked me this question. He says, "Well, David, are you going to be working for Jimmy Carter's reelection for president running against Reagan?" I said, "Well, I don't know, Roy. Odd thing is he's not asked me to help him, and so I don't know if he needs my help or not." This is a true story. Norma comes out on the deck within probably 60 seconds after that or two

minutes and says, "David, the White House is on the phone." I said, "What?" Said, "The White House is on the phone." So I get up, and I don't know how they found where I was at Hogeye, Arkansas. And I go in and pick up the phone, and they said, "Please hold the line for President Carter." And he says, "Senator Pryor, this is President Carter. I said, "Hey, Mr. President. How are you?" Sunday night. Said, "I just haven't had a chance to ask you to help me in my reelection. [*Laughter*] And I just wanted you to know how much I need your help." So I go back out on the deck. I said, "Well, Roy, I guess I am going to try to help him." [*Laughter*] But anyway, that was a true story. That was always a mystery. We thought maybe Roy's home was bugged by the late J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI or something like that. But I want to—I want to mention two things. Man, our time is going so fast. Roy's made two wonderful contributions in books. He also in 1976, I believe that was the case—[19]77, he decided that because it was the 100th anniversary of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain, he was going to go back and retrace some of that. And he did that, I believe, in 1976, some . . .

RR: About that, yeah.

DP: . . . Hannibal, Missouri.

RR: Yeah, yeah.

[01:01:08] DP: You wrote about those times . . .

RR: Mh-hmm.

DP: . . . and those were very poignant. And I couldn't put my fingers on—I—my hands on those. But one great contribution he's made not only to journalis—from journalism to politics and government, he's written this book on Orval Fabus. And this is probably the definitive book, not only on this man, Faubus, who he got to know after eight or ten years of interviewing him and interviewing his friends and enemies and adversaries and everyone. But this is the *Life and Times of an American Prodigal*. And this is probably the definitive book in the country that's ever been written, not only about this man, but also about the times in which Orval Faubus reigned superior, almost as a—as a unbelievable power in this state. Your mothers and dads would—and grandfathers and grandmothers, would all remember Orval Faubus, who served as governor for, gosh, what? Twelve or so years. The other remarkable book. And this is a book about being a word merchant and being able to capture something. When Roy and Norma were moving back to Arkansas from London and New York and Washington and wherever else it—New Orleans where they'd lived. Moving back

to Hogeye. When they were building their home in Hogeye, Roy and Norma spent a very cold January full of ice storms and sleet and snow and cold and whatever. I want to read you one paragraph. Listen to this. "We endured that endless January. We found reservoirs of patience and creativity that we had not used before. We rationed the radio. We read only newspapers. No books before noon. We invented chores and rewarded ourselves with good wine after dark. Neither of us is blessed with an even temper, so we took extreme care in the words we passed. I learned once more during the long enduring days of our homecoming that my wife was very good company. One day toward the end of the month I went out to empty the ashes. The air felt a little gentler. The moon was already high, an hour before sundown, and as I stood looking at it, a hawk came down from the woods and flew right across it. The hawk's belly was red in the shrinking light. I flew along with it a little way to the top of the next mountain, and when I went in to the fire feeling a small blush of confidence." Now, when y'all can put words on paper like that, you're going to be as meaningful and certainly as successful as you—as Roy Reed has been and make the contributions that he's been. Roy, Walter Lippmann was a great American journalist. And I hope that these students have

studied a little about Walter Lippmann and his times. But he was always, I think, struggling with whether or not a journalist was to become, and was to be, and was to play a role of the cynic or the skeptic. Do you have a thought on that?

[01:04:40] RR: Oh, absolutely. I come down on the side of skeptic.

I think cynicism is—is the enemy of good journalism. The cynical reporter is not—is not worth hanging around with. But you expect every good reporter to be skeptical. Skeptical in the sense of questioning. My—my old editor, Turner Catledge, a great Mississippian, used to say that what it takes to make a good reporter is insatiable curiosity and an irresistible urge to tell what you found out. I think that's the—Frank, that's not exactly a definition of journalism, but I'd offer that up for what defines a reporter. But only skepticism will get you there. If the first person that Seth Blomeley had gone to to check out that story about the hard drives had said, "Oh, Seth there's nothing to that. That's easily explained." If he had accepted that—and that probably happened. I don't know. If he had just said okay and let it go, but somewhere his—his professional skepticism kicked in and kept him going. And that's—that's a good thing. That's a good thing. Mere cynicism is a—is a—is an easy way out. That's an easy way of saying, "Oh, they're all the same.

They're all bad guys." You've heard that in your line of work. "All politicians are liars and cheats," which incidentally I think is one of the great slanders of all times. It's done great disservice to our country, that and the idea that government is an enemy. But—but skepticism will get you past that. Cynicism will just get you mired deeper. And finally you'll become an alcoholic or something and give it up and just [*laughter*] [unclear words].

[01:06:37] DP: You know, yesterday I was caught up—late last evening I was caught up in the Virginia Tech situation, and I was watching the—I was watching this kid, 20 years old I guess, who had taken all those pictures with his cell phone. Amazing.

RR: Yeah.

DP: Absolutely amazing. And they said, "Why did you do that? You were in danger." And he said something like this, paraphrasing. He said, "I wanted to know what was going on." And to me that's what a journalist should be.

RR: That's right. That's right.

DP: I don't know whether this kid was a journalist or not at the school.

RR: He ought to be. Yeah.

DP: He said, "I wanted to know what was going on."

RR: Yeah.

DP: I think that says a lot about journalism and what . . .

RR: Yeah.

DP: . . . a true journalist should be.

RR: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

[01:07:27] DP: Roy, your life has taken so many wonderful term—turns, and here you are. You've just gotten this wonderful award, you and Seth. And I would just like to know if you have a comment or two to wind up our little interview today.

RR: Well, I—the only thing I can think of—somebody asked Alistair Cooke when he was finally, at about age of 90, retiring from active journalism what he was going to do in retirement. He said, "Well, my first—my first goal is to slow my backswing, [*laughs*] and I think I'll work on that." [*Laughter*]

DP: You're going to slow you're backswing.

RR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:08:08] DP: Well, I'd like to make a comment just about, if I could, about journalists and journalism and about you. *New York Times*, *Arkansas Gazette*, wonderful writer, wonderful contributions. But you know, there's also the *Dumas Clarions* and the *Fordyce News Advocates* and the *Pine Bluff Commercial* and the *Daily Searcy Citizen* and *Conway Log Cabin Democrat*. There's also these other great little newspapers throughout our

state. And those are the things that I think hold our community together.

RR: Yeah.

DP: This was what I think Ernie Deane was kind of all about.

RR: Yeah.

DP: Sort of holding us together. And Roy Reed has been a part, I think, overall, of this philosophy of letting us know what was going on . . .

RR: Mh-hmm.

DP: . . . so we could take the facts, sift through them, and sort of hold ourselves together as a state. But those little newspapers out there—we call them little—they play just as important a role in our communities today as the *New York Times* or the major papers that we know so much about and get quoted all the time. So I just urge you as journalism students to really, really think about this as a career and try to pattern your philosophy as much as you can about—and—and compare to Roy Reed and Seth Blomeley and others who we honor today. Roy, I think we have one or two more minutes and I'm—we're out of time. This has gone pretty quickly.

RR: It has.

DP: It's gone quickly for us. May not for the students.

RR: Well yeah, yeah.

DP: It has for us.

RR: Did you make notes? [*Laughter*] Were you—were you assigned to write a story about this?

DP: Did you have to come to this class?

RR: Sure they did. [*Laughter*] I always assigned a story, and you could tell a lot the next day when the stories come in by, you know, who paid attention and who didn't. But I have to say that the people who didn't particularly pay attention they—a lot of them went on to become really good reporters, so—so don't worry about it if you miss this assignment. See me afterward. I'll catch you up. [*Laughter*] It's been fun, David. It's been fun.

DP: Thank you very, very much. And Hoyt, thank you for having us. Thank you. [*Applause*]

[01:11:20 End of transcript]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]