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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with
Charles Allbright
Little Rock, Arkansas
15 May 2005

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: [We're here] on a pretty Sunday morning on May 15, 2005. I'm sitting here in Little Rock, Arkansas, with Charles Allbright. That's Allbright with two Ls, correct?

Charles Allbright: Correct.

JM: Charles, the first thing I need to do is to ask you if it's okay if we make this tape recording and present the tape to the University of Arkansas [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's project on the *Arkansas Democrat*]?

CA: Yes. Fire Away.

JM: Okay. Very good. Why don't you just start at the beginning and tell me where you were born and who your parents were, and all that.

CA: Well, I was born February 5, 1929 in Oxford, Mississippi, because that's where my mama was. In those days, it took four weeks to have a baby, two weeks leading up to it and two coming after. Mom's daddy was mayor of Oxford. A long time ago, a young lady came from Arkansas State [University, Jonesboro] to do an oral history. She said, "Tell me about your being born and everything." And I said, "Well, I was a child of parents." [Laughter] [Then] I said, "No, what I mean to say was the child of schoolteachers." [Laughter] But the interviewer was tolerant and I was off to a stumbling start. [Laughter] Anyway, my mom and dad met at Hendrix [College, Conway, Arkansas]. They were both English

majors. When they graduated, they went to Columbia [University] in New York for master's work. After that, [they] went to teach at Monticello A&M, which is [University of] Arkansas, Monticello, now. They both were English professors there. Then Daddy got kicked upstairs, to become superintendent of schools at McGehee. That was my life up until age twelve, and then we moved to Little Rock. I'm not sure where it got into my head about doing newspaper work.

Anyway, Jerry, that gets me born and it gets me to McGehee.

JM: Okay. Well, tell me what your parents' names were.

CA: My parents' names? Are you ready for this?

JM: Yes.

CA: My daddy's name was Fount.

JM: Fount. I remember that.

CA: Do you?

JM: Yes, I do.

CA: My mother's name was Nita.

JM: Nita. Okay.

CA: Fount and Nita. That's one of the great breaks I got—getting born that way. And being born in America.

JM: Yes.

CA: An enormous thing. They were good people.

JM: What was your mother's maiden name?

CA: Ramey. R-A-M-E-Y.

JM: Okay.

CA: She lived in Oxford, but went to Hendrix. She caught the train and went back and forth. She was the oldest of five children—four brothers. Her brother Vaughn was killed in a car wreck at age twenty in Crawford County. She rode the train home from Hendrix to bury him. I went over to Oxford for a reunion recently. Well, I say recently, it could have been about when the last glacier moved through. [Laughter] I lose track of time. But I found Uncle Vaughn in the cemetery there. On his stone was, "Here dwelt he a lad, through all the singing season. Took his fill of music, joy of thought and seeing. Came and stayed and went, nor ever ceased to smile." [When] I came back home from the reunion, I quoted that headstone to her. Mama was in bed then. She lived to be ninety-four. She looked at me. Looked right through my eyes. She saw something only she could see and smiled. I don't know [if] I'd told you that, but it's . . .

JM: Well, that's great. I love that. Do you know if that's a quote from something else, or was this something . . .?

CA: I tried to get her to tell me. It sounds like A. E. Housman to me, doesn't it?

JM: Yes, it does.

CA: But I never have found it. Now that you've embarrassed me, I'll look it up somewhere. [Laughter]

JM: That's okay. I may look myself.

CA: He wrote "The Young Athlete" [reference to A. E. Housman's poem "To an Athlete Dying Young"], didn't he?

JM: Yes.

CA: Anyway, that stone had been there for eighty-some years. It was a nice thing for me to be there.

JM: Yes. When your parents came to Little Rock, what did they do?

CA: My dad went to work for what was called the War Manpower Commission, which, in the language of today, later segued into the Veterans Administration.

JM: Yes.

CA: He participated all his [remaining] working life with the G.I. Bill of Rights. He was proud to have processed 5,000 young Arkansas men through college.

JM: Yes.

CA: You might have been in on some of that.

JM: I was.

CA: Were you?

JM: Yes, I got the Bill of Rights.

CA: I remember you were in Germany playing ball. I don't know whether you ever soldiered any.

JM: Yes. I didn't soldier much, but I did get the Bill of Rights. [Laughter] They counted it.

CA: Daddy was proud of that program.

JM: Oh, yes, it was great. It was one of the biggest things that ever happened to American society, as far as I'm concerned.

CA: That's what I thought. Mom went to work as an English teacher at North Little

Rock High School, and became the head of the English department there. They lived long and useful and happy lives—Mom, as I mentioned, until ninety-four, my dad until ninety-one. She cooked eggs and sausage and all that for breakfast every morning, so it cut him off in his prime at ninety-one.

JM: Yes. [Laughter] It got to him, eventually.

CA: Yes. Wore him out.

JM: Yes.

CA: She had to spend four years by herself after he was gone. Without him, she wanted out.

JM: Did they have any connection with the Arkansas School for the Deaf?

CA: Not educationally. We moved a block from there.

JM: You lived near the deaf school, but they had no connection to that?

CA: [Correct.]

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Go right ahead, Charlie.

CA: My dad had a series of strokes. After he retired from the Veterans Administration, I gave him a camera that my brother, Brice, [whom you knew and he liked you very much.] Brice was in Korea. He sent the camera home.

JM: Yes. I liked Brice.

CA: So, he did some photography—Daddy did. I remember one day the church had a fiftieth-anniversary luncheon for them. They jointly taught a class for forty years. After that, I went to their home that Sunday afternoon. Mom said, "Fount, one of

these days one of us will look up and the other one won't be here." Jerry, you have to be careful who you say this to. I can say it to you. Daddy said, "I know." Here's what you have to be careful about. Mom said, "I want you to know it's okay if you go first, because to be the one left is not what you've wanted to be." After Daddy's final stroke, we took him to the hospital for the last time. He was smiling. It was about noon. Me and Mom and my sister, Ann—he kissed them and waved them out and said, "Charlie, come sit on the bed here a minute." I did. He said, "Do you remember when Mother and I were married fifty years?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Do you remember that she said I could go first?" I said, "Yes, sir." He motioned me closer and said, "I don't want to sound selfish about this, but I'm getting very excited." He died that night. What a hell of a thing for your dad to leave with you. He was ready to go and didn't want to be disloyal to Mom.

JM: Yes.

CA: Anyway, I thought I'd tell you that because you and I are friends forever.

JM: Yes. That's very touching. That's great to have memories like that. I assume that—and you can tell me this—that them both being English majors and professors and everything—did that start your interest in writing?

CA: I'm sure it did.

JM: Yes.

CA: Mainly, in reading. Jerry, you're a big reader. Another thing that pushed me in that direction was that I was an absolute idiot in mathematics. Nothing I could do

about it. I was going to go to Georgia Tech and be an all-American football player. Two things stood in the way, I couldn't do arithmetic and I couldn't play football, [laughter] so I was reading very early. When I was six or seven years old, Mom would hide candy in the bookcase, and made sure I saw where she hid it. I'd go to the bookcase in the pose of somebody reading and get Heath bars out of the bookcase. She knew what to do to get you to like it.

JM: Yes. When did you get into journalism? Was that in high school?

CA: It was in high school. I [worked on the] newspaper at Little Rock High School. It became Central High. It was the *Tiger*. Rabbit Burnett, who was coach then of the football team, said, "Allbright, you're not doing anything here." [We were] down at the practice field. He said, "We're not going to miss *you*. Take this stuff up to Miss Middlebrook in the *Tiger* office." So I did. I was relieved not to get beat up another day, you know? Fred Williams.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

CA: At the *Tiger* office I sat down. Dallied as long as I could so as not to go back to practice. I thought, "I can write better than this." It was so dreadful. I decided right then, "I think that's what I want to do—write sports."

JM: Yes.

CA: And that's what I did. One day a journalism teacher came to me and said, "Mr. Jack Keady at the *Arkansas Democrat* wants to know if you will come visit with him." That put me on the alert, so I went. I was seventeen, and he hired me. It was dreadful, Jerry. The writing was just what you'd write at seventeen. Every

run was *scintillating*, and every fire *raged*. When my stuff was put into the archives at the University of Central Arkansas, I prayed about, "Am I going to include this crap, too?" [Laughter] I did, so it's there, and it's embarrassing. It's good that it is [there]. But that's how I started. One day when I was going to the university with you, the *Democrat's* managing editor, Edwin Liske, came to me. It was a summer day. [He] said, "Red, on Monday, don't wear your tennis shoes." I wasn't wearing tennis shoes. I was in the sports department, but you don't tell that to the ME [managing editor]—point out your shoes. So, that was the end of sports. He moved me to the news side—on general assignment.

JM: Now, this was when?

CA: Jerry, this would have been the first summer—I guess the summer of 1948.

JM: Okay.

CA: The summer that Scotty [Clyde Scott] was in the Olympics. Wasn't he, in London?

JM: Yes. Right. He was.

CA: Bill Porter—it took them twenty minutes to decide who won—110-meter high hurdles.

JM: A photo finish.

CA: Yes.

JM: Yes.

CA: By the way, one day when Scotty came back, he was down in Lake Village, and Fred Petrucelli, who was kind to me in the sports department, and Bob McCord—

these are all people you know. You've known them forever.

JM: Yes.

CA: The three of us went down to Lake Village. I was ga-ga over Scotty. Petrucelli interviewed him. I mentioned the photo finish, with Bill Porter from Northwestern. Scotty said, "I don't run the hurdles that well. When we drew for lanes during qualifying—"of course, the greatest hurdler that year was Harrison Dillard, and he didn't qualify.

JM: He fell down on the hurdles.

CA: Yes. He wanted to get away from Scott. He switched lanes. Scotty came out with his elbows—came out of the blocks. Of course, Jerry, you know a lot more about this than I ever did. But Dillard fell back and won the 100 meters, didn't he? Which wasn't even his event.

JM: Yes. He hadn't even intended to go in the 100 until he failed to qualify in the hurdles.

CA: I know it. Scotty, by the way, is forever the high-point man [at the] old Southwest Conference meet. Won two flights of hurdles, and the 100-yard dash.

JM: Now, when you started to work for Jack Keady—you had been working at the *Tiger* then. Was that while you were still in high school?

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay. So, you started working for Keady going down to the sports department and doing stuff down there.

CA: Yes.

JM: What kind of stuff were you doing at that time?

CA: You can imagine—there were two men, Keady and Fred Petrucelli. And I did what else was done in there.

JM: Yes. Keady. K-E-A-D-Y. Correct?

CA: Correct.

JM: And Petrucelli is . . . ?

CA: P-E-T-R-U-C-E-L-L-I.

JM: I think that's right. Yes. Okay. Correct.

CA: I know that backwards it spells Derf Illecurtep.

JM: [Laughs] Okay.

CA: The first assignment I ever had was, I went to a night meeting at the Boys Club. George Haynie was the track coach at the high school, and also the baseball coach for the American Legion Doughboys.

JM: H-A-Y-N-I-E. Correct?

CA: Yes. Right. Let me tell you, I agonized over my four-paragraph report. I made up my mind I'd never go to work for a morning paper because I couldn't work on a deadline. Working for the *Democrat*, I could stay awake all night and work on it, which is what I did on those four paragraphs. "To play good baseball, you've got to *know* good baseball." That's what Haynie had said. That's how that started. I covered tennis matches knowing nothing about it—what is a passing shot? I didn't tell anybody. The *Democrat* sent me down to Camden to the Ouachita Valley Golf Championship. Two young guys I vaguely knew were Cy Speck and

Charlie Isom. I met them on the course after they had finished their round. I said, "How'd it go?" Cy Speck said, "I got lucky." I said, "What did you shoot?" And he said, "Two and one." I didn't know what the hell that meant. Two and one. Not until years later did I tell Cy, "If I understand it, now, Cy, you had him down two holes, and there was just one to play." [Laughter] But I didn't know back then.

JM: Well, I had to learn the same way.

CA: Then September came, and I went to Fayetteville.

JM: Did you go to junior college?

CA: Yes, one semester.

JM: One semester there. As I remember, you graduated with my wife from Little Rock Senior High in January of 1948.

CA: That's right. The last mid-term class.

JM: Yes. So, that spring semester you went to junior college?

CA: Yes, at J. C.

JM: Little Rock J. C. [Junior College]

CA: Yes. Because I was in college, and I knew everything.

JM: Yes. But you were still working for the *Democrat*.

CA: Yes. I worked there in the summer. When I left in the fall, I was a stringer for the sports department.

JM: At the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville?

CA: Yes. The next summer was when Liske, the ME, came around and said, "Don't

wear your tennis shoes Monday." I was still a stringer for Keady, but covered other campus stuff, too. The panty raid and whatever.

JM: Yes. Okay. So, that summer—but you did some news reporting that summer, then, for Liske, on the news side?

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay. Then you went back that fall, and you were covering both sports and other stuff, too.

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay.

CA: Good times for me. I was into some stuff.

JM: Yes.

CA: I wasn't into school, but I was . . . [Laughter]

JM: Yes. Into a lot of other things. [Laughs]

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay. And you started working for the *Traveler* at the University [of Arkansas, Fayetteville]—the student newspaper.

CA: Yes. With you and Robert McCord and Charlie Rixse. I believe Deane Hardy and Vic Holhoff were the sports editors. I can't imagine any newspaper had four better sports guys than you all. Not only for writing, but knowing sports, too. So, eventually I got phased out of sports. Robert McCord was editor during one of your years in sports. I was managing editor for the *Traveler*.

JM: That would've been—your junior year, I think, my senior year.

CA: It was.

JM: So, you were the managing editor that year. Then, the following year, which would have been 1951-1952, you were the editor of the *Traveler*.

CA: Yes. I didn't have McConnell and Rixse. I had Wally Schmuck, who became a dentist. [Laughs] I forgot who—John Rosso?

JM: It could have been. John was still in school at that time. Yes. Did you graduate from the university?

CA: No.

JM: You didn't finish.

CA: The year I was editor, I got so beat up—so *used up*, I decided, "I can't go back to school now. I've got to take a break." I was at the *Democrat* then, and here came Horace Heidt with his musical group.

JM: Tell me about that.

CA: Well, I interviewed Heidt. His show had already come to Fayetteville, and I wrote a really bad review for it, being your usual excessive kid critic. Then I wrote a piece about Heidt coming to Little Rock. He called me from Jackson, Mississippi, which was his next stop. That's when I decided, "No more school right now."

JM: He called and offered you a job.

CA: Yes.

JM: That was Heidt. H-E-I-D-T?

CA: Yes. You're the only other person who knows that.

JM: [Laughs] Well, I even remember—I believe at that time it might have been Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights. Is that correct?

CA: Frights! [Laughter]

JM: But he called them Knights, didn't he?

CA: Oh, yes. [Laughs] I think I might have said Frights in my campus piece. When I got with him [I] thought, "I hope nobody's been keeping scrapbooks on this thing."

JM: Yes. What did you do for him?

CA: PR [public relations].

JM: Yes. Okay. You traveled with the band. Is that right?

CA: Yes. That's when you and I were next-door neighbors.

JM: Yes.

CA: I went, I guess, in September, and was a newly married guy, as you also know. Korea was shadowing me.

JM: Yes.

CA: I applied for the draft, went back to the *Democrat*—about a year after I went with Heidt—then I went into the army.

JM: Okay. How long were you in the service?

CA: Two years.

JM: Two years. Where did you serve?

CA: I went into Fort Sill. I had said to myself, "I don't want to waste these two years by not doing anything. I want to travel and see things." I had been in the army

for about fifteen minutes when I said, "No, I don't. I want to go home."

[Laughter]

JM: Yes.

CA: I got to Fort Sill and did all those mustering-in things, and took the officer candidates' test. I got called to come see something. This corporal said, "You're the only person we've ever seen here who qualified for OCS [Officer Candidates School] who didn't answer one single math question." I knew I couldn't, so I answered everything else. I got sent from there to [Fort] Chaffee [Arkansas]. That's the rest of it right there.

JM: Yes. What did you do at Chaffee?

CA: TI&E—troop information and education.

JM: Yes. Wrote news releases and . . . ?

CA: No. That was PIO [Public Information Office]. I had *Reveille*, the newspaper.

JM: Yes.

CA: I was also teaching football players from Indiana how to pass fourth-grade work.

JM: [Laughs] Yes.

CA: It meant being close to home and close to Carolyn.

JM: That's your wife.

CA: Yes. I went home the last twenty-two weekends.

JM: Yes.

CA: She won a new car on a raffle.

JM: I remember that.

CA: Do you?

JM: Yes. I do remember that.

CA: Boy Scouts, or something, raffle from the . . .

JM: Yes, I can't remember what it was, but I remember she won the car.

CA: We all would remember that, wouldn't we?

JM: Yes. In those days we would.

CA: I got out in 1955, and I applied to the [Arkansas] *Gazette* and the Associated Press [AP]. At Chaffee, I had run into Harry Ashmore, who was the *Gazette's* executive editor.

JM: Yes.

CA: He told me, "Go see A. R. Nelson." I got accepted by the AP and the *Gazette* on the same day in September. On the *Gazette* as a general-assignment.

JM: Yes. Let me ask you about some other people at the *Democrat* at the time you were there. Do you remember a story that you wrote about the girl whose family got killed in the fire?

CA: Yes.

JM: Do you remember her name?

CA: If you'll hold on a minute.

JM: No, that's all right. Was it Bryant? Was that her last name? I'm trying to guess.

CA: She was the one member of her family left.

JM: Okay. Tell me about that situation. As I remember, Charlie, your stories were so popular that the *Democrat* set up a fund for them and raised a lot of money.

CA: That's true. I don't know how the figure totaled out, and, of course, [it was] Christmastime and here's a child without a family.

JM: Yes.

CA: I was proud of the *Democrat* for that. People sent in checks. In the archives at Central Arkansas University I have a detailed account of those things. But, like so much else, it has slipped away from my mind.

JM: Yes, I understand that. I remember something about it because I happened to look up the clip not too long ago.

CA: Did you really?

JM: Yes. There were ten in the family, and she was the only survivor. They were burned. There was a terrible house fire out on Crystal Hill Road.

CA: Yes.

JM: Most of the others died immediately, but I think two of her sisters died later in the hospital. She was in the hospital, but she wasn't as severely burned, and the *Democrat* sent you out to do an interview the next morning. You did a hell of an interview. Then you did some follow-up stories on it, and then the public just got . . .

CA: Checks came from all over the world, Jerry.

JM: Yes.

CA: I have wondered about that child many times recently. That's one of the things about the work you and I've done. We got to do what we wanted to do. I think we were aware of it on a daily basis. It's kind of geometric, then, that you're

blessed.

JM: Yes. We'll get back to some other things later, but what do you remember about your stay at the *Democrat*—the newsroom, the people there? Tell me about some of the people there and what it was like working for a daily newspaper at that time.

CA: Well, I was grateful to have the job. It occurred to me this was what I wanted to do. The staff people were kind to me. Fred Petrucelli was kind to me. Jack Keady was kind to me. Edwin Liske was Edwin Liske. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

CA: And, you know, we had . . .

JM: That's L-I-S-K-E, isn't it?

CA: Correct. We had some pretty heavy drinkers at the paper.

JM: Yes.

CA: They were in key spots. I might have recalled to you that a couple of them would come to work every other Monday morning with their eyebrows singed off. They had been at home, cooking something. The oven just blew them out. [Laughter] Drinking was another thing in those days. It was somehow traditional.

JM: Yes.

CA: Those of us who didn't do that weren't feeling superior, but we were probably more aware than these other guys were.

JM: Yes.

CA: I knew staffers who, right after we got through [having breakfast at] Walgreens—

they went to city hall, and on the way drank beer for breakfast.

JM: Do you want to name him or shall I? [Laughs]

CA: How about John Scudder, to begin with?

JM: [Laughter] That's it. Okay.

CA: It was tolerated because some of the people who had to tolerate it were also drunk.

JM: Yes. [Laughter] Some of the editors, you're talking about.

CA: Yes. I had some good friends there. That's where I met Robert McCord.

JM: Yes.

CA: I wondered about the pay, but I was riding so high on the idea of a new career. . . .

JM: What was your pay when you started out?

CA: Twenty-six dollars.

JM: A week?

CA: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

CA: But, really, for seven days. [Laughs]

JM: Oh, for seven days. [Laughs]

CA: When I left to go into the army, I think it was about \$56. It was a good time for me because I learned how I didn't want to write, and I taught myself how I didn't want to write. I've thought that if I had any virtue as a writer over those years, it was probably things I left out.

JM: Yes.

CA: Because of, I guess, my mom and dad, I was concerned about how stuff was written.

JM: Yes.

CA: Even today, now I hear on the car radio a blurb for Sears with the sign-off, "Not available at all locations." I say, "You're saying it's not available *anywhere* and you're spending money to put it on the air." [Laughter]

JM: Did you get paid any overtime when you were working seven days a week? Do you remember that?

CA: I remember that I got to go home at 2:30 in the afternoon instead of getting any more money.

JM: [Laughter] Oh, was that it?

CA: That's when it was all over by then. You know, the day was over.

JM: Oh, sure, because the *Democrat* was an afternoon newspaper, and you couldn't make any deadlines after 2:30.

CA: Nothing to do except go home. There was a feeling of gratitude on my part, but also frustration because—well, you remember, in those days—I don't know whether—we got paid in cash.

JM: Yes.

CA: We'd line up on Friday. There was an editor, and then maybe me, and then the custodian, and we'd line up right outside Stanley Berry's office. You'd come in there and he'd pull your envelope out. You'd tear off the cover and sign your name, and slide it back so nobody saw anything. What did we do on Friday? Go

to Lafayette dining room and have a shrimp salad.

JM: Yes. Several reporters would go over there and eat lunch.

CA: Yes. It was something to look forward to.

JM: Yes, it was. But what we did when we got there, as I remember—a lot of times we just complained about the *Democrat*. [Laughter]

CA: Oh, absolutely!

JM: Who were some of the people there on the staff at that time that you remember anything about?

CA: You, of course. Bob McCord. McCord could've been a great all-time photographer internationally if he hadn't gotten hung up on thought. [Laughter] We were a pretty motley group. Photographers, too. The AP offices were right there on the second floor. By the way, as things worked out, I started there about a million years later when the *Democrat* bought the *Gannett Gazette*.

JM: Yes. I'm going to ask you about that. What kind of a newspaper was the *Democrat*, say, in the early fifties [1950s] while you were there and before you went to the *Gazette*?

CA: I thought it was not bad. Editorially, it didn't exist—I mean, in terms of taking positions. That really came to the forefront in the 1957 [Little Rock Central High School integration] crisis. What I loved about it the whole time, even to the day I quit, Jerry—or was removed—was that I had a chance to do better tomorrow.

JM: Yes.

CA: "I didn't write this right, then tomorrow I'm going to write *better*." I was such a

kid. I thought I did a pretty good job of sports coverage, and a lot of it by clipping the *Gazette*.

JM: At that time, though, how did it compare to the *Gazette*, say, in the early fifties [1950s], as a newspaper?

CA: It compared as the afternoon newspaper for three cents.

JM: Yes.

CA: I don't know that. I wouldn't be a good judge of it because my idea, Jerry, was [that] more important than *what* you wrote was *how* you said it. I don't know what that means anymore.

JM: Was there a lot of turnover there as you recall, probably because of the salaries and everything? Was there quite a bit of turnover at the *Democrat*?

CA: Yes. In fact, they were always coming and going. Some people would go into PR. We had some go into utility promotion things—the phone company and electric company. Years later, by fate, I wound up in the same little office.

JM: Is that right?

CA: Yes. It was on the second floor, and later we got moved up to the third floor.

JM: Okay. I'm going to get into that in a minute. When you were on the news side at the *Democrat*, what kind of stories did you typically [cover]? Were you on general assignment?

CA: General assignment. If somebody came to town, I'd go interview them.

JM: Yes.

CA: Mickey Rooney and Horace Heidt, I mentioned them.

JM: Yes.

CA: General assignment was the best deal for me because I'd go to work not knowing what my assignment would be.

JM: Okay. Well, then you wound up—as you said, after you came out of the army, you went to work for the *Gazette*. Let's go briefly—although this is covered in your *Gazette* interview, I know, but you became a columnist at the *Gazette*—first, I believe, the "Our Town" column and then later on—then you left and went—did you go with Faulkner?

CA: Yes.

JM: You went to work for Jim Faulkner in Pine Bluff.

CA: I was on general assignment coming out of the army in 1955. In 1956, a fellow named Carroll McGaughey, who had been writing the "Our Town" column went somewhere else. Somehow I got tapped to do "Our Town." I did that for two years. Mr. [J. N.] Heiskell, who was the [*Gazette*] publisher, of course, talked to Ashmore about my coming in to do editorials. It was a baffling thing for me because I didn't know—except for Jesus Christ, I didn't know what I believed in. So, I went into the ivory tower. [Charles] Buddy Portis, [who wrote] *True Grit*, took my place as the "Our Town" columnist. I went and did editorials for two years. Jim Powell, who succeeded Ashmore, told me years later that Mr. Heiskell said one of my editorials had been the best ever printed by the *Arkansas Gazette*. I couldn't believe it. I said, "What?" And Jim said, "It was headed 'Wood and Water.'" I said, "Well, I vaguely remember that. I was for water, and I don't

remember about wood." He said, "You were for wood, too." [Laughter] I managed to escape that, [and] did the "Arkansas Traveler" column until I went with Win[throp] Rockefeller in 1965.

JM: Yes. You went with Rockefeller in 1965, and you were with him through both his terms as governor. What did you do for Rockefeller?

CA: Speeches.

JM: Wrote speeches. Yes. Okay.

CA: Papers to deliver at, say, Johns Hopkins, Ohio State, Vanderbilt. At the end of his terms of office, there was a lot of rearranging. I became the director of public relations, and in that capacity stayed with him until he died in February of 1973 on [George] Washington's birthday. Cancer, in Palm Springs, California. Do you remember, I called you that morning?

JM: Yes, you did, to tell me that he had died.

CA: And, between you and me, because of our old times together I was glad it was you who was getting the [news] first.

JM: Yes. You went with him to Palm Springs.

CA: Yes.

JM: Did he and you both know he was going out there to die?

CA: Yes.

JM: I thought you did. I thought that was correct.

CA: Yes. He decided that nothing important was going to happen in Palm Springs, so that was the place to do it.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

CA: He went to a room in the eye bank. Stayed there about eighteen days before he died.

JM: What was that?

CA: What was what?

JM: The eye bank.

CA: He left his eyes.

JM: Oh, he gave his eyes. The eye bank. I misunderstood you.

CA: Oh, yes, I see that wouldn't make sense. That was his last stop.

JM: Yes. I hadn't ever heard that.

CA: By the way, there were some family problems. David was the youngest brother, and they got along fine. Nelson—they didn't get along fine.

JM: They didn't?

CA: When Nelson and David flew out to be with him, Nelson didn't get off the airplane.

JM: Is that right?

CA: Yes. They had picked on Winthrop when they were kids at [the Rockefeller home in] Pocantico [Hills], New York. So, one day he [Winthrop] took a sickle and cut Nelson on the shins. When Win's ship took a kamikaze [hit] in the South Pacific [during WWII], he got burned. He was going to ship home when he got a letter or telegram from Nelson that said, "We're proud of you. Stay with it out there." That didn't work right, either.

JM: I bet.

CA: I don't know. "They're not like you and me," as Fitzgerald said.

JM: About the rich, you mean? [Laughs]

CA: Yes. David came to the home on Via Lola Drive. Ben Mitchell, Win's main chef, fed him—David and Peggy Rockefeller, and me and my secretary. It was a hard time for me. I liked Win Rockefeller. When he took office, every board and every commission had been filled with [Governor] Orval Faubus appointments. Every county and every state commission. We had a feeling that we might be doing something if we could—I don't know, Jerry, whether you want any of that.

JM: That's fine. Go on and tell me a little bit about that.

CA: Marlin Hawkins . . .

JM: I don't remember you talking about that a whole lot in the *Gazette* interview.

CA: I didn't.

JM: You didn't? Okay. Tell me something about that.

CA: Win and I went—I went tagging along because he was there—and did the tour of the [Faubus] house at Huntsville. In Orval's day in office, the [governor's] salary was \$10,000 a year.

JM: Yes.

CA: When we walked through the house in Huntsville, Alta [Faubus] stayed back behind—a respectful distance . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: We were talking about them doing a tour at the house at Huntsville. Now, pick up on that, Charlie.

CA: The thing was done on three levels and stuck into the hillside at Huntsville. When we finished the tour and were headed back outside—I wish this hadn't occurred—but there was a small dog there with only three legs. I said, "This must be old dog Trey." Orval didn't like that, but he forgave me later on—years later. [Laughs] Win took his hat and swept the sky and said, "I wish I could afford this."

JM: [Laughs]

CA: And Orval explained, "Frugality."

JM: Frugality. He had been saving that \$10,000 a year. [Laughter]

CA: Yes. Piled it up and made a millionaire's mansion with it. But they had a strange regard for each other—a wary regard.

JM: Yes.

CA: Orval told Win that what stayed with him most was Win's tenacity. To the day he died, Win regarded that as something that he wanted to remember. Orval wasn't a hater. You know that. He was playing those—what happened was he made a deal with a [state] senator in Mississippi County—I'll think of his name later. But the deal was that Orval would do what he did about the desegregation [at Little Rock Central High School] if the senator would give him a [one] cent sales tax he was wanting. That's never been anywhere, either, Jerry. Was the name Bell? Clarence Bell?

JM: Yes. He was from over there somewhere.

CA: On the delta, wasn't he?

JM: Yes, he was on the delta. I don't believe he was in . . .

CA: Maybe it wasn't Mississippi County.

JM: . . . Mississippi County, but he was from [Parkin?], I think.

CA: Maybe so.

JM: Somewhere in there.

CA: Like Hog Hanner. [Laughs]

JM: On the integration situation. Any other particular memories you have from your . . .

CA: *Democrat?*

JM: No, with Rockefeller—with Winthrop.

CA: Well, I went with him all over creation where he was speaking and talking and visiting. He had people to the farm [Win-Rock Ranch on Petit Jean Mountain] to symposiums—one we can't use, but Buckminster Fuller came once. We were meeting a bunch of these heavy guys, and Win was introducing, very relaxed, around a big table. When he introduced Buck Fuller, he transposed the name. [Laughter] And repeated it. When he should have said Buck, he said . . .

JM: Yes, yes, okay. [Laughter]

CA: Anyway, he did many things in terms of trying to do better for Arkansas. He said the worst thing was the state's inferiority complex. He told me that when he left Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] and went rigging in the oil fields of

Texas, one of the guys invited him over to a supper one time. There were four of them at the table, and a teen-age girl waiting over at the side. There weren't enough chairs. Also, there were just four settings of eating utensils. Win said, "That was a huge thing for me to realize. Here's this family—a lovely rural family, but they couldn't feed everybody and didn't do anything about it." One day, he was down in a pit digging, and the noon whistle blew. He said, "I was so beat, I couldn't crawl out of that hole. So I said to them, 'Would you throw me down my lunch bucket because I'm sweating and I don't want to get cold and catch pneumonia or something.'" That was the only way he could get his lunch was for them to throw it down to him. And after they had all left for the day, he crawled out of the pit. A lot of stories about Win. A lot of things that he had high hopes for. He met an Arkansas guy while they were in the service.

JM: That was Frank Newell?

CA: Newell. That's who it was.

JM: Yes. Okay.

CA: I don't know where we've [gone], Jerry.

JM: That's okay. But Frank talked him into moving to Arkansas.

CA: Yes.

JM: One thing I think I missed. How long did he live after you all went to Palm Springs?

CA: After we went the last time, two months.

JM: Yes. There is something I'm trying to remember now, and I don't know—you

called me. I was the managing editor at the *Democrat*, and you called me that morning and told me that he had died.

CA: Yes.

JM: I can't remember whether—you might have even written the lead paragraph or something. I don't remember that. We already had an obit[uary] in type, and I can't remember—you didn't do that obit, did you?

CA: No. I did some talking to whoever had it done. I remember it was you. Maybe it wasn't.

JM: No, it was me. You talked with me. Yes.

CA: But that lead—what happened was I went over to the hospital every morning while he was there, and Ann Bartley was there, his step-daughter. And we had breakfast and I came back. It was at 467 Via Lola Drive, his Palm Springs address.

JM: How do you spell that street name?

CA: V-I-A L-O-L-A.

JM: Oh, okay. Via Lola. Okay.

CA: The first person to come knocking on the door after the word went out that morning was Kirk Douglas. He came and knocked and said to me, "I just wanted somebody to know I thought he was a good neighbor." Dinah Shore was over here on the other side. And the trombonist from Tommy Dorsey's old orchestra lived across the street.

JM: Yes.

CA: That's what we were looking at. Again, I forget where we were. Two months, you said.

JM: Yes. He died at the end of that time. You mentioned something about Doubleday [Publishing Group]. What was that?

CA: He had an agreement with Doubleday and they were advancing [him] money to write. I would be writing with him. And when he died, they said, "Well, we'll just transfer it to you, and write what you will." I never did it.

JM: Was it a book about Rockefeller—about his life?

CA: Yes, about his experience in Arkansas, mostly. There was a \$25,000 advance. I knew if touched that, I'd have to write. I was feeling bad about his being gone.

JM: Yes. Do you still have all those notes? Had you accumulated notes about his life?

CA: They're at UCA [University of Central Arkansas, Conway].

JM: Oh, you turned them over to UCA in the archives up there? Okay.

CA: Yes. There's one thing I looked for and couldn't find—the last thing he did as governor was he commuted the death sentences of people—down at the prison farm. He said, "I can't turn down my teachings of lifelong beliefs." I'm quoting myself here. I wrote the piece. At any rate, he went down there that night with Ken McKee, a former state policeman and a guy who was body-guarding then, and met all those people—those guys who were suddenly going to be allowed to live. It was one of the big—I didn't go. I didn't want to. It was one of the big events for him. He thought he had maybe atoned for something in his life by

doing that.

JM: Yes. He commuted the sentences of everybody on death row, didn't he?

CA: Yes.

JM: There were quite a few of them. I don't remember how many.

CA: Twenty-two.

JM: Okay.

CA: Some of them got out and went to school and lived good lives. Others were pretty bad guys.

JM: Yes. Okay.

CA: He had a big feeling about that.

JM: Yes. Now, let's talk about how you got back to the *Democrat* that later became the [Arkansas] *Democrat-Gazette*. Explain how you got back to the *Democrat-Gazette*.

CA: I had been up to Plymouth, Michigan, to visit with my daughter, Tracy, and her family. I came back after four or five days, and I was going to stop by the *Gazette*, where I was writing the "Arkansas Traveler" column. When I got there, from the airport, there were people coming out the back door with books and papers and belongings. And some were crying. It had just been announced that day that the *Gazette* was no more, and there was no last edition. Then I heard that—Richard Allin and I had a contract. Hugh Patterson said, "But we never had to have them under contract." But when Gannett got there, that's the way it worked. The so-called newspaper war was a big thing for Richard and me in

terms of money because the Gannett guy called us in and said, "I heard you guys met with Boo Hussman." I said, "You did? You can imagine what that was." He said, "Well, yes, here's the deal." He said, "It's going up to \$75,000 and \$10,000 sign-on." [Laughs] We hadn't had any such thing, but he *heard* that we had, you know?

JM: Yes. Yes.

CA: Well, you can imagine what it was. At any rate, that day . . .

JM: This was a contract they were offering you.

CA: No, they bought our contract.

JM: No, I mean Gannett was offering you a contract.

CA: Oh, yes.

JM: And they signed you and Richard Allin to a contract at that time. Is that correct?

CA: Yes.

JM: So, how much was that for?

CA: Seventy-five.

JM: Seventy-five thousand a year and a \$10,000 bonus for signing it.

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay.

CA: Which wasn't hay for an Arkansas newspaper.

JM: No. No. [Laughter]

CA: And we said, "Let's have more of this war."

JM: They signed you to a contract to keep you from jumping to the *Democrat*?

CA: Yes.

JM: Because they got scared. Somebody had already jumped, hadn't they?

CA: Orville.

JM: Orville Henry had already jumped. Okay.

CA: Yes.

JM: And they got scared that you and Richard were going to follow?

CA: Yes. The polls were saying that they didn't want to lose us. I couldn't imagine not working at the *Gazette*, but there this thing came—I told this—I can't think of his name. He later became the honcho at *USA Today*. The main guy at the Gannett paper.

JM: I didn't know him. I wasn't here. I was in Oklahoma at that time, so I didn't know that crew. But I've heard all their names. Was it Craig Moon?

CA: Moon. That's who it was.

JM: Okay.

CA: He's the one who said, "Okay, here's the deal—\$75,000 and the \$10,000 to sign."

[Laughter] Richard—I could almost hear him swallow.

JM: He was sitting there with you. Yes. [Laughter]

CA: At any rate, that day . . .

JM: Is it fair to ask what you were making from the *Gazette* at that time?

CA: Pretty good [money] because of the same thing. I say pretty good. You know what was pretty good, \$45,000 to \$50,000.

JM: Yes. Okay.

CA: When \$35,000 had been tops.

JM: So, at any rate . . .

CA: And, by the way, the minute the *Democrat* bought that contract, the minute it expired, [Walter] Hussman [Jr.] said, "Come on in."

JM: Is that right? You mean . . .?

CA: He said, "You all are the best. I've looked at the best around the South, and so here's what you're going to make," which was about \$15,000 less.

JM: Yes. But when he bought the assets of the *Gazette*, he got your contract.

CA: Yes.

JM: How did you learn that you were going to the *Democrat-Gazette*? Do you remember that?

CA: Yes. It said in the *Democrat* headline, "Allin and Allbright to join staff," page one.

JM: Oh, okay.

CA: I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I got down—I said—somebody told me when I went down to the *Gazette* to get my mail after coming back from Michigan, somebody said, "There's going to be a meeting here at 6:00." So, out in the street there was just a throng. A huge meeting. A lot of crying and a lot of disbelief. George Fisher [the *Gazette* cartoonist] was emceeding [acting as master of ceremonies], which was a strange choice, you know?

JM: Yes.

CA: [Laughter] He was Mr. Excitement, you know? I learned—John Robert [Starr]

called and said, "Do you intend to honor our contract?" I said, "Whatever is happening, I'm going to work." So that's how I learned. It was, "Allin and Allbright to join."

JM: It was John Robert Starr?

CA: Yes.

JM: So you went on over to the *Democrat-Gazette* at that time, then, and just kept writing your column. Okay.

CA: The next day. I was in shock.

JM: Yes. You said they put you in the same office that you had been in . . .

CA: Yes, in 1948.

JM: . . . years before.

CA: Yes. They sure did.

JM: Were you and Richard in an office together?

CA: Yes. We didn't—Hussman said, "I don't care if you ever come to the paper." And we didn't.

JM: You stayed at home and wrote.

CA: Yes. I'd go down there to get mail and e-mail, and to touch some bases because the people were very nice to me.

JM: Were they?

CA: Very nice to me. I felt like there ought to be some kind of continuity, and I needed to go down there. I know certain people don't go—at the [*Arkansas Times*], I don't think Ernie Dumas goes to work. I just felt like I had to keep in

touch and have some friendships.

JM: Yes. I don't know. Maybe it's how we got started or something that—I was always uncomfortable about people not ever coming to the office.

CA: Yes. It didn't work for me.

JM: Yes.

CA: I would go down there—I made up a story one time about how my mojo unit at home wasn't working, “So, I'll just stay down here and do this.”

JM: [Laughs]

CA: I'd visit, you know. I would write it on my old typewriter there—a nineteen-thirty-something Underwood. I never did write on the computer.

JM: Oh, you never did write on a computer?

CA: I never did. I was so slow and [I] agonized over it.

JM: Okay.

CA: Upstairs at home was my old typewriter. After I'd written the column and put it into the machine.

JM: Then type it in and send it in from there.

CA: I made some good friends down there. When they terminated us, Griffin Smith . .

.

JM: Yes.

CA: . . . gave the reason for [reducing] our salaries, and said, "We're going to put this money somewhere else. It's purely my decision. So and so and so and so." He was trying to clear Hussman of it, somehow, but if Hussman hadn't wanted that,

that wouldn't have happened.

JM: Yes. When was that? Do you remember that date?

CA: This was—he asked us to come in, Richard and me, in October of 1953.

JM: You don't mean 1953.

CA: No, I don't mean 1953—how about eighty . . .

JM: 2003?

CA: When we got in there and he closed the door and said, "This meeting is just what you knew it would be." We had no idea what it was. We thought—we had talked just before going in, "Do you suppose they want our office?" You know, because we were never there.

JM: Yes.

CA: We had no idea what it was, and that's when he said that at the end of the year—December 31—we'll be shutting down and giving the money to something else.

JM: Yes.

CA: The strange thing, Jerry—I always thought that I'd decide, you know?

JM: Yes.

CA: I don't know whether you noticed the floods of letters.

JM: Yes, I had heard. Yes.

CA: They kind of broke faith with a certain age-archy. I mean, you've got people in there now who are doing things that wouldn't have gotten into our mimeograph job at Westside Junior High [School]. You've seen leads—"What: When: Where:"—like they were writing a lead, you know?

JM: Yes.

CA: And you've got people weighing 400 pounds writing about what's good for you to eat. And a lot of it is people who haven't paid any dues and time.

JM: I take it that you were not ready to quit.

CA: No, I wasn't.

JM: You would've preferred to keep writing your column.

CA: Yes, I would. Because, actually—between you and me, it was going good. There was good readership. And for Richard, too.

JM: You got a lot of support from the readers that . . .

CA: Enormous. Thousands.

JM: Yes.

CA: Wally Hall even wrote one thing in his column one time. He said, "I'll be glad when the protests about Allbright and Allin are down to 100 a day."

JM: Yes. [Laughter]

CA: Griffin Smith went to Paul Greenberg and said, "Let's shut this off now."—the readers' letters. Paul said, "Let's let it play out." And it went on and on and on.

JM: Yes.

CA: I don't know whether I got off our project here, but . . .

JM: No, this is part of it.

CA: Well, it wound up that my end was at the same place I began.

JM: Yes.

CA: A lot happened in between. A lot of things, a lot of friends. There was not a day

that went by that I wasn't grateful for what I got to do. I think the *Democrat-Gazette* made a mistake.

JM: Yes.

CA: I think it's contributing to the uneasy situation that exists today that fewer people are reading newspapers. You've got people who don't even *take* newspapers.

JM: Yes. That was in 2003. I was out of state at that time—working out of state.

When was it that you came back to the *Democrat-Gazette*? What date was that?

CA: It was in September of 1991.

JM: Okay, 1991. So, you were there twelve years?

CA: Yes.

JM: Okay. Now then, you had this contract with Gannett, which Walter picked up.

How long did that contract run before you got to the end of that first contract?

Was it for a year or two years?

CA: Yes. One year.

JM: One year. Okay.

CA: It had already renewed itself once.

JM: Okay.

CA: So, he pounced when the thing got to be . . .

JM: At the end of that year of the contract, he called you in and said he wanted to reduce your salary and . . .

CA: Yes. It was like a blow to me.

JM: Yes.

CA: I had a good feeling about how things were doing.

JM: What did you reduce your salary to? Do you remember?

CA: I believe . . .

JM: You were making \$75,000, so . . .

CA: I believe to somewhere between \$60,000 and \$65,000.

JM: Yes. Okay.

CA: Which, at that time, I had commitments to children who were in school, and it scared me.

JM: So you operated under that contract, then? Did you happen to sign another contract?

CA: No.

JM: Oh, you didn't sign one.

CA: It wasn't offered.

JM: Oh, they didn't offer you a contract? You just stayed on and they paid you that salary until you got the ax in 2003.

CA: Yes.

JM: Do you remember—now, I know the *Democrat-Gazette* was a stretch there, but we're kind of big on using polls to determine readership and everything. Do you remember ever hearing any of the polls on how yours and Richard's readerships were?

CA: Yes. I never was shown any, but we were supposed to have been one and two behind [sportswriter] Wally Hall. I asked Griffin Smith about that. "I see Wally

is leading this thing. Does that have to do with Arkansas or the quality or what?"

And he said, "Neither." [Laughter] Of course, it had to do with Arkansas. All these call-in shows and people know what everything ought to be. "Don't run that formation."

JM: Sports.

CA: And you got a lot of boring guys who are calling in every day now to these things.

JM: Oh, I can't stand call-in sports shows.

CA: [Laughs] Can you imagine? What do they do? Do they want to be heard?

JM: I don't know. I never have quite figured that out. I guess they want to be heard is the only thing I can figure.

CA: You haven't figured out—you haven't wondered who the hosts would be on the thing.

JM: Yes, I understand. Well, I don't ever listen to them.

CA: I know you don't. [Laughs]

JM: No, you've got too much at stake. We had one of those in Oklahoma that got to be really popular. The only two times I ever listened to it, I was a guest. He asked me to come down as a sports editor and answer questions. I knew what kind of questions I was going to get. They weren't all going to be nice, but I agreed to do it, and those were the only two times I've heard . . .

CA: It was hard to be serious, wasn't it?

JM: Yes. At any rate—so you, in effect, retired on December 31, 2003.

CA: I was fired.

JM: Yes, you were fired.

CA: I was terminated, as they say.

JM: Terminated. Okay. Richard wasn't very happy about that, either, was he?

CA: I think he talked to Griffin Smith after that meeting was over.

JM: Yes.

CA: I didn't know anything to say. This was that same day. Richard stayed behind and they talked about something. I don't know what.

JM: Yes.

CA: It's a bizarre thing, Jerry, to have gone through.

JM: Yes. Did you ever talk to Walter? Did he ever say anything to you about it?

CA: No. And I didn't [seek to?]. I did when the salary was reduced.

JM: Yes.

CA: I said, "I can't do this," and walked out. I *could* do it and *did* do it.

JM: Yes. But you knew that, in all likelihood, Griffin Smith wasn't going to make that move without consulting Walter.

CA: How would he?

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

CA: No way. In fact, he told Richard and me, "Mr. Hussman has said this is entirely my decision." Well, that's bullshit. It is unless he wants something otherwise.

JM: Yes.

CA: Griffin is the only guy I ever knew in half a century of it, Jerry, who came and went with a briefcase.

JM: Yes.

CA: I wondered, "What's he got in there, peanut butter and jelly?" [Laughter] I don't know what you do with that.

JM: But he is the—what is he? Is he the editor? Is that correct?

CA: Executive editor.

JM: Executive editor. Okay.

CA: Well, he would've been doing what you were doing when you were doing it, but you were a newspaper man and he's a bag guy.

JM: What were your feelings—we haven't discussed that too much and everything—when the *Gazette* actually closed [and] when you found out that the *Democrat* had bought out Gannett?

CA: I would have bet my life that that would never happen.

JM: Yes.

CA: In fact, I don't know whether you remember Pat Owens? Patrick J. Owens?

JM: Yes.

CA: He came to interview me one time before that, and I said, "There's no way, Pat. No way it's going to happen." I was stunned—utterly stunned. It got confirmed right away in my heart and mind when they called for a—I don't know what you'd call a wine and melon ball retreat at Red Apple Inn. We were going to go up there and meet and visit and get focused.

JM: Who did this?

CA: Gannett.

JM: Oh, Gannett. Okay.

CA: Yes. I arranged not to go. I had something else to do.

JM: Okay.

CA: One of them came back—and this was an Arkie [Arkansan], not a Gannett guy—Gannett hired and kept him on the staff. He said, “We had a good look at the product.” I said, “At what?” “We had an in-depth study about the product.” I said, “What is the *product*?” [Laughter] He said, “It’s the *newspaper*.” I said, “The *Arkansas Gazette*?” “Yes.” I knew it was over then.

JM: That was when Gannett first came in.

CA: Yes. They chased each other up and down the halls—women and men and whatever goes on at retreats.

JM: Yes.

CA: But I knew it was over . . .

JM: When Gannett took over and when you heard what was going on and how they were operating.

CA: That it was going to be a “product.”

JM: Did it not come as too much of a surprise, then, to you, when Gannett sold out to Hussman? Or did it?

CA: It had come to matter less, and it was not stunning the way it would have been stunning in earlier years.

JM: Yes.

CA: I thought we definitely weren’t the same thing that we had been. Now we had

cheerleaders wearing Spandex shorts on page one, you know?

JM: Yes.

CA: I think it just all passed me by.

JM: Yes.

CA: I wouldn't trade my years with you and other guys in this for what they've got now. I don't know what it is.

JM: Yes.

CA: But I wasn't stunned because it's hard to be stunned when you're working for a product.

JM: Yes.

CA: A product. I'm doing what? [Laughter]

JM: Yes.

CA: Oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi, and here comes some guy after the melon ball retreat saying, "We had a good, long look at the *product*." I think the guy wound up in Shreveport or Lake something in Louisiana.

JM: Neither here nor there, what happened to the *Gazette* as far as this project is concerned. What are your feelings about what kind of paper the *Democrat-Gazette* has been since they won the war?

CA: I think there has been a gradual erosion in certain senses. There seems to be a lot more attention paid to entertainment than to news. To give you an example, you know that they go on interminably with movie reviews. One day in the fall before I left, there was a movie review that the newspaper gave a C-minus to, and had

seven photographs with it. Seven color photographs. Can you handle that?

JM: [Laughter] Pretty good coverage.

CA: I guess it was a terrible movie. Whoever Angelina Jolie is . . .

JM: Yes.

CA: Seven photographs—C-minus. Well, we got some people, too—it seems to me like there's a whole lot of physical fitness, a whole lot is going on that is not in the news. I'll say, again, it passed me by.

JM: Okay. What have you done since you retired or since you were fired? [Laughter]

CA: Well, for the first eight or nine months, I'd get up and be anxious. "What am I going to do?" [When] you've been writing a column for forty years, and you don't have anything to do any more, it takes you a while for that to finally settle in. You're not supposed to be doing *anything*.

JM: Yes.

CA: It's hard to turn loose. Again, if you have that hope that I always did, "I'm going to write better tomorrow." And there's not going to be any tomorrow—so it took me a long time to turn that loose and not to be *wounded* about it.

JM: Yes.

CA: I've done a whole lot of reading that I hadn't been able to do. I still do that. I do some walking and I visit grandkids. I guess I'm doing what an old guy does.

JM: Yes. I'm beginning to find out about that, too.

CA: [Laughs]

JM: Let's go back—is there anything—let's talk a little about the *Democrat* in the old

days again. Is there anything else in particular that you remember about that—maybe something that we haven't touched on too much? Any stories that you did or people or anything?

CA: I remember one time I was sent to Des Arc to cover a murder—the murder of a child whose stepmother had put her in a rain barrel while she was still alive. The reason I remember it was I wrote it was a “grisly” thing and I spelled it with Zs. G-R-I-Z-Z-L-Y. [Laughter] I remember embarrassments like that. There was another one . . .

JM: Well, let me ask you one question. Did the editors catch it or did it get into the paper that way?

CA: Gene Herrington caught it.

JM: He did. Okay.

CA: I both hated him and liked him for it.

JM: Okay.

CA: Gene was a strange editor, too.

JM: Yes.

CA: A parade. A really colorful parade from the Shriners from all over everywhere. I think the things I remember about the *Democrat* were my buddy, Fred Petrucelli, and the Enochs sitting there in front of the Coke machine. Wasn't that their names? Mr. and Mrs. Enoch?

JM: I had forgotten them.

CA: Old, old people. And Keady.

JM: What kind of a guy was Keady?

CA: He was anything but a newspaper man. He was a gentle man and incorruptible, but you couldn't imagine him, let's say, being a Walter Stewart. Walter Stewart would go down—what was the year he went down to the Sugar Bowl and wired back, "Nothing of interest, our angle"? [Laughter] Tennessee was in the [game], and he had gotten snookered [drunk], you know, and didn't know where he was. [Laughs]. "Nothing of interest, our angle." I thought he was great.

JM: Stewart, you mean?

CA: Walter Stewart [Editor's note: Walter Stewart was the sports columnist for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*.].

JM: Oh, yes. He also wrote some great stuff.

CA: Oh, he did. He really did. In those days, I thought he was probably it. But I don't know how he kept going with that kind of . . .

JM: Do you ever see Fred?

CA: No, I haven't.

JM: Yes, I haven't either.

CA: I'll bet you have the same feeling about him that I do, that he's one of the world's pleasant individuals.

JM: Yes, he was. He was.

CA: When this thing came up at the University of Central Arkansas, he did a piece for the *Log Cabin Democrat*. I talked to him on the phone, and I was hoping I'd get to see him. We were going to have an open house and something to

commemorate my stuff and Richard Allin's stuff, and Lu Harden was putting that on. Then Richard got sick.

JM: Oh.

CA: Well, do you know about that?

JM: I don't know anything about that. We'll talk about that in a minute—so nothing else in particular about the newsroom that stands out in your mind?

CA: I hate this for you and me because I'm trying to do a good job for you, and it's not working . . .

JM: You are doing a great job. No, that's fine. Let me ask you this one question. It struck me as kind of funny. Did it ever strike you as kind of interesting how we used to come in early in the morning and do our rewrites, then all beat it out for breakfast and coffee at Lane's Drug Store with the whole staff, practically?

CA: Absolutely. Absolutely. Martin Holmes put his breakfast over here—side of his mouth.

JM: [Laughs]

CA: What was it, about thirty-five cents for breakfast? Something like that.

JM: Probably. Yes.

CA: Oh, yes. We'd find the clips from the *Gazette*—whichever was our venue.

JM: Yes.

CA: Somebody left. Dorsey Woodson left North Little Rock, and they said I was going to have that beat temporarily. Martha Douglas left the federal beat, so they gave me that, too. So, at one time I was doing the "Our Town" column, covering

North Little Rock, and doing the federal beat.

JM: [Whistles] That's a lot of stuff.

CA: It was a lot of stuff for a kid—I was twenty-five. And [A. R.] Nelson came to me and said, "You *know* you're outdrawing the ME [managing editor], don't you?" They had given me about five more dollars to do that. I was making \$75 a week, which was pretty heady stuff.

JM: Yes.

CA: Well, I was covering school boards. I'd peek during the prayers at the city council to see who was talking and walking and whispering.

JM: [Laughs]

CA: I couldn't get reverent over some of it, you know?

JM: [Laughs] Yes. Okay. Well, Charlie, this has been great. Nothing else that you can remember in particular that you want to touch on?

CA: I know what's going to happen.

JM: What's that?

CA: I'm going to remember something, and I'll say, "I wish I'd told Jerry about that."

JM: Well, that's all right. Let's cut it off right here and we'll just chat a while, and if you think of something, we can come back and do it.

CA: Okay.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]