

Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
Special Collections Department
University of Arkansas Libraries
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-5330

This oral history interview is based on the memories and opinions of the subject being interviewed. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using this interview should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Amanda Miller Allen
Little Rock, Arkansas
12 August 2006

Interviewer: Carol Stogsdill

Carol Stogsdill: I am Carol Stogsdill, and I'm interviewing Amanda Miller [Allen] for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's [University of Arkansas, Fayetteville] project on the Arkansas Democrat. This interview is being held in Little Rock on August 12, 2006. We will transcribe this interview and make it available to those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript, Amanda, at which point you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is state your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcription available to others.

Amanda Miller Allen: All right. I'm Amanda Miller Allen, and I agree to do this, against my better judgment.

CS: You will have a great time, I can assure you. Amanda, as all of these interviews have at the beginning, let's start at the beginning. Tell us about your family-

where you were born, when you were born, and give us a little glimpse at the early years.

AA: I was born in Wynne, Arkansas. It's a farming community of about 6,000 people. I was born on April 14, 1949, and that was the day, April 14 [1865], that [President Abraham] Lincoln was shot. My father was born on November twenty-second. [Reference to the day President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in 1963]

CS: Oh, my goodness.

AA: So that was the kind of a thing we always remarked on in my family. My dad was J. R. Miller-Julius Rudolph Miller. And my mother was Elsie Jane [Catlett?] Miller. Dad was a mechanic and a farmer, and mother was a hairdresser and then later worked in a TV [television] factory to get us all through school. I have two brothers and two sisters. What else did you want to know?

CS: Well, tell me a little bit about going to school in Wynne. Wynne is not that big of a place, right?

AA: No. My graduating class was about 130 students.

CS: Oh, my.

AA: So it was not a terribly big school. I went through school there my entire childhood.

CS: I somehow imagine you as valedictorian, though.

AA: I was not. I was not a great student. I was an okay student. I was in probably the top ten in my school, but my older sister really excelled in school, and she's far, far smarter than I am. She has numerous degrees. [Laughs] But I was more

interested in having a little fun, and I didn't-I was more interested in ballet and tap dancing than I was in studying. And, to my regret, I really wish that I had been a better student. That's how I fell into journalism. I was not a good enough student [laughs] to do much of anything else.

CS: [Laughs] And the tap dancing was a very good turning point for that, too, I'm sure. I had forgotten that you tap danced, but I remember now that when we first met in college that that was something you did. I thought that was pretty amazing, having not done anything like that myself.

AA: Yes. Yes, I thoroughly enjoyed that, and it was one of the things in my youth that I kind of just let go and didn't pursue as I got out of college and got older. But now I'm dancing again, so it has come back. I'm doing ballroom dancing, but it's still dancing and it's still fun. And I realize now why I loved it so much back then.

CS: Well, we shared the same growing-up years. Describe what Wynne was like then, because it wasn't all that diverse. Do you remember the [1957] Little Rock Central [High School desegregation] crisis?

AA: I do. Wynne was very segregated, and it's not terribly integrated now. When I was growing up, it was kind of a nice, little place to live. There was a corner grocery store where you could walk and get your groceries. The downtown was pretty vibrant. There was a little hotel. There was a railroad station. It was not-it was kind of like a mid-America small town. I remember it as being fairly pleasant. It has somewhat deteriorated. It's nothing like it was when I was growing up. All the shops that were there have long since moved out. We had a

little jeweler. We had some drugstores downtown. There was a department store. Well, there were two department stores.

CS: Is this where your mother still lives?

AA: This is where my mother still lives. She lives out in the country from there, about five miles out of town. We grew up in town in the early years and then when I was twelve, we moved five miles out of town on a gravel road-way out in the country. [Laughs]

CS: Now, you mentioned you have a sister. Do you have any other siblings?

AA: I have an older sister, a younger sister-my older sister is a computer wizard and works at Arkansas State [University in Jonesboro]. My younger sister is head nurse at Baptist Hospital in Memphis [Tennessee]. And I have two younger brothers, one of whom is a mechanic like my dad-and a very good mechanic-and the other of whom does the computer programming for the gas company in Wynne. The two brothers still live in Wynne.

CS: Really?

AA: Both my sisters still live in Arkansas.

CS: When you were in high school, was there a school paper?

AA: There was a school paper. The English teacher, who was Mrs. [Houser?], was the adviser for it, and to get to work on the school paper was quite an honor. I remember working on it. I don't remember anything that I wrote or what we covered or how often it came out or anything like that, but I do remember her encouraging me to write. She was really probably my first mentor.

CS: And did you like reading?

AA: Oh, I loved reading. The things that I really loved in high school, I excelled at. I loved journalism. I loved reading. I loved writing. I had a very difficult time with math, and still do. I had a somewhat difficult time with science, although I hate that I didn't just make myself learn some of that stuff that I found so boring back then. And I liked history, so I learned a lot of history. I was terrible at geography and still am, which, to this day, I regret, and still work at that and try to sometimes-you could mention a country, and I'll have to go look it up. I have no idea where it is.

CS: [Laughs]

AA: Which is not really good for someone who's now working as a travel editor.

[Laughs]

CS: Well, thank God for electronic maps.

AA: Yes. Reference tools! Reference tools are great. [Laughter]

CS: Journalists-what would they do without them?

AA: So after high school, my sister was going to Arkansas State, and I moved up there. We had dorm rooms right across the hall from each other. I got a BS in journalism, just like you did, and worked on the college paper [The Herald]. We were both managing editors and editors of it. I will say I'm not sure that experience really prepared me for working as a journalist. I think today's kids get a lot more valuable training than we did. There was just not enough real-world training. In my first newspaper job I remember just kind of learning on the ground-you know, just kind of a lot of things that I didn't have a clue about how to do, I had to start to learn.

CS: I think that's true. I think we learned more of the terminology, in a sense, or the basics of things. But, actually, that full range of things and really practical-you know, "Go out and cover it now." I kind of feel you're right. It didn't seem so real-world-like. [Laughs]

AA: It didn't. Well, for one thing, you had a lot more time to put the story together. So, you know, you might go out and actually cover an event that happened on campus, but you might have two or three days to write it instead of having to come back and do it in the next thirty minutes. That's a whole different experience, where you've really got to think fast and type fast and hope you don't make a terrible mistake.

CS: What other classes were you taking? Did you major in journalism from the get-go-you said, "This is going to be my major,"-did you start out doing something else?

AA: The first day of freshman orientation at ASU, they made you put down a major. I had no idea what I wanted to do, but they insisted. You had to have a major because they had to assign you to a professor. And they couldn't do that unless you had a major. So I just put down journalism because I knew I was going to take classes in it, and I thought, "Well, I can always change it later." So that's what I put down without giving it a whole lot of thought. Then I got involved in it and decided, "Well, yes, I really do like this. This is something I want to do."

CS: What did you minor in?

AA: I minored in psychology and sociology, and had thoughts at one time of being a social worker-another high-paying profession. [Laughter] I don't know, I guess

the excitement of journalism was a little more compelling and, you know, having grown up very poor in Arkansas, I had this feeling that I wanted to help people. And I think that career would have been a really bad fit for me because I would have had a very difficult time helping people who weren't able to then continue to help themselves.

CS: Yes.

AA: Because my family-we were poor, but we were not dependent.

CS: Yes.

AA: I think that would have been very difficult to deal with. I'm not sure I would have lasted two months. [Laughs]

CS: Well, you get some of that in the newsroom, anyway, I'm sure.

AA: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

CS: Especially the psychology. What was your overall college experience like? Did you just go to class? Was it fun?

AA: It was a lot of fun. It was the first time that I had ever been away from home. I developed some really close friends, some of whom I still talk to occasionally, including you. [Laughs] It was a time of really trying to form myself as a human being, you know? And it was fun. It was exciting. I highly recommend it to anyone. [Laughs] But I thought I was such a mature human being when I got out of college. And, gosh, I look back on it now and I think, "You were such an infant!" [Laughter] So my first job after college . . .

CS: Yes!

AA: Well, actually, my very first newspaper job was working for a weekly [the Courier Index] in Marianna, Arkansas, in between [my] junior and senior year. I got to write obits [obituaries] and I got to take wedding announcements. And, occasionally, I'd get to write a little, short news story of some kind or other. The year after I got out of-or when we graduated from college, Roy Ockert helped me get a job at the Paragould newspaper-the Paragould Daily Press-and I worked there for two years and learned a lot. Learned a whole lot. There were some people there who, I'm sure, were just astounded at what I did not know.

CS: What kinds of stories did you cover?

AA: Well, for a while I covered city hall, so I covered the city council. They were always squabbling about one thing or another. I covered the planning commission and the city planning office and the city clerk's office. And I'd pick up police reports and I'd do this, that and the other. Oh, I had to write the obits, which I complained about mightily. I thought it was quite sexist that I had to write the obits just because I was the youngest person on the staff. I just thought it was awful.

CS: [Laughs] Well, this is interesting, Amanda. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I am realizing that at that time there weren't a lot of women in newsrooms then, and yet neither one of us ever worked on a women's desk.

AA: No.

CS: Neither one of us had to do society writing or food or anything like that. I mean, we might've had to do a thing or two, but . . .

AA: I don't think we were the type. [Laughs]

CS: I guess! But that's very unusual, really, for people our age.

AA: Well, it was starting to change. I think we arrived right at the cusp of that because some of my friends at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution-I've talked to them about what the newsroom was like there in the early 1970s. And in the early 1970s there were about two women in the entire newsroom, and it was largely white and just two or three women. But that really changed within a five- to ten-year period.

CS: Yes.

AA: But very early on, there were not many women there, and the ones who were had to be pretty tough.

CS: How would you-just talk a little about the editor or the publisher of the Paragould paper. It sounded like they let you just jump right in. It sounded like they weren't worried about-"Gee, can we assign a young woman the job of covering city council?" Were they mentors or . . . ?

AA: Fred Wulfe Kueler, who was the publisher, was really a very kind and helpful man. He put up with a lot of my inexperience and nonsense and learning curve, and was always willing to help me if I didn't know what to do. He was very willing to help me. There was another reporter-there were really just two of us. The other reporter had worked there for years. I mean, years and years. He was a reporter and a photographer. Very professional, and I'm sure he thought I was just the biggest idiot in the world. But he took time. He talked to me about, "This is what you need to do. These are some questions you need to ask." He showed me how to use all the cameras, because you had to take all your own photos. I was so

green. Oh, it's just embarrassing now to think about it. But he was very, very helpful. So they didn't just kind of throw me out there, you know, to sink or swim. They were very good about trying to help me along, and that was-I didn't appreciate it until later when I was more experienced and people would come to me and need help. It takes an enormous amount of time to really sit down and help someone day to day to day to day, and they did. You don't really understand when you're that age how much of their time it's taking when they could be getting their work done.

CS: And what an investment they're making in you.

AA: Yes, which I would . . .

CS: A few years later, you left them. [Laughter]

AA: I was going to say, which I repaid in two years [laughs] by leaving town.

CS: How did that happen? Did you get a phone call? Did you sit down and say, "I need to go on to greener pastures"?

AA: Well, I felt after two years that I had learned quite a bit, and I also felt maybe I wasn't going to learn a whole lot more without going to another newspaper-a bigger newspaper. Also, there was the factor of salary, which was-at the Paragould newspaper I was making \$80 a week. This was 1971 and 1972, and I was making \$80 a week. And I got an additional \$20 for sponsoring the high school newspaper and teaching an hour a day. So during my day-I would end my day at the newspaper and I'd go from [about] 3:00 [p.m.] to 4:00 [p.m.], or maybe it was 2:00 to 3:00, and teach this class of seniors at Paragould High School. I hated that job.

CS: [Laughs]

AA: I hated it-hated it. But it was [laughs] \$20 a week, and I needed it. [Laughter] So at the end of the first year, I did not want to sign up and do it again, but it was \$20 a week and I had to. So with the two of the salaries together, I was making \$100 a week, which works out to \$5,200 a year.

CS: That was big bucks back then, Amanda.

AA: I know. It was big bucks back then. So I sent my résumé in to the Arkansas Democrat, and I got a call from Jerry McConnell to come in for an interview. I went in for an interview, and [laughs] I don't know if I should tell this or not.

CS: Oh, boy! That depends. If it's about Jerry, go ahead. If it has anything to do with me, don't. [Laughter]

AA: Well, back in that era we wore short skirts. You recall this. We did wear short skirts.

CS: Oh, yes.

AA: I remember the ensemble I wore for the job interview, and it's something I would never wear today. It was a kind of bright orange dress that was rather short and somewhat tight. But, you know, at the time I thought it was quite stylish.

[Laughter] And I remember you telling me later that someone looked up and said something to the effect of, "Well, she's gonna get a job!" [Laughter]

CS: That must've been after we became friends. [Laughter]

AA: Jerry was kind of noted for, you know, liking to look at ladies. I think that's all he ever did was look, but he did like to look. So, anyway, Jerry and I had an

interview, which I think I flubbed miserably, and I had some pretty sad clips [reference to newspaper clippings of published articles written by AA] to offer to him. And I don't know why he took a chance on me. I really don't.

CS: I think it's that orange dress.

AA: It might have been. [Laughter] But, anyway, he offered me a job, and I think the job offer was either \$115 or \$120 a week. And I thought, "Oh, a raise! I'm rich!"

CS: Amanda, I think you might have been hired making more than I was making. Where is Jerry? [Laughs]

AA: This is what happens at newspapers. You get hired in at a certain salary and then you get your raises. Meanwhile, the cost of living goes up and the cost of hiring someone goes up. So two years later someone who gets hired is making more than you're making right now. Newspapers have never figured out a way to make that work. It's the same at the . . .

CS: You're right. It's universal, no matter how big the newspaper, there is always that gap.

AA: It's the same at the [Atlanta] Journal-Constitution right now. It seems to be getting worse because at the Journal right now, a big raise at the journal is three percent. That's a big raise. And most people-if you're doing a really great job, you can expect a percent and a half. So, you know . . .

CS: Yes. Well, we'll get into the state of newspapers in a bit. How long did it take him to call you back and offer you the job?

AA: He offered me the job on the spot.

CS: On the spot.

AA: And I accepted on the spot, and went back to Paragould and gave notice. And I think I had moved and started to work from the time he offered me the job to the time I had reported for work, and I think it may have been three weeks. Two and a half or three weeks.

CS: Did you know anyone in the newsroom other than me?

AA: I did not. You were the only person I knew there. I came to work as a reporter. My desk-you may not remember this so much about the Democrat-I remember it because I had to deal with it. We had these old wooden desks that had drawers that wouldn't close or wouldn't open-you know, they'd get stuck. You couldn't slam them shut and you couldn't pull them open. We had these old manual typewriters, and they were not-and we had these chairs that were just decrepit. If [you] leaned back in them, you would fall over and [laughs] hit your head on the floor.

CS: I remember that.

AA: The equipment was just so sad. I had a desk that butted up against Nancy Miller and Richard Quiggle. They were a great combination. They were very funny. They kept me laughing all the time, and they were so welcoming. After I had been there about a month, they assigned me to cover North Little Rock, and that was Richard Quiggle's beat; he was moving to courts, I think. So he took me around and showed me all the ropes and introduced me to [North Little Rock Mayor William L.] Casey Laman, and introduced me to all the players over there. Then he was there to kind of help me if I needed help.

CS: Who were a couple of the big characters when you first got there? The police reporter-do you remember who the police reporter was?

AA: Bob Sallee.

[Tape Stopped]

AA: All right. So, what were we talking about?

CS: Bob Sallee.

AA: Oh, Bob Sallee.

CS: Tell me about him. I remember he always had fascinating pictures.

AA: He did have fascinating pictures. He was willing to pull them out and show them to you. You only had to ask, and he would come back with pictures from crime scenes and from various and assorted things he had covered. And I think, in some ways, you know, looking back on it at the time, I just thought, "Oh, he's just fun." But looking back, I think maybe it was his way of kind of processing some of the stuff he saw because you see some really ugly things on a police beat. He had been on the beat for a long, long time.

CS: Yes, I think you're right, Amanda, about that.

AA: When you're twenty-five years old you don't have enough sense to realize that, and as you get older and ever so mature, then you start to look back on people you knew then, and you understand more about them than you did at the time you knew them. So there was Bob Sallee. As far as characters, Si Dunn-he was kind of a character. Do you remember Si Dunn?

CS: I had forgotten until you just mentioned that name.

AA: He was one of the most precise individuals I've ever know. In fact, I wrote part of a novel once, and he was one of the characters in the novel-fully disguised, of course. I learned a lot from Si, but Si drove me crazy because he was so precise. One of the things I remember about him is he smoked a pipe, and I would come in-and I was wire editor, so I'd get there about-this was when I was wire editor, after I had quit being a reporter. I'd get there at about 2:00 in the morning, and I would have peace and quiet until about 4:00 when he arrived-3:30 or 4:00. And the first thing he would do is take off his coat, and he'd start tamping on his pipe. And he'd tamp on it and he'd tamp on it and then he'd get his lighter out and he'd get it lit, and he'd start puffing and puffing and puffing, and this blue cloud of smoke would just envelope me. [Laughs] Then he'd start shuffling papers around because they always had to be so precise. He was a character.

CS: Why did you leave reporting?

AA: Well, I really enjoyed reporting, and I don't think I did it long enough. I'm really sorry that I didn't do it longer. Really, the reason I left reporting is I had gotten involved with a staff member and later married him-Bill Husted. He wanted me to have more regular hours, because when I was covering city hall, I was out a lot at night. I was out for city council meetings and planning commission meetings and public hearings and this, that, and the other. Sometimes I was getting home at midnight. Then you had to get up the next morning and go write the story, so you never got enough sleep. You'd get home at midnight and you'd have to be back at the office at 5:00 to write the story, and somehow there was never time to take the comp time. So he kept trying to persuade me to get on the copy desk so I would

have regular hours. Well, you know, regular is kind of [laughs]-I don't know that they were really all that regular, but they were mostly daytime, where we would arrive at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, and sometimes we'd be off by 11:00 or 12:00 in the day, which was really pretty nice. You had the whole day left to do whatever you wanted to do.

CS: You and I used to exercise back then.

AA: Oh, yes, we did. We did that for a while.

CS: [Laughs] We took care of ourselves back then.

AA: During that period I had a swimming pool in my back yard-this little tract house we bought that had a very nice swimming pool in the back yard because a pool contractor used to live there. So I would go home and get some lunch and put a float in the pool, and lie down on the float and take a nap. Most every afternoon I would do that if I wasn't cleaning the pool or mowing the grass or doing something else. [Laughs] But that was very nice. I remember those times and think, "Wow! That was just kind of the life of Reilly."

CS: Well, we're going to get back to the Democrat in a little bit, because you were there after I had left and during some of its more tumultuous days, I think, so I want to hear a lot about that. But before we come back to that, talk about what you've been doing since.

AA: Okay. Well, I was at the Democrat from 1973 to 1980. And in 1980 Bill took a job at Bear Creek Corporation in Medford, Oregon. We moved in July of 1980, and when we left Little Rock there had been just a scorcher of a heat wave. It had been over 100 degrees for about thirty straight days. It was just unbelievable. We

left Little Rock at 9:00 a.m. in July. I think it was July 6, and I think it was already over ninety degrees, and we just headed north. [Laughs] We just started driving north as fast as we could. [Laughter] So when we got out there, my plan had been-well, there were a couple of plans that were under discussion. One of the plans was Bill was making this phenomenal salary. You know, we thought it was phenomenal at the time, and it was quite a raise, because I think his top salary at the Democrat before we left was about \$17,000 or \$18,000 a year, and he left with the title of assistant managing editor. [Laughs] But Bear Creek Corporation offered him the amazing sum of \$28,000 a year. [Laughs]

CS: Oh, my!

AA: Which we thought was quite a raise. And after he got out there, his income rose pretty steadily because it was an advertising business, and if you excel in advertising, then you do well. So he didn't stay at that for long. But we had these visions of great wealth and talked about, "Well, maybe I didn't have to work. Maybe I didn't have to work. Maybe I could stay home and write. Maybe we'd have children. Maybe we'd do this. Maybe we'd do that." Anyway, the reality is that while he had been out there applying for this job-they had flown me out there, too, and I just fell in love with Oregon. I loved it. But while I was there, I just dropped in to the newspaper, the Medford Mail Tribune, and I said, "You know, my husband is here interviewing for a job. I may or may not be moving here, and I just thought I'd come in and say hello. I'll be sending you a résumé, but I have no idea if we're going to move here." They were very discouraging, and they said, "Well, we don't have many openings. This is a small newspaper, and

people who get a job here want to stay. Not many people move out of the valley because it's so beautiful, but you may be able to get some part-time work. Go on and send your résumé." So I did. So, meanwhile, Bill got hired and we moved on out there. The week we arrived-the moving van hadn't even gotten there yet, and we were sleeping on lawn chairs. [Laughs] I mean, we didn't have enough sense even to go to a hotel. We were thirty years old. We didn't have enough sense even to go to a hotel room and sleep there.

CS: [Laughs] We just didn't do hotels.

AA: Because Bear Creek would have paid for it.

CS: Well, yes, but you didn't know that. That wasn't the mind-set. You were still living on an Arkansas Democrat mind-set.

AA: Well, we didn't even ask [if] they would put us up in a hotel room. So we had rented this townhouse and we were sleeping on lawn chairs at night. The moving van hadn't arrived, and they called me up from Medford and said, "Come on in and bring your clips. We've got an opening." So I guess it was fate. Within a week I was working at the Medford Mail Tribune.

CS: Because it never would have occurred to you to ask for a few weeks off to enjoy life.

AA: Oh, no. No. I think we had enough time to unload the moving van and get things semi-arranged and then I went to work that Monday. I worked there as a reporter and a city editor. It was a great staff, and I learned a lot there, too. I learned a lot about what I didn't know and what I did know, and made some really good friends there, one of whom [laughs] I was recently in touch with-he saw a story I had

written about Indiana. He's living in Indiana now. He sent me a note. His name is Birch Storm. He has this unlikely name, Birch Storm. We had a nice little correspondence and caught up with each other. He's retired, and just a very nice man. He was a mentor there. Lots of people were mentors there. I really loved that experience because it was six years of living in a semi-paradise.

CS: So you were there for six years?

AA: Yes, from 1980 to 1986. And the Bear Creek went through a bout-the longtime owner of it sold to the R. J. Reynolds Company, and the new management that came in with R. J. Reynolds was difficult at best. Bill started saying, "You know, I think we need to move." So we started looking around, and we thought, "Well, we should move back to the South," because both sets of parents were getting older. So I applied at the Memphis [Tennessee] Commercial Appeal and he applied at an ad agency in Memphis. We both got jobs and moved. Of all the newspaper jobs I've had in my life, that was the most difficult one-the one I liked the least, and that was because I went from a job in Medford, where I was very autonomous-very independent, very autonomous-making decisions, doing what needed to be done-to being a member of the copy desk in kind of a rigid environment where you didn't get to make any decisions at all. And I went from working days and having weekends off to working nights and having Sunday and Monday off. And it was just-I kind of hated Memphis, too. I thought I would love it, and I hated it. So it was just an all around bad thing, and I decided that as soon as I could I would stick it out for a year. But after a year, I was out of there.

[Laughs]

CS: Good for you. Okay, we're going to change tapes.

AA: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Note: As the tape was turned over from Side 1 to Side 2 before it was at the end, it is necessary to fast-forward from the beginning of Side 2 to get to the next portion of the interview.]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

CS: So you didn't like Memphis-that is clear-either as a place to live or a place to work, it sounds like. How long were you there?

AA: We were there for about a year and a half, but I was actively sending out résumés and trying to find another job for probably six or eight months of that year and a half. I kept hoping things would get better, and I really, truly liked the people that I worked with on the copy desk. They were very talented people and very nice, but I felt I was not at all involved in-I didn't feel part of the newsroom. I just felt I was part of the copy desk, and it just was not very satisfying. It was kind of like walking into an insurance office every day. There was not the excitement that we had at the Democrat, or that I've had at other newspapers. When a big story's happening, you know, they're shouting and running around, and I just never saw that there.

CS: So you applied at . . . ?

AA: Well, actually, I didn't apply at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

CS: Oh!

AA: We were trying to go back out West. We wanted to go back. I applied at Seattle [Washington] and San Francisco [California] and San Diego [California]. We just decided that we really loved the Northwest and the West, and we'd try. And we didn't want to live in Chicago [Illinois]. It's too cold. We didn't want to live in New York. So I had sent some résumés there and had gotten a call back from Seattle and talked to someone, and was kind of hoping something would happen with that. Al May-do you remember Al May?

CS: Oh, I do. Yes.

AA: And his wife, Jan, came through town to visit with us. Al had taken a job at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution as their primary Southeast political reporter. He and Jan came through and spent the night with us, and he was really talking up the Journal. Well, actually, before that, Ralph Patrick and his wife, Woodie, had come through. I thought they were just there for a visit. It never even occurred to me that he was there sounding us out-never occurred to me. I'm so dense sometimes. Anyway, they left town. We had a really nice visit with them. They left town, and Al and his wife came through about two weeks later. And Al said, "Well, you know Ralph was sounding you out about a job," and I said, "No!" [Laughs] And he said, "Yes, he's trying to"-this was 1988, and they were trying to beef up the staff for the [National] Democratic Convention that was held in Atlanta that year.

CS: Yes.

AA: So after that, Ralph gave me a call, and he said, "Well, what would you think about coming and interviewing and just seeing what you think?" And I said, "Sure." So we drove to Atlanta. I had never thought about working in Atlanta. It just never occurred to me that I'd want to work in Atlanta. I love Atlanta. I love the Constitution, so it really worked out. So I went and took the test-did horribly on the test-partly because Ralph had taken us out the night before and I'd had a martini, and I didn't sleep all night long. [Laughter] Between the martini and worrying about taking the test and having to do all the interviews and all that stuff, I tossed and turned all night long. Anyway, he overlooked [laughter] how poorly I must have done and offered me a job. I went to work there about two months before the Democratic Convention-maybe three months. I've really loved working there. It's very much like the Democrat in that there are many opportunities. I was hired to work on the copy desk there. It was a daytime job, though. I would not have signed on for a nighttime one. Of course, after I got there, then it became four weeks days, four weeks nights. [Laughter] And then it became, "Well, you know, we really need you on nights." So for about two and a half years there I was mostly working nights-or maybe two years. Then another opportunity came open, and I was able to move back to days and do something different. And that's the way it's been there throughout my career. There have been lots of opportunities that have been offered to me.

CS: And now you're travel editor.

AA: Now I'm travel editor.

CS: And speaking of opportunities, you just got back from the trip I am dying to take!

AA: If anyone is reading this interview, and you're a young journalist, this is the job you should aspire to in journalism. [Laughs] It is the best job I have ever had. As travel editor, I get to do a little bit of traveling-not as much as I would like, but any travel that is paid for by your company is pretty good travel. I get to do a couple of good trips a year and then some small trips around the Southeast. In exchange for that, I get to put out a twelve-page section every week with no help [laughter], so the hours are-it's not like I have a cushy job.

CS: You're not going to get a lot of sympathy from me on this one.

AA: [Laughs]

CS: She has talked to me about an hour about her trip to the Galapagos [Islands].

AA: Well, it's not a cushy job in that I don't work very hard. I work very, very hard. But the travel benefit is so wonderful, and I just like the subject a lot. Some of the editors and writers that I've met who do travel writing are really delightful people, and it's just been a wonderful opportunity for me. I've been doing it for five years now, and I hope that I can continue to do it until I retire. And that's a few years from now.

CS: She's on record in a very vague kind of way. Okay, we won't hold you to a certain year, since you refuse to give it to us.

AA: Well, it's three to five years.

CS: Three to five! She did do pretty good back in Oregon. Okay, Amanda. Back to the Arkansas Democrat.

AA: Yes.

CS: Now, talk about the years after I left [laughs] in the sense that there was a lot going on. Talk about that a little bit-about the change and . . .

AA: Well, you left in 1975?

CS: 1976. 1975. You're right. End of 1975.

AA: Okay. I'm trying to remember. I don't remember when Jerry McConnell left. I believe he left in about 1976-maybe 1977. When Jerry left, there was a change in the newsroom because we had a new managing editor come in, who was John Robert Starr. John and Jerry are . . .

CS: I'm sorry to interrupt, but where was Bob McCord at this point? Was Bob McCord at the Democrat still?

AA: Yes, he was still at the Democrat.

CS: Okay.

AA: He was still editor when John Robert came in.

CS: Okay.

AA: Eventually, Bob McCord left, and John Robert Starr, I guess, took on both titles. But when he came in, there was quite an abrupt change in the culture of the newsroom because Jerry and John Robert were very different personalities. Jerry is more low-key and I guess you could say probably more reasonable in his expectations. John Robert has a sort of driving personality. Well, I can tell you this story about him. This will kind of encapsulate his personality. We had a terrible snow predicted. Little Rock does not have snow all that often, but we had a snowstorm predicted. John Robert gave a little speech to the newsroom about how important it was for all of us to be at work no matter what the inclement

conditions, and, in fact, it was more important for us to be there because there was news to cover. And then he ended his little speech by saying, "I don't want you to call me and tell me you cannot get in to work. I don't want to hear that. It's no excuse. I want you on the road coming to work. If you call me, you better just be calling to tell me you're in a ditch and you need a wrecker to get you out."

[Laughs]

CS: Well! A compassionate man. [Laughs]

AA: Yes, a compassionate man. I have great admiration for him as a newspaperman. I think he was really a wonderful, wonderful newspaperman. He had a really good sense of what made news. He knew how to get his questions answered. He was very determined with-he wouldn't let something go. If he got onto an issue or a cause, he was very determined to see it to the end. I really admired a lot of his qualities as a newspaperman. He was quite difficult to work for because-he had a cot in his office, and he slept there a lot of nights because he was working until midnight or 1:00, and he thought all of the managers who worked for him should be as dedicated. A lot of us did try to keep up that pace. During the time that I worked there, we went to a twenty-four-hour operation. We went from being-did you not know this? [Laughs]

CS: I didn't.

AA: We went from being an evening newspaper to competing in mornings with the Gazette, and for a while-eventually, it became just a morning newspaper. But for a while, we were a twenty-four-hour operation. We had editions we were updating into the evening, and early, early in the morning. Then we would start

the afternoon cycle. It was a continual operation. Well, during that time I was over the copy desk. It was very, very difficult. There were days that were like seventeen-hour days, where I would get there at 5:00 in the morning and not be able to leave until well after midnight. I don't function well on five hours of sleep. I just don't do it. This was not a rarity; it was pretty regular. So one evening after a marathon session where-Bill was at that time-I think he was already an assistant managing editor. He may have been city editor. One of the two. Anyway, he had gotten in at 5:00 in the morning, and I had gotten in at 5:00 in the morning, and we were both still there at about 2:00 a.m. I mean, nearly a twenty-four-hour shift. We left work and we met at an all-night diner that was near our house that mainly catered to bowling teams, as near as I could tell.

[Laughter] You'd drive by there and you'd see people in bowling shirts at all hours of the night. So we met there. This place was called Jo Jo's. We met there, and we looked at each other and said, "This has got to end. We can't do this."

And that's when we started looking around for other jobs. So that was about late 1979. We found jobs, and went in to tell John Robert, and he was not happy. He asked us to leave right then.

CS: Oh, that's too bad, after both of you had given so much to the paper and, sounds like, to him, too.

AA: Well, I think he saw it as a sign of disloyalty, and I can see his point of view. I can see his point of view. But we had both at various times tried to talk to him about the hours, and he just didn't quite get it because the newspaper business was really his life-his entire life. He loved it. He breathed it. And I was only thirty

years old at that time, but I had already come to the conclusion that even though I loved my job, I didn't want it to be a twenty-four-hour job. And if I have one regret about working at the Democrat, it's that I did let it become all-consuming for probably three years of my life, where I was working on Saturdays-I would come in on Sundays. A twelve-hour day was a short day, and that's just too much. It's not a life.

CS: Weren't there also some issues with some of the people who had been there for-again, I wasn't there, and I try to blur out unpleasant things-try to erase them forever-but I will revisit this one. But wasn't he-for instance, Bob McCord-I seem to remember that there were just a lot of stories that he treated Bob badly or . . .

AA: Well, I don't know if Bob-well, I guess Bob would say that to a degree, because he did say that in an interview. [Laughs]

CS: I didn't see that interview, for the record.

AA: They had entirely different styles, and I think Bob McCord respected John Robert Starr as a newsman and as a motivator of people, because he was a pretty good motivator of people until you just got so tired you couldn't do it anymore. I mean, he motivated me for a long time. I think he respected his abilities in that area. I don't think they saw eye to eye on how to get the best work out of people and how to get the best work in the Democrat, and how to use the space they had. I think they had some disagreements in that area, and probably some friction working together, but I didn't see a lot of that.

CS: Yes.

AA: I was personally very sad when Bob McCord left. I really liked and respected him a lot, and he was one of my mentors there in a very kind of hands-off way. He's not someone that I went to with questions and concerns because he really didn't have time to deal with that on a staff level. But I felt he set the tone for the newsroom.

CS: I was just going to say-when I was there, I felt very much the same way you're describing-not so much like there was huge personal connection, but you felt a real sense that here was a person who was taking good care of us-good care of the enterprise-good care of the journalistic integrity, and he was so honored and revered . . .

AA: Yes.

CS: . . . everywhere by anyone who had ever worked with him, and certainly at that paper. So he wasn't someone who I ever was close to in the sense of sitting down and just having long conversations, but I knew that he was helping us all do our jobs.

AA: Yes. Exactly. And I think he ran a lot of interference with Walter Hussman [Jr.] on things that Walter wanted to do that Bob didn't feel were right for the newspaper. I think once Bob left, John Robert-well, John Robert was just a more flamboyant personality. He was willing to try things that were a little outrageous sometimes. I remember being embarrassed-and this shows you the difference in our personalities. I remember being embarrassed by this. He's very proud of it. There was a picture of him that was on the cover of the Arkansas Times. I don't know if you ever saw this, but he was sitting atop a newspaper stand, and he was

kind of looking like a Hell's Angel ready for action, and he had this long knife in his mouth.

CS: I have seen this picture.

AA: And I was so appalled by this, but he was quite proud of it. And I can see it both ways, you know, because he was in a newspaper war. He was trying to call attention to the Democrat. He was doing anything he could to make people notice us, because at that point in time, the Gazette was way, way, way ahead in circulation-had more resources-had more money-had everything going for it, and it really baffles me. They had to work really hard to lose that newspaper war, and I think they did work very hard to lose it. And that's a shame for them. They had every opportunity to just send us back to the smaller newspapers, and they didn't.

CS: So, back to a little happier time. [Laughs]

AA: Yes.

CS: What was your favorite moment there?

AA: You know, I think back on that and I laugh out loud at some stuff. Every once in a while, I'll think of these things. You know, I was just such a wide-eyed innocent when I came there. Do you remember Bill Terry?

CS: Yes.

AA: I remember him . . .

CS: His family owned a dairy, I think?

AA: He was a wire editor at one time, or I guess he was wire editor-or maybe he was just . . .

CS: He was wire editor at one time. Yes.

AA: When I came to work there-I was just this wide-eyed reporter from Wynne [note: AA pronounced it like "Winnie"], Arkansas, and I hadn't been there I don't think two weeks. I hadn't really picked up that the Democrat had a lot of characters, because I hadn't been there long enough to really see all the nuts walking around amongst us acting semi-normal. Bill Terry was over there, and something set him off. I think it might have been Si Dunn, because he and Si used to not get along really well. Something set him off, and when he was on a tear, he could be quite . . .

CS: Yes! [Laughs]

AA: Yes. And the thing I remember is him just screaming like he'd been shot, and I can't even remember [laughs] what it was, but I looked over there and he picked up his typewriter and just slammed it to the floor. [Laughs] And I thought, "Oh, my Lord! What have I gotten myself into here?"

CS: [Laughs]

AA: So, you know, there were so many characters. I remember Leslie Newell coming in. Were you there when we got thirteen inches of rain and it flooded like crazy?

CS: No. No, I don't think so.

AA: Well, I had already come in to work, and it was raining like heck [laughs] when I came in, because I had to be there at 3:00 [a.m.], and it was raining really hard. But it didn't occur to me it was going to be flooding. I mean, it just didn't occur to me. We'd never had one. It didn't occur to me. So I got in, and I was just doing my little job. Si Dunn comes in, and he said, "Boy, it's really raining out there. It's just pouring down." And neither one of us thought much about it. I guess he

got there about 4:00. And at about 5:30, the copy desk [staff] started coming in. And they were all just drenched-I mean, just drenched. They started straggling in, and Leslie Newell didn't get in on time, so about fifteen or twenty minutes after she should have been there or maybe thirty minutes, she came straggling in, and she was soaked to the bone. I mean, head to toe-wet! And I said, "Leslie, what happened to you?" And she said, "I had to swim out of my car!" [Laughter] I said, "What?" Because I didn't even know at that point that it was flooding everywhere. [Laughter] She said, "I had to swim out! I got to the bottom of-" Oh, what is that hill? I want to say Chestnut Hill. That's not right. I can't remember. She said, "I got to the bottom of the hill, and I drove into water up to my windows." And I said, "You're kidding! Are you all right?" And she said, "Oh, I got so"-P-O'd [pissed off]-that isn't exactly what she said. [Laughs] She said, "I drove into the water, and there was a woman who drove in right behind me in a convertible, and she was a blonde. And they came out to rescue her, and I had to swim for it!" [Laughter]

CS: Well, I hope somebody was out covering that story at some point.

AA: Oh, yes. Well, we finally caught on that there was a story happening there.

CS: You finally caught on that there was a problem then. Can you remember a story that the Democrat really beat the Gazette on when you were there?

AA: Oh, well, there was the story-and I cannot remember the guy's name. There was a convict from Arizona, or a man who had lived in Arizona who had been convicted in Arkansas. Do you remember this at all? Somehow, he had been tracked down. He had run away from a road gang and resettled in Arizona, and led an exemplary

life. I think he had children. He was married. Never been in trouble with the law since then. Well, somehow they tracked him down [about] thirty years later, and they were going to extradite him to Arkansas. [Editor's note: According to Gary Rice's Democrat interview, the escapee was Alvin Tyger. He escaped in the 1960s and was found in Arizona in 1974.] And he insisted on surrendering to the Arkansas Democrat. [Laughs] Why he chose us instead of the Gazette, I don't recall. Gary Rice and Bill Husted were involved in that story, and they went out to Arizona. It's all vague to me now, but it was a pretty big deal at the time.

CS: And those moments were always good moments, weren't they?

AA: Yes, when we could beat them on something, yes.

CS: Yes.

AA: Because they had so many more resources and more reporters.

CS: And just because they had a bigger circulation, everybody played their game.

AA: Yes. And they also had a more experienced staff. The Democrat—there was a huge turnover at the Democrat. You would come there and be trained for two or three or four or five years and then you'd be gone. So you were constantly having to train new people. Instead of kind of maturing the people you already had and making them better writers and better reporters, you were starting from scratch again in five years. And that's difficult to do. It's a lot easier to have a really great newspaper like the L.A. Times [Los Angeles, California], when you paid people well enough and give them opportunities and training and resources, and they want to stick around.

CS: It's that term, "destination newspaper," which has its pluses and minuses.

AA: Well, it does.

CS: But you're right; the big papers have the resource and the experience that people .

..

AA: Right, and the level of excellence that you can get when you're paying someone the same amount of money they might make as an attorney, for instance, which is unheard of in a smaller newspaper market. It just does not happen. I'm trying to think of other stories from that era, and I haven't quite-I can't come up with anything.

CS: Strangely enough, I do think that during Watergate, because the Democrat did have the Washington Post news service and the L.A. Times [news service], and those were the two papers that really were up on the top on that whole story and, strangely enough, I think the Democrat on those stories actually gave their readers good coverage and . . .

AA: Yes, because that was well before you could go online and read it online.

[Reference to reading the news on the Internet.]

CS: Right. Exactly.

AA: So you had to depend on the newspaper to provide the information that you were missing.

CS: Yes.

AA: One of the stories I remember being just astounded by when we worked there-in fact, every time we went on vacation, it seemed like something big happened. Something big always happened while we were on vacation. Well, while we were on vacation one year, Wilbur Mills went swimming in the tidal basin. [Laughs]

[Editor's note: On October 7, 1974, congressman Wilbur Mills and stripper Fanne Foxe were pulled over by Washington DC police. Foxe jumped into the Tidal Basin in an attempt to escape.]

CS: The tidal basin.

AA: And dancing with Fanne Foxe and her stage act.

CS: Yes. I still have the Fanne Foxe photo. I do! [Laughter]

AA: And it was just kind of mind-boggling to us, you know? We were on vacation and we come back, and we see this headline, and we're both-"What?" So that was a really fun story, I remember, from that time because it was . . .

CS: And it went on forever, because remember-I think it was his first trip back to Arkansas after that incident, he got off the private plane-he and his wife, poor thing-they were walking down the steps of the plane, and he has a cast on or something like that. I can't remember, but it was . . .

AA: She had a cast on.

CS: [Laughs] She had a cast on. I just remember that it was like, "Oh, that's an interesting way to do it!"

AA: Well, the Post was to explain why she wasn't with him. Remember that?

CS: [Laughs] I do, now.

AA: The cast was-she was at home with a broken ankle or leg or whatever.

CS: [Laughs] Right. That's why she wasn't . . .

AA: Yes, that's why she wasn't there. That's why he was out with Fanne all along.

CS: And I think we all actually got quite a few opportunities at that time because, as I remember-that went on for months, of course-that story. I think that there wasn't

a single person in that newsroom that didn't capitalize off that in some way, shape or form by free-lancing [laughs] certain bits of information. Like, there was a man on the street in Little Rock downtown or whatever. But everybody was-we were all getting calls. "Can you do this?" And I remember some of those amounts of money-again, we were making such little money that the bigger papers were paying us just to go interview people on the street [laughs] and they were giving us more money than we were making in a week.

AA: Oh, there was so much interest in that story in Washington [DC], you know, because he was supposedly a well respected member of the Ways and Means Committee. And, of course, nobody really-because he kept it so secret-nobody really knew he was just kind of a closet drunk. [Laughs]

CS: And by the way, it was never the Ways and Means Committee. Every time you saw it in the newspaper, it was the powerful Ways and Means Committee.

AA: The powerful chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. [Laughter]

CS: But the word "powerful" always appeared before the name. So favorites-how would you put the whole experience? How would you grade it? B plus, A minus, A plus?

AA: You know, it was one of the best work experiences of my life, and maybe that's partly because of the age we were when we were there. And we hadn't had much experience, so it was kind of our first exposure to a real newspaper. But it was such a great group of people, and we were all very much family, and probably too much into each other's business. But I felt like people cared about whether you succeeded or failed, and they weren't going to make you fail for their own

success. It's not as cut-throat as a lot of newsrooms are. We were all kind of in it together, and you genuinely were happy when someone did something to be proud of. You would go over and just hug them and congratulate them, and be so glad for them. I'd rate it pretty high in my experiences in life. Now, if I could go back and do it over again, I would change some things. One of the things I would change-and maybe this is why you can't go back and do things over in life-I would spend less time at work and more time working on projects of my own. If I could go back and do it over again, I would put in my ten hours and no more. My ten hours a day, I'm talking about. [Laughs] My fifty hours a week.

CS: Because ten hours is enough. [Laughs]

AA: Because ten hours was the minimum you could ever expect to work there.

CS: Yes. Right. [Laughter]

AA: I would've gone home and done some of my own projects at night. I would never have done something so ridiculous as work a twenty-three-hour day. That's just absurd. I look at it now and . . .

CS: You would've gone home and discovered Amanda just a little bit better.

AA: Well, I would've-who knows? I might be sitting here talking to you as writer Amanda Miller.

CS: True.

AA: But when you put in a twelve- or fifteen-hour day, you don't have a lot of energy to go home and do something at night. If I could change that, I would change that. Other than that, the people I met there, the experiences I had-I wouldn't change those for anything. And even John Robert-difficult as he was, he taught

me a lot of things. I don't regret having worked for him. I regret letting him bulldoze me, but I don't regret having had that experience, because I did learn a lot from him, and I wish that during that period of my life I had been a little more-strong enough to stand up to that strong personality, which I was not. I just kind of . . .

CS: There were many people far older than you were then who were not able to, either, apparently. Well, do you have anything else you want to say before . . . ?

AA: Yes, I do. [Laughs]

CS: Well, go!

AA: I want to talk about some of the people that really helped me at the Democrat in my career-some people I haven't talked about. One of them is Ralph Patrick, who . . .

CS: Papa Ralph.

AA: Papa Ralph, who was only ten years older than we were.

CS: That's amazing! [Laughs]

AA: He's exactly ten years older. When I came to work there at twenty-three and he was thirty-three, I thought he was so mature and so knowledgeable. And he was. He was very mature for his age. He knew a lot about the newspaper business. He was really a great mentor. We got off on a really bad foot, and to Ralph's credit, we turned that around. The really bad foot was Ralph was on vacation when Jerry hired me, so Ralph had never met me, and I just kind of showed up for work-this little twit [laughs] from "Winnie," Arkansas, and I think he . . .

CS: You were never a little twit. But go ahead.

AA: I think he may have had some misgivings about my qualifications-had I been him, I would have had major misgivings. But we became really good friends, and he became really, really helpful to me in learning to be a reporter and an editor, and learning how to treat people and learning how to maintain your integrity. I think he's really a very fine human being who has a very, very gruff exterior, but wonderful inside.

CS: Yes.

AA: The other two people are Jerry McConnell and Bob McCord. I've talked about them some, but not enough about Jerry. Jerry has been really a lifelong friend and mentor, and very steady and really a joy to know. I was very, very sad when he left the Democrat. We threw him a going-away party. And we called you, actually . . .

CS: I remember. [Laughter]

AA: . . . during the going-away party. After several drinks we called Carol [laughter] just so she could be part of the festivities.

CS: That was a great moment.

AA: But he and his wife, Jo, both have been very kind to me over the years.

CS: Hasn't she been like part of our whole family?

AA: Oh, absolutely.

CS: Absolutely.

AA: She was the newspaper mom.

CS: She might as well have been there every moment.

AA: Bless her heart. She has been a trooper because newspaper people are not easy people to know. You know they are not. Anyway, I want to say that. I don't know if there's anything else I need to say except that I think the Democrat in many ways prepared me to be happy in my work later in life. Not everybody is happy in their work later in life, so I'm very glad for that experience. And that's all I have to say, and the tape is running out.

CS: The tape is running out. I want to tell you how much this experience has been great for me. It's always good to see you. We haven't seen each other in too long.

AA: Way too long.

CS: And even with the Internet, we should do better, and so we must.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]