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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Ralph Baldwin
9 February 2007
Telephone Interview

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. I'm sitting here in my home in Greenwood, Arkansas, preparing to do a telephone interview with Ralph Baldwin. And you are at the office, Ralph, is that correct?

Ralph Baldwin: Yes.

JM: Yes, at the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi. Is that correct?

RB: Yes.

JM: All right. And the first thing I need to do, Ralph, is ask you if I have your permission to make this interview for the *Arkansas Democrat Project* being conducted for The [David and Barbara] Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas [at Fayetteville] and turn it over to the university.

RB: Sure.

JM: Okay. And so we will start out—as I recollect that you—you worked for both the *Democrat* and the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*. Is that right, Ralph?

RB: That's correct.

JM: Okay, that should be a—give us an interesting view. So let's just start out from the beginning, then. Where—where and when were you born, Ralph?

RB: Well, I was born August 31, 1945, in Madison, Indiana. My dad and mother, who were both in the Army, were traveling, and they stopped at a military base there, and I was born at a hospital in Madison, and then was only there for five days before they came to Little Rock, which was where my father's parents lived. And so I grew up in Little Rock.

JM: You grew up in Little Rock. Okay, what were your—what were your parents' names?

RB: Phill Blanks Baldwin was my father.

JM: Phill?

RB: Yes, P-H-I—and he spells it unusually—P-H-I-L-L.

JM: Okay.

RB: The middle name is Blanks—B-L-A-N-K-S.

JM: Okay.

RB: And then my mother's name was Elizabeth.

JM: And what was her maiden name?

RB: Scheirer—S-C-H-E-I-R-E-R.

JM: S-C-H-E-I-R-E-R?

RB: Yes.

JM: Oh, okay. Very good.

JM: Okay, Ralph, where did you go to school?

RB: I went to Hall High [School] in Little Rock and then went to the Arkansas State Teachers College [now the University of Central Arkansas] in—I started there in 1963.

JM: That's in Conway.

RB: Yes.

JM: Where did you go to elementary and junior high?

RB: Oh, I went to Forest Park Elementary.

JM: Okay.

RB: And Forest Heights Junior High.

JM: Okay, and then you went to State Teachers when?

RB: I started in 1963.

JM: Did you graduate there?

RB: Yes, I did, but I didn't graduate on time. I got married when I was a junior, and I dropped out at that point. And I ended up going back. Actually I was working at the *Democrat* when I finished up my degree requirements and graduated. I think I actually took my diploma in 1972.

JM: Okay. When did you get interested in journalism?

RB: You know, I was thinking about that the other night. I think I honestly got interested in it just reading the *Gazette* and *Democrat* every day when I was a kid. I loved particularly the sports stuff and looked at the sports sections avidly in both papers. And then when I was in high school, I got involved in doing the high

school newspaper—was a sports editor for the Hall High *War Whoop*. [Laughs]

JM: Hall High *War Whoop*, huh?

RB: Yes.

JM: Okay.

RB: And covered all sports, of course, for the high school. We had some really fine athletes then, so I really enjoyed calling—covering people like Paul [Becton], who went on to play [football] for Baylor [University] . . .

JM: Yes.

RB: And—and played briefly for the San Diego [California] Chargers, if I remember correctly—ended up tearing up his knee. Tommy Rowland, who was—went on to be a star player for the [University of Arkansas at Fayetteville] Razorbacks.

JM: Basketball.

RB: Yes, right. And there were other ones, and, you know, it was a great class I graduated from, and I really enjoyed that time and had a good newspaper sponsor, Fayrene Johnson. Fayrene Johnson.

JM: How do you spell the first name?

RB: I think it's F-A-Y-R-E-N-E. And no T in the Johnson.

JM: And is that a woman?

RB: Yes.

JM: Okay.

RB: And—oh, by the way, [United States Army General, retired] Wesley Clark was in our graduating class. [Laughs]

JM: Was he really?

RB: Yes.

JM: Was he a standout of any kind?

RB: You know, this is going to sound so “too easy,” but he struck me as just a very serious and very mature kid, you know. The rest of us, or most of the rest of us, including me, were just floundering around worrying about getting dates and getting our driver’s licenses and stuff. And he was a very down-to-earth, very serious and motivated young man and went on and, you know, went to West Point . . .

JM: Yes.

RB: As did Donnie Dietz. You may remember Dietz . . .

JM: Yes, I remember—I remember Donnie. I didn’t remember him going to West Point, though.

RB: Yes, Donnie got killed in [the] Vietnam [War].

JM: Did he really?

RB: Yes.

JM: I did not know that.

RB: And they lived just a couple of blocks from us on Edgewood Road when I was growing up and—and, you know, another great—there were a lot of great families there, and it was a fun time. I kind of cut my teeth then, getting interested in just writing and reporting. And, of course, in high school newspapers, as long as you don’t libel somebody, they let you pretty much have fun and do whatever you want. When I left there, I went up to Teachers, and I began hanging around in the newspaper office up there and asking if I could help when I was a freshman, and

they let me go cover some football games. And I believe that Bobby Tiner was the quarterback at Teachers then. Do you remember him?

JM: Oh, yes, I do. [Laughs]

RB: He was magnificent.

JM: A heck—a heck of a quarterback. Yes.

RB: He was a great athlete. I really enjoyed covering him, and Teachers had some good basketball teams back then, too. And so I kind of worked my way through at getting started writing, reporting, and learning how the newspaper gets put together. It was later on when Dean Duncan came aboard, and I think he was a—ended up being a big influence on me and a lot of kids that went to school there. There's a long list of people who went on from Dean's tutelage to be successes in the industry. Not just in newspapers, but—you know, Steve Barnes was in school there. Dean taught him—Steve's—I'm sure you know Steve. Bob Steel, who was for years news director of one of the TV stations there. And I think he's on KARN radio now. And does the morning show and has his own advertising agency and—or public relations agency. So Dean influenced a lot of people. I think one of the reasons that he was able to do that is that he was somebody that the kids respected because he had been in the industry. He wasn't—he wasn't a pure academic. He was somebody who had—he worked for *Louisville* [Kentucky] *Courier-Journal*. He had done—I believe he had worked at the *Gazette*, too.

JM: Yes, he had worked at the *Gazette*.

RB: And I can't remember all what Dean's resume was, but it was impressive. And

I—he related well to the kids. He wasn't a “rah-rah” guy, but he inspired you to do good work and to try to be precise in the way you worded things. He had a lot of respect for the language and taught the kids to be respectful of the language and to write clearly and concisely and get your facts correct. And his nephew, Andy Duncan, was in school up there at the same time I was, and we ended up being co-editors of the paper with a—with another guy who—actually it was a tri-
editorship. We ended up being editors of the paper.

JM: Yes.

RB: And that was a good time. I'll give you a quick example of how good Dean was with words. We were—State Teachers had played somebody—in fact, I don't think it was State Teachers anymore at that time. I think by the time I got back there and finished up all my requirements, the name of the school had changed to University of Central Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

RB: Or—no, wait a minute, I think it was State College of Arkansas. I think there was an intermediate step in there.

JM: Yes, I think you're right. I don't remember for sure, but I believe that's right.

Okay.

RB: It went from ASTC to State College of Arkansas and then finally UCA. I think my diploma actually says State College of Arkansas. But anyway, I remember one day we were struggling with a headline. Teachers had played somebody—I want to say Troy State [now Troy University], but—anyway, it was somebody that was supposed to beat us pretty bad. And we ended beating them. I can't

remember if Tiner was still quarterback then or if it was Johnny Beard or who, but somebody—we had a good quarterback. We ended up beating these guys, and they were furious. They thought they had—you know, they—they thought the clock had run too fast or something. They wanted one more shot at us or something. And the teams actually lined up in the middle of the field like they were going to fight. And the coaches intervened. There were never any blows struck. But anyway, I wrote a little story about it in *The Echo*. That was the name of the [college] paper. We were struggling with this headline. It was a pretty tight headline spec—couldn't get anything in there to convey the fact that Teachers had upset these guys, and they were furious and there was almost a fight. We're getting close to deadline, fiddling around with it, and Dean finally came over and said, "Let me work on it here for a minute." So he sat down, and it took him about ten seconds, and he wrote, "Upset by upset, Wave sees red." And the team's nickname was the Red Wave.

JM: [Laughs] That was a good—that was a good . . .

RB: So anyway, I remember thinking—you know, I was, like, nineteen or something. I thought, "Damn!" [Laughs]

JM: Well, Dean was—Dean was a good hand. Yes, I worked with him at the *Gazette* and, in fact, I believe that I met his nephew, Andy Duncan, at Hugh Patterson's funeral.

RB: Oh?

JM: He came—he came with Dean. I saw Dean there and—at Hugh's memorial service. He introduced me to Andy.

RB: Okay. Yes, Andy was a very, very smart young guy and really wrote well.

JM: Yes.

RB: I thought he was a—and he went on to be a technical or a scientific writer for, I think—I want to say [the University of] Oregon or Oregon State University or something. I probably got that wrong, but he was—he was always a really good writer.

JM: Yes, okay. And the name of the student newspaper was *The Echo*?

RB: Yes, E-C-H-O.

JM: Yes, okay. Okay, and so you were—you were working and going to school and helping out working with the school newspaper and later became one of the editors. At what point in time—? Well, if you want to go on with that, what you learned anymore or when did you go to work for a professional newspaper?

RB: Well, when I got my degree—Dean actually had a hand in this. He asked me, you know, “Do you want to—do you want to try to get a newspaper job?” And I said, “I would love to. This is what I’ve—what I think I need to do.” He knew somebody who was looking for a reporter—an entry-level reporter’s job, and you’ll be surprised at who it was: Ralph Patrick.

JM: Oh, okay.

RB: *North Little Rock Times*.

JM: Yes.

RB: So I went over there. I believe this was 1968. I hope I’ve—it’s 1968 or 1969. But anyway, I interviewed with Ralph and I got the job, and it was, you know, it was a very tiny, little newspaper—a weekly. And I think Patsy McKown was the

only other reporter there. Tom Riley was the—the publisher.

JM: I might add here that McKown is M-C-K-O-W-N.

RB: Right.

JM: That's come up several other times in these interviews. Okay.

RB: Yes, she was a Cracker Jack. She could do everything. She was—I don't know what's become of her, but she was a good hand.

JM: Yes.

RB: Anyway Ralph—Ralph hired me, and I think he—you know, he was another huge influence on my career, and a favorable one at that. He was a tough editor. And wanted things done right and was strict about it. And I remember—of course, back then everything was on paper. You had an old manual typewriter, and you'd type your stuff up and—and I remember sitting down at Ralph's desk while he would take my copy and read through it, and he didn't have to say anything because he made faces while he was [laughs]—he made faces while he was reading your story. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

RB: And so he—he didn't have to say anything. You knew whether it was thumbs up or thumbs down as he went through it. [Laughs] But he was a very good editor and a good guy. And as I recall, Ralph did a lot of freelance writing on his own—worked for the *Christian Science Monitor*, if I'm not mistaken, and was an excellent writer in his own right. So I worked there. It was—that was probably the most intense year of learning that I had. It was sort of like journalism boot camp. I covered city council. I covered municipal courts, crime, boards and

commissions, and, you know, one minute you're thinking that you're a pretty big deal because you're talking to [North Little Rock] Mayor [William F. "Casey"] Laman or something like that or maybe covering a Lions Club meeting where a gubernatorial candidate is speaking or something like that. And then an hour later, you're taking a picture of the lawn of the month. [Laughs]

JM: Yes. [Laughter]

RB: And you'd better get that shade right. [Laughs]

JM: Yes, yes.

RB: So anyway, that was a fun and demanding time. I had a young family started out. We'd had a child and ended up getting sidetracked from—temporarily from my journalism career because the Model Cities Program had opened up in—in North Little Rock. And they had a—they were going to have an office in city hall and they were looking for a public relations guy—an information officer. And, of course, I covered city hall, and so I'd met all those people. A guy named William Halfacre was going to be director of the program. And we got to be sort of friends and as I—you know, would run my traps over at the city hall and see what was going on over there. And he ended up offering me that job. Well, it doubled my pay. Doubled my salary from, I think, it was either—I was either making \$90 or \$100 a week at the *Times*. And they bumped me up to \$200. So, you know, you wave that kind of money in front of a guy's face . . . [Laughs]

JM: Yes, yes, especially when you're starting out.

RB: Yes. [Laughs] So anyway, I took it, and it ended up being a disaster, really. The program didn't last. They floundered around. I never knew exactly whose fault it

was, but I think that it pretty much fell in disfavor with Casey Laman right from the start. I don't think he was in favor with what they were trying to do and— anyway, the program lost its funding a year later. And lo and behold, there was Ralph Patrick to save my butt again. He—I can't remember whether I called him or he called me. But either way, he knew the program was not going to be funded. Of course, you know, it was a news story at the time. And he offered me a job as a general assignments reporter over at the *Democrat*.

JM: Yes, he had gone to the *Democrat* by then.

RB: Right.

JM: As the city editor, I think.

RB: Correct.

JM: Yes, okay.

RB: So anyway, I went over there and—Jerry, I think that was 1970.

JM: That sounds about right. I went over there in 1971, but I know Ralph was already there, and I think [Bob] McCord and Gene Foreman had brought him in.

RB: Right.

JM: Okay.

RB: Gene Foreman was the managing editor. Ralph was the city editor. And they plopped me down over there and made a general assignments reporter out of me, and it was a good time—fast-paced, good learning time. I would start out the morning with a stack of releases that Ralph had marked up, you know? He'd go through the mail like a machine and everything that he wanted to get something on, he'd write in a big—some kind of a big Magic Marker-type thing—he'd write

on there how many paragraphs he thought that thing was worth, and he would—he would plop down a stack of them on my desk and I would start the day rewriting news releases like that. In the afternoon I'd go out and cover whatever was going on, whether it was a jailbreak or whatever. You know, with general—general assignments, you do everything. And eventually I began working—I think it was Diane Gage—do you remember her?

JM: Yes, I do. [Laughs] Married—married John Woodruff, didn't she?

RB: Yes, yes. She was covering courthouses over there, and they—the county courthouse, and they needed some help over there, so they put me over there in the courthouse for a while, and I covered some trials and, you know, in charge of all the mundane stuff that you do when you cover the courthouse—from typing up all the divorce decrees and all the “for the record” stuff. I think both newspapers at that time tried to be a newspaper of record in that respect. But then there were some changes going on in sports at the *Democrat*. Jack Keady was getting toward the end of his career and they had brought in Fred Morrow.

JM: Yes.

RB: Jack was still sports editor, but I think—and I can't remember exactly how they phrased this, but I think Fred was the executive sports editor and Jack was sports editor or something like that.

JM: I think—I think that [laughs]—that what they did, they let Jack retain his title of sports editor, but they named Fred sports director.

RB: Okay, yes. That's exactly right.

JM: But Fred was in charge of the sports department. All Jack had to do from that

moment on was write his column.

RB: Right—write “This and Thats” and . . . [Laughs]

JM: Yes. Yes, right.

RB: Anyway, so I went over there to assist Fred. I ended up getting some assignments that were just incredible, and I think it ended up being a huge break for me because I got to cover the [Arkansas] Travelers [baseball team]. It may not sound like that much, you know, in retrospect. But what happened was I met and got to be friends with Jim Bailey.

JM: Yes

RB: He was covering, of course, for the *Gazette* as he did for years and years and years. And we got to be friends, and I got to go to St. Petersburg [Florida] two summers—two springs for spring training. I thought that was an incredible opportunity, particularly for a newspaper that was—you know, we were not flush with money or resources, but they felt like that was something that people wanted to read, and I was very fortunate to get to do that. And had some wonderful times—two springs getting to go down there and to interview big-league ball players and keep up with who the Travelers were going to bring—you know, break camp with. I got to spend a lot of time with Jim and learn, you know. He’s a walking encyclopedia of everything, really—not just sports. And I think that those—the opportunity to do that writing and get that exposure helped me. You know, I spent three years at the *Democrat* and then got an opportunity to go over to the *Gazette* and took it. That’s how that happened. But I didn’t want to pass this over. I was already at the *Houston* [Texas] *Post*—when the *Democrat* took

over the *Gazette*. I was already in Houston. I remember—you know, I had known sort of what was going on from—as best as I could keep up with it down there and occasionally talking to Bailey.

JM: Yes.

RB: But I remember just being stunned, like, that this had happened. That it was almost like something that you—if somebody had told you twenty years ago that this was going to happen or had told anybody that that was going to happen at the time that I was working at the *Democrat*, it would've been a huge joke.

JM: No one would've ever believed it, would they?

RB: Ever—ever believed it. It just wouldn't have happened. And so—and, you know, to realize that it happened—I clearly remember coming in at the *Democrat* sometimes early in the morning, and there would be people who were clipping—clipping the *Gazette* up. Clipping the *Gazette* up with scissors. So that they would get the tidbits of news that they needed to start work on. And sometimes rewrite the—just rewrite—what the *Gazette* had. And—and I'm sure—I think when you came in that stuff stopped. But that was kind of a shoestring—the shoestring-type operation that it was way back then. At least that was the impression that I had of it as a young reporter. And in the contrast, though, about being so far a distant second and nowhere near the resources or the manpower or the prestige or anything else. But there were some really incredibly talented people at the *Democrat* at that time. And I just was thinking back—just amazed at the talent that was there. I mean, in the little sports department alone—John Brummett was there.

JM: Yes.

RB: John Bloom.

JM: Yes.

RB: Rodney Lorenzen. I don't know if you remember Rodney or not.

JM: Oh, yes, I know Rodney well.

RB: I don't think—and I hope I'm not misspeaking here, but I don't think Rodney stayed in the business.

JM: No, he did not.

RB: Okay.

JM: He got out—he got out and bought a bookstore and is still running it. [Editor's Note: Lorenzen closed his store, Lorenzen & Co. Booksellers, in spring 2008]

RB: Up in the [Pulaski] Heights [neighborhood in Little Rock]?

JM: Yes, yes.

RB: Okay. All right. Now I remember.

JM: Yes.

RB: But anyway, Rodney is worth mentioning because when he—he was just a kid then. I mean, I don't even think Rodney was twenty. And he was a very good page designer. And, you know, smart as a whip. And John Bloom—you could see even though he was still a kid and so was Brummett—that they both had writing talent. You know, and on the news side we had Bill Husted, Arlin Fields and Bob Lancaster, who the other night I was—remember you told me his name, and I was having trouble recalling his name.

JM: Yes, yes.

RB: But we had—there were probably—oh, Martin Kirby.

JM: Yes.

RB: James Scudder.

JM: Right.

RB: Gosh, I can't—I mentioned Diane Gage.

JM: Yes.

RB: I—I know I'm going to leave out some people—inevitably you do.

JM: Oh, sure.

RB: And then on the copy desk, Paul Nielsen.

JM: Yes.

RB: He's at *The New York Times* now.

JM: Yes.

RB: And that's a funny story, by the way. Years ago we had an opportunity to hire Paul here. He was—I think he was at LSU [Louisiana State University] as a teacher, a professor. And he'd gotten burned out on that, and he was looking for a newspaper job. He came up here and did a couple of night try-outs. And obviously was, you know—and I told him here that—that I remembered him. That he was an excellent editor and had a great background and all that kind of stuff. And I'm not sure what was going on with Paul, but he was eager to get—get going. He wanted something to happen. And we—for whatever reason—just corporate crap, I guess—we dragged our feet for a couple of weeks, acting like we didn't know if we wanted to make him an offer. Finally got off the dime and decided that we would. So I called him up and he said, "Oh, thank you very

much, but I've received an offer from *The New York Times* and I'm going to take it."

JM: Yes. [Laughter] Yes, and he's still there. Yes.

RB: But I was thinking, "Gee!" You know? But I sure am glad we scratched our heads for two weeks.

JM: Yes. [Laughter] Yes. Anybody else you remember on the copy desk?

RB: Well, Larry Gordon was there. And I don't know where—I kind of lost track of him. Was he—did he go up to New York at one point and do . . . ?

JM: Yes, he went up—I think he went up to—and maybe worked at *Newsday* for a while and then worked at the *Philadelphia* [Pennsylvania] *Inquirer* for a while.

RB: Okay.

JM: But he's dead now.

RB: Oh, I didn't know.

JM: He died a few years ago.

RB: Oh, man.

JM: Yes, young.

RB: Well. And then, Jerry, here's one that you'll get a chuckle at. One of my big memories from the *Democrat* was one day there was a big commotion in the newsroom, and you remember where sports—where sports was? The building, I think, used to be a boys' club. [Editor's Note: the *Democrat* was in a former Young Men's Christian Association building] And sports—where sports was must have been a shower room because there was a drain under my desk.

[Laughs] But anyway, there was a big commotion in the newsroom, and we got

up and walked around there, and there was Bill Terry standing up, hollering at you from across the room. And you were hollering back at him. Do you remember this?

JM: Oh, yes.

RB: And I—I don't know what had started it because we were back over there on the other side then. Boy, Terry was mad at something you had told him to do or not to do or something. You could figure that much of it out. But anyway [laughs], Terry—Terry—you remember what he looked like? Kind of a disheveled-looking guy. Kind of a renegade type guy in the newsroom. He—at one point he was challenging you to a fight [laughs] right there in the newsroom. And I remember you handled it real well. You know, you managed to calm him down. And then I noticed later on in the day you had him in your office. [Laughs] That was an event. You don't see that stuff in modern newsrooms.

JM: No, that [laughs]—that might've been—might've been the time that he got mad about something. I don't even remember what it was now. And he picked up his typewriter and threw it in the trash can.

RB: Oh, okay. [Laughs] That must've been the noise that brought us around the corner.

JM: Yes, that's probably what it was. And I was going by—ran back to see what in the heck was going on.

RB: [Laughs] Yes.

JM: But I [laughs]—I don't remember what it was now.

RB: Yes. There was another time when Paul Nielsen got irritated that—about

something that Larry Gordon was doing, and got up and walked over and grabbed him by the back of the chair and spun him across the room. [Laughs] This was a chair that had wheels on it. [Laughs] So there was some funny stuff.

JM: Well, you know, at one point in time—and that might've been before you came, I'm not sure—that Paul went up to the composing room and had an argument with Fred Campbell. They were—I don't remember what it was all—whether to turn the page or not or whatever—but finally Paul just got so mad, and he was supposed to be putting out the paper—he just got so mad, he went out—he walked out and left it—went home. So he got—he got discharged over that. Foreman—Foreman discharged him. But Foreman said, “You know, he [Nielsen] was probably [justified]” He said he could understand why he'd get mad at Fred Campbell. [Laughs] But said, “You just couldn't go off and leave the paper without closing it down.” But at any rate—but, yes, Paul had a—Paul had a temper, but he was a good editor.

RB: Oh, yes, and he was—there wasn't any question about who was the boss. He was running that desk, wasn't he?

JM: Yes.

RB: Yes, that's funny.

JM: But at any rate, what kind of a newspaper was the *Democrat* at that time? What do you remember about it?

RB: Well, I think that the paper was struggling at that time, but that it had its strong points. I think that there were some very talented writers, as I've mentioned, on there. But we were—we were very thin, you know. It was a small paper. They

didn't have that much advertising. I felt like that even though the *Gazette*, you know, with Orville [Henry], particularly, covering the Hogs [Arkansas Razorbacks]—the huge following that the Razorbacks have had, that was a huge advantage for the *Gazette* to have. But at the same time, people loved the Razorbacks so much that they would—they wanted to read what was in our paper, too.

JM: Yes.

RB: The *Democrat*.

JM: Yes.

RB: So they would read everything that they could get their hands on. I think there was—there were some people that wanted to read the *Democrat* because it was another voice, and there was—even though we—the *Democrat* at that time was so much weaker, you know, there was a competition. I think that helped both papers. And, you know, I don't feel like that we at that time broke a lot of stories or had very many beats as far as where we beat the *Gazette* on stuff. But in certain ways, we had a niche because we had some real good writers who, when they would write a good feature story or a profile on somebody, it was well-done, well—you know, well-presented. And it was something that the *Gazette* didn't have. And so I—the nucleus for strength was there all along, I felt like. There were some talented people there. I mean, for instance, just in sports—I mean, the *Gazette* had so many good people over there. I can't remember—at the time when I first started, you were there.

JM: Yes.

RB: You, Bailey . . .

JM: Yes.

RB: . . . Orville.

JM: Yes.

RB: Who else? Wadie Moore.

JM: No. No, I'm not sure Wadie had come on yet then. It wouldn't have been long before he had come on, and I—and I can't remember who was there at that time, you know. And then, of course, they were—Robert Shaw was there for a while and Harry King and . . .

RB: Oh, yes. Okay. I forgot Harry was . . .

JM: And Bill Simmons and . . .

RB: Right. And then, of course—and Chuck—you know, Chuck Miller.

JM: Yes, Chuck Miller. Yes.

RB: And at some point Jerry Schaeffer came on. Jerry was a heck of a desk hand.

JM: Yes, Jerry was there, and at some point in time, and I can't remember when it was—Charlie Thornton was there. Who later went on to become the sports information director at [the University of] Alabama under Paul "Bear" Bryant.

RB: Okay.

JM: Yes. He was probably a little bit ahead of that time, but at any rate—so, yes . . .

RB: Right. And then—and then . . .

JM: And Lassiter came up—Jim Lassiter.

RB: Jim Lassiter.

JM: Yes.

RB: And then James was—James Thompson.

JM: James Thompson.

RB: Helped with the high school coverage and eventually became sort of an office manager for Orville. And I think later on after I left, I think James even for a short time was sports editor.

JM: That's true. That's correct, I think. But—well, let me ask you—at this particular time, just how would you have compared the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* sports departments—their sports sections and sports departments?

RB: I think the *Gazette* had a much stronger grasp on what was going on. They had their beats arranged. They knew who was going to cover what, and I think the *Democrat*, while they had some good writers—some good, young guys like John Bloom and Brummett and we covered the Travelers. I covered the Travelers. I think what they were hoping to do—*Democrat* was hoping to be some kind of alternative view of the Razorbacks. And they thought—they wanted Fred to do kind of offbeat stuff. But the *Gazette* was just a stronger, more well-organized sports section. That's something I was getting ready to say a few minutes ago. We—if guys like Bloom and Brummett and even myself and—and a couple of other ones had—if there had been room at the *Gazette*, these guys could've worked there. I mean, they were good enough to work there, especially as young, breaking-in guys. But there was no place for them. The *Gazette* was staffed, as I'm sure they—Orville and Bob Douglas thought that it was staffed adequately. And so there wasn't any place for these guys to go. It didn't mean that they weren't any good.

JM: That's true.

RB: And they were good. And, you know, as time proved out, they were very good. So, you know, it was almost like the *Democrat* was growing some stuff at that time in sports, whereas the *Gazette* was already there. I mean, you—I don't care who had Jim Bailey, you're going to win. You know, Jim Bailey, to me, was the—was a huge deal. A very unsung talent outside of the state of Arkansas. I don't think—you know, I don't know if Jim has a regional reputation or not, but he certainly deserved it.

JM: Should have.

RB: Yes. I mean, when I went down to Houston, I was kind of surprised that not very many people had heard of Jim or read him. But in the little bit that I've moved around, Jim—you know, Jim's better than 99 percent of the people who are making their living in this business as far as just being a pure writer and reporter, in my opinion.

JM: Yes. So when did you leave the *Democrat* and go to the *Gazette*?

RB: I left in 1973, and I worked at the *Gazette* from 1973 to 1979, and ended up covering—while I was at the *Gazette*, I covered AIC [Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference] sports and occasionally got to go with Orville's entourage when we—they would cover a Razorback game or—got to go down to Dallas a couple of times and cover the [Dallas] Cowboys [National Football League team] and toward the end, they needed some help on the desk. I ended up working on the desk. I started doing the layouts for the front page on a daily basis and it—at some point it was . . .

JM: You're talking about the sports page?

RB: Right. At some point I ended up—I think it might've been 1977—Orville named me sports news editor. And so basically I was in charge of getting the paper out every night. I really enjoyed being around those folks up there. It was a—it was a good group and strong, strong sports section. And, you know, as I mentioned with Bailey, being an anchor in so many areas. And Orville doing his thing and— and Kim Brazzell was there.

JM: Yes.

RB: Kim came in, and we had a lot of fun hanging around and Kim covered a bunch of different things for us, too.

JM: Yes.

RB: He did a good job.

JM: I'm sure that Wadie Moore was there. I know that he was there by then because he was doing the high schools. I had hired Wadie before I left to go back to the *Democrat*.

RB: Oh, did you? Okay.

JM: Yes, yes.

RB: Yes, Wadie was there and doing well. I think we had a real good team. Don't forget David Smith and Tom Strode. That was a great time. It was certainly a great time for me. And looking back, I think in a lot of ways that it was a—it was a great time for the *Gazette*, too.

JM: Yes.

RB: I mean, they were clearly an excellent paper and had been for years, but the seeds

had been sown when the *Democrat* switched over to go head-to-head. And, of course, I was unaware of a lot of the stuff that was going on in the background. I was just a reporter, but the tide was starting to turn, wasn't it?

JM: Yes. Well, it was about the time that they started to go [to] morning [publication], and I think that it was in 1979 that they went morning. I believe that was . . .

RB: Right. I think it was right before I left.

JM: Yes. I believe that—I believe that maybe in January that they went morning in their state edition—the one that went way out in the state. And a few months later, then they switched over the whole paper to morning edition. [Editor's Note: The *Democrat* began distributing a morning edition in January 1979. The paper switched entirely to a morning publication that October]

RB: Hmm.

JM: So—so you left the—before you go on to that, who else do you remember being at the *Gazette*, though, that you—do you remember anything about and specifically that . . . ?

RB: Well, other than in sports—of course, Carrick Patterson was there at that time.

JM: Yes.

RB: He was—he worked two or three different jobs while I was there—worked briefly as news editor and then moved on over and eventually, you know, was the editor of the paper. But—Bob Douglas, of course, who—you know, I had a tremendous amount of respect for. And one of my highlights in my memory was when I was getting ready to leave the *Democrat* and Bob met me over at some little restaurant—talked to me about—you know, made me a job offer. I remember

thinking, “Man, I’m sitting here with a journalism legend, you know, and he’s talking to me.” [Laughs] I remember thinking that was a big deal and . . .

JM: Yes.

RB: And he—he is a big deal. I mean, very well respected and—and deserved that respect, in my opinion. Bill Shelton was the city editor. Bill Rutherford was running the copy desk on news side. Let’s see, there’s—Max Brantley was there. Ernie Dumas was there. David Petty was over in features. Lamar James was a police reporter and a good friend. Do you know what’s happened to him?

JM: I’ve heard, but I have forgotten what—I think that—Lamar—I think I contacted—somebody contacted Lamar for me, trying to run down where somebody lived that he knew where they were. But—but I’m not sure where he is now.

RB: Yes. Well, I thought he did a great job on police, and I regret losing track of him. Let’s see . . .

JM: Who—who else—who all was in sports that you—? You’ve mentioned some of them. Let’s go back over while you were there, who all was in sports? You’ve mentioned Orville and Bailey and . . .

RB: James Thompson and Lassiter.

JM: Okay. Yes.

RB: Wadie, Kim Brazzell and myself. And, gosh, now I can’t remember this kid’s name, but he was—he came in, and he was our Oaklawn [Park Race Track in Hot Springs] writer for a little while and then he ended up having his own radio show and his own—oh, man, I can’t remember this guy’s name.

JM: Oh, what was that—what was that guy?

RB: Anyway . . .

JM: That's not the guy that Walter eventually hired away from the *Gazette*, is it? He got so popular. He was . . .

RB: Yes, that's him.

JM: He was doing the morning line and everything.

RB: Exactly.

JM: Yes.

RB: Yes.

JM: And I can't think of his name either, but I will. But Orville—Walter gave him a pretty big salary to leave the *Gazette* and go over to the *Democrat*.

RB: Yes, we had a funny story about him—was it Randy Moss?

JM: Yes. Yes, it was.

RB: Okay. Well, we had a funny story about Randy. I don't think Randy would mind me telling it now because he was such a—just a kid when this happened. But at the time, when he was at the *Gazette*, we had a dumbwaiter set up where the copy was taken down and put in the dumbwaiter and taken down to the composing room on the first floor. And that had replaced the pneumatic tubes and all that. And remember the belt system that was in there for a while? We had all that stuff. Well, anyway, we were right on deadline one night and frantic to get the last stories and so forth down. And whoever was running the desk hollered out to Randy, "Randy, go take these and put them on the elevator." So Randy grabbed them and took off and came back a little while later. And we thought everything was fine. We started getting calls from the composing room, you know? "Where

in the hell is that copy? We're going to be late!" You know, so we started scouring around and said, "Randy, where did you put that stuff?" And he said, "I put it in the elevator." So we all kind of looked at each other. "No, he didn't do that, did he?" So we run over there to the elevator that takes people up and down. [Laughs] Pushed the door—the button and opened it up and there was the stuff folded up neatly on the floor. [Laughter] But he—you know, he was just a boy. Still that was funny. We got a big laugh out of that, especially when he started making four times as much as we were. [Laughs]

JM: Yes. Yes, okay.

RB: Let me think of who else was there, Jerry.

JM: Oh, I guess that—Chuck was on the desk, I guess. Chuck Miller.

RB: Chuck was there and then at some point Jerry [Schaeffer] came.

JM: Yes.

RB: You know, you had left already by the time I came. You were . . .

JM: Yes, I was already at the *Democrat* before you went over to the *Gazette*.

RB: Right. And, you know, it seems like I'm forgetting somebody in sports, but I can't . . .

JM: Well, I can't think—Harry had already left and gone to the AP [Associated Press], hadn't he?

RB: Right. Yes, Harry was at AP.

JM: Yes. And Brenda Scisson wasn't there, was she?

RB: Yes, she was.

JM: Was she? Okay.

RB: Yes, Brenda Scisson was there.

JM: Brenda Scisson. Okay.

RB: She was tennis, right? She covered tennis.

JM: Right—good tennis player.

RB: Yes. And Mike . . .

JM: Okay, this is side two of this tape on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat*—interviewing—Jerry McConnell interviewing Ralph Baldwin. Ralph, you had—I think you had just talked about Brenda Scisson, and you started to say Mike somebody and—when that tape—side of the tape ended.

RB: Okay, I was going to mention Mike Trimble—another just really excellent reporter that we had on the news side at the *Gazette* when I was there. I don't know what's happened to Mike. But, you know, there was a core of reporters at that time at the *Gazette* in all departments really. I just felt like that we were on par with any paper in the country. I mean, it was amazing really. I felt—of course, you know, I felt privileged to work at the *Democrat*, too, when I was there. I mean, every place you go, you know, there are opportunities to learn and grow, and you're around people who are in the same industry as you who are trying to do the same things. Little Rock—I don't know what it was about—you know, what the situation was, but it seemed like it just spawned just a lot of really talented and good people at those papers. And it could have been that the competition thing was the factor in it.

JM: It could have been because they were—we had some pretty good newspaper people at both papers there for quite a while.

RB: I sure agree with that.

JM: Yes, yes. Okay, why—why did you decide to leave the *Gazette* in 1979, and where did you go, Ralph?

RB: Well, it's kind of a combination of personal and professional stuff, Jerry. I was in the process of getting a divorce. And kind of floundering around personally. The *Houston Post* had made some inquiries up at the *Gazette* about trying to find a layout person. And looking back on it, I'm not even sure—this is kind of funny, but it's—it's the way life goes sometimes. I'm not even sure that I was the one that they were wanting to talk to initially. But they ended up talking to me and asking me, you know, to send them some stuff. And then they asked me to come down and interview. They ended up offering me a job, and I felt like that maybe I needed to do something drastic because my family had—was gone.

JM: Yes.

RB: And even though things were going okay at the *Gazette*—I had been there for six years and I didn't think that there was going to be—you know, I wasn't in danger of becoming sports editor. [Laughs]

JM: Yes, right.

RB: So it was kind of a combination of things. I thought it might be good for me to see what it was like at a really big paper and see if I could compete and so forth. And so I took the job. I went down—I was working at the sports section at the *Houston Post* and . . .

JM: Who hired you at the *Post*?

RB: Bob Anderson.

JM: Okay. All right.

RB: He was the sports editor then.

JM: Yes, I know the name. Go ahead.

RB: I worked on the desk and eventually worked into a rotation where I was doing the front page of the *Post's* sport section. We had a real strong sports section. It was a pro football, pro baseball town. We had pro sports and big city.

JM: I guess you had the Rockets, too, didn't you? Basketball—yes.

RB: Oh, I forgot about that. Of course, the Rockets, who ended up getting a championship before anybody else. The Oilers [National Football League team] failed for years and the Astros [Major League Baseball team] failed for years. And, of course, the Oilers ended up making it to the Super Bowl after they moved to Tennessee [as the Titans]. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

RB: But it was—it was a good time in my life from the standpoint that I was at a big paper, and it was a successful paper. I think our circulation when I went down there was 400,000. And so I managed to stay down there for fourteen years. They underwent a couple of ownership changes, too. When I went there the paper was owned by the Hobby family.

JM: Yes.

RB: And . . .

JM: Oveta Culp Hobby. [Editor's Note: In 1931, Hobby married William P. Hobby, former governor of Texas and publisher of the *Post*. In 1955, she became president and editor of the *Post*]

RB: Right. And they ended up selling the newspaper after I'd been down there for several years. They ended up selling the paper to the *Toronto* [Canada] *Sun*. That ended up not going over very well, and the *Toronto* [*Sun*] ended up selling it to [William] Dean Singleton's group. I think it's News Media Group or something like that. And they're the people who own the *Denver* [Colorado] *Post* and so forth. But anyway, we had begun losing the classified advertising battle with the [*Houston*] *Chronicle*. And there toward the early 1990s, there was always a rumor that the *Post* was going to be sold again. There was a lot of grumbling, and people were concerned about their futures and so forth. And meanwhile, I had gotten an opportunity to write a couple of op-ed pieces for the *Post*, and they were well-received. I started getting more and more interested in the news end of it as opposed to just sports. We had a managing editor there named Margaret Downing, who . . .

JM: What was her last name?

RB: Downing. D-O-W-N-I-N-G.

JM: Okay.

RB: Who left the *Post* and came to the *Clarion-Ledger*. This was—probably would've been 1991 or 1992. She had known that I was looking for an opportunity to get into news. I almost went to work in the editorial department at the *Post* and didn't. In 1994 she called me and told me that they had an opening for an assistant news editor at the *Clarion-Ledger*.

JM: Oh.

RB: And wanted me to come interview for it, and so I did. And it was kind of a

tumultuous thing at the time. We had two kids, and I had remarried. We couldn't really decide if we wanted to make this huge move to move from Houston up to Jackson, but for some reason I felt like it was the thing I needed to do. So we did—we moved up here and within a couple of years, the *Post* had closed.

JM: Yes.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center Staff]