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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Gene Foreman
Home of Roy Reed
Hogeye, Arkansas
18 July 2006

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

[00:00:00.00]

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is July 18, 2006. I'm sitting here in the home of Roy Reed at Hogeye, Arkansas, preparing to interview Gene Foreman for the oral history project on the Arkansas Democrat and [Arkansas] Democrat-Gazette [for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville]. The first thing I need to do, Gene, is ask you if we have your permission to make this interview-tape it and to turn it over to the university.

Gene Foreman: Yes.

JM: Okay. Very good. Now, I'm going to cut out some things that we've done in the others. Your interview for the Arkansas Gazette history covered nearly all of your early history.

GF: Yes.

JM: And there's not much point in going back and repeating all that, except one thing they didn't cover: the names of your parents. What were the names of your parents?

GF: My father was Clemons W. Foreman, and my mother was Louise Vogel. They died in 1982, both of them, within twenty-nine days of each other.

JM: Oh.

GF: My father was born in 1895, and my mother in 1908.

JM: And your father-how did he spell his first name?

GF: First name is C-L-E-M-O-N-S. His middle name is Walter, and the [last] name is F-O-R-E-M-A-N.

JM: Okay. How did your mother spell her name?

GF: Louise. L-O-U-I-S-E. V-as in Victor-O-G-E-L.

JM: Okay.

GF: They're of German stock-both sides of the family.

JM: Okay. Now, then, in the Gazette interview, I think they had reached the point where you had left the Gazette, gone to The New York Times, and, I believe, either five or six months after you went to the Times, there was a strike. Is that correct?

GF: Yes, five months later. I had taken a job at the Times at the metro copy desk in July of 1962. When I got up there, some of the fellow staffers were saying, "Aren't you concerned moving at this time because of the strike?" And I said, "What strike?"

JM: Yes.

GF: So they explained that there was an impending showdown with the International Typographical Union [ITU] and that we likely would be shut down on about December 1. Of course, we all hoped that that would not happen. But that's when I learned about it. So I didn't move the family right away. I stayed up there by myself trying to make arrangements for moving as soon as we passed that strike deadline. Unfortunately, the ITU and the newspapers could not come to an agreement, and the strike began early December and was to last 114 days. It became pretty clear early on that it was going to last a long time, so at that point I did reassess what I was going to do. Over the Christmas holidays, there was a possibility that I would work for the AP [Associated Press] as an extra reporter during the legislative session in January and February. The Times did give me a leave of absence so that if the strike ended, I would not be required to come back immediately, but, rather, would come back, say, around March 1. But the AP in New York overrode [bureau chief] Al Dopking's proposal to hire me for that because they said they could not appear to abet a strike against a member newspaper of the AP. And the fact that the Times had willingly relinquished me for this period did not seem to faze them. So I was talking then with Edmond Freeman-E-D-M-O-N-D-who was one of two brothers, the other being Armistead-A-R-M-I-S-T-E-A-D-Freeman at the Pine Bluff Commercial. Roy Reed put me in touch with Ed. Ed oversaw the newsroom and was interested in my becoming the managing editor of the paper. So we worked things out, and I signed on to work for the Commercial in January of 1963.

JM: Okay. Now, when you say, "cover"-let me interrupt one thing here.

GF: Sure.

JM: You say, "cover the legislature." Do you mean the Arkansas Legislature?

GF: Yes. Al Dopking was the Little Rock bureau chief.

JM: Al was-I remember . . .

GF: He was one of the people I just ran into when I was home trying to ponder my fate.

JM: Yes.

GF: And Al said, "Hey, I've got something that may work for both of us."

JM: Yes.

GF: And it did, indeed, look like a good solution. The strike actually ended in mid-March. If I had done the temporary job, I presume we would've gone back there in March and gone to work for the Times again.

JM: Okay. How many children did you have at that time?

GF: At that time, two. There were three born in Pine Bluff.

JM: Yes.

GF: So we had two children under two years old.

JM: Yes.

GF: So that was a major concern of JoAnn and me.

JM: Yes. You didn't exactly think you could stay in New York City [laughs] at their prices with . . .

GF: Strike benefits of \$60 a week, even then, was not a lot of money.

JM: Yes.

GF: It was maybe a fourth of what I was earning.

JM: So you went to work for the Pine Bluff Commercial as the managing editor in January of 1963. Is that correct?

GF: Yes. Initially, I was the Southeast Arkansas editor. Jimmy Atkinson, at the time, was the managing editor, but Ed had it in mind to broaden my responsibilities. I think in May of that year I became managing editor, which is a job I then held for over five years.

JM: Okay. I remember Jimmy Atkinson. I ran into him later on in Oklahoma City. Tell me about your stay at the Pine Bluff Commercial. What was that like? What was the paper like?

GF: Well, I was very proud of the people who worked there. It's a small paper-20,000 circulation, roughly. It increased by about ten percent during the time I was down there. We covered not only Pine Bluff and Jefferson County, but also half a dozen counties in southeastern Arkansas. And as a regional paper, we made a strong effort to cover the news in counties like Desha, Cleveland [and] Bradley. We wanted to be the newspaper for that area. There weren't other dailies in that area. There were a lot of weeklies. And I think that the paper very aggressively expanded its coverage. We were fortunate also that Pat Owens and Paul Greenberg made a very strong, persuasive editorial presence. Edmond Freeman was their editor who would read all the editorials and talked every day about what our editorial stance would be. But he also was involved in the newsroom-and very deeply involved. It was a very good relationship. I saw Ed as someone who had strong and high standards, and I liked that. He had high aspirations for the paper. We did some capitol reporting that I think was very competitive with the

Little Rock papers. We could send one person up there, but we would break some stories.

JM: Whom did you send?

GF: It was mostly Harry Pearson.

JM: Okay.

GF: Harry was somewhat of a controversial reporter-very tough reporter, quite enterprising and diligent. I thought a lot of Harry. He covered the state Capitol. Occasionally, other reporters did that. Bob Lancaster covered some and, of course, was involved in the melee at the state capitol and was roughed up. Michael B. Smith also did some good reporting from the state [Capitol].

JM: How was Lancaster roughed up?

GF: Kelly Bryant, the secretary of state, in order to try to avoid desegregation of the state Capitol cafeterias, made it a legally-or supposedly legally-a private club, which seems absurd then and now.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

GF: But, of course, after African-Americans and others tried to demonstrate and show that it really is a public cafeteria that everyone ought to have access to, the state police came in and started hitting a lot of people. Bob was very young and looked like he might be one of the demonstrators. They hit him with their clubs, and he was injured.

JM: That wasn't the same episode where they threw Ozell Sutton out, was it?

GF: I'm not sure if that's the same one, although I wouldn't be surprised. [Laughs]

JM: I know he was out there once and tried to go through the line, and they said, "Whoop! No, you can't do this." So they had the guards come and-he said they just picked him up and threw him out. Nevertheless-did you hire Lancaster?

GF: Well, I think it may have been Pat Owens, who for a couple of years was the executive editor. He was on a Nieman Fellowship when I came in January, but he came back in May. I'm not sure whether it was Pat or me who said, "Bob, you're hired."

JM: Yes.

GF: It was a magnificent hire, as you know.

JM: Yes. Great writer.

GF: Yes.

JM: Okay. Who else did you have on your staff down there that you hired?

GF: Well, Brenda Tirey, who worked at the Democrat and is a fine reporter. Tucker Steinmetz, I thought, did an outstanding job on the Tucker [State] Prison Farm episode where [Governor] Winthrop Rockefeller's prison superintendent was digging into the sordid past of Tucker [State Prison]. When they started digging up bodies that had been buried on the grounds-people whose deaths were not recorded-so there was an investigation, and The New York Times came down. But I think that Tucker [Steinmetz] was on the ground floor of that and did a good job of covering. Richard Portis, for a while, was our Southeast Arkansas bureau chief.

JM: Is that right? [Laughs]

GF: Yes. The one and only bureau. I think it was in a trailer home in Monticello.

JM: Yes.

GF: Richard roamed the Southeast Arkansas area and turned in stories. Richard, of course, is a doctor now.

JM: Yes.

GF: But he remains a talented writer. It runs in the family.

JM: Yes. I don't know if he ever lived in Monticello. They lived at Hamburg for a while, I remember.

GF: That's where the family grew up. We sent Richard to Monticello to report for the Commercial.

JM: Yes.

GF: The brothers were Richard, "Buddy" [Charles] and Jonathan.

JM: Yes. I remember that their father was superintendent of schools at Hamburg. What else happened . . . ?

GF: John Thompson was our city editor most of the time I was there.

JM: Okay.

GF: He did an outstanding job.

JM: Did he? He was the one who later owned the North Little Rock Times.

GF: Yes.

JM: Right. Okay. [Is there] anybody else you remember in particular that you had on the staff?

GF: No. It probably will occur to me as we talk.

JM: Yes.

GF: I don't want to leave anybody out. All in all, it was a very bright, young crew. Our salary scale was limited even more than the Little Rock papers, so we were basically hiring people who had zero experience, but who had the promise to be good journalists.

JM: Yes.

GF: Bill Young was our sports editor, and a hardworking one. He did a good job of covering Pine Bluff and Southeast Arkansas sports. We had a reporter named Alice Dickey, who came in and did a good job. We set up a copy desk. We had a staff of about twenty people, and we put three or three-and-a-half people on the desk, editing the wires, editing all the copy, writing headlines, drawing the layouts and overseeing production. Paul Nielsen was someone that we hired for the copy desk. I was talking to Harry Pearson one day. I said, "Harry, if you'd just help me find someone who is good in the language-not necessarily experienced as a journalist-maybe we could turn that person into a good copy editor." Connie Elkins, who was local, fit that bill and learned to be a good editor. Harry came back the next day and said he had talked to the placement director at Duke [University, Durham, North Carolina], which is his alma mater, and she had just the right person for us: Paul Nielsen, who was the son of the physics department head, and who had a liberal arts English degree from Duke, and had been teaching for a year at a girls' high school in Connecticut, was looking for a change. So I had Paul send me something he had written, just to see what I thought about his language skills. He sent the syllabus for his English course, and, of course, it was

very promising, so I told him to catch the next Greyhound [bus] to Pine Bluff. In short order, he was our news editor.

JM: Yes.

GF: And Paul learned fast. He's now working at The New York Times.

JM: Yes, I know. I've talked to him. Okay. So [is there] anything else you remember that you all did while you were at the Pine Bluff Commercial-stories or anything?

GF: Well, I think that it was a period in which we improved the paper. We benefited from solid reporting. Thanks to the hardworking desk people, the paper, I think, read better and looked better. So I feel really good about that and about the little staff that we had and how that had . . .

JM: Yes.

GF: Tom Parsons, I might mention, also . . .

JM: I remember him, too.

GF: He now works for the AP in Little Rock. He went on later to be the editor of the Commercial.

JM: Yes.

GF: And while we're talking, Larry Fugate came in to be the police reporter and then went to Jonesboro and did some good work up there. My understanding is that he directed the coverage of the school shootings there in the mid-1990s, which was a Pulitzer finalist, and he is now the editor of the Commercial.

JM: Oh.

GF: So people kind of have come back to the Commercial, even though it's now no longer owned by the Freemans.

JM: Yes. It's now owned by the Stephens Group, isn't it? Okay. Originally, it was Donrey.

GF: Yes, it was originally Donrey, but Stephens took it over.

JM: Then Stephens took it over. I don't guess this is a point to discuss "Chinese overtime." [Laughs] I've heard a lot of stories about that.

GF: When I came, they were working five-and-a-half days. I was talking to Ed. I said, "I really think that we need two full days off for everybody." They were still on a fifty-hour week, with forty hours at straight time and ten hours of overtime. And that overtime was built into the pay, but it was paid at time-and-a-half. Everyone pointed out to me that this made the hourly base pay very close to the minimum, which at that time was \$1.25 an hour. With the overtime, it came up to \$70 or \$80 a week. This wasn't much then, but it was what kids coming out of college were getting-sad to say.

GF: Then the Wage and Hour Division came in and said, "This is wrong."

JM: Yes.

GF: So two things happened. Ed took my recommendation, and we went to a five-day work week. Everybody was off Sunday, unless they had an assignment to do and then they were off one other day, generally not consecutive because we had to have somebody there all the time, other than Sunday. So in response to the Wage and Hour, the lawyers put their heads together with the owners of the paper. The new system was called both "Chinese Overtime" and also called the "Belo System."

JM: Yes.

GF: See, we went to a forty-five-hour week, and the five hours were calculated at overtime, but somehow it was legal-I'm not sure how-that they would say that the base pay was for any and all hours worked at straight time. Therefore, under the "Chinese Overtime"/"Belo System," the overtime started with hour forty-one, but you only got time-and-a-half for hours over forty. Not only that, but the total number of hours then were divided into that base salary so that the hourly rate became smaller the more hours you worked. I remember how frustrated Bill Young would be that he would work about seventy-five hours a week, and at the end he would be getting just the minimum wage because that was the floor beneath which we could not go with "Chinese Overtime."

JM: [Laughs] Yes. Okay.

GF: So while it may be hard to believe, looking back at it now, the forty-five-hour week with five days, not five-and-a-half, was actually a reform.

JM: Yes. I understand that. Well, I can relate to that. I started at the Democrat in 1951 at \$45.12 a week, and that was for a six-day week.

GF: Yes.

JM: I did not calculate until later on that I undoubtedly was working for less than a dollar and hour [laughter], and that wasn't much more than the minimum wage then. Okay. So you left the Commercial . . .

GF: Jerry, I might add that-Brenda, I think, in her interview mentioned the fact that another labor problem we ran into was that the state labor laws dating back to about 1908 or something said that women couldn't work more than nine hours a day. So adjustments had to be made on that. I think Brenda had gone on to the

Louisville [Kentucky] Courier Journal and received a minute check from us in settlement of her hours over what she was supposed to have been paid.

JM: Yes.

GF: But that law created problems for us. If a woman was going to, say, cover a council meeting, and the council met longer than we thought it would, we were technically in violation.

JM: Yes.

GF: It was maddening. Of course, a law like that today-people would laugh at discriminating between women and men, but that was what we were dealing with.

JM: Yes.

[Tape Stopped]

[00:21:07.21]

JM: All right, Gene. At what point did you leave and go to the Democrat, and why did you make that change?

GF: Okay. That was mid-1968. It was in July, as I recall. Mr. K. August Engel, who had been the owner of the Democrat for many years, had died. His two nephews, Marcus George and Stanley Berry, took over the operation of the paper. Marcus was, of course, most interested in news and editorials, and Stanley in business and the production of the paper. That's kind of how they divided it: right down the middle. But Marcus had hopes that we would improve the paper, and Bob McCord, a good friend of mine, was the editorial page editor. So in talking first with Bob and then with Marcus, we felt that we were at a point where we could work something out, and we did. So I came up in July, and my title was news

editor. But the understanding I had with Marcus that was brokered by Bob McCord was that I would have broad authority to try to improve the paper across all the fronts, except for the editorial page. That's what I started doing in July of 1968. I was interested, if we could, to stay in Arkansas. JoAnn and I both liked Little Rock particularly, and that was appealing to us. And the hope that we could put something together that would improve the paper and make it a worthy and formidable competitor to the Gazette was something that I found very challenging.

JM: You say, "broad authority"-how broad an authority? Did that go as far as to hiring new people and relieving old people or . . .?

GF: Yes, it did, and we kind of finessed it there.

JM: Yes.

GF: Gene Herrington, who was a very decent person to me, and kind of understood the situation.

JM: Yes.

GF: In fact, Gene went on after a few months to AP&L [Arkansas Power and Light Company] to a PR [public relations] job.

JM: Okay.

GF: I then became the managing editor, which essentially was what I already was charged with doing.

JM: Yes.

GF: But, yes, we did hire some people then, and we started making some changes.

JM: Did Bob and Marcus make some kind of representation to you to what their hopes for the paper would be and what they were shooting for?

GF: I can recall that in only very general terms, which is to say we drastically would improve the quality of the paper-the quality of the reporting, the way the paper looked, the way it read [and] the way it was edited-to be a strong competitor [of the Gazette], which I didn't think it had been. And I felt the Gazette had some very good people. I'm very fond of the Gazette, and always was. The sort of newspaper war that occurred years later was not anything that we had in mind. Somebody might say it's wishful thinking that with p.m. [afternoon] papers starting to fold across the country, this could happen. But it was a hope that we could do it. What we saw was kind of a gentlemen's battle with the Gazette. We'd win some; they'd win some. Then, like the National Football League players, after beating up each other for two hours, we'd shake hands and say, "We'll beat you next time." It didn't turn out that way. [Laughs] I don't think that I could've been a part of the newspaper war as it eventually evolved. I just had too many friends over there.

JM: Yes.

GF: It never occurred to me that the Gazette would ever go out of business.

JM: Yes.

GF: I had thought that the Democrat had a good chance of staying alive, and that we could hold our own.

JM: Yes. Were you aware of what had been happening to their circulation and their financial situation at that time?

GF: No, not to the degree I probably should have.

JM: Yes.

GF: But I knew the circulation was already starting to dwindle.

JM: Yes.

GF: Our hope was, of course, that we'd gain circulation. Put out a better paper-gain circulation. But, as we know, the next three years it continued to decline. And part of that assumption-again, wishful thinking-was that the advertising and circulation departments would be similarly rejuvenated. That they would be aggressive in battling the Gazette in a competitive situation that we hoped would be more evenly matched than what it had been.

JM: I don't believe-from stories that I'm hearing-I don't believe that the advertising department made those changes, or the circulation department, either.

GF: Definitely not the circulation. No, the advertising didn't, either.

JM: Yes.

GF: It also became evident that there were strong differences in approach and goals between Marcus and Stanley. I think the division of authority between the two was cumbersome and held the paper back.

JM: Yes.

GF: You know, I don't fault either one of them. Stanley is dead now, but both were honorable gentlemen.

JM: Yes.

GF: But it was not a good business model, as I was to learn.

JM: Yes. Stanley, apparently, from the stories I get, was pretty tight-fisted about things—spending money and . . .

GF: Yes. I don't think he shared Marcus's hope that we could improve the situation.

JM: Yes.

GF: I hope I'm fair to him, but I think he was more willing to settle for a distant second place than to really be a true competitor.

JM: Yes. I think that K. A. Engel's theory was [that] he was willing to settle for second place.

GF: Yes. [Laughs]

JM: So maybe Stanley inherited that attitude.

GF: It's quite possible.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

GF: Because of all the observations I would make, that's the way he thought.

JM: Is there anything specific that you did to try to change the paper, though, to improve it? What were some of the changes that you made?

GF: We were at Day One. It was a hot morning in July. I got to work at 6:30, and Si Dunn, the veteran desk man—telegraph editor—showed me how things were done. I was listening and trying to learn that day. I said, "Si, where are the page dummies?" Si said, "Well, there aren't any." I said, "Well, how do we know how much copy to send?" And he said, "Well, I'll send a note up." So he wrote a note out and said, "How many pages today?" He put it on the conveyor belt that went from our desk there on the second floor. It was beside the spiral staircase on which we would ascend to and come down from the composing room on the third

floor. So Freddy Campbell, the composing room foreman, a few minutes later sent back a note that said, "Sixteen pages open at this time." I said, "Si, we really ought to have dummies." That was one of the things I took up that first week with Marcus: "We have no page dummies. I don't know of any newspaper that doesn't have page dummies." I think the practice was that the printers placed the news content with some minimal supervision from the news editor, who went up there before the deadline. The production department knew more than the advertising department about where advertisers preferred their positions in the paper to be and what kind of deals had been made there about placement. So they would place the ads and then they would place the news.

JM: Yes.

GF: I think the only pages that were dummied would be the front page and some other special pages [and] maybe a sports front. But it was minimal involvement of the news department in the preparation of the paper.

JM: Yes.

GF: But Marcus then got together people from the advertising department, and we met with them. It was kind of a new idea: page dummies. I remember the ad manager saying, "Maybe we wouldn't get as many ads left out if we had page dummies." Very soon, within a week or two, we started getting page dummies. That was step one, a very fundamental thing. But it was only indicative of the sort of changes that I had to make over the coming months and years.

JM: Yes. We have an interview with Fred Campbell in which Fred explains that at one time the makeup men in the composing room, the ITU, placed the stories on

all the other pages except page one. They just decided what would fit, and where, then they would get through. Then whatever they had left over-you know, they might have a whole bunch of type left over that they'd been sent-and then they'd just dump it.

GF: No telling what stories are being dumped. [Laughs]

JM: No. No.

GF: So it was completely unsatisfactory. If you want to have a professional newspaper, editors had to have control of what went in.

JM: Yes.

GF: I don't think Freddy would dispute that. I don't think he did. How Freddy thought about the dummies, I don't know, but I can't imagine that it was a problem for him. Maybe it simplified his life. But he had a lot of responsibilities, and I think that probably he got blamed if an ad got left out. There was a lot of finger-pointing that went on then, including Freddy pointing at us for breaking deadline.

JM: I think maybe in the old days, and I'm just basing this, to a degree, on hearsay, that maybe most papers were like that. But I think most of them had changed by then. I think maybe even the Gazette at one time-that it was pretty much the ITU-the back shop people put the stories on the pages except for the front page. But that had been several years before. But I know that-in fact, when Orville Henry first went to the paper, the sports [department] didn't even get to make up the sports section at the Gazette; the copy desk made it up-the news desk. But, at any rate, what other changes did you make? Or people that you hired . . . ?

GF: Well, we had an inadequate desk staff, just in terms of numbers. And there wasn't a read-back function or anybody in charge. Si was the wire editor that pasted the inserts in and new leads and was responsible for watching the wire and, of course, wrote headlines. Leon Hatch and Ted Woods, who were copy editors, would write headlines on both local and wire news, but it was not organized in a way that there would be supervision and a single person responsible for what happened. So, fairly soon, we moved to create a copy desk with a slot. And as time went on, I felt that the slot and the copy editor should not have to dummy pages also. Of course, dummying had not been done before, except on the front page. But now we were laying out inside pages, so I created a layout desk, even if it was just one person on a given day. One of my theories about management of the newspaper is that while you need to have flexibility in case people get sick or are on vacation, having a minimum feasible number of people doing layouts gives you more consistency, rather than having everybody do layouts.

JM: Yes.

GF: So we created a layout desk that would do all the page layouts. We had a slot, who would oversee all the copy editors. Then we created a wire desk. We also added the Los Angeles Times/Washington Post news services, which gave us some stories with more depth than AP generally gave, and also stories that the Gazette would not have. The Gazette had The New York Times news service in addition to AP.

JM: Yes.

GF: But this gave us more depth reporting that was exclusive to us in Little Rock. And, of course, some of my critics in the newsroom would note that the very first weeks I was there, we used Washington Post stories on the [Democratic National Convention in] Chicago [Illinois], in which there was rioting. Some of the people were saying that our news coverage was more liberal than the Gazette's editorial page, which I think was an exaggeration.

JM: [Laughs]

GF: I didn't see it that way, but their point was that it was not the plain, vanilla AP.

JM: Yes.

GF: It was, I think, more depth than Democrat readers had been getting in the past.

JM: Yes. Who did you put in the slot? Do you remember who you started out?

GF: I'm not sure who was in the slot initially. Paul Nielsen, who had worked for me in Pine Bluff and left to go to the Gazette, came over . . .

JM: Yes.

GF: He left the Commercial for Little Rock because, as he told me, Pine Bluff had only two movie theaters, and one of them always showed Disney movies. He came over and became the slot, and he would be in charge of the copy desk. He also got the paper out, going upstairs in the last hour-the pressure cooker, as Stanley quite aptly called it-trying to beat the deadline to produce this afternoon paper and get all the pages made up. Nielsen was the slot most of the time.

JM: Yes.

GF: And the wire editor became Bill Terry, who scanned all of these wires and really put a lot into that. I thought we were getting a very decent wire report. The pages

looked good because our page layout person did it, and that became Richard Allen. That's A-L-L-E-N . . .

JM: Yes.

GF: . . . who now is at the Herald-Tribune in Paris [France]. Richard was our regular person doing layouts. And, of course, there were relief people and other . . .

JM: Where did you get Richard?

GF: He came over from the Gazette.

JM: Okay. I couldn't remember because, see, I started him over at the Gazette.

GF: Yes.

JM: But I didn't remember how-and he was at the Democrat when I later came back after you left.

GF: Yes.

JM: But I didn't know how he-he didn't work for you at Pine Bluff, though?

GF: No, he did not.

JM: Yes. Okay.

GF: Nielsen, of course, had.

JM: Yes.

GF: Nielsen got into a fracas with Freddy Campbell.

JM: I've heard a little bit about that.

GF: It was verbal.

JM: Yes.

GF: But it was very heated, as those things tended to be. The pressure cooker was really tough on people's nerves, and we were struggling. From the production

standpoint, there's a small window in which to set the type. And if we didn't have a smooth copy flow, if there were lulls where they didn't have anything to do, then later we'd double the amount of copy-you know the paper is going to be late. In the hot-type days-until the computers in the newsroom set the type-there was always friction between the newsroom and the production department over copy flow.

JM: Yes.

GF: That happened to me later when I was managing editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer. Until we took over the typesetting, about 6:00 every evening, the production foreman would show up in the newsroom to complain about copy flow. He would say, "If you're trying to prove that you can send more copy than we can set into type, you win."

JM: Yes.

GF: Well, I lost my temper a time or two in dealing with Freddy, but Nielsen is more volatile than I am, and he just stomped out.

JM: Yes.

GF: I said, "Paul, don't leave." He said, "I've had it, and I'm out the door." So I went up there to get the paper out. This was after Paul had been the news editor a year or two. Huddling with Marcus later, we couldn't condone what Paul did. I was successful in getting Pat Owens, who was then at Newsday, to help Paul get a job.

JM: Yes.

GF: So Paul went on to Newsday, but he was history at the Democrat.

JM: You had to turn him loose at the . . .

GF: He walked out on an edition when he was in charge of getting it out.

JM: So what other changes did you make? Anything else that you remember in particular?

GF: Well, we were trying to rejuvenate the reporting. One of the things on the reporting side that I didn't think was acceptable was the fact that they rewrote the Gazette without verifying anything they wrote. They did this as quickly as they could in the morning. The editors would hand out stories to be rewritten, and no phone calls would be made to sources. And if the Gazette had made a mistake, we made it, too.

JM: Yes

GF: Any close reader would see what was going on. It wasn't verified, and it wasn't original. So we started saying, "If we're going to rewrite the Gazette, we've got to verify it." Well, this doubled, tripled, quadrupled the amount of reporting time. And George Douthit, the veteran capitol reporter, who was my leading critic in the newsroom and made no bones about it, told everybody in sight, "This is madness." He confronted me one day about it and said, "You read these stories in the Gazette in the morning and then in the afternoon you read them in the Democrat. You figure it out." Well, he was both right and wrong, in hindsight. On the one hand, I was right. If we were going to report the same thing the Gazette did-if we thought those stories were worthy of passing on to our readers-we ought to verify them. But I think that George was right by indirection. I should have focused more on enterprise. I think we did a lot of good enterprise, more than the Democrat had done in the past. But I should've recognized that we

had limited time and limited resources. And a lot of stories that were in the Gazette, we should've just kissed off and said, "We're not going to try to match them on that." It's clear to me now that we should've enterprised more than what we did.

JM: Yes.

GF: John Robert Starr wrote later in one of his columns-he was the editor of the paper. It was a column that was not favorable toward me, but he said that "Gene edited the paper as if Bill Shelton was looking over his shoulder."

JM: [Laughs]

GF: And I told Dixie Shelton, after Bill had died, that I chose to take that as a compliment because Bill-when I was his assistant city editor back in the late 1950s-was a mentor for me. And it's true that a lot of the ideas about a newspaper of record that I carried forward, including in this Democrat ME [managing editor] job, were influenced by Bill. But I think that Starr was referring more to what Douthit was, that we ought to be spending more of our resources doing original reporting. I understood what he was saying and what George was saying.

JM: Did you come to a parting of the ways with Douthit along about that time?

GF: We did. Yes. Tucker Steinmetz was an assistant city editor at that particular time. I understand that he asked George over the phone out at the capitol bureau why we didn't have a certain story, and George did not like the question. He thought it was arrogant and unbecoming of a younger reporter to ask him about that.

JM: Yes.

GF: So he came down to the office and resigned. I told him, "George, you've been here a long time. You need to think this over. Take overnight and think about it. Don't quit on the spur of the moment." And he said, "I don't need overnight. I'm outta here." And he was.

JM: Yes.

GF: But that speaks to the whole sort of tension between the new people and the veterans.

JM: Yes.

GF: And I don't know-I understand the veterans, how they probably felt about that. And maybe in retrospect, some things might-could have been done to try to soothe their feelings or to reach out to them. But I don't think that anything could have really resolved the main issue, which was that we wanted a paper that was not the sort of paper they had in the past. And that meant, in terms of people in a couple of key jobs, that we needed what the management guru of the time, Laurence Peter, called a "lateral arabesque"-lateral somebody out of a job where they were impeding our ability to change the paper. And the city editor was one, and the sports editor was another. I've read Fred Morrow's [interview] on that. Fred came in as sports director.

JM: Yes.

GF: He knew his job was essentially to do what Jack Keady had been doing all this time, but we wanted somebody who had different approaches. We moved Jack out. Jack was a very harsh critic of me, but I understand how he felt. But we needed to move ahead.

JM: As I remember, Jack was retained as a columnist, but he was removed from the supervisory position in the sports department. Who was the city editor?

GF: We kept his column, but we said, "That is what we want you to do. Fred is going to run the sports department."

JM: Yes. Who was the city editor?

GF: I'm embarrassed to say I can't recall his last name; his first name was Rod.

JM: Rod Powers?

GF: Powers. Yes.

JM: Was it? Okay.

GF: And we tried to find a place for him. I'm sorry about that, but that's what we felt we had to do. If somebody's been a starter on a baseball team and they become a pinch hitter-well, usually they don't feel good about it.

JM: Yes. I understand.

GF: So Rod moved on at some point.

JM: He went to one of the Bees [newspapers] in California. Modesto, I believe.

GF: Yes. But he was not who we wanted as city editor. I think that we gave it a try.

JM: Yes.

GF: But it was clear that we were not in sync. And this enabled me to make what I thought was probably the most important appointments: Ralph Patrick to be city editor.

JM: Okay.

GF: Ralph rejuvenated the staff-led them every day. He's an outstanding journalist. He went on . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[00:45:31.05]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

[00:46:15.04]

JM: . . . just talking about that you'd brought in Ralph Patrick as the city editor, and he rejuvenated the staff. At this time, you had hired some new reporters, too, hadn't you?

GF: Yes. Over a period of time, we hired quite a few reporters. I think that anybody looking at this could say, "Well, it's young versus old," and I guess that's the way it played out. It wasn't deliberate. The fact is that we didn't pay a lot of money, and we wanted to hire good people, or at least people who had the potential to be good. And if a person had ten or fifteen years of experience and had proved himself or herself to be a very good reporter, we couldn't afford them.

JM: Yes.

GF: So we were trying, as we had in Pine Bluff, to scout out talent who had not proved themselves yet. The exception-an asterisk-would be people like Tucker and Bob [Lancaster], who came up to join us from Pine Bluff and had gotten their start there, and wanted to see how it would be in Little Rock on a larger scale.

JM: You brought Lancaster over from Pine Bluff?

GF: Lancaster came in, and Tucker Steinmetz.

JM: Okay. Where did you find James Scudder?

GF: I am not sure how we got Scudder, but it was a great acquisition. I'll say that.

JM: Yes, it was.

GF: James is a wonderful intellect, and he really added a lot of class to our staff.

JM: Really good writer.

GF: Yes.

JM: Yes.

GF: I'm embarrassed to say I don't remember exactly where we got James. Martin Kirby was one of our hires. Bill Stroud, who had worked for me in Pine Bluff . . .

JM: Martin Kirby?

GF: K-I-R-B-Y. Martin. M-A-R-T-I-N.

JM: Yes. Martin Kirby. Yes.

GF: Bill Stroud, who had gone on from Pine Bluff to Chattanooga, told me-I don't know whether it was on the phone, or maybe I ran into him-he was from McGehee. He said I ought to really look up Martin Kirby, who had been in his Cub Scout pack. Martin had just gotten a degree in writing from Johns Hopkins [University, Baltimore, Maryland], so I called down to McGehee to the family's home. Martin was not there, but I got his grandmother on the phone. I talked to her and told her who I was and that I was interested in talking to Martin. She said, "You're not going to try to hire Martin for a little bit or nothing, are you?" I said, "Yes, Ma'am." [Laughter] But Martin came on for a little bit or nothing and made a very good reporter.

JM: Yes.

GF: Martin was also very fastidious about wanting the readers of the Democrat to get every bit of the knowledge that he wanted to impart.

JM: [Laughs] Yes.

GF: So one day he wrote a forty-inch story, and I couldn't find a place that would accommodate the full jump, so we trimmed it two inches. Everybody really worried about the trim. Martin, of course, came into my office the next day and said, "You trimmed my story." And I said, "But Martin, we gave it the longest space inside that we had, and I think the trim was artful, even if I do say so myself." And Martin said, "Well, I think that rather than deprive the readers of this information, you should've set it in successively smaller type so they would get every bit."

JM: [Laughs] That sounds like Martin. I'll have to tell you one story that I'll throw in because it's a good place. I might not use it elsewhere. But I inherited Martin, of course, from you. He came in one day-and I can't remember the story. It was a really good story. It was a big story. It was an investigative-type story, but he came in, and it was seventeen copy sheets. But it was a really great story, so we got all but about the last four or five paragraphs in, and we just chopped off the last four or five paragraphs. Well, Martin, as he was wont to do sometimes-he had saved a punch line for the last, right at the end.

GF: Oh.

JM: He came back and complained, and said, "You cut my kicker. You cut off my kicker." [Laughter]

GF: Well, I understand-empathize with both of you.

JM: I said, "Martin, I understand, but if it was that good, maybe you should've put it higher up in the story." [Laughs]

GF: Maybe so. Yes. [Laughs]

JM: But, nevertheless, I'll skip that one.

GF: Martin beat the Gazette a few times. I want to talk more at some point about the competition with the Gazette.

JM: Yes. Okay.

GF: Maybe the Gazette people don't remember it quite the way-when Harlan Lane, I believe is his name-a banker . . .

JM: Yes.

GF: . . .kind of a questionable banker came in to take over Union Bank, and Martin was on his case very early. He led on that story.

JM: Oh.

GF: Another one that he did was where they were building what was then the tallest building in Little Rock, and there were two buildings going up at the same time. One owner announced that it was going to end at eighteen stories, and the other one said, "Okay, we'll end at eighteen stories, too." But when the other one put their tree on top [signifying the building had "topped out"] at eighteen stories, they went up six more stories to twenty-four.

JM: [Laughs]

GF: So Martin was on that case, too, which was a fun story.

JM: Talk a little bit more about your competition with the Gazette.

GF: Yes. The Gazette was a good newspaper, but I thought that they were coasting, and in terms of being a competitor that could win some battles with them, I thought that could be done. In fact, that did happen, but it didn't help circulation. I thought the better the paper got, the more circulation we lost. But the Gazette

demonstrated to me that because of its tradition for excellence-something that we were trying to create from scratch-that they, even on cruise control, could do better day in and day out than we could.

JM: Yes.

GF: It was hard to beat them. And, of course, you have [Gazette] reporters like George Bentley, say, at the courthouse-been there so long, knew everybody, and was a good reporter. It was going to be hard to beat George.

JM: Yes.

GF: But we dug hard, and I think that we came up with some good enterprise stories. And, as I've said before, I think that that should have been more of our focus, and we probably should have played them bigger.

JM: Yes.

GF: My recollection is that the Gazette had The New York Times [news service],so they got the Pentagon Papers [story] first.

JM: Yes.

GF: But they didn't run it, for some reason. Then the Washington Post, which we had, caught up. So in Little Rock, we ran the Pentagon Papers first. That's the sort of thing that occasionally we would come through with when they left the gate open.

JM: Yes.

GF: But it was hard, day in and day out, to beat their solid reporting staff.

JM: Bigger staff and good reporters and a lot of experienced reporters.

GF: Yes. The difference was experience.

JM: Yes. They had people who'd been on the beats a long time, so it was very hard. I remember-I think it was Brenda saying that she was-at one point, and maybe this was perhaps after you left that we had her out at the capitol . . .

GF: Yes.

JM: . . . and she was competing against Ernie Dumas and Doug Smith. [Laughter]

GF: I wouldn't want to do that. [Laughter]

JM: No, I wouldn't, either, because as far as I was concerned, Ernie Dumas was the best they ever had out there.

GF: Yes.

JM: And Doug wasn't bad. Any other particular changes you made? Let me ask you about one-I was thinking on that today-didn't you use Lancaster as a page one columnist for . . . ?

GF: Yes, which put a lot of pressure on Bob, but I think he did pretty well.

JM: Yes.

GF: Very well. I know his columns were good, but we'd want to see more reporting, and I think the pressure of so many columns meant that he didn't get to do as much reporting as he should have. So we probably should've been more sparing on that.

JM: Yes.

GF: One of the things we did was to try to improve page design. At the Pine Bluff Commercial, we had gone to a six-column format. We were an early paper on that. The Louisville Courier Journal started it. I had read Edmund Arnold's book

on Functional Newspaper Design. Ed later became seen as stodgy and backward, but at that time he was thinking things that nobody in page designing was doing.

JM: Yes.

GF: Page design was something not many journalists really paid a lot of attention.

JM: I read his book. [Laughs]

GF: Yes. That came out in about 1960, I think.

JM: Yes.

GF: The six-column format on a newspaper page—even though those pages were wider then—was closer to what Ed called the optimum line length for ease of reading. So six columns were easier to read than eight columns, which had been the standard for years and years.

JM: Yes.

GF: The ads were still in an eight-column format. This meant some inside pages that did not have squared-off ads or no ads; we had to go with the old eight-column format.

JM: Yes.

GF: But on any page that could—front page, section fronts, some inside pages, say, that there was an eight-column ad that went all the way across and maybe left three or four inches at the top, we could run that story in six columns. So we used six columns everywhere we could.

JM: Yes.

GF: Because we believed it was easier to read and looked better. However, the Democrat did not set type the way the Pine Bluff Commercial did. At the Pine

Bluff Commercial, we'd edit wire copy and then people in the composing room punched what we called the TTS tape. They had a keyboard, and it would punch a tape, which then ran through line-casting machines that would set lines of type. They would justify-set those columns-whatever width we wanted it. The Democrat had subscribed to the AP TTS-teletype setter-which meant that if we changed a word in the paragraph, then the rest of the paragraph from that line down had to be reset, and that was impractical.

JM: Yes.

GF: So we tried to accommodate that by going to a seven-column front with six normal columns and one wider column, which we could afford to have set separately. Lancaster's column most days would run in that wide column.

JM: I remember that-down the left-hand side of the page. I remember.

GF: Yes. And we had some other features there. The weather index would be at the bottom. We also dropped the column rules, which gave the paper a more airy look, which is passé now, but was groundbreaking, almost, then. So we opened up without column rules. We tried to move the paper, even with the strict typographical production limitations we had, toward a more contemporary or even ahead-of-contemporary look.

JM: Yes. I shared your view on the six-column format. It was a heck of a lot easier to read than the old one.

GF: Yes. Well, of course, in the years since, to save money, publishers have successively narrowed the web width. I don't disagree with that in principle, because if you look at the Wall Street Journal or try to hold the Wall Street

Journal, which has the old web width, it's really cumbersome. As they narrowed the web width, then each page becomes narrower on the broadsheet paper, and it's easier for a reader to handle.

JM: Yes.

GF: The casualty, though, is in the width of the columns. They become increasingly narrower and hard to read.

JM: Narrower. Yes.

GF: And in 1968, at over twelve picas or more than two inches, they were hard to read. Now they're less than two inches, unless you go to a format with five columns on a page, which a lot of papers have done.

JM: Yes. So any other changes you remember particularly that you made?

GF: We set up a copy desk dividing the wire editing, the page layout and copy desk supervision. We had a city editor and an assistant city editor who would direct the staff. We were trying to improve the appearance of the paper-the way it was designed-and the quality of the editing and writing. And, of course, we looked for opportunities to do enterprise that the Gazette would not match.

JM: Yes. [01:00:16.13] So at what point in time, and why, did you leave the Democrat?

GF: I left at the end of the summer in 1971. Pat Owens had been at Newsday as a columnist, and he engineered a job offer for me. Newsday was going to a Sunday paper. It may seem strange today, but a lot of papers were still just six-days-a-week or five-days-a-week and did not have Sunday papers. In the decades since then, publishers and editors recognize that Sunday papers, where people have

more time to read, is a very remunerative paper to have. When Colonel [Harry] Guggenheim sold the paper to the Times Mirror, the new owners said, "We've got to have a Sunday paper." That was happening during the summer of 1971. David Laventhol was the editor, and he was going to put Dick Estrin, who had been the daily news editor, in charge of the new Sunday paper. So he was casting about for someone to take the title of executive news editor to be in charge of producing the paper six days a week. Well, I would not be there six days a week, but I would be in charge during the week and oversee the news and copy desk. Patrick Owens convinced Laventhol that I was a person who would do that, so Dave made me a very good offer to come east again.

JM: Yes.

GF: One of the things I got was that if there were a strike, I would keep on getting paid. [Laughter] I had felt that it was time for new leadership in the Democrat newsroom. Both Ralph and I were wearing down. I do want to say that I appreciate all the work that these young staffers did. [There was] a lot of camaraderie among them, and they just knocked themselves out trying to put out a good paper. I'm really proud of the people who came to work there during those three years.

JM: You had some good people. I remember at some point in time, I think, you hired Mary Lowe Kennedy and . . .

GF: That's right. Mary Lowe Kennedy went on to be the assistant city editor under Ralph.

JM: Yes.

GF: Mary had worked along with Bill Eddins, who became the slot after Paul left.

Bill Eddins became the slot, and we didn't miss a beat-no criticism of Paul, but Bill was blossoming as an editor. Like Mary Lowe, he went on to work at the Inquirer in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] for many years. He was always well regarded. Both Mary Lowe and Bill had been summer workers at the Commercial. They graduated from Pine Bluff High School. They came back after college and worked at the Democrat. They were key players well beyond their years doing jobs that in most papers people with many more years' experience were doing, and they were doing it well.

JM: The Democrat had continued to struggle financially, though.

GF: Yes.

JM: Like most afternoon papers, though-that people didn't want an afternoon paper. They wanted to watch TV when they got home.

GF: Yes, it was really evident that afternoon papers were struggling against the tide.

And in most cities in the country they were moving toward just the morning paper, and we've naturally seen that happen everywhere now in the decades since then. But then trend was taking shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

JM: Yes.

GF: And as we saw in the latter stage of that, even in towns where a publisher owned both papers, they consolidated into a single paper published in the morning. So in the post-World War II period, which we, of course, were well into, a whole generation had grown up moving to service jobs rather than industrial jobs. And

television-not so much as a news competitor, but as a competitor for leisure time-had taken over. Instead of people coming home at 3:00 in the afternoon from their job and opening the afternoon paper, they came home at 5:00 or 6:00 and started watching television.

JM: Yes.

GF: Whether it was news or whether it was entertainment, they were not reading afternoon newspapers. More and more people didn't go to work at 5:00 in the morning as some industrial people did, because they were in service jobs. So they had time over breakfast or coffee to skim the morning paper, maybe take it to work with them and maybe read it some in the evening. Clearly, for a lot of reasons, morning papers were the way to go.

JM: Yes.

GF: And that meant not the Democrat.

JM: Okay. And you say you went to Newsday? If I remember, Newsday is on Long Island [New York City, New York].

GF: Yes, it is on Long Island. It was then published in the offices in Garden City, which is in Nassau County, which is next to Queens and Brooklyn and is one of two suburban counties on Long Island. The other, farther west, is Suffolk. Geographically speaking, Brooklyn and Queens are on Long Island, but they are part of the city of New York.

JM: Yes.

GF: Newsday was a franchise, and it did really well-over ninety percent household penetration at the time in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Suffolk went all the way

out to the very eastern tip of Long Island. So we were covering those two counties. After I left a few years later, they built a new plant and a new newsroom in Suffolk County, which made a lot of sense because it was more centrally located in their circulation area.

JM: Yes. Okay. Now, who was the guy who hired you?

GF: David Laventhol. L-A-V-E-N-T-H-O-L.

JM: Okay.

GF: Laventhol had been the city editor of the Herald Tribune. Later, he was the editor of the "Style" section of the Washington Post, a section that he invented. Then was hired by Bill Moyers to come up and be the editor at Newsday.

JM: Okay. How long were you at Newsday?

GF: A year and a half. When I got to the Times in 1962, I said, "This is the paper I'm going to be at to retire from." Then circumstances did not work out that way. Now I was back in the East and had arrived at my destination paper. "I'm going to stay at Newsday. I like Laventhol. I like what Newsday has done." But Roy Reed called me after I had been there a little over a year and was just getting settled in my job. He said Gene Roberts had been appointed executive editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer. Gene had been for four years the national editor of The New York Times. And I said, "Yes, I read that in the Times this morning. That's very interesting." He said, "Well, Gene wants to talk to you about a job." And I said, "Well, Roy, I just got here, and I like Newsday. I don't know what he wants to talk to me about. My job was essentially equivalent of assistant managing editor, and Newsday is making money, and I don't think the Inquirer is." He said,

"Well, give Gene a hearing. Just promise me you'll talk to him." So Gene asked me to come down, and he talked to me over several hours-two different sittings-on one trip down to Philadelphia. Finally, after all those hours, I asked him, "Gene, what kind of job are you talking about?" He said, "Well, I was thinking managing editor."

JM: Oh.

GF: Up until that point, I had no idea that it would be anything that I would be interested in. But his sketching out of what he hoped to accomplish at the Inquirer-and the fact that I would be the key hire, and he was making some very good ones.

JM: Yes.

GF: For example, Steve Lovelady, who had been a page one editor at the Wall Street Journal and really knew how to work with news trend stories, was the assistant managing editor he brought in. John Carroll, who later went on to be Baltimore [Maryland] Sun editor and Los Angeles [California] Times editor, was coming in to learn to be an editor after being a reporter for about ten years at the Baltimore Sun. David Boldt, also from the Wall Street Journal, was coming in to help shore up our reporting coverage. So he was hiring some good people, but the managing editor's job was clearly the key job.

JM: Yes.

GF: I appreciated the confidence he had, thanks largely to Roy's selling job. Roy got me two out of my last three jobs-Pine Bluff and at the Inquirer.

JM: Yes.

GF: So when he said "managing editor," I said, "Okay, let's talk." I asked Gene, "Tell me more specifically what your ambitions are for the Inquirer." I'd been spending a good part of that day reading that paper, and it was pretty bad, which nobody disputed. He said, "Well, I think in four or five years everybody will see that we're one of the best half-dozen or so best papers in the country." That really stunned me; that seemed to be overreaching. But as I thought to myself, "Well, everybody said, 'Gene Roberts knows what he's talking about. If he says something, book it.'" So it was very exciting what we did at the Inquirer.

JM: Yes. So he hired you. You took the job.

GF: Yes, I did.

JM: You knew Gene before that, didn't you?

GF: I had never met him before in person.

JM: Oh, okay.

GF: I had talked to him on the phone a couple times.

JM: Okay.

GF: When I was at the Democrat, he called me from New York. A friend of his in the South was jobless at the time, and he thought he was somebody maybe we could hire. I don't think anything came of that. And some other occasion-I forget what it was. I had talked to him twice on the phone, but I had never laid eyes on him.

JM: Okay.

GF: So that was the first day that we knew each other, really.

JM: And you all did turn the Inquirer around, as I recall.

GF: It was a great experience. He is a genius, and it was an honor and [a] privilege and a learning experience to work next door to him for the next eighteen years.

JM: Yes. How many Pulitzers did you all win during that eighteen years?

GF: In that eighteen years, we won seventeen. After he left, we won one. We were finalists about a dozen times.

JM: Yes.

GF: But we only won one in the 1990s.

JM: As I remember, you had some investigative teams that . . .

GF: Yes. Gene had a theory that you build a newspaper by doing some things that'll attract attention in a wholesome way-do some good reporting that . . .

JM: Yes.

GF: Philadelphia did not have a reputation then for investigative or in-depth reporting. It was all pretty straight-ahead stuff. We were locked in a battle with the [Philadelphia] Evening Bulletin for who was going to survive. It didn't take long to find out that all the smart money in town supposedly was betting on the Bulletin. It had a larger daily circulation. We had a larger Sunday circulation. The difference in each case was about 175,000. And as one of the editors told me when I came, "The game is, 'who's going to wipe out the other one's lead while [taking?] their own?'" As it turned out, we did wipe out their daily lead. When they went out of business in 1982, we were leading them by about 30,000 daily. But our 175,000 Sunday lead had turned into 425,000, and the Sunday paper was the cash cow of the operation. The fact that we blew them away on Sunday really kind of sealed their fate. But it was a really spirited battle through the 1970s.

JM: Yes. So how long did you wind up staying at the Inquirer?

GF: I stayed for twenty-five-and-a-half years as managing editor.

JM: Twenty-five.

GF: So it was the paper, then; that was my career paper.

JM: Yes.

GF: I retired in 1998. I wanted to retire a little bit early and teach for a few years at Penn State [Pennsylvania State University]. The then-dean, Terri Brooks, at Penn State's College of Communications, offered me a five-year contract, and that sounded about what I wanted to do. Her successor, Doug Anderson, asked me to stay on. I'll be teaching my seventeenth semester in the fall of 2006. It will be my last one. I've really enjoyed teaching. I wanted to stay in Pennsylvania because our family-grandchildren and extended family-was almost all around the Philadelphia area.

JM: Yes.

GF: But it means that I had to commute over there and stay three nights at State College, which is in the center of the state, 175 miles from my home. The driving back and forth and being away from home is the negative about the job.

Everything else has been very, very positive.

JM: Your home is where?

GF: It's in St. David's, which is about twenty miles from the Inquirer building, which is downtown in what we call Center City, Philadelphia.

JM: Yes.

GF: So it's a little closer than the Inquirer is to the state college-twenty miles closer.

JM: Yes. So it was a good haul, though, from there to State College.

GF: Yes, it's a drive of more than three hours.

JM: What were you teaching at Penn State?

GF: I teach a skills course in news editing with eighteen students. I teach a news media ethics course, an applied ethics course with a discussion of case studies. That's fifty students. And like all of my faculty colleagues, I teach a one-credit freshman seminar. Mine is on *The Elements of Journalism*, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel.

JM: Yes.

GF: I'm in the classroom about eleven-and-a-half hours a week. But anybody who has taught college knows that that is just a small part of the time it takes. It was eye-opening-the effort that goes into preparing. Even if you teach a course repetitive semesters, you're always trying to freshen it. You bring in new material and try to improve over what you did the last time. So it's a lot of preparation, and the editing, of course, never diminishes. Excuse me-I call it editing; it's grading.

The grading is always there.

JM: But you're getting ready to stop teaching after this year? Is that correct what I heard?

GF: Yes.

JM: But you plan to stay in Pennsylvania?

GF: Right. Our decision to retire where we were is dictated by the fact that it is where our family is, and that's . . .

JM: Yes. They kind of grew up there.

GF: Yes. They grew up, and they've stayed. JoAnn and I consider ourselves fortunate. The only one of our children who lives away from home is five hours away at Charlottesville, Virginia. Our daughter, Susan, is on the faculty at the University of Virginia. We have one grandson down in Virginia.

JM: What does she teach?

GF: Sports medicine.

JM: Did any of your children go into journalism?

GF: No, they didn't. None of them did. You know, I was not going to twist their arms.

JM: No, me neither.

GF: One of our daughters would have made a terrific journalist if she had decided to do that, but they're all very happy with what they're doing.

JM: As I recall from your Gazette interview, you wanted to be a journalist at an early age . . .

GF: Yes.

JM: . . . that you started thinking about that.

GF: None of them showed that inclination at an early age.

JM: Yes. Okay, Gene. That has kind of covered it. Well, wait a minute. We wound up-your wife's name is JoAnn. Is that correct?

GF: Yes. J-O, capital A-N-N.

JM: Okay. I thought so.

GF: And her maiden name was Baldwin.

JM: Okay. And you met her at the Gazette, didn't you?

GF: Yes. She was in the advertising department there in 1956 and 1957 when I graduated from college.

JM: And soon you had five children.

GF: Yes. Our five children were born between 1960 and 1967. When the girls were in their teens, JoAnn decided to take in foster children.

JM: Okay.

GF: We have two others who are adopted and are grown up now.

JM: Oh, do you? Okay. Okay. All right. And you have how many grandchildren?

GF: Eighteen.

JM: Oh, boy!

GF: Yes.

JM: Yes, you've got a crew. Okay. Gene, I think we've pretty much covered it. Let's go back to the Democrat for a minute. Is there anything else that you can think of?

GF: Yes, an anecdote.

JM: Okay.

GF: The division between Stanley and Marcus over how the paper was run was illustrated rather painfully on a Monday-which was my day off-and Paul Nielsen was in the slot. They had a story about an undercover policewoman who posed as a prostitute but got no takers. I hope they didn't name her. [Laughs] The headline that Paul and the copy editor came up with was "Pretend Whore Gets No Takers." So the paper-the first edition came out, and Stanley got his copy of the paper, and he saw this headline on the front page. He was offended and figured a

lot of readers would be offended by this word. So he ran up to see if Marcus was there to tell Marcus, "Let's get this changed." But Marcus was not there. It was my day off. So he [Stanley] went to the copy desk. Nielsen was in charge of the copy desk. Nielsen knew that Stanley did not have authority over him, given the unique division of responsibilities. So Stanley was telling [him], "Let's change this headline," and Paul said, "Why? This is a word that Shakespeare used. Why can't we use it?" And Stanley was sputtering about that, and it was evident after a couple of tries to reason with Paul that he was getting nowhere. So he rushed down to the pressroom, which was under his control. He ordered them to stop the presses, and they took chisels and knocked that word out. [Laughter] It [the headline] said, "Pretend [blank] Gets No Takers," and people could figure out for themselves what used to be there. [Laughter]

JM: Yes.

GF: When people called me about that, it was one of those stories that I knew what they were going to say next. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

GF: I think that we've covered most of the things that I had thought we should cover. Do you think of anything else?

JM: One thing I was going to ask you about was sports. When you brought Fred Morrow in, did you give him any particular slant that you felt he ought to pursue as far as covering the [University of Arkansas] Razorbacks or anything else in his sports coverage?

GF: I don't know that I did give him any specific instructions. Fred became the anti-Orville in that he was maybe more critical of the Razorbacks than he needed to be. But he gave us a fresh approach.

JM: He did.

GF: People who were reading about the Razorbacks could certainly get some insights that they weren't going to get from the Gazette. But I was basically trying to just upgrade the coverage across the board.

JM: Yes.

GF: And, obviously, in Arkansas the Razorbacks are going to be the number one beat.

JM: Yes.

GF: Which Fred himself handled. And in that respect [01:22:35.21]in the great 1969 shootout [football game] at Fayetteville between [the University of] Texas and Arkansas, that Arkansas lost-Bob Lancaster wrote a color story for the front page. I think I can quote the lead, maybe not word for word. The idea was that after the game, [President] Richard Nixon was over in the Texas locker room giving the national championship trophy that Nixon himself had devised to Darrell Royal. [Arkansas Razorbacks coach Frank Broyles] met with the team and then kind of forlornly walked out of the locker room and started walking across the campus. An old man came up to him, and they embraced. Bob was observing this from a distance. Bob, in his succinct, eloquent way, set the scene in the first paragraph, and the second paragraph said, "That's the way it is in football. Fifteen points gets you a trophy from the president. Fourteen points gets you a hug from an old friend." I don't think you would've read that in the Gazette.[01:23:44.17]

JM: No, probably not. [Laughter] Yes, I think Fred probably resented the fact, though, that, of course, Orville got first on everything.

GF: Yes.

JM: No matter what you do, that kind of grates on you after a while, I'm sure.

GF: I think Fred said, "Even if I wrote the most glorious things about Frank Broyles, I still was not going to get any more access."

JM: No.

GF: But I think that he did a fine job of covering the Razorbacks. Fred is a very talented writer.

JM: Oh, he was a terrific writer.

GF: And his game stories, I thought, were really good.

JM: Oh, yes. He was a really outstanding writer. I always thought the world of Fred.

GF: I understand how tough it was for Fred.

JM: Yes.

GF: The city desk—at least I was around that, to take some of the heat, and Bob McCord was off to the side.

JM: Yes.

GF: But the sports department was around the corner, and it was Fred against the world, it seemed like, I'm sure, to him.

JM: Yes.

GF: I certainly felt it. I was the focal point of the disenchantment of some of the veterans. I was the guy causing it all.

JM: Yes.

GF: It's all understandable, but it was the most hostile environment [in which] I ever worked. On the one hand, I was really thrilled by the outstanding work that the young staffers were doing-how hard they were working and how well they were doing. On the other, it was constantly battling through the tension.

JM: So it was sort of a hostile environment, then, that you went into?

GF: Yes. And the same sort of situation could have occurred in Philadelphia, but it was not nearly that tense. There certainly were examples there of people who had been there a long time working under one system [who] now were being told to work under a different one.

JM: Yes.

GF: But it probably was the scale of things that made the difference there.

JM: Okay, Gene. Well, I think we've covered a lot of ground here. Anything else that you can think of in particular about the Democrat, or anything else, for that matter?

GF: No, I think that should take care of it.

JM: Okay. Good. Very good. Well, I appreciate it a lot. It's been very informative. Thank you.

GF: Thanks.

[Tape Stopped]

GF: Jerry, I just wanted to say that I was really gratified when I left that you were appointed managing editor. I felt that the people I had brought in would be in good hands.

JM: Thank you.

GF: And I said before, I thought that the paper was ready-Ralph and I were kind of burning out, and it was time for someone else to try to lead that newsroom. I really appreciate you coming along and doing that.

JM: Thank you. Well, it was interesting. It was fun. It was a challenge, and I had a lot of the same problems that you did . . .

GF: [Laughs]

JM: . . . which I will touch later in my own [interview]. But having to hire people at beginning wages-you know, you couldn't hire an experienced reporter or an experienced copy editor-but it was. You left some really good people there, too, that I really benefited from. So I thank you very much.

GF: Thank you, Jerry.

[01:27:03.22]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

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