

Gazette Project

Interview with

Jim Bailey,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
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Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This interview is part of the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History's project on the *Arkansas Gazette*. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you an opportunity to review the transcript, at which point you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is tell me your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcript available to others.

Jim Bailey: Jim Bailey and I am perfectly willing.

JM: Okay. Very good. I guess we'll start off with, maybe, just what, in your view, made the *Arkansas Gazette* special.

JB: Well, Jerry, when the *Gazette* closed in 1991, I was talking to a fellow that I used to work with there named Ralph Baldwin, who, quite a few years before the *Gazette* closed, had gone on to the *Houston Post* and other papers, but he grew up in Little Rock. And he said that the thing that he remembered best about the *Gazette* — not when he was working there, but when he was growing up — he picked up the *Gazette* every morning, and if something really important in the

world had happened, he knew instantly because the *Gazette* didn't waste any banner-screaming headlines on trivial matters. It had to be something like "Japanese Hit Pearl Harbor," or "President Got Assassinated," or "Arkansas Won a Football Game from Texas," that kind of thing.

JM: Let's just talk about the paper in general, though, about what you saw of other papers compared to what you did at the *Gazette*.

JB: Well, of course, I had read the *Gazette* quite a bit in south Arkansas before I worked there. When the school desegregation crisis at Central High caused the great uproar against the *Gazette* — the advertising boycotts and threats and so forth, in 1957 — when it happened, I happened to be covering something in Stuttgart, probably the Stuttgart duck-calling contest in December of 1957, and I got acquainted with an elderly couple over there. They were cordial to me but not really outgoing. So the next year, I was back there again, 1958, and they were a lot warmer. And the gentleman said, in effect, "We quit taking the *Gazette* when all that happened, but we started back because we just have to know what's going on in the state."

JM: Do you remember anything along that line about the role of sports? Did that change any during that time or after it happened?

JB: Well, I went to work there in 1956, as green as I could be, no prior experience to speak of. And I think you had gone to work there the previous year. My impression is that in 1957 when the Central High desegregation crisis came and there was a continual uproar, the *Gazette* greatly expanded its coverage,

particularly, of University of Arkansas football, and, obviously, Razorback football was one thing that went across the whole spectrum. No matter what you thought about Faubus, or segregation or Central High, you wanted to follow the Razorbacks. And my impression is that from that time forward, Razorback football coverage expanded and expanded and expanded. They had been doing a pretty extensive job with it for a long time before that, but the whole sports section grew considerably after that, and it might have anyway. I don't know.

JM: The whole paper had more space, didn't it?

JB: Well, the expansion of sports would have probably happened to some extent anyway. I think, though, that the Central High crisis was a factor in opening up at that time. Of course, from 1954 on, Razorback football was a front-page thing in the *Gazette* every Sunday morning. Over the years, a lot of people have said, "Do you think that's journalistically sound?" Well, I don't know, but it was realistically sound because that's what people wanted to read.

JM: Did you have any particular problems covering anything because of the integration situation? Did anybody ever give you much hassle about it?

JB: No, nobody hassled me. I'd get a few rude remarks here and there about whether or not our editor had been assigned directly from Moscow, but as far as my job, going to cover the thing, no, I didn't have any hassle. I probably would have if I'd been covering some meetings regarding integration. I don't know.

JM: You went to work there in the summer of 1956. Who did you replace covering the AIC [Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference]? Who had been doing the AIC

before you came there?

JB: Well, you and Charlie Rixse came over from the *Democrat* the previous year, and Charlie had been covering the AIC. In the spring of 1956, he was moved to the city staff. Sports was left with a vacancy, and I kind of staggered into it.

JM: Did you come directly from Southern State — or it wasn't Southern State then . . .

JB: It was Southern State, but it's now called Southern Arkansas. Yes, I came directly from there. All I'd ever done was a little work for the college paper, a little work for the local Magnolia paper, stringing for the Little Rock papers.

JM: How many people were on the Sports staff then when you got there? Do you remember? Full-time people?

JB: Okay, there was Orville, Orville Henry, the boss. There was you. There was Wilbur "Bill" Bentley. And then there was me, replacing Rixse, and I believe that was the extent of full-time people. There were couple of Eddies: Eddie Best and Eddie Abel. Part-timers just out of high school.

JM: What about Chuck Miller? Wasn't he there?

JB: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Chuck. So it was Orville, you, Chuck, Bill Bentley and me. We were the full-timers.

JM: Five full-timers, yes.

JB: Eddie Abel and Eddie Best were part-timers, technically, but under the system that they used, part-timers often worked as many hours as full-timers. So it was seven staff members and several contributors, such as Tom Mull and Gus Allbright, who did wildlife and fishing and hunting things.

JM: What do you recall about Orville and how he ran the ship and what he did?

JB: Well, let's start with what he did.

JM: Okay.

JB: He was the sports editor. He did the hiring and firing. He made the schedule. He filled out the pay cards. He covered the Razorbacks. He wrote a column five days a week most of the year, six days a week during football season, including his Monday-morning rehash, which was essentially a column, 4,000 words long! In the summers, he covered a lot of golf. He covered the Arkansas Travelers. He did everything. One time, years and years later, I was looking at the staff — I don't remember if it was one of the last sports staffs at the *Gazette* or one after I was over at the *Democrat-Gazette* — I looked at all the names on the staff and their responsibilities, and I tried to figure out how many of those had replaced what Orville used to do, and it was about 8! [Laughs]

JM: When you got there, he probably was still working the slot a little bit, wasn't he?

JB: He was still working the slot one night a week most weeks and trying his best to get out of it, which he did. Within a year after I was there, he didn't regularly work the slot anymore. He would come in eight or nine o'clock in the morning, maybe ten o'clock. — Of course, the paper's natural work cycle was mid-afternoon to midnight — he'd come in nine or ten o'clock in the morning, answer letters, plan a budget or something. Then in early afternoon, he'd write his column — I'm speaking of summertime essentially — and that night he might be out covering a game at Ray Winder Field, or he might be out at a golf tournament

all afternoon. And then, sometimes, if he wasn't doing baseball, if he wasn't doing golf, he might go home and eat supper and then come back and help out wrapping up the paper.

JM: Do you remember how he used to transmit his games from Ray Winder Field back to the paper, how he got the story back to the paper?

JB: Dictated it over the telephone. That was the way to go.

JM: But he would also file for other papers at the same time, wouldn't he?

JB: Yes, in those days, all minor league ballparks had a Western Union operator on duty. I was rarely there when Orville was doing a game, but let's say we were playing Chattanooga and he was going to file for the Chattanooga paper. He wouldn't have done this with many other Western Union operators, but the fellow who had been there in the ballpark for so many years, Earle Little, he and Orville were so accustomed to each other, and Little was very good. When the game was over, Orville would total up his box score, pull over there close to Earle Little and dictate off the top of his head the story for the Chattanooga paper, and then he'd pick up the phone and call the office and dictate the story for our paper, all off the top of his head, which a lot of people did in those days, but not too many of them as well as he did.

JM: Do you remember when he told you that you had to start doing that when you were covering AIC games and you . . .

JB: He didn't have to tell me. I started covering AIC football games, and the game would end at approximately ten o'clock, and I had approximately an hour to file.

If you tried to sit down and write a 12-, 15-, 20-inch story on your typewriter and then pick up the phone and read it, it wasted a lot of time. So before my first season was over, I might sketch out a little lead, a little outline on the typewriter, but, essentially, I just started picking up the phone and dictating. There was no other way to go.

JM: Maybe it wasn't the case so much in the football games, but when you were covering basketball games, how was it you always got a telephone after the basketball game was over? [Laughs] Covering a tournament, how was it you always get a telephone line back to the *Gazette*?

JB: Well, I guess you're talking about the district playoff games down at Pine Bluff?

JM: Yes, yes.

JB: The Arkansas schools would be playing for a trip to the NAIA [National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics] tournament at Kansas City. Other than a pay phone out in the lobby, which spectators were always using during the game and at halftime and so forth, the only phone was in an office, I guess a coach's office, but when this playoff was going on, it was an office where the officials dressed. There was an eight-team playoff, and they started with four games on Saturday, from late afternoon to near midnight, and then the semi-finals Monday and the finals Tuesday. The really tough night was the first one, with four games, one after another, with about 15 minutes in between. One phone. Two papers, us and the *Democrat*. So an old friend, Joe McGee of the *Conway Log Cabin*, who, being with an afternoon paper, wasn't in any hurry to file. He didn't even have a

Sunday paper at that time. The *Democrat* was an afternoon paper six days a week, but it came out on Sunday morning, with the same deadlines as the *Gazette*. So when a game was winding down, I would get up from the press table, go down around the end zone and — the office we were going to was actually underneath the stands on the opposite side of the gym. Well, I'd stand there at the edge of the court long enough to get the final score, and then I would go down, get on the phone — even before the officials got to the dressing room — start dictating, [and I'd] leave Joe to pick up the box for me. Well, here would come my competitor, and he'd stand there and, of course, he was nervous. The other game was about to get underway. Here comes Joe and he'd hand me the box, and I'd read the box, and probably maliciously, I'd sit there and chat an extra minute or two, "How's everything going with the high school tournaments? How's Northside?" And this guy, the other guy, would be going crazy. And just as the other game was getting underway, "Okay, better go. I'll see you," and so I'd slam the phone down, and he would jump on it. And he would reappear out on the court about the middle of the first half of the next game. The funny thing is that we did that five or six years in a row, and he never seemed to remember from one year to the next. [Laughter]

JM: What do you remember about covering the Razorback games, doing the sidebars and going along with Orville, covering that? I suspect, but I can't remember for sure, your first two years you probably were covering AIC games a lot of that time on Saturdays.

JB: Well, I always was, but I would always help with some Razorback games, and there'd be certain years I would do more than others. Oh, that was top of the line. That was the best duty in the world.

JM: Why was that?

JB: Well, it was something everybody was interested in.

JM: Do you remember how much Orville used to write on the Razorback football games?

JB: I never counted it! [Laughs]

JM: Let me put it this way, who was the last person out of the press box?

JB: Orville and whoever was with him.

JM: Yes! [Laughs] How were they transmitting the games then back to the office?

JB: Western Union. There would be Western Union operators on duty in the press box to transmit your stuff. Of course, it seemed like over the years, Western Union started phasing out its night press rate stuff, its media services. I don't know whether it was deliberate or not, but old employees who had been doing that sort of stuff for years and years were sort of retiring as a group. And I don't know if the newcomers didn't take to it, but, anyway, the Western Union operators that you had by the 1970s were nothing like the Earle Littles of 10 or 15 years earlier. And that's when the telecopier came in. Remember that?

JM: Partially.

JB: Kind of an ancestor of the fax. You'd type your story on a standard-sized typing sheet, roll it around the cylinder and make contact with the office, hook up with a

companion machine, and if everything worked, the cylinder would whirr and whirr and whirr and whirr. And then you'd call the office, "Was that a clear transmission?" "No." It never was, not on one try. And then, behind that, came the barely portable computer units. And, to me, the best I ever used was Tandy by Radio Shack, very small and very functional, by far the best I ever had to try to use.

JM: Eventually, you could transmit from memory straight to the office, but, originally, you had to have tapes or something. Didn't you store it on tapes and then . . .

JB: Yes, we had a big, cumbersome machine. It weighed about 40 pounds. We lugged it through airports and everything, a big machine covered with blue cloth. Teleram, that was what we called it. Teleram. And you typed onto a tape, and it would come on with some sort of warning when you were about to run out of space. The tape was allotted in spaces about 8 or 10 inches, and you had to go onto the next block. And if you forgot to save before you moved on, you lost that block. And the tape was just about like that kind of cassette tape you play music on. It looked like it. I remember one night in War Memorial Stadium press box, the machine was fouling up and, for some reason, we thought it was the tape. And Orville pulled the cassette out and just opened the window and threw it out in the stadium somewhere, and I always wondered if some workman picked it up the next day and thought he had him a little music tape and went home and played it.

JM: But didn't you have one episode, maybe at War Memorial Stadium, that you were

having trouble transmitting, and you threw the tape out of the window, into the stands, and then discovered it didn't go through? Or is that my memory . . . ?

JB: That's possible. I don't remember that particularly.

JM: I thought I remembered that Orville was having trouble transmitting and finally got it through, and he handed it to you and said, "Throw that thing as far as you can."

JB: He did the throwing in the only incidents I remember.

JM: Okay.

JB: But after that, the Teleram came out with a new model and no tape, and much easier to handle and, as I say, eventually, the little Radio Shack was by far the best one. Texas Instruments had a horrible machine that when you typed into its system, it also printed out on a roll of paper. And then you hooked up and sent it to the office, and — I never did have to work with one of those, but a lot of people I saw in the press box with them, they would send, and then they would call the office, "Did that go through?" "Yes," and he'd pull the roll of paper up that the story had printed out, and he'd say, "Okay, in the first graph, I meant to say such-and-such and in the second graph, I meant to say such-and-such."

JB: How much do you remember about the Friday night operation? I know you remember a lot about it, but anything particular that you recall?

JM: You mean Friday night high school football?

JM: Yes.

JB: Oh, yes. One thing I remember — Of course, we had different editions, and the

people who lived in the first-edition territory, the most distant, were always unhappy because they couldn't get night games in the paper. So their football team played on Friday night, and they wouldn't see it until Sunday. And there was this fellow at Fordyce — and this was probably into the middle 1970s. I can't recall his name. I'm not even sure I knew it at that time — but he worked for the weekly Fordyce paper, and he was the fellow who called in Fordyce games. And I'd get him on the phone two or three times a football season and he'd be griping about, you know, no story in the paper the following morning. And, one time, the computer stuff was on the way, and I said something to the effect, "Well, the paper's going computerized in the next year or so and that's supposed to speed everything up." So, a couple of years later, we were computerized. Of course, computers, to say the least, didn't help on deadlines at all — And I happened, one Friday night, to be talking to the same fellow.

JM: It wasn't Bill Whitehead, was it?

JB: No, he worked for Bill's paper.

JM: Oh, I see.

JB: And I didn't identify myself that night and, obviously, he didn't realize he was talking to me, but he was griping all over again about lateness, no game story on Saturday morning. And he said, "Jim Bailey told me a year or two ago that when you went to computers, it was going to solve all this problem." I said, "Well, I guess that shows you how much *that* son of a bitch knows!" [Laughter]

JM: When you first started, they were probably still using a lot of high school kids

called in to help on Friday nights.

JB: Always, from the time I started till the last time I did it, and your local correspondent might be the high school kid statistician, the high school team manager, an assistant coach, the head coach, some local newspaperman or just even a big fan who followed the high school and volunteered to do it.

JM: We had a bunch of part-timers in the office, also.

JB: High school kids, basically, and at times, some years, other staff members from outside the sports department would take calls, or a mixture of both.

JM: Did they complain any about that?

JB: They didn't complain, but, of course, they were on overtime, the staff members who didn't work in Sports. They didn't complain, but the novelty of it wore off after a week or two, and by the time you got into October, a lot of them had some other reason that they just couldn't be there on Friday night.

JM: Do you recall, out of the part-timers who worked in sports and other people who worked in sports — there were quite a few of those who went on to pretty good newspaper jobs, weren't there?

JB: Yes. Before I got there, a fellow named Pat Hogan, who started working there, I guess, in high school and went to Little Rock Junior College a couple of years, went down to Florida State on a partial baseball scholarship and wound up as the sports information director at Florida State and, eventually, maybe the public relations director for the whole school. He was a pretty important fellow in the administration down there. And then a fellow named Tom Dygard, who worked

there before I did, went to the Associated Press and eventually became a bureau chief somewhere. In fact, Orville had at least three beginners who became AP bureau chiefs, Tom Dygard, Robert Shaw, Bill Simmons. And then Harry King, who started working as a part-timer at the *Gazette*, went on to a long career with the AP, in the Little Rock bureau, mostly as a sportswriter. Orville was so limited in the number of full-time people he could have on the staff. He was always looking for these bright young kids — Some of them didn't turn out to be so bright, but — young kids who were interested in journalism. I guess he'd get recommendations from the journalism teachers at Central or North Little Rock, and he'd break them in working part-time, which, as I said a few minutes ago, might mean they'd work forty hours a week some weeks, but there was never any room to add them as full-time staff members. So they would go — they might join the *Gazette* as a part-timer while in high school, go to LRJC [Little Rock Junior College] for a couple of years, when UALR [University of Arkansas-Little Rock] was still a junior college, then go to the university, maybe be the *Gazette*'s main sports correspondent at the university, and then go somewhere else. A lot of good young people went through there.

JM: Any of those you remember, off hand?

JB: Well, Jim Standard. He was a copy boy, and then he was a part-timer in sports. Then he went to Fayetteville as a correspondent and, eventually, I think he wound up as the editor or editorial page editor of the *Daily Oklahoman*.

JM: Both, I think. Let's see now. Ronnie Robinson worked there. Did he work in

sports, or was he just a correspondent in Fayetteville?

JB: Ron worked in sports a summer, at least a summer, and then he was our sports correspondent in Fayetteville one year. And, of course, he became part of the very successful Cranford, Johnson, Robinson Agency, an advertising agency.

JM: He finally became president of it, didn't he?

JB: I think so.

JM: How about the Allen boys? Did they work in sports or were they copy boys, or what?

JB: Frank Allen had been to college a year or two, and I think he'd been in the army for three years and was back in school at UALR. He joined up. He was a little older than the average beginner. He went to school at Fayetteville and spent a year as our Fayetteville correspondent. Then he died at the age of twenty-six right after he joined the staff full time. Then we had his brother, Dick Allen. He was a beginner, a part-timer on the sports staff. And they had another brother named Mark. I think he was only a copy boy or something.

JM: Well, Dick went on to a pretty illustrious career, didn't he?

JB: Apparently he did. I'm not really familiar with where all he went and what he did after he left Arkansas. Apparently he did. He's now in Paris with the *New York Herald Tribune*, which is defunct in the U.S. but still publishes an overseas edition.

JM: At any rate, go back for a minute to the integration crisis. Do you ever remember any particular benefits that the sports department got out of coverage of that deal?

Did you ever hear it communicated that there was some sense that the paper felt like the sports coverage had sort of helped?

JB: I never heard it communicated. Everybody assumed that it helped, and everybody assumed the paper knew it helped because we did things that cost money that we hadn't been able to do previous to that.

JM: Was there a period of time there when maybe the news side thought that Orville was getting a few privileges from the higher ups?

JB: Oh, I'm sure they did.

JM: I remember a reclining chair. Didn't he have a reclining chair put in that he could take a nap in?

JB: He had a reclining chair. I don't know if it was for that purpose. And in 1971, just before that year's Arkansas-Texas game, we got a television set in sports. Of course, televisions are all over newsrooms now, but that was a first up there at that time, and I think a lot of people in the regular newsroom noticed that.

JM: When did you replace Orville in covering the Travelers? Didn't he finally sort of get rid of it and — well, not get rid of it, but he just finally wore out, I guess — but he had you take over Traveler coverage. When did you pick up the Travelers?

JB: There wasn't a certain year. Orville just gradually did the Travelers less and less, and I started doing them more and more until the point came when Orville only filled in a few games most years. That took place between 1958 and 1963, 1964, along in there.

JM: What in your view, if anything, made the *Gazette's* sports department and the

Gazette's sports coverage special? And how did it compare, say, with the rival, the afternoon paper, the *Democrat*, or with other newspapers, that you saw at that time?

JB: Orville went a long way towards making it special. One thing, Orville was, by the time I got there, accepted as the last word on the Razorback football program. And I covered the AIC more or less twenty years, and you covered high schools for quite a while, and after you, Wadie Moore covered high schools for quite a while, so I think one of the main differences between the *Gazette* and the *Democrat* in those days [was that] the people who covered college football, high school football, were established, entrenched, you might say. They knew all the coaches and all the coaches knew them, whereas the *Democrat* was always starting over with young fellows, and by the time they began to get their feet on the ground and know their way around, they were gone and another young fellow was in. The *Gazette* had a better pay scale and therefore more stability, not that *Gazette* staffers were getting rich.

JM: How about any other particular ways that it compared, say, with other newspapers that you were aware of? Let's say the Texas papers.

JB: Well, in those days, I didn't think any of the Texas papers were any good overall. The *Houston Post* had a good sports section, a good sports department. Of course, the *Dallas Morning News* made worlds, *worlds*, of improvement about twenty years ago, but I thought they were pretty pathetic back in those days.

JM: Weren't the other Texas writers, did they consult Orville quite a bit on the

Razorbacks and stuff like that?

JB: Some of them did. Dave Campbell in Waco. Lou Maysel in Austin. Yes, some of them did. I mean, in Texas, as in Arkansas, he was considered the last word on what was going on with the Razorbacks.

JM: I know you worked with her some — tell me about Mary Grace.

JB: Mary Grace, the switchboard operator. I don't know how old Miss Grace was. I'm guessing she was into her sixties or seventies, or just about, when I went there. In those days, if you wanted to make a long distance call, you called the switchboard operator and gave her the number if you had it — and the name and the city if you didn't — and then she'd always, in a matter of seconds, it seemed like, call you back and say, "So-and-so's on the line," or "So-and-so's coming to the phone." She could find anybody anywhere. I think the most amazing thing she did — the Travelers had had a wild left-handed pitcher named George Brunet, as a young kid in the 1950s. He went on and pitched for several big league clubs. At this particular time, he was pitching for the California Angels and having some degree of success, and I wanted to talk to him for kind of a follow-up story because he was well remembered in Arkansas. He was living in southern California and had an unlisted number, and I couldn't get any satisfaction out of the Angels. But I knew that he came from a small town in Michigan. I can't recall the town offhand, but it wasn't a major city up there. So I called Mary, and I told her I wanted to talk to George Brunet, who was living in California, but I had no number on him in California. He wasn't listed in

California, but I told her he came from this town in Michigan. So in about thirty minutes, she called back and said that she had gotten hold of a Brunet in that town and he had told her the names of some other Brunet relatives who lived in another town. Then she came back with a progress report that the Brunets in that town had told her about some Brunets in another town — all of these in Michigan. And, finally, she found a relative of George Brunet who actually had his phone number and gave it to her. So I called Brunet out in California. As soon as I identified myself, he said, “How in the *hell* did you find my number?!” I said, “George, you wouldn’t believe me if I told you.” [Laughs]

JM: In all the time that you were at the *Gazette*, do you recall anything in particular about the photographers? I know they did a lot of work for sports, took a lot of pictures.

JB: I think the *Gazette* probably had as good a photography staff as any paper in the country. I think they had as good a news staff as any paper in the country and as good a sports staff as any paper in the country, and the thirty-five years I was there the paper went through a lot of changes, with Gannett and so forth, but photography held up all the way through. We always had really outstanding photographers. At the time I went there, we had Larry Obsitnik, who was quite a temperamental fellow. I guess artists are supposed to be temperamental, and I thought he was sort of the Rembrandt of black and white news photography. And Gene Prescott, who was a great photographer. You’d go out on assignment with Gene, and he would draft you as a prop or something. I went out to interview

some Traveler pitcher with his wife and infant in a motel here one season. Gene went with me and we were going to shoot a picture of the family, the couple and the child. The baby was crying and disagreeable and not cooperative, so while Gene was shooting the picture, I had to get down on my hands and knees and make cooing noises and clown for the baby. But the baby smiled. And we had a really great-gun photographer, Rodney Dungan, who went on to — he left the *Gazette* and had great success, I think, with his own film business. A great photographer named Willie Allen, and then many years later Pat Patterson and Steve Keese. We always had good photographers.

JM: Some of them really seemed to enjoy shooting the sports stuff, too, didn't they?

JB: Most of them did. I guess I wouldn't remember them fondly if they hadn't. Gene Prescott would run up and down the floor with the basketball teams, up and down the sidelines. And they say one time Gene was over shooting a big feature race at Oaklawn Park in Hot Springs and as the horses were thundering into the stretch, somebody noticed there was a human being down there in their path. He escaped before security could go get him, but it was Gene getting the horses coming straight to him.

JM: [Laughs] I guess that was one way to do it. Any particular stories that — well, let me ask you about one. Do you remember interviewing Sonny Liston's mother?

JB: I sure do.

JM: What happened on that?

JB: Well, this was shortly before Liston fought Floyd Patterson for the heavyweight

title in 1962. They were going to fight in the fall, and this was March of that year. And a fellow who is not very easy to explain in a few words, Raoul Carlisle of Forrest City, was connected to the newspaper there and was an old planter, landowner. We heard through him that Sonny Liston — Sonny Liston had come originally from the Forrest City area, and we heard through Mr. Carlisle that his mother was living over there again. So I went over with Patrick J. Owens, who had worked at the *Gazette* and by that time was the chief editorial writer at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. He was interested in Liston because Liston had always been identified as a Pine Bluff native, and there was a great mystery about exactly where he came from and so forth. So we went over and visited with Mrs. Liston and . . .

[End of Side One, Tape One]

[Beginning of Side Two, Tape One]

JM: Okay. We were talking about interviewing Sonny Liston's mother.

JB: Well, Mr. Carlisle went with us, and he had told us beforehand, "Now, you've got to call her Mrs. Liston. I didn't call her that the other day, and she just kind of rared back at me." We got in there, and we hadn't been there thirty seconds, and he was calling her "Helen," and she didn't seem to mind. She clarified a lot of things: that Sonny actually came from Forrest City and what his birthdate was. His birthday was always in dispute. I thought it was a pretty good interview.

JM: What do you remember about Patrick Owens?

JB: Pat Owens was a reporter at the *Gazette* a couple of years, and then he went to

write editorials at Pine Bluff, and he went a lot of places after that. Detroit, for one. I thought he was really a brilliant writer, and he wasn't appreciated at the *Gazette*. He was a little different from the kind of every day news reporter they were looking for. He was a very talented man. Later, he was back with the *Gazette* briefly as an editorial writer.

JM: What do you recall about Gannett and what happened when Gannett took over? What happened to the paper and what happened to the sports department?

JB: Well, the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* had been to court about — the *Gazette* sued for some of the, what they call, “predatory practices” in the so-called newspaper war and lost. And, almost immediately, the Patterson family was ready to sell the paper. They had negotiated with some other newspaper group before Gannett, but that didn't happen. I think it was October of 1986 that the sale of the *Gazette* was announced, and Gannett took over in fact, I mean actually took over, about two months later as 1987 was getting underway, although Mr. Malone, the new publisher sent by Gannett, arrived almost immediately. When he met the staff was when he got off his famous line, “Gannett has deep pockets.” And they started flexing their financial muscle in 1987. The *Democrat* had been giving away or discounting classified ads. The *Gazette* started fighting them on that, doing the same thing. And they opened up the paper a lot, the color and so forth. And 1987 was for me a very great year. Because of Gannett, I covered the St. Louis Cardinals' home games all that season, all the way through, including the World Series, which they lost to the Minnesota Twins. There were a lot of,

several — a lot would probably be a stretch — but there were several Gannett papers in the middle west and Oklahoma and the South that wanted more coverage on St. Louis. And the stuff I did on the Cardinals was supplied to all these other papers by the Gannett News Service, so that was, as they say, a good gig. I did the same thing essentially through 1990, although it didn't work out so well after 1987 because the Cardinals never had that good a year again.

JM: Okay. Anything else about the way that Gannett ran the paper, though? What was your feeling about why the *Democrat* started gaining ground and . . .

JB: Well, Jerry, I think, if anything, the people who were running the *Democrat*, Mr. Hussman and a lot of the news people over there who had been working in Little Rock for several years, actually understood what made the *Gazette* good better than the people who, by then, were running the *Gazette*. For example, the Gannett team came in. On the front page of the *Gazette*, down the left side, of course, was the “In the News” thing, little snippets, little bright, unusual things gleaned off the news wire, not of earth-shaking importance, but interesting. Gannett couldn't understand that. They thought that should be junked and replaced with something about what Burt Reynolds said to somebody or something. But they did a survey, and 90% of the *Gazette* readers, or some fabulous number like that, — a huge percentage of the *Gazette* readers — didn't want “In the News” tampered with. A lot of things like that. For example, Pat Carrithers, the *Gazette*'s wire editor, was the man who, you might say, was the force behind “In the News,” culling these little bright items off the wire and

compiling them. And the first few months after Gannett took over, there was always a team coming in from some other Gannett outlet to hold seminars on “The Gannett Way” and such. And Carrick Patterson was the managing editor at that point, and he came by Carrithers’s desk one day and said, “Come on back to such-and-such room. People here from the *Shreveport Times* and the *Jackson Clarion Ledger* want to show us how they do this and that.” And Pat said, “I’m busy. And I’ve been looking at the *Clarion Ledger* and the *Shreveport Times* for years and years, and I don’t think I can learn anything from them.” There were a few old hardcore *Gazette* rebels in the system. None of us made much progress after Gannett arrived.

JM: How did the operation actually change under Gannett? What type of stories got played? Did the sports coverage change any?

JB: Everything — what people who had been working there for a long time considered “hard news” and, therefore, important news was not, all of a sudden, as important as “soft news,” feature type news. One thing I noticed there and at other Gannett papers, there was always a little thing, a little notice, asking readers to “Contact us if you think you’ve got a story that needs to be in the paper.” We had always been under the impression that professionals were supposed to find these stories. But the Gannett system is in all newspapers now to some extent, even the good ones. They’ve all been influenced to some extent.

JM: Did the length of the stories change?”

JB: Not as short as *USA Today* stories. The news holes got smaller, but they always

had what seems to be called in the trade “take outs,” a big blow-out feature on somebody, with photos and a long story. It was just a complete shift in emphasis.

JM: Did that carry over to the sports department, too?

JB: Oh, yes, it carried over to the sports department. — Not in what we covered, but in the way we went about it. — Like we had, oh, gosh, Orville moved to Fayetteville in 1983, and in 1989 he went to the *Democrat*. And we had a whole succession of sports editors: James Thompson, who had been Orville’s assistant, was sports editor, and then Gannett brought in Paul Borden from the Jackson paper as sports editor. After Orville switched to the *Democrat*, Paul Borden went to Fayetteville to do essentially what Orville had been doing in Fayetteville. And they brought in . . .

JM: When Orville switched to the *Democrat*?

JB: Yes, when Orville switched to the *Democrat*, Paul Borden went to Fayetteville. A fellow named Don Collins, who had been on *USA Today*, came in for a while. And one day they sent Don Collins off and changed to Bob Stover, who had been on the *Gazette* for about twenty years on the regular news side as a reporter and editor. Now, we’re talking about several changes in just about two years. It was a pretty grim scene.

JM: Did it change the *Gazette*’s sports department very much when Orville moved to Fayetteville?

JB: Not really. It didn’t change what we were doing. No, by that point, by the time Orville went to Fayetteville, other than some golf, he really wasn’t writing

anything except Razorbacks, and the operation didn't change that much except he was no longer in Little Rock. And, of course, after Gannett came, the limelight was still on the Razorbacks, and we didn't cover that many different things, but we covered them in a much sillier way.

JM: What do you mean, sillier way?

JB: Oh, let's see. A new guy would come in as sports editor from Gannett, and he would say, "Let's do a feature on Fordyce football," because they all knew about Paul "Bear" Bryant. We had been doing those periodically for years in some form. So somebody would go do one. And then they'd change editors, and the new editor would say, "Let's do something on Fordyce football. That's where Paul Bryant came from." You know?

JM: Yes. Had Orville, by the time he left and went to Fayetteville, right before he left, was he still doing quite a bit of the assignments? Was he making up story ideas?

JB: No. By that time, James Thompson was doing what you might call the administrative sports stuff.

JM: We've talked quite a bit about sports, and we'll come back to that. What about the news operation? Anything sticks out in your mind you recall about the news operation, how it worked, some of the people who used to work over there?

JB: Well, the best I could tell, there were four key people on the news floor: the managing editor, first A.R. Nelson, later Bob Douglas; the city editor — or later after Gannett got there, it became the metro, or metropolitan editor — the city editor, Bill Shelton; the sports editor, Orville Henry, and the news editor, or the

slot man, which for a time was also Bob Douglas. The managing editor, the news editor, the city editor and the sports editor were, in my way of thinking, the only four people on the floor who could get you fired. And all those guys were great at what they did. But in 1974, there was a movement to go union on the news side, start a guild chapter, guild membership, which didn't go through. But it wasn't until then, I don't think, that the *Gazette* even had what the military might call a table of organization that — there's this fellow, and then below him there's this fellow, and below him is this fellow and so on and so on. We didn't have a lot of middle management kind of people. We had a sports editor, and we had people who functioned as assistant sports editor, but assistant sports editor was not a formal title. Then, all of a sudden, assistant editors of some sort proliferated all over the building. And if you were an assistant editor of something, even though you didn't realize you were an assistant editor, being assistant editor, you were management and not eligible to vote for the union. [Laughs]

JM: That was brought on by the union vote?

JB: That's when it happened.

JM: Yes.

JB: So after that, I don't know, my God, when we finally closed in 1991, I don't know how many assistant sports editors of various kinds we had.

JM: Any of the reporters or other people who came through the newsroom that you recall in particular?

JB: When I got there, the star of the stable was general assignment reporter Ray

Moseley. In 1957, 1958, especially in 1957, when there was a kind of siege mentality out around Central High, he wrote the lead story most every day. Of course, all these people I'm thinking about were not there at the same time. Some of them overlapped and some of them didn't. Ray Moseley. Leland DuVall, who wrote "Business and Farm." Harry Ashmore, the Pulitzer-winning executive editor and editorial writer. And then reporters down through the years, Ernie Dumas, Mike Trimble, Doug Smith. About the last in line was probably John Brummett in the 1980s and early 1990s. And, of course, Charles Allbright, with his "Our Town" and "Arkansas Traveler." I mean that was world class. I mean, any paper in the world would have done all right with a staff of reporters like that. And, of course, we briefly had Charles Portis, who was a reporter and then a columnist. He was with us only a couple of years and went on to write *True Grit*, *Norwood* and some other books.

JM: Roy Reed.

JB: Oh, Roy Reed! I certainly want to put Roy in there. Gene Foreman. And Patrick J. Owens, even though he couldn't get many decent assignments at the *Gazette*. Charlie Rixse . . .

JM: Before Gannett took over, did the *Gazette*, in your view, — and I was gone away from here — start going down hill any in the latter years?

JB: Well, I felt like the *Gazette* was pretty much at its peak from the time I got there in the 1950s until well up into the 1970s. Towards the end of the 1970s, the *Democrat* finally bowed to the inevitable and went morning, went head to head.

And some people on our straight news side thought that we never reacted very well to that. I remember one editor telling me — And I won't tell you who he is because maybe he'll be interviewed and he'll tell you himself — but he told me a long time after the fact that when the *Democrat* went morning, our editors were called in and told “We're not going to do anything different.” But this editor said, “But we did — from that day forward.”

JM: They certainly had a period of time there, which you mentioned, that they really had some exceptional reporters, didn't they?

JB: Yes. Roy Reed. Moseley. Ernie Dumas. Trimble. Oh, there are several that are probably slipping my mind. Like we were talking about a while ago, the edge we had in sports because we had experienced people covering all the beats who were well established and respected in the beats they were working in, the same thing was true out there. Those guys doing the straight news were also, for the most part, going up against inexperienced people.

JM: Any particular stories that you were involved in in sports that you recall? You know, anything unusual or anything that you particularly enjoyed doing, or any beats that the *Gazette* got, anything like that stand out in your mind?

JB: Well, I thought interviewing Sonny Liston's mother was a coup. That wasn't done very often. [Laughs] You mean, a so-called “great scoop”?

JM: Well, yes, or not necessarily a great scoop, just a fun story.

JB: Well, I loved baseball. And I liked to write about boxing. We didn't have any, but I still liked to write about it. I enjoyed football. I enjoyed covering pretty

much whatever I was covering, so long as it was confined to football, baseball and basketball.

JM: I know you were crazy about boxing. Didn't you and Cus D'Amato become pretty close friends? How did that come about? Who was Cus D'Amato? Maybe you better spell it first.

JB: C-U-S, first name. D-slash-A-M-A-T-O. He was a New York fight manager who managed Floyd Patterson and was quite colorful and controversial in this time. I wouldn't say we became friends, but I got a chance to go down and do a fight in Houston between Muhammed Ali and Ernie Terrell in 1967, which was kind of like an Arabian Nights thing for me because the hotels were full of boxing writers I'd been reading all my life. Jimmy Cannon, not a boxing writer as such, but a top columnist. Red Smith. Also fight people, Nat Fleischer, the editor of *Ring Magazine*, old managers, old fighters. And during my trip down there, in three or four separate conversations over three or four days, Cus D'Amato and I probably talked about twenty hours, and other than that I never was around him. I got some pretty good stories out of that, I thought, but I also got a lot of insight and background. Archie Moore. I got to be friends with Archie Moore, the former light heavyweight champion. I even had Archie as a house guest once.

JM: What was special about Archie Moore? I mean, at first as a fighter, then maybe as somebody you knew, but tell me about Archie's career just briefly.

JB: Well, Archie started boxing in the 1930s, and he was a world-rated fighter for about twelve years before he was ever given a chance to win a title. He won the

light heavyweight title, and then he later challenged Rocky Marciano for the heavyweight title and lost, but knocked him down. And he persisted as a fighter until he was nearly fifty. He scored more knockouts than any other fighter in history because he had a lot of fights and he could punch. But he was a different kind of guy. Colorful, nice guy.

JM: Didn't you — and this is probably calling on you to toot your own horn a little bit, but didn't you kind of endear yourself to Cus by recalling some things that he'd forgotten that you remembered? I know that you had a great memory and kept track of information.

JB: Well, he was groping around for the name of somebody who had been a schoolteacher who had helped Patterson as a youth, and he couldn't come up with his first name. And I said, "Ernest?" "Yes, yes." Yes, things like that kind of impressed him.

JM: Didn't you ride the train back from Houston after that?

JB: That was our last conversation. That one lasted all night.

JM: Yes. You rode from Houston . . .

JB: To Little Rock.

JM: To Little Rock. And you got off in Little Rock and he went on to New York.

JB: He went on to New York, yes. I never saw him again.

JM: And was that the only Ali fight that you covered?

JB: No, I saw him with Jimmy Ellis also in Houston. Those were the only two fights I saw Ali [when] I was present, you know, in person.

JM: He was, needless to say, a pretty good fighter at that time. Was he about at his peak at that era?

JB: Well, he fought Terrell in 1967, just a couple of months before they barred him from the ring for refusing military service. He was twenty-five then and just coming to his peak. He was out of the ring from 1967 to 1970, so his peak . . . he probably missed. He was idle in what should have been his absolutely peak years. He was very colorful, but he wasn't a very good interview. He was a showman. He had great mass interviews, but not so hot with one on one.

JM: Did he, in one on one, did he spout some of his famous lines or was he pretty normal?

JB: The two or three times I talked to him one on one, he wasn't spouting his nonsense. He was polite, but not particularly communicative.

JM: You worked for the *Gazette* for your whole career, in effect?

JB: I planned to. I had thirty-five years.

JM: Well, yes. You did go over to the *Democrat-Gazette* after that, at some point after they bought it out.

JB: I was at the *Arkansas Times* for about a year and a half, and then I went there in 1994.

JM: And you've retired now.

JB: Yes, I'm retired. I still do a few things, but I'm officially retired.

JM: You still do, what, once-a-week . . .

JB: Once-a -week column and a few other things occasionally.

JM: Do you remember the Gator Bowl game? I guess it was about 1959.

JB: Oh, yes.

JM: Do you remember what transpired on that in the coverage?

JB: You mean, the whole staff going?

JM: Yes, how did that come about?

JB: I don't know how it came about. We were told that the whole staff was flying to the game. Of course, Orville was already there. He was always at the bowl town by the time the team was. But the rest of us flew down on a fans's charter. I think you were the only staff member besides Orville who did anything at the game. The rest of us were just in the stands. Eddie Best was one of them, and I really don't remember who all went. Chuck Miller, of course, went. But the funny thing about it was Shelton, the city editor, and Douglas, I guess at that time he was the news editor, they put out the sports section, so we could go.

JM: They flew everybody in the sports department . . . And only you and Orville had to work.

JM: Yes. I had to do both of the dressing rooms, so I remember. [Laughs] I never did figure that out.

JB: I would have been happy to do one of the dressing rooms.

JM: Well, I never have figured that one out. The story I had always heard was that they'd said, "Well, you all have been working in there for so long, and the Razorbacks never have done anything. You never have gotten any special treats." So we got this bowl game all of a sudden and so . . .

JB: I remember there was turbulent weather on the flight, and Eddie Best got sick
Twice. Robert Shaw, he was a young fellow on the staff. He was one of them on
the trip.

JM: Anything you remember about Harry King when he was on the staff?

JB: Harry was a golfer, still is, and I used to kid him about his golf stories. He was a
fellow who would have made a great long-term addition to the staff, but the
structure was such then that he had to go somewhere else. The young people
coming up off the sports staff either had to get a job in another area at the paper or
go somewhere else, and Harry went to Associated Press. And he's been, I think,
outstanding for them over the years.

JM: Harry was a big lover of playing sports, wasn't he? He loved to play anything,
touch football . . .

JB: Touch football. In fact, he was always, like, on Saturday night, he'd be playing
touch football with somebody up and down the alley that bordered the *Gazette*
there and, boy, he was always showing up in splints. And Orville told him one
time, "If you ever get hurt playing sandlot sports again, you're done," or words to
that effect. Later Harry had what amounted to a broken leg, and he had to conceal
it. [Laughter]

JM: What was it like working the *Gazette* sports at night — because I'm sure you
worked nights most of the time, probably three to midnight.

JB: Yes, I worked essentially at night from 1956 until 1987. After 1987, except for
being out at some game at night, I was usually at work during the daytime. The

early days, what was a real pain — the sandlot programs, the baseball, the kid leaguers, calling in. We ran line scores and highlights. In fact, for about an hour, an hour and a half every night, we were covered up in them. We didn't have that many people. We were covered up. Bill Bentley wouldn't answer the phone unless he absolutely had to because he was basically desk, anyway. So one night about three people were there, one of them being Bill, and we were covered up with kid leagues. The phone kept ringing. And, finally, Bill — Bill was, of course, an old timer, and he wore one of those green eye shades, like you see in movies about old newspaper people. He actually wore one. So Bill finally answered the phone, and the person on the other end said something like, "I have the first twelve games we had out here tonight in Geyer Springs." And Bill said, "Okay. Just a minute." And he put the phone down and muffled it with one hand and jerked his eye shade off with the other and hurled it up in the city room and screamed, "Goddamn!" [Then with a calmer voice:] "All right, sir. What's the first team?" But Orville, bless him, he finally decreed that we didn't run stories or scores on any competition among people younger than thirteen.

JM: [Laughs] That certainly lowered the work load, didn't it? Somebody hung around, though, at least until midnight, didn't they, to answer the phone?

JB: Oh, yes. Whoever was closing the paper — Bill Bentley or Chuck Miller — somebody had to kind of back them up on the phone.

JM: Well, there were always phone calls, weren't there? At least people wanting to settle bets or something like that?

JB: Yes. When I went there, one of the great Traveler teams, that is, as far as fans were concerned, one of the most memorable Traveler teams was in 1937. This was only about twenty years later, and we'd get calls, "Who played first base for the 1937 Travelers?" I didn't know, so I'd ask Bill Bentley, and he'd say, "Jack O'Neill." And in any period of time a big prize fight would trigger about two or three days of calls, bets people had made on what happened between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, or whatever. And Mr. Bentley — of course he had worked, I think, for the *Gazette* on the regular news side back in the 1920s. He was kind of a gypsy. He worked for papers all over the place. Then he came back later and he was sports editor in the early 1930s, and he left again. Ben Epstein became sports editor, the guy who brought Orville in. Epstein went to New York during World War II and worked for the *New York Daily Mirror*, and Orville became sports editor. Mr. Bentley came back in about 1950, basically as a desk man and a two-time-a-week columnist. If you remember, Mr. Bentley did a lot of poetry in his columns. He never wrote a column on something that he had gone out of the office and taken part in. He did cover the Travelers occasionally. He loved baseball. He loved baseball and horse racing, but he didn't gamble. He was one of the few people on earth who liked to go to the horse track just to see the horses run. But he was always breaking out into a poem of some kind in the paper. The Travelers had three veteran hitters named Les Peden, Eric Rodin and Ben Downs, and Bill saluted them with a little poem in his column that started out, "Rodin and Peden and Benjamin Downs – Dynamite's represented by those proper nouns."

And he'd get a release from the Game and Fish Commission about hunting seasons, and he noticed one about rails and gallinules, and he wrote that the public was going to get a chance to "rail after rails and gun for gallinules."

[Laughter] But a lot of the people who were obsessed with the Razorbacks didn't like him. They said, "Orville, why do you let that guy write? He doesn't ever write anything about the Razorbacks."

JM: And then, wasn't there some sentiment, though, among some of the readers or coaches, in particular, that Orville wrote too much about the Razorbacks?

JB: Oh, yes. Any coach at a high school or a college, most of them thought he did, very much so. Like when Orville went to the *Democrat* — shortly after he went to the *Democrat*, they had some function down in south Arkansas, at Crossett. Maybe it was the Ashley County Hall of Fame or something. And we got a letter from a lady down there complaining about how little attention the thing got from the *Gazette*, and she said, "When Orville left, I thought that would end all of that stuff."

JM: [Laughs] On another subject, though, did it seem to you that the *Gazette* at one time — and this was during Orville's management era — did pay a lot of attention to the history of sport?

JB: Well, they devise a name for everything, and I think the current name for what we are talking about is "institutional memory," usually mentioned in the context that no institution has any institutional memory anymore. There was always somebody at the *Gazette* who had been there long enough to remember this, that

and the other or covered it or something. And the staffs get younger and younger and younger. Orville always wanted everything covered. He'd take care of the Razorbacks, and he left it up to the rest of us to throw the others enough raw meat to keep them sullen, but not mutinous.

JM: [Laughs] He wanted the high schools covered as well.

JB: He wanted everything covered well, but he didn't want — originally, he had done it all. He had covered the Little Rock Tigers, Travelers, Razorbacks, whatever. Golf. And when he built the staff, a lot of people would complain that Orville didn't pay them any attention, older people who remembered if you sent the sports editor at the *Gazette*, be it Orville or one of his predecessors, a Christmas card, he'd write a column at Christmas, "Oh, I got a card from . . ." Remember, they used to collect their Christmas cards and just do a column about . . .

JM: Just a list of names.

JB: . . . just everybody. Yes. That changed, you know. That changed.

JM: Well, I think Jack Keady kept doing it.

JB: Well, like I say, that changed. Orville was always out ahead of the curve. He was on the trends before anybody else in our area was.

JM: Anything in particular?

JB: Well, the University of Arkansas is up at Fayetteville, about four or five hours away by car at that time from Little Rock. It seems so obvious now what happened, but at that time a newspaper in central Arkansas writing that much on a school that far away wasn't obvious. What was obvious to people who were

around at that time was the old way. Ben Epstein, Orville's predecessor — the Razorbacks would come down and play their annual football game in Little Rock. He'd do a lot of stuff on it. Otherwise, he'd do state teachers, Arkansas Tech, the Pine Bluff-Little Rock high school series. Orville saw that the Razorbacks were the wave of the future and were going to be the consuming thing in Arkansas sports.

JM: How about coverage after TV became prevalent? Was he also sort of on the cutting edge on how to handle that?

JB: Well, I think what happened most places, what got buried in the minds of most newspapers, you have to have a lot of quotes because, presumably, if it's a big enough game, everybody has seen it on TV and you don't need that much detail. You use some quotes. No matter how inane. No matter how repetitive. No matter how banal. No matter — Orville never did buy that part of it. He wanted quotes but quotes that meant something. Nobody writes game stories anymore. They have a lead that says who beat who and "Joe Jones ran 28 times for 238 yards and two touchdowns." Then, boom, a quote from Joe Jones. And then somebody else did something else and then, boom, a quote from somebody else.

JM: Anything else that you recall about the way the *Gazette* operated then or any of the people who worked there that . . . ?

JB: Well, of course, the old *Gazette* hands who are sentimental about the paper look back now every day — it seemed like Mount Olympus or something. There were people who worked there who were very mediocre. Some of them lazy. Some of

them disagreeable. It was just like any other paper, but when it needed to be, it was a great paper. It always could rise to the occasion.

JM: Did it seem to you that most people did take a lot of pride working for the *Gazette*?

JB: The good ones did. In fact, when Gannett came in, they sent in Walker Lundy. He didn't come directly out of the Gannett system. He had been at Fort Worth and several other places, and he became the executive editor. Walker Lundy looked at all these people at the *Gazette*, like Ernie Dumas, Jerry Dhonau, Doug Smith . . .

[End of Tape One, Side Two]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

JM: Okay, you were talking about Walker Lundy.

JB: Walker Lundy came in as executive editor, or something similar, I guess near the end of 1987 or the beginning of 1988. The first thing he did was spend several weeks interviewing all the staff members. And people who had been there a number of years, like Ernie Dumas, Jerry Dhonau, Doug Smith, Max Brantley, Jerry Jones, he apparently thought we were all old Mossbacks. You know, satisfied, entrenched Mossbacks. His idea was that everybody ought to be clamoring to move on to a bigger paper. And, of course, the kind of people I'm talking about were the backbone of the *Gazette*, people who had so much pride in the *Gazette* they never had any idea of working anywhere else. They couldn't help it. But, anyway, Lundy called me in, and I suppose his interviews were all

pretty much the same with everybody. He said, “What do you do?” I told him, “I cover baseball, football, whatever’s in season, write columns.” “Well, how long have you been doing that?” “Oh, twenty-five, thirty years” — however long I’d been there. “Well, what would you like to do?” “Just what I’m doing.” And he got a similar response from all of us old settlers. He couldn’t cope with that. And after Gannett had been operating the paper about a year, they sent off a bunch of pages to editors on other Gannett papers for evaluation, critique or whatever. And some fellow in White Plains, New York, critiqued about a month’s worth of sports pages. He didn’t like the way we were doing things, but the silliest thing he said — and this is, as best I can recall, this is verbatim his little notation on the page — “The Outdoor page, the fishing, the wildlife, looks okay to me although I didn’t read it.” Read it?! Somebody was supposed to read it?! Some critique.

JM: Well, you mentioned — we’ll come back to that in just a minute — that a lot of people had been there a while, we discussed that, but there was a lot of continuity. There was not an awful lot of change, turnover, was there?

JB: Not immediately, but . . .

JM: I mean over the years.

JB: Oh, no, not over the years. Well, there was turnover, but key people stayed there for years and years and years and years and never thought about leaving. Then they started bringing in people — Well, after Gannett was there, I remember walking through the newsroom, which was full of people, and there were about six or eight people I knew by name, about six or seven others I knew by face, and

about ten or twenty I hadn't seen before. [Laughs] It was constant turnover, adding, subtracting, and then Lundy was swept aside, and they brought in Keith Moyer. He was the last one. He went down with the ship.

JM: What was he like?

JB: Oh, he said he wasn't a newsman as such. He was a manager. I don't know about manager, but I know he wasn't a newsman as such. He thought the solution was to entice a bunch of *Democrat* people over there. He got some, but the only change that would have been any good was, like in the other direction, Orville going to the *Democrat*. That was an earth-shaking thing. He couldn't arrange any transfer in the opposite direction that would cause any attention.

JM: That would make that much of a difference. What kind of a reaction did you get over the years from people that you dealt with throughout the state? How did they — the people, you know, that you covered, coaches, players, other people — what kind of attitude did they seem to have toward the *Gazette*?

JB: Oh, very favorable for the most part. Yes. Very favorable. [Laughs] Like at an AIC meeting one time, something came up around the table, and Mr. John Tucker, who was the athletic director at Arkansas Tech and a legendary old, tough coach — somebody mentioned something, and Tucker said, "I haven't heard of that." And the fellow representing the *Democrat* said, "Well, it was in the *Democrat* yesterday." And Tucker fixed him with a steely glare and said, "I don't read the damned *Democrat*." [Laughs]

JM: You and Orville — I know you did the book on the Razorbacks. How was that

done? How was that division of labor?

JB: I did, essentially, the first half of the book, which went up to the time Broyles took over, and he did the last half, the Broyles years. Of course, a lot of the stuff that went into my half of the book I had dug out of the files based on interviews and stories that he had done over the years with past coaches such as Fred Thomsen. Really, Orville's fingerprints were all over the book. I just typed out the first half of it.

JM: I don't guess there's any updated edition?

JB: Well, the book came out in 1973, and we updated it in 1979 and we updated in 1996, so I don't think . . .

JM: You updated in 1996?

JB: Yes.

JM: I don't have that version. I'll need to get that one.

JB: It was published by UA Press.

JM: University of Arkansas Press?

JB: The others weren't, but it was.

JM: Okay. Did it sell pretty well?

JB: According to the reports we got from our original publisher in Alabama, not particularly, but, on the other hand, everybody in Arkansas seems to have a copy!

JM: Maybe they didn't do too good of an accounting.

JB: In addition to doing the publishing, they did the bookkeeping.

JM: Did you do something on Ezzard Charles? Did he come through here?

JB: He came through here when he was out of boxing. He died of something similar to Lou Gehrig's Disease. He didn't have that yet, but he was traveling, doing public relations work for a wine company. Yes, he was one of my old heroes when I was a kid. I think I startled him because I knew something about his career.

JM: Yes. Do you have any favorite interviews that you did? Maybe we've discussed some of them, but any favorite people that . . .

JB: The best interview I ever had, I believe — and not necessarily the most important — it was after the World Series in 1988, between the A's and the Dodgers. In the first game, Kirk Gibson, who couldn't even walk, came hobbling off the bench and pinch hit against Dennis Eckersley, who had an incredible year in relief — was almost untouchable — hit a home run off of him and hobbled around the bases. That was the first game, and that turned the whole series, and the Dodgers won. A few weeks after that, Jim Palmer, the Hall-of-Fame pitcher for the Orioles, was in town doing promotions for, I guess, he was on TV and in commercials, modeling underwear. He was out at Dillard's. That was the kind of thing I never cared for, traveling celeb coming in, you have to go talk to him although there isn't any reason to. And so I was sent out to Dillard's to talk to Palmer. He was the best interview subject I ever saw. We got to talking about the World Series game, and he analyzed the whole thing from Gibson's standpoint and Eckersley's standpoint. We talked about the Orioles, the great Orioles teams he pitched for and how he and [manager] Earl Weaver were always

jawing at each other. Just great stuff. I was only supposed to talk to him about twenty or thirty minutes — you know, they had him scheduled — but whoever was supposed to come in behind me wasn't there, so we talked more than an hour. Well, he talked. I listened. And, finally, he had to go on to somebody else, and I went back to the office and asked, "How much do you want on the Palmer thing?" And they gave the standard Gannett-era answer, "Oh, about fourteen, fifteen inches." So I wrote about twenty. But I fed off that for months. I came back later and did a column about him and Weaver. I mean, it was just a treasure trove interview. You don't get many of those.

JM: No. You appreciate when you do get them, though, don't you?

[End of Interview]