

Gazette Project

Interview with

Wayne Jordan,
Arkansas State Police Headquarters
Little Rock, Arkansas,
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Interviewer: Ernie Dumas

Ernie Dumas: I'm here this morning with Wayne Jordan, long-time reporter for the *Arkansas Gazette* who now is with the Arkansas State Police. Wayne, at the outset, we signed this paper, but I'd also like to get it on the record that you understand that the transcript of this interview will be on file with the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History archives at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, and that it will be available as a public record for research for whoever wants to see it. Do you understand and go along with that?

Wayne Jordan: Yes, I do. I fully understand that.

ED: Okay. Wayne, to start off, tell me where and when you were born and who your daddy and momma were and something about your early life.

WJ: I was born on August 7, 1939, in Prague, Oklahoma.

ED: Prague?

WJ: Prague.

ED: P-R-A-G-G?

WJ: P-R-A-G-U-E. It's the way they pronounce it.

ED: Oh, it's like Prague in Czechoslovakia.

WJ: Like Czechoslovakia, but they call it “Pragg.”

ED: Okay. [Laughs] How big is Prague?

WJ: It’s about 2,000 people. It’s the county seat of Okfuskee County in Oklahoma.

ED: How do you spell Okfuskee?

WJ: I do not know how to spell that.

ED: Okay.

WJ: I was christened as Norvell, N-O-R-V-E-L-L, Norvell Wayne Jordan. My father was Tillman N. Jordan. He ran a grocery store in Oklahoma and in Gentry, Arkansas, for thirty-nine years.

ED: So Prague is just across the border in Oklahoma from Arkansas?

WJ: No, it’s about ninety miles southeast of Oklahoma City.

ED: Okay.

WJ: It’s about right in the middle of the state.

ED: So he had a store there and also in Gentry?

WJ: Right. My mother’s name was Dolores Wist, W-I-S-T. And they were born in Madison County, outside of Huntsville on the War Eagle River on one of the mountains around there.

ED: Both of them were born in Madison County?

WJ: Right, in the area of St. Paul, Pettigrew, and the War Eagle.

ED: Not too far from Greasy Creek and one of those places . . . Combs.

WJ: It’s not very far.

ED: It’s not far from Orval Faubus?

WJ: That's correct. And my grandfather was George Washington Jordan, and there was a little town on the War Eagle called Jordan, Arkansas. And my grandfather made moonshine whiskey when it was legal and would ship it to St. Louis. And that's one of the ways that we made money over there. So there are some stories about that.

ED: A noble profession in those days in the mountains of Arkansas.

WJ: Until the revenuers came in, in the early 1900s, and put a cap on that. But you could get a federal stamp. I used to have that, a copy of that—literally, the federal stamp that my grandfather used to legally make that.

ED: So you grew up in Prague?

WJ: I lived in Paden the first three years of my life. My father's grocery store was in the little town of Paden, a few miles from Prague. We moved to Gentry in 1942. Of course, World War II had just begun for the United States in the Pacific. So that's where I grew up. I graduated from Gentry High School and went into the army. I entered the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in January of 1961. I had a brain hemorrhage in March of that year which paralyzed me on my right side. I've been wearing a brace, oh, since that time, about forty years.

ED: What year was that when you had the brain hemorrhage? This was when you were a student there?

WJ: This was when I was a student at the university, yes.

ED: And what year was that?

WJ: It was March of 1961. That's when it occurred, March thirtieth of that year.

1961 was when I had the brain hemorrhage, and I've been wearing the leg brace for forty years now. And because of that, I have a nickname the police in Arkansas gave me about thirty years ago. They call me "Iron Leg." And George Fisher drew a cartoon of me as the "Iron Leg." It's funny. I've still got copies of that, and I don't know why they started it, but Lieutenant Don Wall of the state police, in fact, was the one who started calling me that [laughs], and it stuck.

ED: You were in high school at Gentry. Did you take an interest in journalism at that time? Because that's a very small high school and probably didn't have a journalism program.

WJ: No, but from junior high we had a school paper, and I wrote for that paper. And the first thing I had published was a little essay when I was twelve years old. It was published in the *Gentry Journal Advance*, the weekly paper. My hero was Morris Lambertson, who was the editor of the paper. He had a column called, "Ramblings." It was so wonderful, some of the things he would write about that were going on in town. He had this unique manner of writing about things like Doc Ransom. We called him "Doc" because he was the veterinarian, but he didn't have a degree. He was just one of those farmers out there who knew a little something about taking care of sick animals, and so everyone called him Doc. He would write about Doc and how Doc would get drunk while chasing foxes and things like that. He had a bunch of dogs. It was so hilarious. Everyone knew Doc.

ED: Doc didn't mind being written about in the paper and described as being a drunk?

WJ: Not at all. It didn't bother him at all. There was a lot of honesty in these people. It was wonderful. But Morris didn't have any room to talk because Morris was constantly drunk. [Laughs] All the boys who were twelve or thirteen years old would run around town in those days because it was safe. Nobody was afraid you'd get hurt or be kidnapped, all the things people worry about today. In a little town like Gentry of about 800 people you didn't worry about things like that. So at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, we'd be on the streets running around. Morris would be over there, and you could hear him banging on that old typewriter because he didn't have any air conditioning, so all the windows would be open in his office. He had an old flatbed press, and you could hear that clanging around whenever they were going to press.

ED: Yes.

WJ: It was a marvelous thing. I can smell it and hear it to this day.

ED: A wonderful fragrance about those old newspaper offices.

WJ: And listen to Morris talk about what he was going to write that day. So he had an enormous influence on me. He was just wonderful in his use of words. He was just a great guy, I thought.

ED: So you had been published when you were twelve?

WJ: Yes, I sure did. I can even tell you what it was. I wrote on how the city and the school should get together to raise some money to start a college scholarship program for the people who would need it. I was thinking about myself [laughs], but I really enjoyed writing that and I did my research.

ED: So you wrote for the junior high school paper and the high school paper?

WJ: Yes.

ED: And then you went into the army for a while and then got out and went to the university. At that time did you know you were going to be a journalist, what you were going to major in?

WJ: No. What I wanted to do was to be a stockbroker. That's what I really wanted to be. And, in fact, after the brain hemorrhage paralyzed me and I took two years to recuperate, I got my stockbroker's license and passed all the necessary state regulations and tests to get my license and everything. I was doing that whenever I decided to go back to the university. I would have been about twenty-six at that time, and I got on the GI Bill and went back to the university, but my heart was not in it. That's just the facts. I don't know why. I can't tell you even to this day. I wanted to write. That's what I found out that I really wanted to do, so I got on the *Arkansas Traveler's* staff, and I wrote some things that people had never even thought of. In fact, the editor up there was Sylvia Spencer.

ED: Yes, Sylvia's back in town now.

WJ: Is that right?

ED: Yes.

WJ: Whom did she marry?

ED: She wound up marrying a general.

WJ: Is that right?

ED: Some kind of top nerve gas/chemical weapons man in the military, and he retired

about two years ago, and they moved out, and they live here in Little Rock.

WJ: Well, I'll be. Well, anyway . . .

ED: So she was the editor?

WJ: She was the editor. And she said at that time—for example, I did an article on Vietnam veterans who were drug addicted and how many of them we had at the university. And she said, "I would never have thought of that." I don't think anyone did. So I felt fairly good about some of the stuff I did up there for the *Arkansas Traveler*. Well, that was my interest. I couldn't help it.

ED: But you were studying something else? You were in the school of business?

WJ: Yes, I was in the school of business, yes. But it was just like when you're really in love with a woman and you leave her, but you can't get her out of your mind. That was how it was with writing. I just couldn't get it out of my mind. I enjoyed it immensely, so what was going on, I went to my counselor—no, he called me in. I can't remember the man's name, but he said, "You know, Wayne, you've been here for almost a semester, and you're not doing too well." [Laughs] And I said, "Yes, I'm having some problems, but I'll get the kinks out." And, of course, I had no intention of getting the kinks out. I don't know why. I can't tell you. I told my mother, "Mom, can I come back home? I want to write. I want to be a novelist." She said, "Well, Wayne, you can't make a living at that." I said, "Well, I know that [laughs], but I'd like to try. I'd just like to try because I love reading and writing." She said, "Well, okay." So I wrote a letter to A.R. Nelson, who at that time was the managing editor of the *Gazette*. I had been reading the

Gazette since I was a baby. The *Gazette* was always my paper. I would read the *Southwest Times Record* and the *Tulsa World*. Any newspaper that I could get a hold of I liked to read. When I was in high school, I would read *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in our library. We had all of those papers. I spent my time reading them and novels, but I loved nonfiction more than anything. I wrote to A.R. Nelson that I was failing in school and that I wanted to be a novelist and I needed to make a little money on the side. “Could I write for your features section? I could do things in northwest Arkansas or anywhere if you want to give me assignments.” I sent a couple of my *Arkansas Traveler* stories. Well, Leroy Donald had already read some of them. He was the state editor at that time. So Leroy had already read some stuff about me.

ED: This would have been 1968, 1969, along in there?

WJ: 1965.

ED: 1965.

WJ: No, 1966.

ED: Okay, 1966.

WJ: So I was waiting at home. I was traveling between Gentry and Fayetteville every day with Joe Yates. Joe was from Cherokee City, west of Gentry, but I rode with him and we would ride back and forth. Well, my Mom said I’d gotten a phone call from Little Rock and, “You need to call this Leroy Donald.” So I called him. I thought he was going to say, “I got your letter and we’re going to do that.” But Leroy said, “Would you like to come down here on our dime, and let us wine and

dine you a couple of days and see if maybe you'd like to work for us?" I said to myself, "Why in the world would they want me down there?" I could not understand that, but whenever he said, "Wine and dine for a couple of days," I thought, "That sounds good." [Laughs] So I said, "Yes, here I come." So I went down there and went into A.R. Nelson's office. He had my letter. I'll never forget the way A.R. looked across there, and he said, "You know, your letter is why we're interested in you as a writer, a reporter, is that you have told us your history in three short paragraphs, showing me that you were a failure in college, [laughter], but that you wanted to improve your life even though you were a failure." [Laughter] He said, "This type of candor, and the way that you write, your style, is what we like in the newspaper business." I said, "Well, I don't really want to be a newspaper man." I said, "Quite frankly, I enjoy reading it and—I don't know—I could probably do it. It does not bother me to ask the tough questions." And we talked about that for a little bit. Then he said, "How much money would you want?" I said, "How about \$125 a week?" He said, "\$125 a week!" He kind of laughed. He said, "No, I don't think so." He said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. How about starting out at \$85?" And I thought about that, and I said, "Mr. Nelson, I'll tell you what, I will do that if you promise me one thing. If I do well and if I come up with some good news stories, you will pay me what I'm worth." And he got up and put his hand out, and he said, "Sounds like a good deal to me." [Laughter] So that's how I was hired.

ED: Of course, their interpretation of a person's worth was a lot different than what

we thought we were worth. [Laughter]

WJ: That is true. People, when I tell them about when I started out in the newspaper business, how much I earned a week, they laugh. They just laugh.

ED: Yes, I started off at \$80 there several years before, but they acted like they were paying me more than they'd ever paid anybody.

WJ: Yes, they acted like it was coming out of the national treasury and that if we got too much money out of that treasury, it would bankrupt the country.

ED: Yes.

WJ: They didn't talk about things like this at a company [laughs], that the whole system would fall if we got too much money. And whenever Douglas got us that huge raise that year, I'll never forget that. I could not believe it. Whew, boy!

ED: What we thought was a huge raise. I don't remember what year that was.

WJ: I don't remember. It was 1972 or 1973, something like that.

ED: So this would have been in 1966, and you went down to, what, work on the state desk?

WJ: I came to work on the state desk.

ED: Leroy Donald was the state editor, and I've forgotten who else was on the state desk.

WJ: Matilda Tuohey.

ED: Matilda Tuohey was on the state desk. T-U-O-H-E-Y.

WJ: Yes. And then there was a guy taking the obits—I can't remember his name. But, anyway, the magic of the newsroom, the old newsroom—people would just have to

see it to understand it. We had Pat Carithers back there stripping the wires, and you could hear that clatter of all the wires going, and it was fantastic. We sat there right next to him, if you remember.

ED: Yes, the state desk was back there next to the telegraph desk.

WJ: Yes.

ED: And all those clattering teletype machines going.

WJ: Yes, and then we had that conveyor belt working there. I'll never forget.

ED: Yes, that awful thing.

WJ: That thing was just horrible. I felt like I was in a J.C. Penney's. Do you remember years ago the old J.C. Penney's used to have a conveyer belt that they shipped their checks up to the mezzanine?

ED: Well, they installed that conveyer belt at some point, and it was to run copy, I guess, so that they wouldn't have to have copy boys anymore. But at the copy desk you could put your copy on this thing, and it would take the copy back into the Linotype room, where it would be set in type. So they rigged up this big conveyor. But I remember it just drove people crazy. There was a copy editor named Ray Kornegay.

WJ: [Laughs] Yes, I remember that.

ED: An elderly fellow who was a wonderful copy editor, and a wonderful old guy, and a great storyteller, and just a rabid leftist. Ray was about sixty-five, I think, when he went to work there. And he was always in a towering rage. But he hated that conveyer belt. The noise just drove him crazy.

WJ: He sat right next to it.

ED: And every day I thought he was just going to climb up there and rip that thing out.

It lasted just several years, I think, before they finally took it out.

WJ: If you remember, Ray was there the day that it broke or that night—it was real close to deadline and that broke and that thing started whipping around and whipping him [laughs] with that broken conveyor belt. Ray jumped up on it with his pocketknife and cut it and just started whipping it and cutting it. [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

WJ: He was up on top of that thing.

ED: Yes, he went crazy.

WJ: He was cutting it, and it cost about eight thousand dollars or something. [Laughs] They almost fired old Ray over that.

ED: Yes, but it was a happy moment for him.

WJ: Yes, he loved it. I was back over there where you guys were on the city desk, and I had come in from somewhere out of town and, for whatever reason, someone was using my typewriter. So I was back there at the city desk. And, as you remember, the copy editors in those days, the early days, were wonderful. They were well read. You couldn't slip anything by them.

ED: They were a great group.

WJ: Oh, they were great people. They were.

ED: Great people, arrogant.

WJ: Oh, arrogant is not the word for it.

ED: Horrible.

WJ: They'd catch you doing something, and that's what Ray did one day. He yelled back there, and he said, "Hey, Jordan!" And I said, "Yes!" And he said, "Let me ask you something, boy." He said, "In the *Arkansas Gazette*, do we *apprehend* anyone?" And I said, "Well..." And he said, "Answer my question!" [Laughter] And I said, "Well, I didn't." And he said, "You damn fool! You don't *apprehend* anything in the *Gazette*. You *arrest* them." [Laughter] So I said, "Well, thanks." When the copy editors started rampaging, everyone just kind of cowered because they were so, like you say, arrogant.

ED: They loved to catch you at things. Pat Crow once stood up and read to the whole newsroom some sentence that I had written. And it was a terrible sentence, but he just read it out loud with great triumph. He really put me down. [Laughter] They weren't modest.

WJ: Well, Bob Douglas was yelling back there to—oh, you know him and love him—the courthouse reporter?

ED: Jerol Garrison?

WJ: Jerol Garrison. Jerol was back there, and Douglas said, "How's your novel coming?" [Laughter] And he said, "And by the way," —oh, what was that he said? —He said, "Are you now describing how the person was chewing gum?" Jerol was so detailed. He remembered everything. Jerol jumped up and grabbed his typewriter and just picked it up and slammed it on the floor [laughs] and stormed out of the newsroom. I'll never forget it. He left not long after that, but

I'll never forget it because I was looking right at him.

ED: Yes. I was sitting right beside him, terrified. My heart stopped to see mild-mannered Jerol Garrison lose his cool like that.

WJ: [Laughs] Yes, it was something. But, anyway, they did, by the way, give me raises quite quickly. I think I got three raises in the first eight months.

ED: Well, that was pretty good. What was the state desk like, working on it? Was it pretty laid back? Leroy was kind of laid back, I think.

WJ: I came in at three o'clock in the afternoon on December 30, 1966, and I was ready to go to work. And they said, "There's no sense in going to work now. Where are you going to stay?" And I said, "Oh, I'll get me a little old apartment down on Louisiana or something like that." I didn't have a car. So I came in on the bus.

ED: You rode down from Gentry on a bus?

WJ: Yes, [laughs] I sure did.

ED: You got off at the Trailways or Greyhound bus station?

WJ: I got off at the Greyhound down at Sixth and Broadway. And I walked up there with my one old, cardboard suitcase. I thought I was getting ready to go to work. Leroy said, "There's no sense in going to work. We're going to have a party tonight. Why don't you get with Mike over there and . . ."

ED: Mike Trimble?

WJ: Mike Trimble. He said, "Maybe you can stay the night at his place." Well, you know that Mike's place was an animal house. [Laughs] There was a party going

on over there all the time. It was one continuous party. And there I was. I went out there about five o'clock, and I mean it was boogieing at that time.

ED: Was that when he lived at Ridgeway and Lee Avenue?

WJ: Ridgeway and Lee..

ED: That big old, rambling apartment house.

WJ: He and George Carter had that whole thing. There were some people in there, and I asked Mike, "Who are these people? Are they at the paper?" because I didn't see them down there. He said, "I don't know who they are." [Laughs] He just had them coming in off the streets, you know. They would just come in, and it was a wonderful atmosphere. I mean it was so wild. These people were so wonderful. I spent the first two nights there and then got a little old apartment down on Louisiana Street. But the next morning, the first morning that I came in and was watching Leroy, Leroy had a stack of papers on his desk, every paper in the state of Arkansas. He would read them every week. Of course, I didn't know it at the time, but he was only looking for certain things. He knew those papers so well that he would just glance over them, the headlines and what have you. He knew what he was looking for. Something that the newspaper there in the hometown—for example, the little Cabot paper or something like that, McGehee—would not do the true news story. They would just maybe hint at what was happening in the city hall, for example. They did not like to get into controversy. Leroy would pick up on that [laughter], get to the real news story about it, and it was marvelous. But what got me was I thought he was reading the

whole thing. And he would [makes fast rushing sound of reading paper and slapping it down]. And I thought, “This is incredible. Wish I could be like this man.” I could not believe how fast he could go through these newspapers, you know. But that’s how we found out what was going on in the state, by monitoring these weekly newspapers and the dailies.

ED: How long did you work on the state desk?

WJ: I was on the state desk for sixteen years.

ED: Sixteen years on the state desk?

WJ: Yes. I covered . . .

ED: Yes, let’s talk about some of these stories that you covered on the state desk. If you can remember. I know that’s hard to do, but can you recall some of the big ones?

WJ: I covered every major murder trial, I’ll tell you that, that happened in the state.

ED: Yes, I remember all those years that you were out covering all those murder trials, all the county courthouses.

WJ: I covered every desegregation case. I know it had to be covered, but it was the dullest thing. But I covered every one of them outside Little Rock.

ED: That was a period there when you covered desegregation, I guess in the courts—school desegregation—a period from about 1967 to about 1973, or 1974, 1975, were [when] the bulk of those desegregation lawsuits went through the courts throughout the South.

WJ: That’s exactly right. And I covered the prisons. Of course, the transition from

the trustee system. You covered some of that. I covered the prisons for thirteen years and got to know . . . you know we had one, two, three riots. Two times they took over the prison. And the state police would come in and beat them up.

ED: Did you cover the prisons in the 1960s? Yes, I guess you were there when Tom Murton was the prison superintendent?

WJ: Yes.

ED: I think he lasted about, I'm sure less than two years.

WJ: Yes, less than two years.

ED: Maybe less than a year.

WJ: Murton was nuts, really he was. He was the most paranoid man I was ever around.

ED: Yes. He was the prototype for the character in . . . what was that movie?

WJ: Brubaker?

ED: Brubaker. B-R-U-B-A-K-E-R.

WJ: Yes. But he had everyone sold, as you well remember, that he was the savior of the prison system. The fact of the matter is, the real facts are, that he was absolutely terrified of the inmate population. He did not like to stay overnight at any of the prisons, at Cummins or at Tucker. He was afraid that someone might slit his throat. [Laughs] And that was a good possibility. So he kept some thugs. He developed a kind of a thug system, and these inmates would go with him wherever he went. It was, well, it was to protect him, although the inmates themselves were not necessarily dangerous to him. But he thought that. He was

not a manager. He could not manage the system. It was in complete chaos when he left. What that system really needed was someone who knew how to manage a prison. He knew how to talk about a prison or prisoners, but he certainly was not a manager. Then the Texans came in. These Texans knew how to manage a prison, I'll tell you that.

ED: Do you remember when Murton had all the bodies dug up? That was in 1967, probably right after you went to work?

WJ: Yes.

ED: Murton had all the bodies dug up, and it made stories all over the world.

WJ: Yes.

ED: Where inmates were brutally murdered and their bodies chopped up and put in boxes. Of course, it turned out years later that when they had the bones examined it was an old cemetery from the 1930s.

WJ: That's correct.

ED: A pauper's cemetery.

WJ: Yes, it was an old cemetery and actually predated the prison.

ED: Yes.

WJ: It was an old church cemetery, which was, by the way, on an old U.S. Corps of Engineers map that anyone could have had. But no one really wanted to . . .

ED: Remember the day that Walter Rugaber of *The New York Times* was down and wrote a big front-page story? I guess it was in papers all over the world—Italy and Japan. It was really the second time in a period of ten years when Arkansas made

worldwide news, the 1957 integration crisis, and then ten years later the unearthing of the bodies at the prison.

WJ: I now remember that. I now remember that. That was my first real taste of East Coast journalism. Because when I talked with him and I asked him how can he get from this point to this point without any evidence [laughs], you know? How can he get the evidence?

ED: Yes.

WJ: I was talking at that time with W.A. Tudor, who was the commander of the state police criminal investigation division. They were researching every inmate who had been in that prison that they could find records of. Of course, the records were horrible, too, and a lot of the records were simply an inmate's nickname. A lot of times that's all you knew was that it was someone called, "Blue Nose" or something like that, and that's the only way they had a record of him. So he had told me, and he didn't want to hear this from Tudor, that they had identified eight inmates that they didn't know what happened to them. It took about another year or year-and-a-half, and they finally located where they were in California or something like that, but there was one who apparently was murdered. They figured that he was murdered, but that was the only one. But they couldn't prove it through the circumstances and the records, etc. So, anyway, I thought that was fascinating, all of that. But I was also upset with the East Coast media because of the way they handled that. You know, "Poor old Arkansas, you know how they refuse to acknowledge their errors."

ED: Yes, the prison system was pretty bad, but it was not quite that bad.

WJ: Well, it was a bad system. There's no doubt about that. Then when Terrell Don Hutto came in from Texas and initiated the Texas system, he did a good job, there's no doubt in my mind, with what resources he had. Of course, he put Art Lockhart in charge of Cummins. Art Lockhart was a Texan who didn't take anything from inmates. I'll never forget what he said to me one day. Art Lockhart was giving an interview, and he said, "You know I don't give interviews, but I checked around and you're a real straight shooter and you would tell it just like it is." I said, "That's exactly right." I said, "I was wanting to know something about Barracks Eight where the bad guys were." He said, "Well, we'll just go down there, and I'll show you what I've done." We walked out into what they call the "yard" and, as you well know, the yard was that long, long corridor that connected all of the barracks of Cummins. We stepped out into that corridor, and most of the inmates were out working and what have you, but there were seven, eight, ten guys there you could see. When Lockhart stepped into the corridor, one of these free-world guards—of course, at that time there were very few free guards— they were just trying to get it started. He yelled out, "Warden on the yard!" or something like that. All of a sudden the inmates got up against the wall of the prison there and put their nose against the wall. As Lockhart would walk by them, he would kick their heels, kick them apart to where there would be eighteen inches, or whatever inches they were supposed to be apart. If they were like that [indicates a prisoner's leg spacing], he'd kick them and say, "No, wait a

minute, it's supposed to be twenty-four inches instead of eighteen inches." And I said to him, "What's that?" He said, "The inmates call it 'Texas TV.'" [Laughs] So he really ran a tough prison.

ED: So you covered the prisons, and I guess most people are more familiar with your prison stories because you covered the prisons for quite a number of years.

WJ: Yes. And there was story after story on that.

ED: It was also, I think, during this eighteen years that you said you covered all of the murder trials. I guess, just about all of the crime around the state you wrote about for the *Gazette*.

WJ: Yes.

ED: Whether it was arrests or whatever. I think you developed during that period, more than anybody else, a relationship with law enforcement communities. Not just the state police, but every sheriff's office and police department across the state knew who Wayne Jordan was because you had dealt with them. I know Max Brantley later would talk about how valuable those connections were that you developed with the law enforcement community for the *Arkansas Gazette*, which was not a terribly popular paper out across the state.

WJ: How that started was rather interesting. This started because of the civil rights thing. Every time that we had a little uprising, whether it was at Stamps, or Forrest City, or wherever, I was the person who went. And so, I got to know the sheriffs.

[End of Side One, Tape One]

[Beginning of Side Two, Tape One]

WJ: So what occurred because of the civil rights activities, from about 1967 to about 1974, I got to know many of the state police troop commanders because they were always called in to quell whatever disturbances there were. And then the sheriffs. I got to know the sheriffs and Pine Bluff's police chiefs, you're absolutely correct. This is, in fact, what occurred. I got to know them so well because there were so many of these little disturbances. The first big one was at Forrest City, where the black students in Forrest City about 1968 destroyed Lincoln High School. I think they just literally threw the books and everything out of the windows. Several hundred students rioted that day. The state police came in, along with several police departments, but primarily the state police. That is where I got my baptism in the racial problem in Arkansas. The way I wrote about it, which was the truth, caused enormous—I cannot tell you how many times I was spit on and threatened with my life [laughs]. In fact, the FBI called me one Saturday morning and said, "It's best if you don't go back into Forrest City because the White Citizens Council is going to kill you." That terrified me. It did. It scared me, but I went ahead anyway. But I took precautions. I didn't get myself into dangerous positions. But I can tell you that there were some scary moments in the Forrest City situation. There is one: the night when they tore up the school. There were about one hundred state troopers in town. There was a kind of a martial law, a curfew that they were trying to put together. Fletcher Long, Sr., who was the prosecuting attorney for St. Francis County at that time,

called a meeting of the farmers in the courthouse, in the courtroom. I'm sitting in this courtroom at about 6:30 that night. I had just filed my story, called in my story, and I ran back to the courthouse because I had heard about this meeting. Fletcher Long had deputized all of these farmers, and they were armed to the hilt. I'm telling you, they had—well, I don't know what all they had [laughs], but they had rifles and what all. These men, about a hundred of them, were sitting in the courtroom, and the other media were outside in the hallway. I had Gene Prescott with me.

ED: The great *Gazette* photographer?

WJ: Yes, great photographer. He was with other media outside the courtroom, but I stepped inside and there was no place to sit except inside the railing. So I opened the little door on the railing and walked in and sat down. Sitting in the judge's chair was Ralph Scott, commander of the state police, and standing where a person would normally testify, but without a chair and standing was Fletcher Long. I'm not kidding you, Fletcher Long—and this was in March—Fletcher Long was dressed in a white suit. He was white-haired. He looked like Colonel Sanders. But he was an impeccable man. All I could think about was *Gone with the Wind* or something like that. I mean, you couldn't help but see that. Over in the jury box sat Red Montgomery, a big sheriff. He was a sheriff, and he was red-headed. That's why they called him "Red," obviously, and other deputy sheriffs and a couple of state troopers. Long was on a tirade. "We're going into that black community"—that's not the way he said it, but "We're going into that

community, and we're going to bring out those who destroyed our school! And we're going to get them, and we're going to have justice in this town!" Everyone was saying, "Yeah! Yeah!" and like that, you know. And Ralph Scott's just sitting there, and he's not saying a word. I'm writing furiously on my big, yellow pad. Long was saying, "And I'll tell you that . . ." And he looked over there, and he said, "Hey! Hey!" And I looked, and I said, "Me?" And he said, "Yes, you. Who are you?" "I'm Wayne Jordan." "You're who?" "Wayne Jordan." "Oh, you're Wayne Jordan, huh? Well, who is Wayne Jordan?" "Uh, I'm a reporter." And you could, oh, . . . [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

WJ: "Boy, what are you doing in here then? You're not supposed to be in here!" And then he said, "Who are you a reporter with?" I said, "The *Arkansas Gazette*." [Laughs] Those farmers began making noises. This big old deputy got up and said, "Mr. Long, you want me to remove him?" [Laughs] I thought, "Boy, this is getting pretty tough." So he said, "You know you're not supposed to be in here." I said, "Sir, Mr. Long, have you familiarized yourself with our new FOI law?" He said, "What?" I said, "The Freedom of Information Act that was passed by the legislature last year. Are you familiar with that?" You could see the frustration on him. He said, "Boy, do you know where you're at?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Tell me where you're at." I said, "Forrest City." He said, "Yes. Do you know what county this is?" I said, "Yes, sir, it's St. Francis County." He said, "Well, listen, boy, this is St. Francis County. That law don't

apply here. It may in Little Rock, but it doesn't apply in St. Francis County.”

[Laughs] Then here comes the sheriff, the deputy sheriff, after me. So I got up, and I'm going out the door, and I got through that swinging door just as quick as I could. And Gene was outside and I walked out there, and he said, “Oh, Wayne!” And I said, “What's wrong with you?” And he said, “Man, why didn't you let them throw you out?!” He said, “Boy, what a shot that would have been!”

[Laughs] Gene, he was really upset with me because I wouldn't let that deputy throw me out of that courtroom. [Laughs]

ED: So did anything else happen that night?

WJ: Nothing that night. But, of course, you know that was an ongoing thing. I was spit on by a deputy sheriff in that same courthouse about a month after that. They spit on me, and then they didn't even acknowledge that I was there. It was just like I didn't exist, but, boy, they all knew me. [Laughs] All of them knew me. So about three or four more months after that—and you know it was so heated. There was so much controversy over there. John Walker, the civil rights lawyer, was over there in court all the time defending those kids, about eight or ten of them, that they charged with rioting. Oh, it was something. I was at the Holiday Inn. I had just completed filing my story with the state desk, and I had a six-pack of beer that I had iced down. I drank about three or four of them before getting ready to go to dinner. There's a knock at the door. I start to open it, and these big white men push their way in. There are about three of them and a young boy, I'm going to say about twenty-one or twenty-two years old. They were with the

White Citizens Council, and they wanted to know—no, not the White Citizens Council—what was the name of that other group they had over there? Well, I guess it was the Citizens Council. It was one of them. But, anyway, Dr. Sabin’s group . . .

ED: Yes, I remember them.

WJ: Yes, the John Birch Society, that’s who it was. But it was White Citizens Council—you know you couldn’t tell them apart really. [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

WJ: They were in there, and I said, “What do you guys want?” It scared me. It really did, but I fortunately had had about four beers, so I appeared kind of relaxed. They said, “Where are you from? We want to know why you’re writing that stuff about those black folks.” And I said, “Well, the reason I do is because they’ll talk to me. You guys won’t talk to me.” I said, “Why don’t you let me interview you right now?” They said, “We’d better not see a word about this in the paper. We’re just trying to get some information here. Where do you come from?” I said, “Northwest Arkansas.” They said, “No, no, you’re from Illinois or somewhere like that. I can tell that. I can tell that by the way you talk. You don’t talk like an old Southerner.” I said, “I do, too.” [Laughs] I said, “I’m from Gentry, Arkansas, a hillbilly.” They said, “No, you’re not either.” They argued with me over almost everything. “Where’d you go to school at, Moscow?” [Laughs] They just could not understand why a white boy would quote these black folks. They were very upset with me. Then they asked me this, “Have you

ever been in the army?” Now, here’s a lie. This is a lie that I told, but I couldn’t help it because I’d told this lie before, and I love telling it. I’m wearing this brace. I wear a brace—So I said to them, I said, “Do you mean to tell me you don’t know that I’ve been in the army, in Special Forces, in the Eleventh Special Forces group in Thailand?” They looked at me. What they didn’t know was that I—whenever I was in the army, I was in what’s called the Top Secret Lab at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We had access to all of the Vietnam War information, since Fort Bragg is the headquarters of the Special Forces, the Green Berets. So I knew a lot about them. So I told this lie: that I had parachuted into Thailand in 1964 and broke my leg in so many places that I had to wear this brace [slaps leg]. “Now, where have you all been? Where have you people been?” That boy who was sitting there, he was sitting on a piece of furniture in that motel room, and, like I said, he was about twenty-one or twenty-two years old. And I said, “Where were you? Where have you been? Why aren’t you in the army? Why aren’t you out there defending the United States?” I just got self-righteous. You know [laughs], and I just loved rambling and yelling, and screaming, and things like that. “Look at me!” [slapping his leg] “Look what’s happened to me!” You know, tears started coming down. I’m not kidding you. You’ve never heard anything like it. Before they’d left there, two things happened. They were upset with that boy for not being in the army. [Laughs] I got them all bent out of shape with him. He said, “Man, I’m just a farmer! Man, I’m just a farmer!” “You ought to be up there doing things for our country!” They invited me to the VFW.

“Yes, Mr. Jordan, anytime you’re in town, you just come on by. You come on by.” You know? [Laughter]

ED: “You’re a good American”?

WJ: “You’re a good American.” [Laughter] It was a lie, but it saved me. It saved me on a couple of occasions.

ED: I’ll bet it did. I’ll bet it did. What things?

WJ: Just lies. [Laughs] You know there’s always a good one. I’ve got to tell you this, too, and this happened to me twice, but I’ll just tell you about one of them. Here we had another riot at a school in Marianna. The state police came in as they always did to make sure that people aren’t killing each other and calming down everybody. So it was the next morning after that night. I’m eating breakfast at the local restaurant. As customary, I had a sports coat on and a tie.

ED: We needed to wear ties at the *Gazette*.

WJ: Yes.

ED: We always wore ties.

WJ: Yes, the reporters wore ties to distinguish them from the raunchy *Democrat* reporters. They were raunchy. But here I am trying to eat breakfast and read the morning *Gazette*. There was a group of farmers over there. Now this is Marianna, and they are discussing the events of the night before and the day before. They were very upset. They were very upset that they were under almost martial law with the state police in there, and whitey wouldn’t let them come downtown and all that kind of stuff. Or go into the black community. There’s

one farmer, and he was standing up and there's seven or eight others there, and he kept looking over at me. I'm sitting in a booth. So he walks over there, and he says to me, "Who are you!?" I said, "I'm-I'm-I'm Wayne Jordan." "What are you doing in town? What are you?" And I said, "Well, I'm here [laughs] covering the . . ." "Covering? You're a reporter, aren't you? I knew it. I told the boys over there you were a reporter. Who are you reporting for?" "Ah, *Arkansas Gazette*." Boy, he hit the back of the booth, and I thought, "Oh, he's going to hit me." [Laughs] He said, "I want to tell you something right now, boy," he said, "I ought to snatch you out of that booth right there and take you out and whip you." He said, "I would if I didn't have so much respect for Orville Henry." I said, "What?" And he said, "Yes, I'll tell you what, boy, I hate your paper, but we love Orville. We love Orville Henry. He gives us the information we need to know about the Razorbacks. And if it weren't for that, I'd thrash you, boy. I'd put you out there, and I would whip you like a yard dog." I'd come back to the *Gazette* after these kinds of things and grab Orville and hug him. [Laughs] He'd say, "What are you doing, man?" And I'd say, "I love you, Orville. You saved my life." [Laughter]

ED: Well, he stirred up a lot of circulation.

WJ: Yes, I know it. I know it, but it was the truth.

ED: Yes.

WJ: It was the truth. Those were the times. And then we had "Sweet Willie Wine."

ED: The what?

WJ: Sweet Willie Wine from Memphis, who marched across Arkansas.

ED: To show that blacks need not fear the white people in the delta. So he marched down the highway from Memphis to Little Rock.

WJ: That's right.

ED: An unforgettable march.

WJ: He was. He said that black folks said that you couldn't walk from Memphis to Little Rock without getting killed. He said, "I just want to show them that it can be done." Of course, he was as sarcastic as he could be. [Laughs] He had a state police escort, of course. I was there. I've walked it. I walked a lot of it with him, too, and drove it and what have you.

ED: I remember the most intense moment was, I guess, when he got to Hazen?

WJ: [Laughs] That was the funniest thing.

ED: Hazen, where you had Jerry Screeton, the mayor and state senator.

WJ: Yes. He armed the town. He lined up a whole bunch of fertilizer trailers. That's what they would fertilize with, these trailers. They could go across a field with them. He lined up a bunch of these trailers out there and stationed armed men in them. He said, "They're not going to walk through this town. We're going to do it. We heard that they are bringing thousands with them. And we're not going to let them just walk through this town and just destroy this town." You know, there were only about two guys. [Laughs]

ED: Yes, just Sweet Willie and two or three others.

WJ: Yes, there were just a couple of guys.

ED: Sweet Willie was this skinny little kid, and I think he had one . . .

WJ: Withered hand.

ED: One withered arm and weighed about one-hundred-and-twenty pounds.

WJ: [Laughs] Yes. Well, Sweet Willie, he just walked through that town. He just walked right through Hazen, and, boy, they didn't like that. They didn't like this either. We were coming into Forrest City about six o'clock at night, and it was getting dusk. I'm walking though, this time. We thought that Forrest City was going to be a turning point at that time. We were walking by this bar, this tavern, and this woman came out of there leading seven or eight men—and I don't remember what her name was. But W.A. Tudor was in charge of the state police detachment that was there, about seven or eight troopers. He was in charge. He looked at this woman, [laughs] and she was, and I'm not kidding you, she must have been about two-hundred-and-seventy pounds. Just Boom! Boom! Boom! You know, with these men. She said, "These people aren't going to walk through this town. We're not going to allow them to get past this place right here." W.A. later said to me, in his head he was thinking, "Am I going to have to wrestle this huge woman? [Laughs] He said, "And you know, she could probably beat me." You remember how small W.A. was? [Laughter]

ED: Yes, he was.

WJ: He thought, "Well, I'm going to have to somehow defuse this situation."

[Laughs] Because they were ready to fight, you know. They were ready to go.

That was the one thing they didn't want to have to do was whip up on somebody.

W.A. was talking, he got her talking and talked her back into the tavern, just he and she. They were talking in there. Well, we got uniformed troopers, about fifteen of them down there, and no one wanted to tangle with them. Those old boys who were drunk who came out of that tavern said, “We don’t want to tangle with all those troopers.” [Laughs] So that kind of defused it. But getting her out of that situation helped enormously because she was cursing and... [laughs].

ED: So he just distracted her?

WJ: Yes. And finally talked her out of it. Of course, when he got her away from all of the others, she kind of calmed down. But it was something. Sweet Willie Wine was a great walk. That was a great walk.

ED: Yes, it was, a historic moment. Although I don’t know what it all meant, but it was a key point in that struggle.

WJ: It was. It was.

ED: A black guy walking to Little Rock.

WJ: A guy just wanting to walk to Little Rock. Can he do it or not?

ED: Yes, and he walked to the state Capitol.

WJ: Yes, he went all the way to the state Capitol, that’s exactly right. And Robert Shaw was with me, of the Associated Press. Robert was there.

ED: Robert was formerly at the *Gazette*, but by that time he had gone to work for the AP.

WJ: Yes. You know, it was some wonderful times.

ED: Rockefeller was governor at that time. And Ralph Scott was the state police

director.

WJ: Yes.

ED: A very enlightened and wonderful guy, Ralph Scott, the state police director. I still see him occasionally.

WJ: Yes.

ED: Lives at Conway. He's an old FBI man.

WJ: Yes, an old FBI man, and he had a definite idea of what was right and what was wrong.

ED: Yes.

WJ: He really helped out. Really, he did considerably, to defuse those situations. He used the state police to do it. Like over in Forrest City, that night that I was talking about where they wanted to throw me out of that meeting. After I had left that meeting, Scott got up and told Fletcher Long that if he led one person into the black community to do what they said, he would arrest him. "You stay out of that." He said, "I'm creating a barrier of troopers into the black community, and no white man is going to go into that community." That was unheard of.

ED: He was a tough guy.

WJ: He was tough.

ED: It was important to have Ralph Scott as head of the state police at that moment, I think.

WJ: It really was. It had set a tone, by the way, for other directors. So that was real good. It's almost like Bob Sarver and those two or three years that he was the

head of prisons.

ED: After Murton?

WJ: After Murton, yes, and very difficult times because it was still under the trustee system. But if it were not for him, we probably would not have had the lawsuit in the prisons that declared it unconstitutional. He's the one that basically engineered the lawsuit that finally declared the Arkansas prison system unconstitutional for cruel and unusual punishment. He helped a lot in that.

ED: Yes, he was brought in by Rockefeller as well, he and Ralph Scott. Two critical appointments by Rockefeller during critical stages of our history here in Arkansas.

WJ: Rockefeller was, that is—of course, you covered him. I didn't. I covered him on occasion. But Rockefeller was so funny to me. I mean he was, literally. He'd say things that were funny. And I don't know if he said them to be funny. I don't think he did. I just think he was talking. I know that his handlers, whenever he was out on the campaign—Down at Hot Springs he was addressing some group one day, and his handlers were trying to get him away from answering more of these questions. It was something like the Municipal League or something like that, and these mayors would get up and say, "Well, Governor, what about dah-dah-dah?" And he started saying these off-the-wall things, you know? [Laughs] And they'd say, "Well, but we need this money for these water developments," or whatever it was. And he'd say, "Yes, well, we'll do it," and know he can't. He'd just say all kinds of things. Then they'd ask questions like, "Governor, what

about what we hear about your private life?” “Well, I’m not going to talk about things like that.” And he’d really be surprised who would ask questions like that. Well, some of these reporters around there sure made fun of him. They finally got him out of there, and he was walking away, and I asked him—I’m walking with him—and I said, “What are they talking about ‘private life’?” “Oh,” he said, “It’s just the same old thing.” He said, “I think the first time I ran, they said I was a queer. And the second time I ran, they said that I was a womanizer.” He said, “I wish they would make up their minds. Either I’m a queer or I’m a womanizer.” [Laughs] He was so funny. But I interviewed him during one of the campaigns up at Newport, and he had this big van, you know, RV.

ED: A big old bus or whatever.

WJ: Yes, a big old bus.

ED: Or something like that.

WJ: And it was in the summer, and it was hot. And we were in the heat. They escorted me into where there was a little table on that bus. And someone came in and put a jar, it was like . . .

ED: A jar of vodka?

WJ: Yes, that’s what it was. I thought it was water. I thought it was for me. So I grabbed that and he said, “No, no, that’s not for you.” And I said, “Okay, okay.” “Do you want something?” And I said, “No, no, I’m okay.” And that’s what it was. It was vodka!

ED: Yes, he drank vodka all day.

WJ: So he came in, and he sat down. The stories that I . . .

ED: Unusual politician he was.

WJ: He was. He was. And I used to say to other people, I said, “Hey, I’m confident that we,” meaning the media, “we protected him somewhat.” We did. But he was fun. He always had the Christmas parties. [Laughter] He’d show up.

ED: Yes, he’d put out a pretty good table.

WJ: Yes, he would. And, of course, we could be bought that way.

ED: Yes, before we had ethics.

WJ: All that ethics stuff.

ED: Well, let’s see. The eighteen years carries us up to what, about 1986? Now you did a spell there where you were kind of an investigative reporter.

WJ: Yes.

ED: Bob Douglas created an investigative reporter team.

WJ: Yes.

ED: Teams for a period there, I think you and Carol Matlack did some investigative reporting for a period of time?

WJ: We did that. One of the things that we did, finally, conclusively, showed, unfortunately, the mismanagement of some of the programs that were spin-offs from the civil rights movement, like COPE.

ED: Yes, the “War on Poverty.”

WJ: Yes, the “War on Poverty.”

ED: There was some fraud.

WJ: Yes, a lot of fraud. We did several articles on that, which showed the ineptness of some of the managers of those programs. Those programs were essentially feel-good programs, which was fine. We needed to do something like that. They wouldn't—in today's world, they wouldn't function.

ED: Greedy people got put in charge of some of them.

WJ: [Laughs] Oh, yes. That reminds me. I did an eight-part series on how the Republicans outdid the Democrats. I can't remember which election it was, but it was with Rockefeller. One of his elections, either it was 1968 or 1970 . . .

ED: It was probably 1968. 1970 was when he got beat by Dale Bumpers in the general election.

WJ: That's right.

ED: 1968 was when he beat Marion Crank.

WJ: Yes, he beat Marion Crank in 1968 then. I did this series on how the black vote was "converted" [laughs] from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in just one fell swoop, one election.

ED: Yes, he got probably not quite as big, but almost as big a vote in the black community as Bill Clinton later would.

WJ: Yes.

ED: With his 1966 and 1968 elections.

WJ: Yes.

ED: It began to change a little bit in 1970, I guess, when Dale Bumpers got the black vote.

WJ: Yes, he did, and I showed how this was done. One of the people that I quoted was Fred Pickens, a lawyer from Newport.

ED: He was the Democratic Party lawyer.

WJ: Yes, chairman of the U of A board, I believe, at this time.

ED: Yes, he was.

WJ: And Fred was a very knowledgeable, very nice man. At the meeting of the East Arkansas Gentry—I loved them because they were so candid in their way, just like Marlin Hawkins was. Marlin said he'd never voted a cemetery. Never. But he never could show me how there were only nine-hundred-seventy people registered to vote and there when thirteen hundred had cast votes. [Laughs] Nothing ever came of that. Marlin would just say, "Well, that's just not true. Most of these people that you're talking about work for American Airlines or Douglas Aircraft over in Tulsa, and they drive back and forth." Well, some of those people did. Believe it or not, there were some people I found who did that, but not two-hundred-and-fifty people! [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

WJ: I mean, he was one of the greatest smoke-and-mirror men, and people loved him. That's another thing. People didn't know how much they loved Marlin Hawkins up there. But, anyway, let me go back to Fred. There was a tote board in the courthouse. I had met Fred Pickens at the courthouse. The tote board was chalked with some of the precincts, some of the townships where the voting was done. I knew where the majority of black folks voted, and it showed sixty-eight

people had voted Democratic. It showed that and one Republican vote. And I said, “Fred, I don’t understand that. Do you mean to tell me that sixty-eight of these black people voted Democrat against Rockefeller? And then there’s just one Republican?” He said, “You know, as much as we try to educate these people, there’s always one or two of them that go against it.” [Laughter]

ED: Yes.

WJ: Shug Banks up in . . .

ED: Mississippi County.

WJ: Mississippi County—was the county judge. I went up there, and he’d say, “Mr. Jordan.”—Shug dressed in black. I don’t know why he did that, but he had a lot of black articles of clothing. He also had a tote board up there. He’d look up there, and he’d say, “Wilson, Arkansas. What’s happened down at Wilson, anyway? Here all these years we’ve been taking care of those folks and look up there, seventy-two to two, seventy-two for Rockefeller and two against. What has happened?” [Laughs] Well, you know, they were wonderful. We all knew what happened. You know, someone got in there with some money, that’s what happened. You couldn’t get a preacher to tell just exactly how he did it. You know, where did he get the money? Who gave him the money? So the articles had a lot of innuendo, but I quoted enough people that you could read it just as easy. It was wonderful.

ED: Yes. All right, let’s see. You did investigative reporting. That would have been in the 1980s?

WJ: Yes, in the 1980s. I'd say from about 1981 to 1984. That's about right, yes.

ED: And then after that what did you do?

WJ: Well, I started to work for Bill Shelton.

ED: On the city desk?

WJ: On the city desk, and I did—let's see, when did—this was just before Gannett bought it.

ED: Gannett bought it in 1986.

WJ: 1986, that's right. So I started in about 1984, with Shelton. I did the police beat, primarily, and covered the roasts, you know. When someone would roast David Pryor, I'd cover that. I kind of liked it, to tell you the truth. I had some good food, got some good banquet food.

ED: You were on the police beat when the *Gazette* closed, I think, right?

WJ: I was taking care of what they called the "Arkansas Page." I don't know if you remember that. That was that Gannett monstrosity.

ED: Okay, yes, I'd forgotten about that. That's another one of the innovations of the Gannett people.

WJ: Yes, the Gannett people. I did that, I and two others, and that was a lot of work, I'll tell you. That was a lot of work. I know it was one page every day. You'd think, well, that couldn't be, but, whew! Boy, we worked hard. All three of us did that. I can't remember who it was that was with me, but we did that.

ED: Then Walker Lundy came in.

WJ: Oh, yes.

ED: Do you recall much about Walker Lundy? Did you have any personal dealings?

WJ: Oh, yes. Yes, I had several things happen with Lundy. Remember how they loved to have these meetings, these “feel good” meetings? Unity meetings where we’d all get together, and he’d tell us how well we were doing, etc.? They had this thing about the *Democrat*. That’s what I could not understand to this day. I still don’t understand it. One time he was up there, talking about a survey that the paper had done. They brought in somebody from one of their other papers or maybe more than that, kind of a team, to assess the *Gazette* as to what we needed to do. What we were doing right and what we needed to do. I think, if you will remember, they found out that we were doing a lot of things right. We were well thought of by the readership. But Lundy said, “But the thing is we need to get more reader input. We need to interact with the reader more and find out what they want.” I jumped up, and I said, “Mr. Lundy, we don’t need the reader to tell us how to put out this newspaper. They have trusted us for one-hundred-and-fifty years around here to provide them with the information that we know that they need. So we know what to do to keep the people of Arkansas informed. What they expect of us every morning when they get up to have their coffee is a product that’s going to inform them of what they need to know to get through that day.” [Laughs] He said, “You are an elitist! You’re an elitist!” I said, “Yes, damn it, I sure am!” [Laughter] I don’t know if you remember that.

ED: Yes. Well, he didn’t like you much.

WJ: No, he didn’t like me.

ED: He didn't like you, because toward the latter stages Max Brantley said that Lundy had a list of seven people that he wanted fired, wanted Brantley to fire. And, of course, they were all the old *Gazette* hands still on the city desk. There were you, Johnny Woodruff, George Bentley, Brenda Tirey, all these people who'd been there some years, old traditional *Gazette* employees. He wanted them all fired. Brantley wouldn't do it. And Max thought that he was going to be fired. Lundy had told him, "You could be fired yourself." Of course, Lundy was fired the next week. Max said that he felt he was going to be fired shortly after that. And then you had Keith Moyer come in right at the end.

WJ: And John Hanchette.

ED: John Hanchette.

[End of Side Two, Tape One]

[Beginning of Side One, Tape Two]

ED: We're talking about John Hanchette. He wore cowboy boots.

WJ: He wore cowboy boots, and he was the one that put me on probation for six months. He wrote a lengthy letter about how inept I was, and I did not understand or refused to obey an editor's direction. I wouldn't take any direction. So they were going to just give me six more months and that was it. I had to be just right under whatever that woman's name was, that city editor. I just had to go to her every . . .

ED: Kate Marymount.

WJ: Yes. She would direct me in exactly the way I should report. It was right after

that that Hanchette came up with this lengthy memo that she got and gave to me. That memo said this: around town he had been seeing police cars with their hoods up. These police cars, apparently, were overheating. So the police and the city were in cahoots to keep people from knowing that these police cars, which were bad—all the motors in these police cars were bad and they were overheating. That there was a huge conspiracy to keep the people of Little Rock from knowing that. So I read this Hanchette thing and I'm sitting there, and Kate said, "That's a good one. You get right on that." [Laughs] I said, "Kate, don't you know why the police lift the hoods on their cars?" She said, "No. Bad motors?" I said, "No, if you'll notice, all of them are the dog cars. These are canine cars. So when they stop in the summer like this, they lift the hoods to let the air escape. You keep the motor running because there's a dog in the back and you have to keep them air conditioned. That's why they do that." [Laughs] They went through the roof when I told them that. They said, "Oh, now that's ridiculous." And I said, "Well, it's the truth. That's the reason for it. There's nothing wrong with the stupid cars." [Laughs] They were so—oh, you can't believe.

ED: Just goofy people.

WJ: Oh, they were so ignorant. They were. And, yes, Lundy did not like me at all. I'll tell you that.

ED: No, he didn't like any of the old *Gazette* hands.

WJ: Well, you remember I was working on the state desk. I don't know if you remember, but I had some experience with Max. He was the night editor on the

city desk, and he was over me at that time. This was after Leroy. Leroy left me on the desk and let me handle it. I was on the state desk. But Jimmy Jones, he didn't do that with him. He wanted me to be under Max, which was fine. But Max was, at that time, and I still don't know what the deal was. He was a little suspicious of me because he thought that I was kind of a "hot dog." [Laughs] I know he did. We got word from Fayetteville that a man had taken over this sorority and was holding several women hostage in the sorority house. I think it was because he had been jilted by one of the girls. So the Fayetteville police surrounded the thing. It was a breaking story, and it was about eight o'clock at night. Max said, "Let's get on this!" He was directing where to go and everything. So I just walked back there and picked up the phone and found the house number of the sorority and called up there. The phone rang, and this guy gets on the phone. I said, "Hey, how you doing?" "I'm fine." "A lot of activity going on there, right?" "Yes, yes, there's quite a few of them. I just want my voice heard. I just want people to know what's happening." So I'm talking to the guy, right? I'm finding out why he's done this, etc. Max looked up there, and he said, "Get off the phone! Call the police up there and find out what it is. What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm talking to the kidnapper." [Laughs] "You're what!?" I said, "I'm interviewing the kidnapper." [Laughter] "Keep after him. Jordan's interviewing the kidnapper!" He's telling the desk, you know. It was so funny. I tell you. [Laughs] And there was an escapee from the prison. I don't know if you remember this, but he gave up to me. He had escaped while he was

staying at Pine Bluff. At the doctor's office he escaped. The search was on. I'm sitting in the *Gazette* office about two days after that, and the phone rings. He says, "Mr. Jordan?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, this is Tony, the escapee." [Laughter] "Hi, Tony. How are you doing?" "Well, I'm okay, but," he said, "you know, I don't like it out here. These people are trying to find me and everything, and I'm afraid they're going to shoot and kill me if they do." He said, "I think I'll just go give up. Can I give up to you?" I said, "I don't know. Have to figure that out with somebody." He said, "Well, I just don't want anyone shooting me." I said, "Well, you come to the *Gazette* at a certain time, and we'll make sure that you get out." So I called Little Rock PD. I said, "Tomorrow morning at ten o'clock there's an escapee that everyone's looking for that's going to be here at the *Gazette*. You guys want to come up and take him into custody?" Believe it or not, I like to never have gotten them convinced that that was going to happen. The first guy I talked to did not believe me. I had to go and talk to the shift commander in the patrol division because the detectives would not believe me. [Laughs] I said, "Well, okay." So they had two Little Rock officers waiting on him, and he came up, and they carted him off, and they took him back to prison. [Laughs] So it was a wonderful time.

ED: Yes. Jimmy Jones was the state editor for a period. You worked under Jimmy Jones for a while?

WJ: Yes.

ED: What was that like? What was Jimmy Jones like as state editor? How did he

compare with Leroy?

WJ: Oh, he didn't come close to being as good as Leroy. Leroy gave me great freedom to instigate and pursue news stories. Because of that, the *Gazette* broke many news stories, such as executives at a farm credit agency in Lonoke stealing millions of dollars from farmers. Also, although it wasn't under Leroy's banner, I stumbled on information that led to a series of articles about Bill Clinton and several legislators conveniently not paying their personal property taxes. It was much more fun working on the state desk, where stories were varied and exciting. The city desk was more sedated and dry. It was also somewhat frustrating that the city desk treated the state desk like a stepchild, but the truth is we broke major, substantial stories under Leroy's leadership. We had an organized group of correspondents who provided us with excellent news intelligence. We also had staffers with noses for news, like Peggy Watson in Fort Smith and Bill Lancaster in Pine Bluff. We didn't attempt to write like Faulkner or Fitzgerald, as some do today and even then, but you couldn't beat us as diligent collectors of hard, cold facts. And we presented it to readers in words they could understand. The difference between Jimmy Jones and Leroy Donald? On the first morning after Jimmy took over as editor, I found a note on my desk. The note was from Jimmy. It said that I could no longer pursue news stories that I discovered and that I would write only news stories as directed by the editor or assistant editor, Matilda. I sat down with a sinking feeling in my heart. It was soon apparent that being a *Gazette* reporter would no longer be as much fun, since I was being

buckled down like that. Oh, Jimmy let me initiate a few stories, but only after I had pleaded with him. That was why Bill Shelton, who became my editor in the early 1980s, gave me an “uninspired” rating during a yearly assessment. But I don’t think editors understood the deep frustration that I felt in Jimmy’s smashing of my enthusiasm. Jimmy never gave me an adequate answer for why he was tying me up. During the ten years I worked with Leroy, we plowed some new ground. For example, we were the first paper that ever did a news story in Arkansas about the emergence of the Republican Party in northwest Arkansas. And why? The reason for that was Leroy Donald. He understood what was happening before it happened. It was a [?]. Leroy was—he directed a lot of our prison coverage, the politics of prisons, and how it was done at the State House. I’m confident that when you [Ernie Dumas] were writing something about the prisons, that was sparking something for us to do. To write about how they were doing in another area like building new dairy barns on the two prison farms, because it was going to save this amount of money, etc. We did a lot of that kind of stuff. Leroy saw that. We did the demise of the oil industry in Arkansas. Of course, Leroy was from El Dorado. So he understood Arkansas much better than Jimmy did. Jimmy kind of let news come to us. We didn’t go out, under Jimmy, and do a news story that captured the mood of the whole area, like groundwater on the grand prairie and how we were losing it. We didn’t do news stories like that under him. To depict and show what was happening in Arkansas, historical perspectives for the leaders of the future. For some reason, he was not one to do

that.

ED: Just breaking news stories was what he covered?

WJ: Basically, breaking news stories.

ED: What kind of stories do you have about the end of the *Gazette*? I guess we all remember what we were doing right at the end when the *Gazette* was sold to the *Democrat*, in that period before it actually occurred. We were kind of in the dark about what was happening. Any memories of that period?

WJ: Yes, there are a couple of them. Under the Gannett banner was the most miserable period of my life. To me, those people didn't understand news. They didn't know how to collect it. It was all puff. Nothing hard. Good hard news, they weren't interested in it. They harassed me a lot. So I didn't have a good feeling for those people at all, but I was determined that they weren't going to run me off, too. That was a challenge, too. But I will tell you that two days before we closed, I don't know why I did this. It was a mood. No one was telling me. As you well know, people were not giving us any really good information, anything that you could sink your teeth into about what was going on. I started gathering up some of my old news articles that I had in my desk. I got a couple or three cardboard boxes and started packing it up. No one had to tell me. I just started doing it. There weren't very many other people who were doing that either, but some were. Some of the reporters were doing it. Taking some of the old memories out in those boxes. So I carried it home. I remember walking out of the door, two days before, carrying these two boxes to my car, and that was so

sad. I can't tell you how sad I felt. I felt like I was leaving a woman, you know? Even worse, this was even worse [laughs] because it was a life. Walking out of that historic building that night was really a traumatic event for me. I think it was a Friday wasn't it, that we closed?

ED: Friday afternoon. Friday afternoon, as I remember.

WJ: I remember that we're standing around. I walked into the newsroom, as was customary, about nine-thirty. And everybody was milling around. I didn't see anyone working. It so happened the day before, by the way, I had killed off every lead. They'd have to get it off the hard drive because I killed off all the advance obituaries that I had written. I killed everything off, all of my tips that were still on and everything—all my intelligence, you might say—I cleaned off my computer the day before. So about ten-thirty I tried to log on. I couldn't log on. Well, we were all starting to question it. "Uh-oh, we can't log on." Meaning that something bad had happened. We knew that at that time. About eleven o'clock they said that there would be an announcement at three p.m. that afternoon. They weren't making any assignments or anything. We all figured, naturally, this is it. Something bad has happened, something bad. I don't know who said this, but someone said, "Well, let's get some booze." [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

WJ: So by one o'clock, and I've always been a drinker, but I didn't drink anything that day. I wasn't drinking at that time. So by two o'clock that newsroom was rocking and rolling. [Laughs] And we were drinking. Of course, by then we

knew it was gone and we weren't going to have a paper the next day and all that stuff. It's kind of hard to describe it. As you remember, we put a microphone up there, and everyone got up there telling some old *Gazette* stories, drinking and what have you.

ED: We usually blamed Gannett as well as Hussman.

WJ: Yes, yes, it was a mutual thing. We were wanting to know where were the Gannett people. It was gone. It wasn't there. Those crummy people.

ED: Moyer, and all of them, Moon. They had already left. Well, Moon had already gone.

WJ: Yes, he had already gone.

ED: They brought in this guy from out west to become the undertaker, the last publisher, Moe Hickey.

WJ: Moe Hickey, yes.

ED: Moe Hickey. He wasn't to be found. I never even met Moe Hickey. He was the publisher, and I never saw him.

WJ: They were just incredible people. I had no use for them at all. But the other thing is I resented that Hussman brought in all of those security guards. I resented that. Of course, they confiscated all of the news files and everything, as if we were going to destroy them.

ED: Gave us until five o'clock to get out of the building.

WJ: Yes. In fact, escorted—I know Max and me, there were about seven or eight, or maybe ten, who were escorted out of that building. I had a box with the last of

my stuff. Remember Barbara, the personnel manager?

ED: Barbara Carter?

WJ: Carter, Barbara Carter, she said, “Hey! Wait.” And in a box she threw this up in the air towards me. Twenty-five years . . .

ED: Your watch?

WJ: Yes, an *Arkansas Gazette* watch. It was inscribed with my name on it. I was going to get it at the banquet in December. And she said, “Hey! Wait. Here’s your watch.” [Laughter]

ED: Well, that’s a great story. She tossed your watch to you on your way out of the building on October 19, 1991, your twenty-five year watch.

WJ: That’s exactly right. And that one was also when the storm troopers were escorting us out and here comes that, and I caught it. She gave it a great throw. And here’s my watch.

ED: Your anniversary watch. What does it say?

WJ: It says, “*Arkansas Gazette.*”

ED: It does, on the dial, “*Arkansas Gazette.*” That’s a nice-looking watch.

WJ: Yes, it’s a very nice-looking watch.

ED: You see I got my thirty-year ring about a year before, a little gold ring, which I got, but it isn’t the *Gazette* any longer.

WJ: Isn’t that wonderful?

ED: That’s right.

WJ: And it says here, “N.W. Jordan.”

ED: Want it back?

WJ: Yes. So that's twenty-five years. What a wonderful thing. [Laughter]

ED: Well, let's talk about the *Gazette* generally. I guess that's the only newspaper really that you ever worked on, the *Arkansas Gazette*, daily newspaper.

WJ: Yes, I went to work for the *Rogers Daily News* for about three years. And then I worked a little weekly called the *Arkansas Times*. That's what it was named.

ED: Was this after the *Gazette* closed?

WJ: No, before.

ED: Before?

WJ: Yes, in Fort Smith. Of course, I had written things for my little *Gentry Journal Advance* and what have you, but, yes.

ED: Do you think the *Gazette* was a special place to work? Or are we kind of crazy about that?

WJ: It was a wonderful place to work. The openness . . .

ED: Why was it that way?

WJ: It was because of the group that we had in the mid-1960s through the 1970s and early 1980s. We were a very cohesive group, and we had an understanding of history, what the *Gazette* meant to people. Obviously, we were very proud of its history and so, yes, it was a special place because of the historical impact that this paper had on the state. I meant that truly when I said that the *Gazette* was the conscience of the state. It gave the direction in which this state should go morally, industrially, and in every way as a community. I mean, thinking of the

state as a community. Here's what this community should do. We would do it editorially. We did it in our news stories. By the way, I've always thought—and anyone who wants to take a good look at objective news reporting should read the old *Gazette*—it was the most objective newspaper that I have ever read. I am a big-time reader of newspapers. But no newspaper can come close to that. It's because of the editorial direction that was given by A.R. Nelson and by Bob Douglas. Bob Douglas was by far the best editor, news editor and managing editor, that I think any newspaper could have. He gave us the guidance that we needed in the areas that we needed. So I just thought, obviously, that we had gifted people who gave their heart to that newspaper. You could see it in the coverage of disasters, how we would mobilize whenever there would be a string of tornadoes come through and we had to have reporters here and there. The day that Robert Kennedy was shot, how we put out a special edition. And how many it took to put it out. It was a wonderful work. And the only reason that you could have that kind of a newspaper is by utilizing all of these different talents. Good reporters, good writers, and that's not necessarily the same thing, as you well know. [Laughs] I never thought of myself as a great writer, but I was a pretty good reporter. You know what I'm saying? I can explain the story and what I saw without embellishing it or detracting, or subtracting, or adding to. And the editing. It was just a combination of so many different people that put it together. It was a relaxed place to work. You didn't have anybody, until the Gannett people came, who were mind-boggling in their micromanaging . . .

ED: You didn't have all the factions, in fighting, and bitterness that you encounter in any kind of industrial or commercial organization. At least, I rarely saw that at the *Gazette* in all the years I was there. I think that's kind of unusual.

WJ: I thought it was remarkable. It's been a great life. The *Gazette* was a great twenty-five years. Even, and I'm going to say, even with Gannett, because I fought them tooth-and-nail. They had no vision at all when it came to Arkansas. They were condescending. They thought we were hillbilly hicks. I disliked them. Oh, they just infuriated me. And then we, all of us who put that paper out, and, particularly, I remember starting in 1966 when I came there, and you had only been there about a year or two.

ED About six years, 1960.

WJ: Had you been there that long? This was whenever Mike Trimble and Doug Smith and, oh, everybody, they just increased that staff enormously. And here we go, so many of us. Remarkably, we're Arkansas boys. We didn't have to have someone from New York City.

ED: Nearly everybody there was either native born or had lived there.

WJ: A long time.

ED: Their education had been in Arkansas.

WJ: And we've had—oh, what was his name, from Bentonville? Editorial writer?

ED: From Bentonville?

WJ: Yes.

ED: Wasn't Jerry Neil?

WJ: Jerry Neil.

ED: Jerry Neil.

WJ: Jerry Neil. How can anyone forget Jerry Neil? One of the most extraordinary people I have ever met in my life. He could drink like a fish, but . . .

ED: A great writer.

WJ: A great writer and an excellent mind. He had an excellent mind. See, that was another thing. He could put things in perspective with an elegance. That's what it was. He could do it and it made you proud. You knew that most of the people who read his editorials did not like what he had to say. Lots of people didn't, but they couldn't get around the logic in what he was writing. They couldn't do it. Again, that's what I was talking about. He gave direction to the state. I thought of us as having a responsibility to the readers in that very area, to make sure that they got that information that they needed to conduct their affairs. I thought we did a great job.

ED: Well, okay, Wayne, we've covered a lot of territory.

WJ: Yes, we have.

ED: No sense going on with these stories.

WJ: That would be senseless, but I think we've put it down. I hope we've put it in a way that people who will listen to this will understand the passion that we had at the *Gazette*.

ED: All right. Thanks.

WJ: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]