

Gazette Project

Interview with

Laurie Karnatz,
Fayetteville, Arkansas,
2 July 2002

Interviewer: Scott Morris

Scott Morris: I am here with Laurie Karnatz. I am interviewing Laurie for the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History's *Gazette* Project. Laurie, I would like to ask you on tape to agree that this transcript will be available for research. This is the same sort of agreement as the written statement.

Laurie Karnatz: Yes, of course.

SM: I would like to start with the basics. For example, where were you born?

LK: Houston.

SM: Houston, Texas. When?

LK: 1957.

SM: Where did you grow up?

LK: Fayetteville.

SM: From when to when?

LK: 1964, with a couple of years in Europe. I left the first time in 1977.

SM: That was when you were twenty, right?

LK: Yes.

SM: Who were your parents?

LK: William and Merlee Harrison.

SM: Did you have any siblings?

LK: Yes. I have two brothers – Sean and Quentin.

SM: Your brother, Sean, also worked for the *Gazette*, correct?

LK: Yes, he did.

SM: Your father, Bill Harrison, is one of the founders of the creative writing program?

LK: That is correct.

SM: If you could, summarize your life before you came to the *Gazette*. What did you do and what were your interests?

LK: I was a wild teenager, and then I had babies. My husband went to college and then he left. I went to work as a secretary for the journalism department.

SM: At the University [of Arkansas, Fayetteville]?

LK: At the university. Bob Douglas was my chairman and my boss. Roy Reed was there at the time.

SM: Do you remember or recall when that was?

LK: In 1987.

SM: That was the year that I graduated from journalism.

LK: I had always like journalism. I was an avid reader of the *International Herald Tribune* and all the news magazines that I could get my hands on. I liked non-fiction, fiction. I always wanted to be a writer. Bob and Roy started working with me.

SM: Can you tell us what first got you interested in journalism?

LK: It was just a teenage thing. I liked information and liked to know everything. It

was a bad habit.

SM: I wouldn't say that.

LK: I am nosy. I like to know everything.

SM: That is a good journalist. How old were you when you got married?

LK: I was twenty-two.

SM: You started having children. How many children did you have?

LK: Two.

SM: Did you go to college then?

LK: No.

SM: In 1987 you went to work for the university journalism department as a secretary.

How long were you there?

LK: I was there only a year. Well, maybe a year and a half.

SM: You said that Mr. Douglas and Mr. Reed went to work on you. What do you mean?

LK: I was a waste as a secretary. I knew it, and they knew it. I didn't want to be a secretary. They kept telling me, "You don't need a four-year degree. You just take all the classes that we tell you to take." I started taking all the classes they told me to take. I had taken classes on and off over the years, mostly English and some graduate-level English classes. Some were literature and creative non-fiction.

SM: Where did you take those courses?

LK: Here at the University of Arkansas.

SM: What kind of classes did Mr. Reed and Mr. Douglas direct you to?

LK: Reporting I and II, Editing, and Ethics. I can't remember, but I took every one they told me to. Diane Blair's classes on politics and government were wonderful.

SM: She was my state and national government teacher. Do you remember any other teachers who were significant or important to you?

LK: Bob Carey. I enjoyed the Ethics class simply because he would pull out pictures and articles. We were able to debate it.

SM: Bob Carey, he was a professor of journalism?

LK: Yes, he retired from UPI [United Press International]. Bob only recently retired from the journalism department.

SM: The journalism ethics course, you really found helpful.

LK: Yes, I liked the debate of whether or not a photo should run, whether or not a crime victim's name should run. I enjoyed the debate.

SM: Was it useful to you when you got onto the job?

LK: I did use it. I developed my set of own personal ethics. It did not always jive with my editors'.

SM: How would you characterize your journalism education that you got? Was it a meat-and-potatoes sort of journalism? What kind of journalism do you think those classes were designed to produce?

LK: Just good old-fashioned journalism.

SM: What do you mean by that?

LK: Basic facts, no fluff, not features. I did take a features course, but I did not enjoy it. Just good old-fashioned, basic, fact finding journalism. There were a few lessons that I learned. There are funny ones that stick with you — and getting somebody's name spelled wrong gets you an "F." Every story that I have ever written, if I have a name spelling wrong, it is an "F." I still give myself an "F."

SM: That was Mr. Reed.

LK: That's right. I still give myself an "F."

SM: I once spelled Ron Bumpass, the lawyer here in town, as "Bumpas." I think I tried to drop one of the S's. Mr. Reed called me on that. I guess we should say that Bob Douglas was the chairman of the journalism department and former managing editor of the *Gazette*. Roy Reed, who was a professor of journalism, is a former *Gazette* reporter and a former *New York Times* reporter. They were both our teachers. After you started taking these journalism courses, how long did that go on?

LK: I took classes for a couple of years. That also included some of the time that I spent as secretary for the journalism department. I took classes here and there.

SM: Any other stories or any other things that you learned that are worth repeating?

LK: False titles. Bob and Roy were big on false titles.

SM: False titles being what?

LK: Being, attorney – Ron Bumpass.

SM: Were you already interested in working for the *Gazette*? Did the influence of these two help?

LK: They said that was where I needed to be. They both said that was where I needed to be.

SM: Did they say why?

LK: At that time it was the best paper in the state. There were a lot of complaints about Gannett ruining it. I did happen to notice there were some stories and some front-page headlines and front-page photos during that time Walker Lundy was editor. They were fairly atrocious and appalling. It was *National Inquirer*-type stuff in my mind.

SM: What time period would it have been that you were taking these courses?

LK: It was 1987, 1988, and 1989.

SM: Gannett bought the paper in 1986 or early 1987. Walker Lundy was the first Gannett editor of the paper. What was the view of the journalism faculty towards the paper at that time?

LK: They were concerned that Gannett did not know its readers in Arkansas. It underestimated the readers in Arkansas. I agree with them. I think the Arkansas public was horribly — to quote George Bush — “misunderestimated.” I think Gannett made some really terrible decisions. There was not a lot of talk about that in the journalism department. They just never understood that they had smart, educated readers in Arkansas. They thought we were all hicks. They played up to the hicks.

SM: The Gannett executives. Was that the attitude of the faculty there?

LK: That was about it. I think quite a few of the faculty — yes, there was a lot of

discussion about that.

SM: You came out of that kind of training ground. When you completed your courses at the university, did you go to the *Gazette*?

LK: I worked at the *Morning News* and then the *Springdale News* for six months in their features department. I created a couple of columns and things like that. They asked me to stay, but it had been recommended that I go to work for the *El Dorado News Times*. It was known to my children as the *Hell Dorado News Times*. We lasted there another six months. It was so unpleasant down there, partly because of the leadership of the paper. I was packing up to move home to Mother when Bob Stover called and offered me a job at the *Gazette*.

SM: That would have been when?

LK: It was December of 1990.

SM: Do you remember what Bob Stover's position was?

LK: At that time, Bob Stover was city editor. He was shortly moved to sports. Right after I started, he was moved to sports.

SM: Sports?

LK: He was moved to outdoors, sports.

SM: I thought he was moved to business, but I could be wrong.

LK: No, sports.

SM: This was about when?

LK: December, 1990. I had interviewed with Bob over Thanksgiving. I had literally walked into the paper over Thanksgiving weekend and said, "Do you have time to

talk to me?” He knew my brother, Sean, because he worked for the Searcy Bureau. He knew my parents, and he knew Bob and Roy. He said, “Sure.” He sat me right down and interviewed me.

SM: Were you still at the El Dorado paper at that time?

LK: Yes.

SM: I guess we should note that the El Dorado paper was owned by the Hussmans, the people who owned the *Democrat*. Bob Stover interviewed you then. Were you in for a particular job?

LK: No, I was just interviewing.

SM: What did he ultimately offer you?

LK: He called in December and said they needed someone to do the journal page. It was a really fun and interesting job. The *Democrat* staff and some of the executives made a lot of fun of it. The journal page was made up of briefs from all over the state and usually a story or two. It had a seventy-percent recognition rate among readers.

SM: That was in a survey that the paper did?

LK: I think it was in several surveys. It was consistently known by readers. They would go and pick out just the one area of the state that they wanted to check.

SM: I am trying to remember what it looked like.

LK: It was a full page of briefs. When Bob hired me there were about fifteen or sixteen stringers throughout the state that I would talk to every day. The idea was that I would condense as much as possible into little bitty stories so that you could

get the who, what, when and where in a couple of paragraphs.

SM: How long were these? A hundred words, maybe?

LK: Gosh, I was never good at words. Three inches or four inches, maybe. For a good one it would be five or six. They usually tried to have a twelve-inch story or so.

SM: There was always a piece of art, too. How many of those little briefs did you do?

LK: I have every single journal page that I ever did. I raided them from the *Gazette* library when I left. Twelve or fifteen with a story or two.

SM: You were primarily an editor? They would submit a story, and you would . . .

LK: They would give me the information over the phone. Generally, they would read it to me over the phone, and I would write it all down. I learned to type really fast. It came in handy later on. I can keep up with county commissioners with my little lap top. They would call, or I would call them, and type in the stuff. I would edit it, fix it, and someone else would place it.

SM: You didn't do the layout?

LK: No. The layout was actually done alphabetically except for whatever story was chosen for the day. Occasionally, I would write one of the stories.

SM: Alphabetically based on . . .?

LK: The county name.

SM: The county name. Who were these stringers?

LK: There was a radio guy in east Arkansas, another radio person in south Arkansas. There was a freelance writer in Harrison. They were people who were, generally,

somehow involved in the news, either as a freelance basis or with radio stations.

There were a few who actually worked for other small papers.

SM: It wasn't just some little old lady or little old man living down a country road.

They had some background in news. I remember that it was a really good, newsy page. It was fun to read for native Arkansans. Did you do that the whole time you were at the *Gazette*?

LK: I did it the whole time. Occasionally, I would fill in when something would come up. I always had to cover the minor stuff. It wasn't much fun. I wasn't very creative, either. They would send me to some kid thing at the hospital. I just wasn't very interested. Yes, Bob and Roy would chastise me for that comment. I got to where I would do occasional stories. For instance, if one of the stringers had something really good, like the race riot at a school in Rogers. That was really fun to write. It was something that a radio stringer couldn't do, so I did that.

SM: What was your day like? Coming in at about 9:00?

LK: I would come in around 9:00 or 9:30, and I would read the entire paper, and I would correct it with a red pen. I would correct the whole paper. People would walk over and look to see how many red marks there were for that day.

SM: You just did that for yourself?

LK: I did it for myself. The editors and everyone would come and see what I had found.

SM: Where did you sit in the newsroom?

LK: I sat near Leslie Peacock and the two police guys. Wonderful, wonderful John Woodruff was catty-corner from me.

SM: You were near the city desk?

LK: I was by the city desk. The schools reporter — I can't remember all of these people's names. I had a lot of fun with them. I was right by the city desk. I got to eavesdrop on all the conversations.

SM: Let me ask you this, then, especially where you were located physically. When you first came into the paper, what was your first impression of the place?

LK: It was home. I rarely had that feeling when I first walk into work. I was just home. There were people I knew from the Fayetteville area, people that I had grown up with through journalism. The whole atmosphere was very comfortable to me except for the city editor. He didn't come out very much, so it was fine.

SM: What about the people there? Were there any particular characters or interesting people?

LK: I loved John Woodruff. He covered the city of North Little Rock. He was the city reporter for years. He was just a wealth of information. He was incredibly kind and thoughtful. Wayne Jordan, who had been at the paper for many, many years — he covered police. I had gotten pretty close to him, and he would tell stories of his old drinking days with other cops. He was pretty much relegated, by this point, to searching all the other newspapers in the state. There was a subscription to all other newspapers, and Wayne would read them to see what we had missed. He was very entertaining and also helpful. He got razed some by

the new folk. They thought he was just an old fogey and an old timer. In a way he was. I want to remember this man's name — he was black and he was an editor. He was one of the best that I have ever seen. Who am I thinking of, Scott?

SM: Perhaps, Alvin Reid.

LK: Yes, yes. I loved Alvin. He was so good. I would sit and watch him rewrite a lead or the first two paragraphs of a story in a flash. He would do it beautifully. It was almost as if — had it been my lead, I would not have known the difference. I would have been thrilled. I loved Alvin Reid.

SM: He was assistant state editor, right?

LK: Yes, he was. He was really good, very kind, very generous. He gave me lots of time. He had a great sense of humor. I tried to find him a couple of times. He and his wife lost their baby. I wanted to give my condolences for that and to also tell him how much I enjoyed him and learned from him.

SM: Was Alvin your immediate boss?

LK: For a while he was and then Leslie Newell [Peacock] was. Bob Stover was at first. They moved Bob to sports. Then it was Alvin. Alvin left and went to another paper in Kansas. Then it was Leslie Newell.

SM: She was your boss in the end?

LK: Yes. I did love Alvin. He went and volunteered at the schools. He went to my children's school and taught about journalism. He taught at Woodruff Elementary. I think he went to *USA Today* and did sports.

SM: I think that was right.

LK: He liked baseball.

SM: He was a big sports fan.

LK: I think he eventually went and did a baseball magazine. Alvin, I thought, was very good at what he did. I learned a lot by just watching him do it.

SM: Any other memorable folks or stories from the newsroom that you remember? Save the end of the paper for a bit. Were there any other things you saw in the newsroom?

LK: There was the time that John Reinan got on my brother's computer. Sean had already been moved from Searcy to the main office. John was married to someone in graphics. He was now in St. Petersburg.

SM: I am drawing a blank, but his wife was our graphics editor.

LK: Yes, she was. She is now at Poynter. Her name was Monica Moses or Monica Moseley. She is Monica. She is in St. Pete now. John is now—or at least a year ago I found him. I got some information from him on a story that I was writing. I think he was at the *Tampa Tribune*. John Reinan got on my brother's computer and sent me an e-mail through the company e-mail system. It said, "You always were mom's favorite!" Sean got really upset about it. I thought it was funny. We started using passwords for in house e-mails.

SM: I remember that the e-mail system was abused quite a bit.

LK: I had a lot of fun with the e-mail. It was like "party at my house tonight," "party at my house tomorrow night. Come on everybody," and they did.

SM: Let's go back to your hiring for a moment. Did you have to meet with Walker Lundy at any point?

LK: No, never. He was gone by the time that I had gotten there. It was Keith Moyer and that lovely wife of his. She was the writing coach.

SM: Keith Moyer was editor of the paper when you came to work. Did you meet him when you interviewed?

LK: No.

SM: When was your first meeting with him?

LK: I don't think I ever met with him.

SM: Never.

LK: No, he wasn't interested in what I did.

SM: Did you ever meet Lundy under any circumstances?

LK: Yes, he came to the university and spoke once.

SM: Did you attend that event?

LK: I attended the event, but I don't remember what he said. He did come and speak.

SM: Did you have any particular impression of him?

LK: Boy, I could get myself into trouble. I thought he was a moron. That could have been prompted a little bit by Bob Douglas.

SM: Do you remember specifically why you thought that?

LK: This is all so very vague. We were also drinking and doing the twist that night. It was a U[niversity] of A[rkansas] journalism event. As I recall, he talked about what I refer to as the *USA Today* mentality. Turning everything into *USA Today*,

all pictures and no major news. It was just dumbing it down. He talked about the importance of that. He never used any of those terms. My whole impression of it was this was important to him and where he thought journalism was going. It was just dumbing it down for the reader. I think the reader deserves a whole lot more credit.

SM: At the risk of skipping around here, during the time that you were the journal page editor, were there any particular articles? You mentioned a race article at the Rogers school.

LK: That one was pretty interesting. My favorite story that I ever wrote, and it was absolutely horrible. There was a prominent family in east Arkansas. The sheriff was Dave Parkman. We were on pretty good terms because they had a lot of drive-by shootings and we talked frequently. This prominent Arkansas family – his sister was president on the school board, father was a judge, blah, blah, blah. One of the children wasn't very mentally stable. Everybody knew it, but no one talked about it. My favorite story that I ever got to do. I was at a restaurant around the corner from the *Gazette*, when I got the phone call. This middle-aged or sixty-ish, not very stable, brother had apparently attempted to decapitate his father in the kitchen with a meat cleaver. When it didn't work, he dragged his father, who was about eighty-two, outside to the barn, where he finished the job with an ax. He went and got the big family turkey platter and put his father's head on it. He placed it on the front yard and just sat on the front porch until the family came home. I got to write a couple of really good stories about that. Then

the whole thing, as was normal for east Arkansas, just kind of disappeared, just like the brother. He got put away and that was that.

SM: Things really do have a way of disappearing over there. Do you remember what county that was?

LK: Dave Parkman was the sheriff, and I can't remember. He once told me that I had a good voice for phone sex. I think that was why he was always so helpful when I talked with him over the phone.

SM: Any other memorable stories that you worked on? Funny, sad, or significant?

LK: There was one, speaking of ethics. There was a mobile home fire in east Arkansas. The parents were asleep, and the children were asleep in the back of the mobile home. The fire was apparently in the middle. The parents were all cut up and burnt from trying to reach their children. I think two of the three children died in the fire. One was at the burn unit in Memphis. The parents had clearly struggled to get their children out. They tried to break through the glass, tried to go through the windows. They were hurt. Bob Stover absolutely insisted that I call those parents and get comments from them. I couldn't imagine trying to do it. He made me do it, and I haven't ever been so grateful in all my life as when the family refused to talk to me.

SM: Those are some of the hardest phone calls to make. They really are.

LK: I have never been so grateful as the day they refused to talk.

SM: The odd thing is that sometimes they want to talk. Is there anything about the *Gazette* or the people or the institution or what it was like to work there versus

your expectations?

LK: Everything was fun. I was by the state desk, so I wasn't by the guys doing the city stuff. I just had a lot of fun talking to some of the old timers. Especially Jerry Jones, who was in business and had been there forever.

SM: He was the assistant city editor when I started.

LK: When you started, yes, then he moved into business. I enjoyed it a lot. There were people whom I didn't particularly like or respect. For the most part, I have few bad memories. I thought it was a good team.

SM: One reason that I asked about what attitude toward the paper was in the journalism department, after you heard all of that and shared that opinion of the paper, did your attitude change once you were inside the paper?

LK: I thought we were so far — despite Moyer's presence, I thought we were so much better than the *Democrat*. I was always pleased about that and proud to be there. I think there were things that could have been improved. As rude as I am sometimes, I think he was certainly an improvement over Lundy.

SM: I guess that it would be interesting if you shared this opinion. It seemed to me there was a point during that last year where Moyer backed off of everything. He let the line editors make the decisions. It seemed to me like it went back to more of the old *Gazette*.

LK: I didn't want to say or do anything. There did seem to be a point where he was very uninvolved. It was certainly an improvement over the Lundy days.

SM: The paper closed of October in 1991. What do you recall?

LK: The rumors started in late summer. I got frequent updates from the northwest Arkansas journalism crowd.

SM: What did they tell you?

LK: That Gannett was looking to get out because the losses were too big. There had been a huge scandal where Dillard's had pulled all of its advertisement. Dillard's found out they were paying more than several other large enterprises. They got really mad and pulled their advertisements. This hurt the *Gazette* financially.

SM: It was our biggest account.

LK: Plus, Walter Hussman did a really smart thing. He ran all of his classifieds free. There was a lot of talk about those things. The rumors then did start about getting out. It was financially not viable.

SM: Do you remember what the first rumor was that originated in Little Rock?

LK: The first one that I heard originated from northwest Arkansas.

SM: After you heard that from the journalism department up here, do you recall what the first rumor was that started it in Little Rock?

LK: My understanding was that the word spreading around Little Rock came from northwest Arkansas. Bob Douglas had been talking to Hussman and was concerned. He started phoning people in Little Rock. At one point, I think that Bob had discussed himself working as a consultant.

SM: I think he did for a while. I think it was afterwards. The earliest rumor that I heard that originated in Little Rock was the Channel Eleven report. Do you recall?

LK: I don't remember that one.

SM: They interviewed the father of a *Gazette* carrier who had been told that the papers were going to merge. We all sort of laughed it off. We very nervously laughed it off.

LK: I did not laugh it off. I had Bob Douglas saying, "It is really serious." He swore me to secrecy. I was only a little bit secret about it.

SM: When did you first hear from northwest Arkansas?

LK: Probably in late August. By late September there was a flurry of activity in the newsroom, trying to figure out how to buy the paper or how to keep it afloat. We tried to figure out how to get the federal government to step in with an anti-trust.

SM: How would you describe the mood in the newsroom during those last days?

LK: Frantic. Everybody was trying to do their job, but they were worried and nervous.

SM: Do you recall any sense of disbelief? Were there people who, in spite of the facts, just couldn't accept that the *Gazette*, this great institution, might go under?

LK: I think there were some. I don't know if it was actually disbelief. Well, maybe so. They couldn't imagine that it was really going to happen. There were some people who couldn't imagine that it was really going to happen. Others were looking for jobs before the end came.

SM: How did you handle it yourself, personally? Knowing what you knew, how did you handle it?

LK: I did my job every day and prayed it wouldn't happen so I could keep my job.

That was it. I just toughed it and went on.

SM: What about those last few days when it became clear that things were coming down to the wire? What do you recall about those days?

LK: Everyone was so upset, so very discouraged. Even down to the last minute we were trying to get the government to step in. Anything to not let the paper be lost. I remember — you will have to pardon me. My brain doesn't function well these days. I remember hearing that the anti-trust efforts had fallen through. I think that was when everybody gave up. That happened on a Wednesday or Thursday, and the last day of the *Gazette* was a Friday. We were all there at work, getting ready to put out the next day's paper. That's when the announcement came: "There would not be a next day's paper." I think we were all appalled that we had not been given an opportunity to have a final day.

SM: A farewell issue. Can you go into a little bit more detail about that final day? What do you recall? When did the word get around?

LK: At 10:00. It was early, and it was announced that there would not be an issue put out that day.

SM: Do you recall how the announcement was done?

LK: It was in the newsroom. We were told that Walter Hussman, or one of those guys, was going to come and speak to us. It would be around noon. We had a couple of hours to be in a panic mode. Nothing was hysterical, but we were all pretty mad that there was no notice. Not a day's notice. I can't think of a single person who was not angry with that. We did start to gather some things up. I

gathered up every journal page that I had ever done. I had them in a nice little clamp. I took those to my car pretty early in the day. There was some fight in the parking lot over a *Democrat* photographer who was taking pictures of people who were leaving. I can't remember who punched him, but somebody punched him. The police were called. It was not good. As soon as the announcement was made, I called the journalism department at the University of Arkansas. As the speech was given to all of us, certain people would keep jobs, and they would try to keep all of us they could. I had all the friends around me. I called everyone that I could. Bob Douglas, the journalism crew, my parents. In my case, two of my parents' three children were losing their jobs in the same day. I dialed the phones around my desk to different numbers and let these people listen to the entire announcement.

SM: If you can, tell me specifically whom all you called.

LK: My parents, Bob Douglas, Roy Reed, maybe somebody else. The journalism department probably had it on speaker phone. My impression was that they sat around and listened to it on the speaker phone.

SM: Did Mr. Reed or Mr. Douglas say anything to you when you called and told them this was it?

LK: They were very upset. I don't remember the conversation, but Bob knew this was it. He knew it was coming. It was still so hard to deal with. Bill, the editor, also. He has since died of cancer.

SM: Bill Rutherford was the managing editor of the paper.

LK: Yes, he was.

SM: He had for a long time been the news editor.

LK: He was a wonderful man. He was trying to take it well and to keep everyone in reasonable spirits.

SM: What did your parents say?

LK: It was not a good day in the Harrison household. It was very sad.

SM: Do you remember any more specifics about what you did or what others did during those two hours?

LK: I know that people were trying to gather their things. None of us knew what we were going to be allowed to take. We were able to get our clip files from the librarian. I was also able to get all my journal pages. We gathered up our personal belongings. I can't think of anyone who took things they shouldn't have taken.

SM: My memory is that some people stood up and told stories about the old *Gazette*.

LK: Some did tell stories.

SM: I think a few drinks might have been shared.

LK: Yes, somebody went to the liquor store and bought booze. I had forgotten all about that. That evening, several groups of people met in bars. The next day different ones went and met at bars. There were parties and one was at my house, a big one. There was moaning, crying, and partying for several days. I guess we all then started to find work.

SM: Before I move on to what you have done since, I will let you make comments.

LK: It was a huge loss for the state.

SM: In what way?

LK: The history. The *Democrat-Gazette* is not the caliber that the *Gazette* was. It was the oldest paper west of the Mississippi. All of a sudden, it is gone, and it doesn't matter that they have added the *Gazette* to the *Democrat's* name. The *Arkansas Gazette* is history.

SM: What did the institution and its history mean to the people of Arkansas? Did it have a place, or do we exaggerate when we call it an institution?

LK: No, I don't think we exaggerate. I know people who for years would not pick up the *Democrat*. It was a lot of people, people who were not related to journalism. People all around the state could not believe it was gone.

SM: What do you think the *Gazette* stood for?

LK: I think for so many years they worked so hard to get the real news, to get it right, to do it right. That was due to the employees. The people who worked there made it.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

LK: I read the *Gazette* for years and years before I was ever lucky enough to work there for one year. I just had almost a whole year with them. I think clearly what made the *Gazette* was the talent and effort of the employees. They wanted a good paper, and they made a good paper. It was of great importance to them. I don't think that is very common anymore. I think it is uncommon in the newspaper

industry these days. It is incredibly sad.

SM: What did you do after the paper closed?

LK: I went to work for the *Northwest Arkansas Times* for two or three years.

SM: That is the Fayetteville newspaper?

LK: That is the Fayetteville one.

SM: What did you do there?

LK: I covered schools and the university. I also covered county government. Then I couldn't deal with the editor of that paper anymore. He was a former sports editor from Texas. I think he just didn't like women, at least not strong, aggressive women, which I always was. I went to work for the county assessor's office. I took a course and became a certified paralegal. I moved off to Florida and went to work for Motorola. I went to Fort Lauderdale.

SM: When was that?

LK: In 1995.

SM: About four years after.

LK: I worked for the *Northwest Arkansas Times* through 1993. It was [about] two and a half years. In Florida I was working for Motorola. I had a lovely, glorified title, but I was an administrative assistant. On a whim I applied for a job at the Knight-Ridder paper in the Florida Keys, the *Florida Keys Keynoter*. I started this job in February of 1996.

SM: Where was it based?

LK: The paper was in Marathon, which was the center of the Keys. The paper covered

all the Keys. I had a wonderful editor and staff that I worked with.

SM: What did you do there?

LK: I covered government. In the Keys there are a lot of environmental issues, restrictions, lots of state and federal involvement. It was complex. I found it fun and interesting. I also covered politics to a degree. That came later when they added politics. They needed someone to do it. When my editor left, I left and moved with him to *Key West Citizen*.

SM: Let me stop you there. The *Keynoter* was a Knight-Ridder?

LK: It was a Knight-Ridder paper.

SM: What was the circulation?

LK: I am going to say fourteen thousand. It was something like that. All the news was separate. We were actually very competitive with the *Miami Herald*. My goal was to beat the *Miami Herald* bureau reporters. I usually did.

SM: The *Herald* is a Knight-Ridder paper, too?

LK: Yes. When the *Herald* assigned a new reporter to the Keys bureau, she would follow me around. That was funny.

SM: How long were you at the *Keynoter*?

LK: Until June of 2000. July 1st, I joined the *Key West Citizen*, which is where my editor had gone. I wanted to go with my editor. I loved him. I trusted him. We made a great team. I worked there until January 4th of this year.

SM: Who owns the *Key West Citizen*?

LK: The *Key West Citizen* was a Thompson paper. They sold it to a newly formed

company, Cooke Communications. His name was John Kent Cooke of the East Coast. His family owned baseball teams. They decided they wanted to have a newspaper.

SM: How big was it?

LK: The *Citizen* was probably about fourteen thousand circulation, too. They were trying to expand their coverage. The *Citizen* had focused on Key West only. One of the reasons for hiring me was to expand their coverage base. I was not focused on Key West. I was focused on the actual county — environmental regulations, restrictions, the politics — county government. Key West County customers paid county taxes. I loved my boss. I went and did the very same thing that I was doing.

SM: I know this may be difficult. If you do not want to talk about it, you don't have to. Why did you leave the paper?

LK: My daughter was killed in a car accident on January 4. I took all my vacation and bereavement leave. I went to go back to work and even wrote a couple of stories. They were major stories. They were things that I had covered for years. While I was in Fayetteville for my daughter's service, FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] came down with orders to put the Keys on probation, the national flood insurance program. This was because the county for so many years had failed to enforce any flood rules. That was a huge story. The county had been fighting forever. I actually wrote that story from Arkansas around the time of my daughter's service. I tried to go back to work. I just did not have the

concentration that was needed to do the job. I won four or five press association awards. I was afraid that when my brain was not functioning well, I would suddenly start making mistakes I had never done. My boss calls every week and says that my desk is empty.

SM: Still to this day?

LK: Yes, and it has been six months.

SM: What have you done since?

LK: I packed up my house in the Keys. I moved everything into storage here in Fayetteville. I am living with my parents and helping close down a jewelry store for a very old friend. I will head to California in a couple of days, where my manly child is going to make me a grandmother. My son and his girlfriend are expecting.

SM: Your son's name is?

LK: Sam.

SM: How old is Sam?

LK: Sam is twenty-two. My daughter was nineteen.

SM: Do you plan on staying in California?

LK: No, I am just going for a nice long visit. I am going to take a trip to Seattle with a brilliant former county commissioner whom I covered a lot. Then I am going to come back and have to find new work.

SM: Do you think you will go back into journalism, or do you know?

LK: I don't know. I can't imagine not. It is what I was good at. I am told that brain

function will return. I know that they sure need help with their reporting here.

SM: You would like to stay in Arkansas?

LK: I would like to stay close to home for a while. I am not sure that I could bring myself to work for the papers. I don't think they are interested in real news. But we will see.

SM: Getting back to the *Gazette* to conclude. Is there anything else since we have been talking that might have come to your mind about the *Gazette* as an institution or as a newspaper, the people, the readers, or anything else that you would like to say?

LK: I can't think of an eloquent way to say it except that it was such a wonderful mix of personalities. I mean the readers, the writers, everything about it. It was just a lovely gift that Arkansas had. I am sorry that it is gone.

SM: I really appreciate the time that you have taken to talk to me.

LK: You are very welcome.

[End of Interview]