

Gazette Project

Interview with

Roy Reed,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
6 September 2000

Interviewer: T. Harri Baker

Harri Baker: This is the eighth interview session with Roy Reed. It is September 6th of the year 2000. I am Harri Baker, doing the interview. We are in my home in Little Rock, Arkansas. Roy, before we pick up the chronology, you mentioned before I turned on the tape recorder, an anecdote from the *Gazette* years about the Stephens brothers.

Roy Reed: Yes, W. R., “Witt” Stephens. I have had him on my mind lately, and I remembered this occasion. It must have been in the early 60s. One day I came into the office after making my rounds, doing whatever I was doing at that time. Bill Shelton, the city editor, called me up and said --- it was very late in the afternoon --- he said, “We have just heard a rumor --- We don’t know if it is true or not --- that Witt and Jack Stephens have bought the Gus Blass Company.” It was a department store, the main and biggest department store in Little Rock. He wanted me to check it out. I figured if it were true, it would be a page-one story. It was of enormous significance in the city. I started trying to call Mr. Stephens, Witt. At that time, Jack was clearly the younger brother. You always started with Witt if you had a choice. I couldn’t get him on the phone. The time was

growing short and the deadline for the first edition was coming up pretty fast. I just got in my car and drove to his house out in the western part of Little Rock. I knocked on the door, and he invited me in. He was a very friendly guy. He was always very congenial. We sat down in his den, and he asked what I needed. I told him that we had heard this rumor that he and his brother had just bought the Blass Company department store. I asked if it was true. He sat there and kind of frowned as if he was trying to remember. He said, "Well, I have been out to the farm this afternoon. I just got back. Let me ask Jack." He picked up the telephone and called Jack. With a perfectly straight face, he said, "Jack, I have got a *Gazette* man sitting here. He said something about --- Have we bought the Gus Blass Company?" He paused and said, "Uh-hummmm." He hung up the phone and said, "No, no, we haven't." [Laughter] He got a great kick out of doing stuff like that.

HB: Was it unusual in those years that you would have been assigned to what was essentially a business story?

RR: Not at all. Our business coverage in those years was kind of hit and miss, as it was with most newspapers. Back then newspapers of our size did not normally have a business section. Leland Duvall was the business columnist. He kept us up to date on things we needed to know in the world of business. Business news was treated pretty much like other news. There was not a whole lot of business news, to be honest about it. I am not sure why. It took a long time for business

news to be considered on a par with other news like political news.

HB: Well, shall we resume the chronology?

RR: Yes.

HB: We have been dealing with your time at *The New York Times*, first at Atlanta and then at Washington, the White House beat, then the Civil Rights [beat] in Washington afterwards. That brings us up to about 1969, and you are off to New Orleans with *The Times*. Now, how did that come about?

RR: I was getting pretty well ensconced, I guess, in the Washington scene. I was caught up in that great whirl of activity. It is very easy for a reporter, or anybody else living in that town, to come to believe that Washington is the center of the universe. We lived in a very nice house in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Our kids were going to good schools. They were teenagers by then. I had always assumed that I would spend the rest of my working career in the Washington bureau for *The New York Times*. The Washington bureau people, there were about thirty of us at that time. It was a common belief, stated quite matter-of-factly, that any given *New York Times* reporter in Washington had the equivalent power as a United States Senator. Now you see the humor in that, but we were pretty full of ourselves. I just assumed that I would be there forever. Then something happened.

HB: There were thirty?

RR: There were about thirty, yes. Only three of those were women. That was a separate story. That was before the women's movement really got going.

Eventually, those three women, who were all good friends of mine, discovered that they were being paid systematically less than any of the men, including brand-new reporters. They sued *The Times*, along with other women in New York. They won their suit. Out of it came a wonderful book called *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and The New York Times* [1992], by Nan Robertson. Something happened that I had not expected. My old running mate from Atlanta days, Gene Roberts --- When I left Atlanta to move to Washington, he left Atlanta at about the same time to become the Saigon bureau chief for *The Times*. He spent the next two years covering the Vietnam War in Saigon and had some horrendous experiences.

HB: That was at the height of the Vietnam War.

RR: The height of the Vietnam War, yes. He did a very distinguished job of reporting from over there. *The Times* had called him back to New York to become the national editor, a very prestigious job on *The Times*. The national editor is over all the domestic bureaus around the United States. I forget how many there were at that time, twelve or fifteen, coast to coast. Gene came down to Washington right after he had gotten home from Saigon and had a talk with me. He came out to the house one night. This is a North Carolina guy. He and I, both being southerners, we have always been kind of on the same wavelength. He said, "Roy, how are you liking it up here?" It was customary when asked that kind of question to start bitching about things. You never let on that things were going beautifully even if they were. I don't know why, that is just the nature of

newspaper reporting. He listened for awhile. I have no idea what I was complaining about. Nothing of any consequence, I am sure. He said, “Roy, how would you like to live in New Orleans?” [At Reed’s first mention of New Orleans, he pronounces it as an exaggerated “New Orleeeens.”] This took me completely by surprise. Well, before the night was out, I had agreed to open a bureau in New Orleans. He chose New Orleans. It was not that he especially wanted a bureau in New Orleans. It didn’t really make any sense, for a lot of reasons, to have a bureau in New Orleans. We had bureaus in Atlanta, Houston, maybe Dallas, maybe Miami, I can’t remember. To open a bureau in New Orleans didn’t make a lot of sense, but, of course, that was not what he was after. He was starting to build a national staff of his own reporters. He had a lot of good reporters on the national staff already. Some of them were getting old and getting ready to retire, and some of them were getting ready to move abroad, move to New York, and this and that and the other. He knew he was going to have some slots open. He wanted his own people that he knew. Frankly, he liked my reporting. I was known at *The Times* as a writing reporter. This means, someone who took pains with his writing as well as his reporting. This was at a time when *The Times* was fighting off years of reputation as being a dull newspaper, “just the facts” kind of reporting, straightforward. It was an editor’s paper. Ted Bernstein, Theodore [M.] Bernstein, legendary editor, not “the editor,” but the one who was over all the copy editing in New York. They called it the “bullpen.” Ted Bernstein was a stickler on language, grammar, and straightforward reporting, and

making sure the copy editors had the last word on any story that ran in *The New York Times*. You can see where this could cause some frustration for reporters. You send in a beautifully written story, or so you think, it comes out in the paper and it has been changed here and there, and they have meddled with your phrasing. It is infuriating sometimes. It was known as an editor's paper. This is not a bad thing for a paper to be known as. There is a lot to be said for that. All of us reporters were rankled. Gene was a reporter, now becoming an editor. He wanted to change that. Gene was a very subtle operator. He never hit a problem head on. He would come on to it sideways. He would have never gone up to Ted Bernstein in New York and said, "Ted, we are going to change the way things are done." That was not Gene's style. His style was to simply look around and hire and transfer reporters who had some writing style into responsible reporting jobs around the United States. He started with me. He knew I liked visiting New Orleans and was a nut about New Orleans. That was how he got me on the national staff. That is how we moved to New Orleans.

HB: Let me divert a little here. There is a sizeable body of literature about politics within *The New York Times*. Do I assume Mr. Roberts, in addition to assembling his own staff, was positioning himself to becoming managing editor or anything like that?

RR: Absolutely. In fact, he never became managing editor until much, much later, after a distinguished career at the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. It was one ill-fated happenstance at *The New York Times*. If he had been the managing editor in

certain periods of *The New York Times*, *The New York Times* would have been a different, and in my opinion, a better paper. He left after several years as national editor, when he saw his way blocked for managing editor. Abe Rosenthal, A. M. Rosenthal, had become executive editor, and he had his own favorites in the newsroom that he was promoting and moving into positions of power. Gene was not one of those favorites, and Gene knew it, so when Knight-Ridder called and asked him to take over as editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Gene saw a terrific opportunity and grabbed it. While he was there, in eighteen years the newspaper won seventeen Pulitzer Prizes. He became known as probably the best editor in the United States. He eventually, after things went downhill at Knight-Ridder and the corporate headquarters became less interested in quality and more interested in the bottom line, Gene went back to *The New York Times* as managing editor, not as the top job, but as managing editor under a bright, young executive editor named Joe Lelybeld. He stayed until he retired at the age of sixty-five. He then became a journalism teacher at the University of Maryland. He was very good in politics. The cards were stacked against him.

HB: Did you, Norma, and the kids have any reluctance about going to New Orleans?

RR: I think all of us were uneasy about leaving the center of the universe. All of us kind of enjoyed being in such a place. At the same time, Washington is a hard place to be comfortable in. We had a pretty active social life there. We also understood that Washington was a formidable place for us Arkansas folks. By the time we got to New Orleans, we were all pretty excited about it. Norma liked

New Orleans a lot. The kids loved growing up there in that decadent, sultry atmosphere. I am not sure that it is the best place to raise your kids, but they turned out all right. By the time we got there, we were all pretty excited. We arrived with Hurricane Camille in the summer of 1969. It must have been about this time of year, the first of September. I can't remember the date. We had barely gotten unpacked when that hurricane hit the Gulf Coast and hit New Orleans with a glancing blow. I can remember boarding up the windows and taping the glass and stocking up supplies along with everybody else in the neighborhood. I guess that must have been the first major story that I covered out of New Orleans. I remember getting in the car after the storm was over and trying to get just thirty miles over to the Mississippi coast. That was where the main part of the storm had hit, at Gulfport, Biloxi, and Pass Christian. I couldn't get there, at least not by the usual route. The roads were full of debris, full of houses that had been blown off their foundations and out into the middle of the highway. Eventually, I made my way north up Mississippi, up through central Mississippi, all the way to Hattiesburg – maybe one hundred to one hundred-fifty miles up from the coast – then crossed back down another southbound highway. I made it to the coast by dodging debris in the middle of the highways. I will never forget, along the way I kept seeing these enormous birds. At that time my son and I were avid bird watchers, and I recognized these birds as Man O' War birds. They never come on land. They live entirely over the water and on the water out in the open ocean, enormous birds with about a seven-foot wing span, and they had been

blown ashore. They had no idea what to do. They were walking around in the middle of a four-lane highway. A number of them had been hit by cars and were killed. I finally made it down to the coast and started to work. It was midday, about noon. *The Times* had sent a reporter from Atlanta, Jon Nordheimer from Atlanta, to try to come in from the Mobile side. The idea was that whoever got there and was able to file would have the story. He got in but couldn't find a phone in time to file. I stayed just about an hour or two at the most and headed back north. I knew there would be trouble finding anything. I had to go to almost Hattiesburg to find a working telephone. I got a story for the first edition that night.

HB: That must be a tough story to cover. Who do you talk to in that kind of thing?

RR: Just whoever you can grab. I made no attempt to try to find the mayor of the town. God only knows where he would have been out in that town. I talked to, as I recall, a policeman or two, some business people, people wandering around dazed at the beach. There were boats washed up in the middle of the highway, enormous fishing boats and that kind of thing. I was furiously making notes on what it looked like. The wire services had the vital details, the number of deaths, the number of injuries, that sort of thing. My job was to get the color and flesh it out with human beings.

HB: Did you have a photographer with you to take pictures?

RR: No photographers. There again, the wire had plenty of pictures. We knew we could depend on them. I didn't carry a camera.

HB: Where did you live in New Orleans?

RR: Called Upperline Street [1818], two and a half blocks off St. Charles Avenue. St. Charles Avenue was the great dividing mark with a streetcar line running down the grassy median of the boulevard. It was called Uptown. In New Orleans, as you know, directions are not given as north, south, east, or west. It is given uptown, downtown, riverside, and lakeside. The streets do not run in any particular direction.

HB: Was that the Garden District?

RR: No, that was uptown from the garden district, out towards the universities, Loyola and Tulane.

HB: I know where that is. When you are *The New York Times* bureau chief in New Orleans, does that fancy term mean just you?

RR: Absolutely. Even in Atlanta, there is always a bureau secretary or administrative assistant, but we didn't have any. I was it, except for one peculiar circumstance. My move to New Orleans coincided with the retirement of the great *New York Times* executive editor, Turner Catledge. Catledge was a native of Mississippi. He had married a New Orleans woman named Abby, a lovely Southern lady. They retired to New Orleans in a house that they had built in the Garden District as close to being an exact replica as they could make it of their two-story Manhattan apartment. It was a lovely house on Prytannia Street. Punch Sulzberger, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger [the publisher], was a long-time friend and admirer of Catledge. Catledge was his senior by many years. He mentored

young Sulzberger as he came along in the hierarchy of *The Times*. They became personal friends as well as professional friends at *The Times*. When Turner retired, Punch owed Turner a little bit because he had to ease him out. There had been a terrific fight for the top job, and Turner had come out on the losing end. Punch, who had made the decision to do this, very reluctantly, felt that he owed Catledge something. He insisted on setting up Catledge with a well-equipped office in New Orleans. This coincided with my moving down there. It made sense that Turner and I would share an office and that this would be the bureau. We rented an office down in the Maritime Building on Carondelet Street. --- There are a lot of French names in New Orleans that are not pronounced the way they are in French. They have their own way of saying things there. --- We had wonderful furniture. I would go in everyday and work from there or work out of there. I did a lot of traveling. Turner would come in once or twice a month. He appreciated having the office, but he did not spend any time there. On the days that he would come, I got lessons in newspapering, free lessons. He and I became fast friends. It was wonderful to go to lunch with Turner Catledge in a New Orleans restaurant. The lunch would last three hours, always. Always with a lot of wine and wonderful food [and], mainly, Turner's stories, with everything from growing up in Mississippi to life at *The Times*. Eventually, he wrote his memoirs. [Turner Catledge, *My Life and The Times*, 1971.] I had the privilege of reading it in manuscript form before they were published. I have to share one story that he told among hundreds that I heard from him. A little background: He would tell

these stories over lunch and then on the walk back to the office, maybe two blocks or sometimes three. Turner, even then, was showing signs of age. He was in his seventies. He had a disorder that I can't really put a name to. He had to walk very slowly. He would walk a few steps and then would have to stop and catch his breath and rest. He was too proud to admit that he had this physical disability. To cover it up, he would walk maybe ten yards down the sidewalk. He would then stop and turn to me, and sometimes take me by the arm, and turn and face me. He would then launch into a story. For however long it took to tell the story, he would be standing there resting. Then we would go a few more yards, and he would stop and again tell another story. One of his best stories involved his boyhood in Philadelphia, Mississippi, which became a notorious town during the Civil Rights era. He was a boy there long before the town became notorious as a racist enclave. His family was poor, but his uncle was well to do. He owned the main general store in town. Turner was a boy of twelve or thirteen, maybe fourteen. He went to work in his uncle's store. He worked there after school and weekends, I guess, until he finished high school. He said, "In those days, Neshoba County was solidly Democratic. From the town of Philadelphia, at every election there was one Republican vote cast. Everybody in town knew who this Republican was. It was an old recluse who lived a mile or two out of the main part of town. He kept to himself and never had much to say when he came into town to shop. Everybody knew and, frankly, distrusted him because he was the only known Republican in Philadelphia. It had been that way for years. One

day, this old man died. Since the general store doubled also for the town mortuary, they had coffins on hand and that sort of thing. It was up to the uncle to take care of the body. He sent Turner to collect the body. Turner had a boyhood friend, and he collected his friend. They took the store's Model-T pickup truck. You could drive at a tender age in those days. These two boys felt the full weight of their responsibility as they went out to the man's house to collect the body. Here they were being entrusted with making funeral arrangements for the town's only Republican. They were terribly proud of themselves that they had been entrusted to do this. They went out to get the body and brought it back, and the funeral was held. The matter was about forgotten until the next election. Lo and behold, that Republican vote showed up in the next election. [Laughter] Turner said, "The whole town was astounded. We had buried the wrong man!"

[Laughter]

HB: Since the bureau in New Orleans was just you, there was no secretary even, did you have a specific territory or subject? How did you get your assignments? Did you just think of them?

RR: This was very vague. Roberts liked operating vaguely. That was his style. It was understood that my territory was very fluid. The Atlanta bureau had traditionally been responsible for Louisiana and New Orleans. In fact, that is where I developed a taste for New Orleans, from flying there out of Atlanta. Gene did not want to get crosswise with the Atlanta fellows. There were two of them. He never laid down any territorial boundaries. Instead, it was understood that if there

was a breaking news story near New Orleans, I would automatically cover it. That was okay with the guys at Atlanta and Houston because it saved them from running to the airport on a dead- run. I remember having to do that once when working out of Atlanta. I was in New Orleans, covering a federal court trial of a Ku Klux Klan leader in Bogalusa, Louisiana. I don't know if I told this story or not. I got caught there. Anytime you could avoid traveling, it was a plus unless it was a story that you really wanted to do, a background story, an in-depth story, or an investigative story, or something like that. To jump up on a moment's notice and go tearing off to cover a breaking news story was always --- They were glad enough to have somebody around who wanted to cover ferry disasters and that kind of thing. Mainly, the understanding I had with Roberts was that I would use New Orleans as a jumping off place for anywhere in the United States. I developed a kind of beat. I don't know what you would call it, looking back on it. I had an interest in farming, agriculture, and environmental matters. In those days, neither of those subjects was covered in a systematic way in *The Times*. [There were] feature stories of all kinds. One reason Roberts wanted me on the national staff was to write features. He didn't much care what the subject was. I remember once, he came up with an idea that turned into a nice little story. In fact, it is reprinted in a book of mine, in a collection called *Looking for Hogeye* [1986]. The idea was to fly up to Chicago and buy a ticket on the "City of New Orleans" train. It was run by the Illinois Central Railroad. The Illinois Central ran from Chicago through Illinois, down through Tennessee, across Mississippi,

and then to New Orleans. His idea was to go up there at Christmas time, not on Christmas day, but a day or two before Christmas, when traffic was heaviest. Somehow he had found out that hundreds of black people who had migrated from Mississippi to Chicago would go home for Christmas every year on this “City of New Orleans.” They would drop off on stops all across the Mississippi Delta, Jackson, right on down to the end of Mississippi. He wanted a feature story about it. That was the only instruction. I wrote the thing in about twenty-four hours, sleeping as I could. Interviewing people, men, women, kids, and brothers. It was wonderful. People having card games, poker games, telling stories, a cranky old conductor. One guy was moving home for good. He had all he could stand. He said he had a farm down there around Port Gibson, south of Vicksburg, at least his family did. He was moving back there and never going to leave it again. He was single. He struck up an “on board” courtship with this young woman. As it turned out, she was married and was running away from a mean husband. The husband had caught her in a dalliance up in Chicago. He was threatening to kill her. The young man courted that woman furiously all the way to Port Gibson. He finally had to take “no” for an answer. He wanted a bride. He wanted somebody to come and live with him on his farm. Meanwhile, he had gotten awfully drunk. She turned him down. All kinds of little neat touches like that. It made a nice Christmas story. Roberts was a genius in keeping up with stories that were involved, not just feature stories but in-depth stories. He once had me travel to South Carolina and do a story about the industrialization of South Carolina.

This was years and years before South Carolina became known as an industrial giant. Now it is known for making German automobiles. This was at the beginning. They had one of the model programs for attracting industry. We used that to describe industrialization programs across the South. I spent weeks on that story. He would give us time to do the stories. He was a smart man, knowing when to push and when to pull back. Eventually, he would call up and say, “Roy, we kind of need that story.” You knew you had about all the time he was going to give you, so you better get serious about writing it. One story, I had writer’s block. I could not get it done. It just would not come. Eventually, I flew to Hot Springs, Arkansas, my hometown, where my mother lived. I think my father was dead by then. I had kinfolks all over that town; aunts, uncles, cousins, and my mother. I checked into the Arlington Hotel. I didn’t use a pseudonym, but that was the spirit of the thing. I didn’t want anybody in the town to know that I was there, any of my kinfolk or friends. I holed up there for two weeks writing this story. Eventually I had this. . . You have been in the rooms at the Arlington. You know that they are enormous rooms. I had documents spread out all over the floor, all over the desk, tables, vents, everything. In two weeks I got that story done and went home. Roberts was that kind of editor. He would let you have what you needed to get a story done. It made for a really good story.

HB: Do you remember about the year that the story was printed?

RR: I know it was in the 1970s sometimes.

HB: Just in case somebody wanted to trace it down. Did you make up your own

assignments too?

RR: Yes, I did. A lot of my own assignments. As I say, I was getting interested in agriculture. At that time, we were seeing the first of the alternative agriculture cropping up at various places. Barry Commoner of St. Louis was one of the leaders. There were others in Iowa, and into Missouri. I did all kinds of stories about alternative kinds of agriculture. No-till planting, new kinds of plowing, less chemicals, and that kind of thing. I remember one story in particular, about cattle ranching. The price of cattle had just dropped terribly. Cattle ranchers all over the West were suffering. I wanted to find a typical Western rancher to use. That was the way we did things. They still do it at the newspaper. They will find examples and develop it. That one person's story to illustrate the longer story. In this case, I found a rancher on the western slope of Colorado. I drove out from Steamboat Springs for miles and miles. I picked this guy because he happened to be president of the Colorado Cattleman's Association. I don't remember his name. He had this wonderful rustic house way back in the mountains. His ranch covered miles and miles. I remember driving in and asking somebody, some hunters that he had allowed to hunt. They eventually showed up with some grouse that they gave to the family. I stayed for dinner and had grouse for dinner that night. I also remember that it started snowing. That was how it ended up that I was having dinner there. I was going to head back to Steamboat Springs because I had a motel room. I got snowbound there and they were afraid for me to drive back. I was scared too. So they put me up for the night. Anyway, the

lead on the story was a joke that this rancher had told. He said there was a joke going around among ranchers to illustrate how sorry the cattle business was at that time. He said there was a cattle rustler who fell in with a feed thief. They decided to go in together and make a team. The rustler provided all the stolen cattle and the thief provided all the grain that they needed to feed the cattle through the winter. They sold them in the spring. The prices were so bad that they lost ten dollars a head. [Laughter] You could get away with that kind of lead on a story with Roberts. This was part of his encouragement of better writing, livelier writing. You entice the reader in and then get him to read the whole story. Of course the reader discovers by the fourth or fifth paragraph that there is a serious side to this story. You have statistics and national figures on the price of cattle and how they compare to a year ago. We did a lot of stories like that.

HB: How were stories like that perceived at *The Times*, Roy? That is not exactly. . . You may be the only person who understands what “no till” agriculture is.

RR: This was a little bit of an uphill fight. Only a genius like Roberts could have sold the stories like that. Roberts, even then, was developing a mystique about himself. The city fellows were already in awe of Roberts, because they had figured out that he would out think them at every turn. I heard some of them use the phrase “to country boy” as a verb. They figured out pretty soon that if Roberts came into the room, you put your hand on your wallet. That kind of thing. He was known as a country slicker. You would go into the daily news

meeting at four o'clock every afternoon. All the sub editors would meet with the managing editor and they would go over the day's breaking stories. The great competition between the three main desks, foreign, national, and city, was for space in the next day's paper. Traditionally, the managing editor would try to make a more or less equal division. Roberts would come out with the lion's share of space. He was a genius. He was a very quiet kind of guy. I think I have probably talked about his manner of speaking or not speaking. He would use that on the New York fellows. They did not know how to deal with this. He sold them on the idea that we needed to do a better job of covering the country. This was at a time when the paper was beginning to think seriously about becoming a national newspaper. They had been kicking it around for years. *The Times* was conservative. I am not talking about politics, but management. During this same period, *The Times* had a very disastrous adventure with a West Coast edition. It had not worked out. They felt they had been burned, but the idea of a national paper was still kicking around. Now, of course, it is a national paper. It is one of three national newspapers, along with the *Wall Street Journal* and *U.S.A. Today*. It has a definite niche. *U. S. Today* is kind of a popular --- *The Times* is the serious, thinking person's paper, and, of course, the *Wall Street Journal* is mainly business. At that time, this was a dream, but Roberts had the dream very much alive in his head. He wanted --- in fact, one of his disappointments was that he left before he was able to realize [it]. He had started to work as national editor, learning everything there was to learn about circulation, the business of the

newspaper, with the idea of making *The Times* into a national newspaper.

Somebody else got to finish his dream.

[End of Tape 7 - Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 8 - Side 1]

HB: This is just kind of idle curiosity, actually. These *New York Times* senior editors, these city boys you are talking about, my impression is that a rather large number of them come, in fact, from small towns all over the country, starting with the family that created the modern *New York Times* from Chattanooga, Tennessee.

RR: Adolph Ochs, you might say, was the founder, although he's not. He made it what it was. His successors made a point of hiring non-Jewish editors. They did not want *The Times* to become known as a Jewish newspaper.

HB: I wonder, because they themselves were Jewish.

RR: They themselves were Jewish. In fact, that has caused quite a lot of discussion, tension, and controversy around *The Times* down through the generations. Israel gets it in their head from time to time that *The Times* has it in for Israel. They say that since you are trying to prove that you are not a pro-Jewish paper. Well, for one reason or another, Clifton Daniel from North Carolina became managing editor. Turner Catledge of Mississippi, Gene Roberts. They liked to hire Southern reporters. Claude Sitton, one of the greatest reporters of the twentieth century, was from Georgia. A lot of these fellows moved to upper ranks, as you say. There was always a mix, a very interesting mix of New York natives, Jewish and non-Jewish, in the newsroom, along with these outlanders from the South and

Midwest and the West Coast. One of their great investigative reporters named Wally --- Wallace --- Turner was from a little town in the Missouri Ozarks. He had settled in San Francisco. He owned the West Coast for *The New York Times* for generations. It was a great mix. It was considered historic when a Jew, A. M. Rosenthal, became the top editor of *The New York Times*. He broke the pattern.

HB: In your national beat working out of New Orleans, did you have a budget? You did what you wanted to, and somehow or another Gene Roberts would arrange it for you?

RR: That's right. I was on the national budget. Gene had a budget. *The Times* was always very generous. In fact, when I went to work for the paper, we flew first class. That changed in a couple of years. The profit margin during those years was terribly small. They had a crunch with all kinds of problems, modernizing the printing plant, the strike. They had to cut, so we had to start flying economy class.

HB: Did you ever get word from some business type, some number cruncher from the national desk, that you were spending too much?

RR: Not in general. Every now and then they would kick back a particular expense statement, questioning a particular item. I don't recall a single one, except for one very unfortunate thing. I always felt sorry for this poor bean counter. Years later in London, my wife and I had to fly home on an emergency visit because her mother died. She was in a bad car wreck and had died. We had to take a very fast trip to El Dorado, Arkansas. Along the way I had to make a number of phone

calls on my *New York Times* telephone card. We had always been told that you use your *Times* card to call home. You use it for personal reasons even though it was a business card because we want to keep your families happy. A bunch of these calls showed up on my telephone expenses the next month. This assistant managing editor complained about it. He had not known the reasons for the calls and was understandably embarrassed when he found out.

HB: Here is one that may call for some introspection, Roy. Did I ask you in a previous session, if looking back on the Civil Rights coverage, if you had any regrets about it? The only thing that you mentioned was that there was no real serious coverage about the background of the white Southerners. Directly or indirectly, is what you were doing in the New Orleans bureau, addressing that?

RR: I don't know. I have never thought of that. Certainly there was a lot of coverage out of the New Orleans days that had to do with white Southerners and nothing to do with the race issue itself. I guess that might be seen as a redress of a wrong. I don't know if it was a conscious decision on anybody's part, Roberts's or mine. By that time the Civil Rights story had receded, and we were turning our attention to other matters.

HB: Another general question, it was during these years, 1974, that you bought forty-five acres of land near Hogeye, Arkansas?

RR: That's right. That came about indirectly because of stories. I mentioned environmental stories and rural stories. I guess what I was really about in those years was the rural beat and developing that. All kinds of stories, demographic

stories, about the shift from rural to urban and washing back into rural. All those kinds of things. I wrote a lot of those kinds of stories. I remember the Census Bureau was one of my sources from time to time. Also, at that time, something called the “back to the land” movement had erupted all over the United States. I traveled to Vermont one time, New Hampshire, and Maine, writing stories about “back to the land.” I did some stories about that in the Ozarks. Part of that was driven by personal desire. We had been in New Orleans for several summers at that time. You see where this is headed. It could be pretty miserable down there in the summer time. In fact, from the end of March until the middle of November, it was awfully hot and sultry. I looked for any chance to get into the mountains. The nearest mountains were the Ozarks. If I needed a place to hide for a particular story like “back to the land,” the Ozarks were handy.

Environmental stories, I remember doing a story about some environmental degradation in some — They must have been spraying some chemical in the national forest. I used the Ozark National Forest as an example. I remember making some people at Dow Chemical unhappy because of a story or two that I wrote about their part in this spraying operation. Anyway, during these trips to the Ozarks, I would come to Fayetteville --- it was kind of the capital city of the Ozarks. I began to think that I ought to have some land around here for the eventual day when I would retire.

HB: You didn't think about buying land down in --- what was your home country?
Down around Hot Springs?

RR: I did. I wanted country land. My ancestral lands up in the northern part of Garland County and Yell County. Yes, I toyed with the idea. I actually would drive around sometimes. There is some lovely country in the mountains in Yell County, out from Danville. I searched along the northern bank of the Arkansas River, up around Ozark, Clarksville. I was looking, by now, quite seriously. All the time knowing that Fayetteville made more sense. I also had begun to get the idea that I would like to teach journalism.

HB: I was going to ask if that was in your mind.

RR: Bob McCord, an old, good friend of mine, Robert McCord, of North Little Rock. He always kept up his ties to the journalism department at the University. At that time, Ernie Deane, the old “Arkansas Traveler” columnist, had himself become a teacher at the journalism department. Ernie and Bob were friends. One time Bob called me up and said, “Would you be interested in teaching at the University?” Dr. Harry Marsh was then the chairman. The short of it is that I said, “No, but someday maybe.” It was left that way. After some period of time had elapsed, I had a serious conversation with Harry. That was much later in London. Back in 1974, this was all in the indefinite future. Anyway, I ended up buying forty-five acres of land in Hogeye, Arkansas.

HB: How did you pick that particular piece? There must have been a lot of forty-acre pieces of land available.

RR: I had a week of vacation that I devoted to this search. I went up there and started out early Monday morning with a real estate agent who took me close in to

Fayetteville. Then with a widening circle all around every side of Fayetteville. Finally, it was Friday afternoon, and I was running out of time. I hadn't really found the place that I was looking for. She showed me this spot at Hogeye. I met the owners, Seth and Clarrissa Timmons. They were living in this house, which is now my house. We got acquainted and discussed price. I looked around and rather liked it. It had a house dating back to the 1890s. I knew that we wanted a place where we could spend at least part of the summers getting out of the New Orleans heat. This would work. The real estate agent dropped me back to Fayetteville. I drove back out there with their permission. They let me wander off and around by myself. I walked up to the top of the hill where there is an open pasture. You can look out across the valley of the Hogeye Branch, Hogeye Creek. It is not at all a magnificent view as mountain views go, but it is very fetching. It happened on that particular Friday afternoon, we had one of those glorious sunsets. I was hooked. I made an offer on the place before I left town.

HB: Norma agreed with this idea eventually?

RR: Yes, she really liked the idea of a place with some altitude. This was a house at 1500 feet or thereabout.

HB: You are now living in a house designed by Fay Jones? What happened to the Timmons' 1890 farmhouse?

RR: It is still there. We lived in that house for a time while we built.

HB: It is still on the place?

RR: It is still there. It is occupied by a friend, Maggie Fox, the widow of Alvis Fox.

They moved there not many years after we moved into our new house. We had a succession of young couples living in the old house, rent-free. They would pay rent by helping me take care of the cattle. Feeding the cattle in the wintertime, keeping up the fence. [The cattle] were always breaking a fence, various things like that. None of these young folks had really worked out to my satisfaction. One had, but he and his wife had moved away to Kansas. Anyway, we were looking for a more stable couple. A friend told us about this couple that was a little bit older than we were who needed a place to stay. We made this same arrangement with them. They would look after the cattle. He eventually died of Alzheimer's Disease. She has stayed on by herself. She no longer takes care of the cattle. I sold my cattle and leased the pasture to a neighbor. She takes beautiful care of the house and the yard. She loves flowers. A photographer came recently and took pictures of Maggie and her flowers in the front yard. They ran a series of pictures and a feature article about Maggie in the monthly newsletter or magazine put out by the Electric Co-ops of Arkansas. She has really made a little show place out of this little house and yard. She stays on.

HB: Were you attracted by the idea of having a mailing address of Hogeye? [Laughter]

RR: Absolutely. I foresaw a beautiful dateline in *The New York Times*. In fact, I have used it numerous times. I don't know how I escaped detection. Early on I knew that I wanted to spend summers in Hogeye. By this time, Gene Roberts had left the paper and had gone to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. His successor was a man named David Jones. David was a Pennsylvania man and another former reporter.

He became a good friend of mine. Dave was, in fact, my editor many more years than Gene Roberts was, as it turned out. I hit up Dave to let me live in Hogeye in the summer. He said, "I will ask Abe." He came back with the word, "No. Abe won't have it. He thinks you need to be in New Orleans in case there is a disaster." I told him I could fly out of Fayetteville. He said, "No, Abe thinks you need to be in New Orleans." So that was it. He quietly agreed that he would cover for me. I hope that Abe Rosenthal will someday see this interview on the Internet --- now that it is too late for him to do anything. Dave Jones covered for me --- I forget how many summers, well, until we moved to London. We would go up there early in the summer and just stay right on through the summer. If anybody asked where Roy Reed could be found, in case of a breaking story, Dave and his trusted clerk on the national desk always knew the phone number in Hogeye. They would get me, and I would go flying off to wherever the story happened to be. I wondered if Abe ever got suspicious because these Hogeye datelines kept showing up in New York. "The greatest gardener in Washington County," from Hogeye, Arkansas, feature stories like that. He never said anything.

HB: You may not have fooled him. He may have just decided it wasn't worth making an issue out of it. Was David Jones as easy to work with as Mr. Roberts?

RR: Yes, but in a far different way. Dave was not a city boy. He was a small-town boy. He was a northerner, but he had studied under Gene Roberts. I mean, he literally studied Gene's methods. He knew all the little tricks Gene would use

when he would call a reporter out somewhere in the United States to make an assignment. He knew, for example, a reporter would not want to do the assignment. He had picked up all of Gene's little methods of cajoling, flattering, and he learned to do all these little tricks. They just did not come out the same. They were very studied, and you could --- I would sit there smiling to myself when Dave would pull this con job on me to persuade me to do this or that.

HB: He had the words, but not the music?

RR: That was about it, yes. It didn't matter, of course. We liked each other a lot, and we both understood that "The Story" was the important thing, the story or whatever was going on. --- The story in that other sense and not a particular story in the paper, but the longer view. It is a terribly nebulous thing. You might say, Civil Rights over a ten-year period – the story changed in such and such a way. We both had a great appreciation for "The Story." We were pretty much on the same wave length on what would make a good story.

HB: I should have asked this earlier. . .

RR: Excuse me, let me say one more thing on Dave. He had a particular way of operating that was at least as good as Roberts or maybe better. It would invariably produce a story. On a slow day in New York, maybe he hasn't heard from Roy. Maybe he suspects that Roy isn't doing much in the way of work. Dave would call up and remind me of Hogeys. He would make small talk for a few minutes. Then he would say, "Roy, what is going on down there?" This question was not a casual question. We both understood that he wanted to know -

-- he was looking for a story. My mind would start racing because I knew that I needed an answer. I would come up with an answer. It would produce a story.

HB: You must have had a file of possible stories!

RR: Yes. Sometimes I would reach into that file in my mind. Now and then I would be caught cold. I remember two specific, very specific, times when that happened. One, when he said, "What is happening down there? What is going on during this time of year?" This was early summer. I had been sort of toying with the idea of a piece on Dale Bumpers, his hometown, Charleston, Arkansas. In fact, I went down there. This was after a conversation with Dave over a story idea that he liked. Dale had just been elected Senator. It was a very small town. We thought it would be rich with --- at those times *The Times* would run a feature with a tag line on it, "Talk of The Times." In this case, it would be the "Talk of Charleston." The story that resulted was not a "talker." After I got down there and did all my interviews with families and friends, Sunday school teachers, church people, and that kind of thing, I was having trouble writing the story. I was talking to Dave about this on the phone. He said, "What is really happening in Charleston?" Well, I said, "The only thing going on here is Vacation Bible School." He said, "What is that?" In Pennsylvania they do not have such a thing. I explained Vacation Bible School. He said, "Well, that is the story." And it was. It turned out to be a lovely little feature about Vacation Bible School in a typical southern town. Another time he called me at Hogeye and asked me, "What is going on?" I said, "Man, we are in the middle of the dog days. Nothing is going

on.” He said, “Dog days, huh?” You can see where that is headed. It made a feature about what happens during the dog days. Including some fairly serious research on when the dog days occur. It turns out that there are different times, depending on which source you use. He was very good at prompting reporters to come up with story ideas either out of those memo files they all carry around or spontaneously. He and I were a pretty good team for a lot of years.

HB: This is asking you to back up some. You left Washington in 1969, and that was the year the Democrats left and the Republicans came in. Is that a coincidence or . . . ?

RR: Yes, there are a lot of coincidences. The thing about Roberts talking me into it really was the main reason. I had no intention of leaving. Nixon had come in, and I left after six months of the Nixon administration. I guess that was part of my discontent. I never had a run-in, but I described earlier a story about the Nixon crowd complaining about my coverage of school desegregation. To a reporter, that doesn't make a whole lot of difference. “The Story” is always there, and it doesn't always matter who is in office. There is a story there to be told. Probably, when I was talking to Gene that night at my house about how I was liking Washington, I might have said something about this Nixon crowd. I don't really know. I can't really say that it directly had anything to do with my leaving Washington.

HB: Here is another one out in left field. Anytime in these years, did you switch from typewriters to computers? Many newspapers were doing it in the 1970s.

RR: I didn't start using a computer full time until I moved to London. There was an episode sometime during the mid 1970s when *The Times* was trying to change over to computers. As with everything else in newspapering, *The Times* was bringing up the rear — more or less on purpose. They wanted to see how it was going to work out for the other papers. A lot of other papers had some disastrous experiences with computers before they finally got the bugs worked out. During this period, *The Times*, in typical fashion, assigned an editor, a mid-level editor, to look into it. I remember the guy's name was Chick Butzikares. Chick was a nickname. I have no idea what his real name was even then. He was a good ol' boy, a New York City boy, but he was a good ol' boy. --- If that makes any sense to you. --- He and I could speak the same language. Periodically, all the national reporters, all twelve or fifteen of us from around the country, would be called to New York for a two-day meeting over this and that. I think it was coincident with one of those meetings. All of us were there. Chick was brought in. This might have been the reason for the meeting. They wanted to talk to us about computers. Computers in the newsroom is one thing, where you just set them on the desk. They were already experimenting with this. With national reporters and foreign reporters, the problem is altogether different. We carry portable typewriters. Nowadays, a correspondent carries a Radio Shack [laptop computer] or some such thing, a computer that weighs five or six pounds and does complete, utter magic. You can file a story, write, from that little ol' tiny computer. In those days, we all carried Underwoods or Olympias, or Olivettis, which weighed ten or

twelve pounds. Well, Chick produced this machine he was really pleased with. He brought it out and showed it to us, and it was about two feet by eighteen inches and about six inches thick. We looked at it and opened it up. It was sitting on a table. We all took turns playing with it. It felt pretty good. It had very easy keys to operate. Somebody asked the fatal question, “Chick, how much does it weigh?” Chick kind of grimaced and said, “Well, they have it down to thirty-two pounds.” [Laughter] Well, that was the end! Nobody was going to carry thirty-two pounds of computer. Besides, you couldn’t even check a portable typewriter in your luggage. I think I might have been the one who did it one time. It came out, literally, in pieces. You would have to carry it on board and store it under your seat. It was hopeless, Chick knew it. He knew he was trying to sell a hopeless proposition. That was the end of that for the time being. It was not until I went to London that I started using a computer every day.

HB: By that time, there probably were the small Radio Shack and other . . .

RR: No, in fact, I never carried a portable computer during the two years I was over there. I used them in the office. Even then, they weren’t small enough.

HB: Okay, is there more that you would like to mention with your years with the national staff?

RR: I guess I should say a word or two about New Orleans. That was my headquarters, and that was our home for seven years. Our kids grew up there and went off to college from there. They considered themselves New Orleanians. Where you grow up is your hometown. Our son, John, still has close friends from

his high school days in New Orleans. He goes down there at least once a year, sometimes twice a year. Cindy --- They both graduated from a high school for bright students, called Franklin High School, in uptown New Orleans. They got a wonderful education.

HB: That is a public high school?

RR: Yes, it was a college prep school. Cindy, who was the older, got into Oberlin College from Franklin High School. Benjamin Franklin High School is the full name. John got into Yale on the strength of his high school education there. We all loved the city. We all knew a few people who lived there and did not like it. Typically, they had moved in from other places and had been fearful of moving into the city itself and landed in one of the suburbs, Metairie or the West Bank. They never really got into the life of the city. We moved close in deliberately because we wanted to be part of the life of the city. It was a smart move as it turned out. We really found that there was a lot to love about the city. Cultural stuff, of course, arts, plays, music, and mainly, our lives began to revolve around Tulane University through a happy circumstance. We ended up, by accident, across the street from a professor of political science at Tulane. His name was Henry Mason. He and his wife, Mattie, were Dutch and had long since become American citizens. They had grown up in Holland during --- he was in the war [World War II]. He fought against the Nazis. They kept their ties to Holland and went back every summer. We got acquainted with them early on and liked them a lot. One thing led to another, and Norma ended up as the departmental secretary,

and the job title became Administrative Assistant in the political science department of Tulane. That became part of our social life through the Masons and Tulane. We learned all kinds of things from the teachers and other folks at Tulane. They became our main friends in New Orleans, with one notable exception. We were at a party one night --- People were eager to entertain *The New York Times* guy. We were considered a real oddity in this most exotic of all Southern cities, and most ingrown. We were considered most odd. We got invited to all kinds of dinners and parties. One night at a party in uptown New Orleans, I found myself in a conversation with a woman named Frances Marcus. She lived about a mile away from us uptown. She kept wanting to know about *The New York Times*. She was asking very knowledgeable questions about the newspaper. As it turned out, she was an old reporter. She had worked many years as a reporter before she got married, had kids, and quit. She worked at the *New Orleans Item*, or the *States-Item*, I guess it was. She had worked in upstate New York. Somewhere along the line, she had met and married a Pennsylvanian named Bernard Marcus. Anyway, he had settled in New Orleans and married her, a south Mississippi girl. They had married and settled in New Orleans. He was a lawyer. They became our closest friends. We have remained close friends to this day. Out of that chance meeting at this cocktail party, she hit me up to write some stories for *The New York Times*. We needed a city, a New Orleans stringer, a part-time correspondent, not on staff, to cover events when I might be out of town. I was traveling all the time. She turned out to be a really good *Times*

stringer and is still doing it all these years later, although it is on a much diminished basis. Years after the Reeds moved away from New Orleans, she continued in that job and became invaluable. They eventually put her on some other status. She became more than just a non-staff stringer. She was on a retainer of some kind. They called on her for all kinds of stories down through the years. She is an excellent writer and became one of the mainstays of the Travel section in the Sunday *Times*. She wrote travel stories from all over the Caribbean and all over the southern United States. From that, the guy on the national desk who was in charge of all the stringers around the country, I guess Roberts — he said, “We ought to look into people like Fran Marcus, women who used to work in the newspaper business who got out to raise their families and would like to do some part time work.” They hired a great number of them from around the country. It was kind of a pacesetter. We left New Orleans with pretty much mixed feelings. We loved the city, but there is a languor that gets hold of you in New Orleans, and we could feel it sucking us in. We knew what would happen. Finally, we decided if we didn’t get out, we never would.

HB: Do you mean that it kind of zaps your initiative?

RR. Yes. I had pretty well run the story out. Seven years is a long stretch for a reporter to do the same thing. I had run into the same problem at the *Gazette* years ago. You find yourself doing the same story over and over, meaning, the same kind of story. I knew that it was time to move on. Remind me to mention a particular story about the Mississippi River in a minute, but let me finish this train

of thought. I approached Dave Jones with an idea for moving to New York. At various times in the past I had made it very clear that I did not want to live in New York. It was understood that all the domestic correspondents were welcomed back in New York if they wanted to come. Not many of them did. Now and then, one of them might be called back, in a fit of hostility by the editor. I remember a famous case of Molly Ivins, the first woman national correspondent, who was sent to the Denver bureau. She was writing wonderful stories from out there. A marvelous writer. Today, as you know, she is one of the leading national columnists working out of Texas. She was the Denver correspondent for *The New York Times*, and she offended Abe Rosenthal with at least one notorious incident. I am not sure if I have told that. I probably should. I think this led directly to her being recalled. It illustrates what can happen. It ties in with my approaching Dave Jones about moving to New York.

HB: I tell you what, Roy, this is almost to the end of the tape. So we don't cut right in the middle of an anecdote, let's stop here.

[End of Tape 8 - Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 8 - Side 2]

HB: Okay, we are on the other side now. You were talking about Molly Ivins, in Denver, offending Abe Rosenthal.

RR: Molly was a terrific writer. She was very clever and funny and also kind of a prankster. She got into the habit of inserting words and phrases into her copy just for the entertainment of the copy editors in New York. She knew they would take

the words out on the copy desk --- Jokes and that kind of thing. --- They would laugh and mark them out and send the copy back to be set in type. One day she found herself down in the Texas Panhandle or somewhere. She was covering a chicken festival. Every little town had its festival. She thought she would get a feature story, and she did, a nice little feature about the chicken festival. She included a paragraph in which she described a contest, a chicken-plucking contest. It was to see who could pluck the feathers off a chicken the fastest. For the entertainment of the copy editors, she said, "It was what you might call a gang pluck." She knew they would take it out, and they did, of course. Well, somehow, Abe Rosenthal found out about it even though it was not in the paper. He called her up in a fury and ordered her to New York for a personal conference with him. I have heard her --- she told me the story of what happened. --- She went into his office and sat down. He was still in just a rage. Abe had a very hot temper. He had once fired a Columbia University stringer. It was a famous episode in newspaper circles. He was a very bright kid named Clyde Haberman, a Columbia stringer. This was a coveted college job because, traditionally, the stringer would go to work on the staff of *The Times* when he graduated. People would fight over that job. One day in a list of awards from Columbia University, just for a prank, he had inserted the Lady Brett Ashley Award. He had put the name of a buddy of his next to it. Of course, this was an inside joke, presumably a sexual joke about his friend that everybody would understand. But Lady Brett Ashley was the heroine of the [Ernest] Hemingway novel, *The Sun Also Rises*

[1926], the one whose boyfriend had been, literally, emasculated in the war.

Anyway, he inserted this as a prank. Abe, who was then the editor, had caught it and fired him. He said, “Newspapering is serious. You don’t take a chance on something like this.” In newspaper history, there are all kinds of sad stories about things done as pranks that got into print. So he fired Clyde. Years later he hired him back, and he is now one of the best reporters on the paper. Anyway, when Abe found out what Molly had done, he called her to New York. As Molly tells the story, during the conversation, he said, “Molly, ‘gang pluck.’ You know if that got into the paper, that’s like saying “gang fuck.” Molly said she went back in her chair and tried to look amazed and said, “God, Abe, I can’t put anything past you.” [Laughter] Well, that was pretty much the end of her career at *The New York Times*. Anyway, people would get called back. He ordered her to come back to the metro staff after that. Shortly after that she left the paper.

HB: I assume to come back to metropolitan staff after that was punishment?

RR: Yes, it is a demotion. It is still looked on that way. If you have become a correspondent, out around the country or foreign, you don’t want to get called back. Here I was, deliberately asking to be sent to New York for a special reason.

HB: Let me pause here a moment. You mentioned a while back to remind you of the Mississippi River story. Should that go in here before?

RR: I will wait just a minute to tell that. Here I was asking to go to New York, but I didn’t want to be sent there permanently. What I suggested to Dave was to come up there for maybe a year or two at the most, on a sabbatical.

HB: It wouldn't be Dave at this time, would it?

RR: Dave was still the national editor. It was in 1975 or 1976. What I specifically had in mind was not reporting from New York. I did not want to be on the metro staff, but to be a copy editor or some assistant national editor, doing anything except reporting. I was burned out on reporting. I wanted to come to New York and do something else for a period of time, then go back to reporting. He ran that past Abe and, to my amazement, came back and said, "Abe does not want to see you quit reporting. He thinks you are too valuable on the reporting staff. He wants you to keep reporting. How would you like to move to London?"

HB: Wow.

RR: I did not even hesitate. It seemed like a dream assignment and it was. That was how we happened to leave New Orleans. It was directly because I had run out my string in New Orleans. There were still some stories to be done. One of them --- this tells you something about how newspapers work. --- Sometime in the early to mid 1970s, I had happened onto a story that nobody else had written. In those years, the lower Mississippi was the most polluted river in the United States. It all came from chemical plants and other industries, highly polluting industries, along the river banks between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. I don't remember what got me curious about this, but something did. I looked into it. Sure enough, some studies had been made, never published, except for maybe scientific journals. There were researchers, university people, interested in this. It was easy enough to find once you started looking. I did a story --- I think it was on

page one of *The Times* --- about the desperate pollution, poisonous stuff, in the drinking water of New Orleans. It made a splash with the New Orleans *States-Item*, which in those days, was the afternoon newspaper. It was the lead story. They had *The New York Times* wire service. They picked up my story and ran it across the front page, the top of the front page of the *States-Item*. It caused a huge splash locally.

HB: Did you get a byline?

RR: Absolutely. Then, in a few weeks, it was kind of forgotten. Years went by, years went by --- I am talking ten or fifteen years went by. I had left *The New York Times*, had left newspapering. I picked up whatever paper I was taking in those days. It might have been *The Times*. It might have been the *Arkansas Gazette*. Here is a story that somebody else had discovered – that the lower Mississippi River was the most polluted river in the United States! [Laughter] That is the way that newspapering works. It used to be kind of a saying amongst reporters, “If you find a good story, you ought to write it every chance you get.”

HB: You have the new generation coming along every once in a while, too. We are going to stop this because it is lunchtime.

[End of Interview Session]