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## *Arkansas Democrat Project*

Interview with

David Davies  
13 June 2007  
Via Telephone

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. I'm here in my home in Greenwood, Arkansas, on June 13, 2007, preparing to do a telephone interview with David Davies, who is in his home in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. And this project is for the history of the *Arkansas Democrat*, and we're doing it for The [David and Barbara] Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville]. And the first thing I need to do, David, is ask you if we have your permission to tape this interview and turn it over to the university.

David Davies: You certainly do.

JM: Okay. And I'll start out—you are now a—as I understand it, at the University of Southern Mississippi. You're dean of the Honors College? And you're a professor of journalism.

DD: That's correct.

JM: But you worked both at the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*. Is that correct?

DD: That's correct.

JM: Okay. Well, let's just get you there. Let's just start out from the beginning. First, spell your name.

DD: Sure. It's David. I use my middle initial R.

JM: Okay.

DD: And the last name is Davies—D-A-V-I-E-S.

JM: David R. Davies. Okay. Where and when were you born, David?

DD: I was born in 1957 in Malvern and attended the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

JM: Okay. Did you go to—did you go through twelve grades of school at Malvern?

DD: Yes, I went through my—except for a brief stint when my family moved to Hot Springs, I did all of my schooling in—in Malvern and graduated at the high school there in 1975.

JM: Okay. And then you went from there to the University of Arkansas?

DD: That's right.

JM: Okay. Before we go—before we go any farther, what were your parents' names?

DD: My parents' names were Jewel Davies—that's J-E-W-E-L.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

DD: And my father was Clyde Donald Davies, and that's them.

JM: Yeah. Okay. And what'd your father do?

DD: My father was in the Air Force and died a few months before I was born.

JM: Oh, is that right?

DD: Uh-huh.

JM: Okay. And did—did your mother work after—after that?

DD: No, my mother was disabled. [DD clears his throat] Excuse me. She had arthritis that struck her in the early 1960s, and pretty much my entire life she was housebound or very nearly housebound because of her arthritis. It was rheumatoid arthritis of the spine.

JM: Hmm. Oh, boy, that's tough. Yeah, I've known some people who've had that. Okay. But at any rate, so you went on to—when did you become interested in journalism?

DD: I worked for [laughs] my high school newspaper, which was the *Leopard Spots*. And I was one of three co-editors for the paper, and it was only a monthly, but for whatever reason we had three co-editors my senior year. And I just enjoyed writing. I had grown up reading newspapers, including the Malvern paper [*Malvern Daily Record*] and the Hot Springs paper [*Sentinel-Record*], but when I started taking journalism class, which I can't remember what led me to take that class. When I started taking journalism classes, we read the *Arkansas Gazette* every day. And so I became hooked on the *Gazette* at an early age, at least in— for my high school years.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And so I decided to major in journalism.

JM: Okay.

DD: And French of all things.

JM: Oh, okay. That's not a bad combination. Now so you went on to the university, and you did major in journalism there?

DD: I did. I started at the university in 1975. I started out with a major in journalism. I was a broadcast journalism major actually. I had my sights set on working in educational TV. I don't know where I came up with that idea. And enjoyed my French classes, which were required as part of the major. The language classes were required. And so I went ahead and took the additional classes to finish the major.

JM: Okay. And so you—so you got a—you got a degree—a bachelor's degree with—in journalism?

DD: That's right. In 1979.

JM: Okay. Who were some of your professors?

DD: Well, Roy—interestingly enough, Roy Reed was starting at the U of A. If my memory serves me, his first year at the U of A was my senior year at Arkansas, which would've been 1978/1979. David Sloan taught photography. And I would run into him later in my career. I'll tell you about that in a little bit.

JM: Okay.

DD: Let's see. The department's chairman was Jess Covington.

JM: Okay, I remember him. Okay.

DD: Yes, and a very nice man. I had him for some of my early classes. The broadcast professors were Varnell Lee and Mr. Oneil. And for some reason, Mr. Oneil's first name escapes me. It'll come to me in a little bit.

JM: No, I don't—I don't remember.

DD: But I had—Dennis Oneil. O-N-E-I-L. No apostrophe. And so I had a—I mean, there was a—seemed to be a really good place. Again I was coming up through the broadcast side, and so I worked at KUAF, which is the student station at Arkansas. It's since become quite professionalized, but at the time we called ourselves the ten-watt wonder because we had a power of only ten watts. And it was completely student-run.

JM: Uh-huh. And was—Bob Douglas hadn't come on the scene yet when you first got there?

DD: I think—I—I can't remember. I did not have many associations with Mr. Douglas, and I think it may be because he came after I did. I'm almost certain he did.

JM: Yeah. Okay. All right. And that's very possible. I'm trying to remember. Yeah, because I remember I was at the *Democrat* in—let's see, 1975, when you started, and I know he was still the managing editor at the *Gazette* at that time, so . . .

DD: Right. And my friends, such as Scott Morris, who came to the *Gazette* in later years—I mean, their experience at the U of A was a good bit different because they had so many folks that I had not—that I did not have during my time at the U of A.

JM: Okay. So when did you decide to go into print journalism?

DD: Well, it's funny. I started working part-time in radio, and so during my college career I worked at a couple of radio stations after KUAF. I worked at KNEW, which was an easy-listening station that played on the cable [TV] channel that had

weather rotating over and over and over. And I went from that station to KHOG. That's—you heard it right—K-HOG.

JM: Yeah, I'm familiar with that.

DD: And we were a Top 40 station, and I was working at that station part-time when I graduated from Arkansas. And I was working sort of part-time as a DJ [disc jockey] and in production, and part-time in news. And that was my job when I was full-time. It was about half-time covering the news.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And it was in the days when it was not at all unusual for radio stations to cover news. And so I did that for a year and a half or two years after my graduation. And in 1980, by happenstance I ran into a high school friend, Kim Cherry, who worked at the *Northwest Arkansas Times*, and she told me about an opening there. So I applied. And so in 1980 I jumped ship from KHOG to the *Northwest Arkansas Times*.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And there I covered what we affectionately called “the Boonie Beat,” because I covered the outlying towns around Fayetteville. And everything from Prairie Grove School Board meetings to the Winslow City Council. Much of it having to be covered by phone because I think I covered something like twelve or thirteen municipalities and school districts. And I was there until 1982 at the *Northwest Arkansas Times*. After a couple of years, I decided I wanted to [go to] France and study. So I went to Europe [laughs] in the fall of 1982 and studied there—was planning to study the entire year. But after one semester decided, “You know, I

really need to go back home. Pick up my career.” And so I did and moved back to Little Rock in December of 1982 or January of 1983. And landed a job in radio again, this time at KARN, which at the time was the flagship for the Arkansas Radio Network.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And so I worked in news there briefly—quickly grew frustrated with radio and wanted to get back into print, and that led me to the—to the *Democrat*, and I got a job there in, I believe, June or July of 1983.

JM: Okay. Who hired you?

DD: I was hired by Bob Sallee.

JM: Okay. Well, what was Bob then, the city editor?

DD: I think Bob was—had some title of assistant managing editor. He was higher up in the food chain.

JM: Yeah. Okay. It’s possible.

DD: The city editor at that time was Roy Hobbs.

JM: Okay. Yeah.

DD: And it was funny—I was frustrated at KARN for various reasons. I loved the people I worked with, but I felt like I needed to do something different. And sort of on a lark, I went to the *Democrat* to interview. Really just trying to get my dibs in for a possible job. And to my amazement, they hired me. And so I left the interview knowing I was hired. And—and then started, gosh, you know, two weeks later.

JM: All right. And what did you start doing?

DD: Well, I started out—I think I was GA [general assignment reporter] for just a very brief period. I mean, really just a matter of weeks. And they moved me fairly quickly to the federal court beat. And Larry Ault was rotating off that beat. That's Larry Ault—A-U-L-T.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And I believe he just died here a few weeks ago. Larry took me over to the courthouse and showed me the traps to run in the beat, as he called it.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

DD: And so I learned about checking my traps at the courthouse and got a good introduction to beat reporting, thanks to Larry. And started covering the federal beat. And it was pretty incredible. I mean, here I was, you know, high twenties at this point, I suppose—mid to late twenties—working for a fairly large newspaper with a beat of some responsibility. And that was the neat thing about the *Democrat* in those days, that you did get this opportunity to do something not too far out of school. The newsroom was mostly my age or—or younger or slightly older. There were folks across the newsroom, you know, with all kinds of responsible beats. Some with more experience than me, some with about my experience level.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, let's start again. Okay. What was—that was right in the middle of a newspaper war [that] you landed in, wasn't it?

DD: That's right.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. What was it like working at the *Democrat* then?

DD: Well, it was intensely competitive. I mean, more than anything, the important thing to do was to not get beat by the *Gazette*.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: I think we wanted to beat the *Gazette*—that was important, too.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs]

DD: But the thing that I remember most was the fear of not letting yourself get beat by the *Gazette*. And it's funny because perhaps some of the editors sort of looked down on the *Gazette* to say, "Oh, you know, they're—they're snobbish. But they're old and they're lazy," and all this kind of thing. There was—it was fashionable among the editors to say, "Well, you know, we're the up-starts, but really, we're the better ones." But in the newsroom, all of us worked with the *Gazette* reporters and respected them, so we felt like—you know, I think the reporters—the rank and file—had a healthy respect for our competitors.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: I know I did. I mean, on the federal beat my counterpart at the *Gazette* was George Wells. And, you know, he was kind enough to show me this, that, and the other. Now, he didn't give away any—any stories believe you me. But, I mean, he would say, "Yeah, you need to look at—here's what to know about that." Or, "Here's what to know about this."

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: Intensely competitive. I remember—I was not exposed as much to pressures from [John Robert] Starr because the federal beat seemed to be a little removed from where most of his interests were, you know, pointed during my time at the

*Democrat*. He seemed to be paying a lot more attention to what—what’s going on in the county courthouse. And, of course, this was the time of the [Bill] McArthur case and Tommy Robinson. [Editor’s Note: Robinson, then sheriff of Pulaski County, accused McArthur, a well-known defense lawyer, of conspiring to kill McArthur’s wife, Alice, in July 1982. McArthur was arrested but a grand jury refused to indict him. Mary Lee Orsini, a former client of McArthur’s, was convicted of the crime]

JM: Tommy Robinson.

DD: All of this other stuff. And so his attention was focused, you know, on stuff going on over there.

JM: Yeah.

DD: Now the one time that I got pulled into some Starr stuff was whenever the school case was in court, which, of course, I would occasionally be pulled in to cover that kind of stuff, although more likely it was covered by Cynthia Howell. And, of course, he took a—he, Starr, took an intense interest in the school case and was very, very [laughs] resentful of Henry Woods and had a lot to say about Henry Woods. So, I mean, I got some attention from Starr, you know, in that . . .

JM: Now which school—which school case are you talking about?

DD: The Little Rock school desegregation case.

JM: Okay.

DD: And at that point, I believe very—about the time I got on the beat, Henry Woods had ordered the Little Rock School District to consolidate with the North Little Rock and Pulaski County school districts. And so a lot of the—the aftermath of

that was still being fought here, there, and yon. And so I was pulled into some of that. Starr was a huge opponent of that consolidation and—and therefore, a huge opponent of—of Henry Woods.

JM: Yeah. Henry was the federal judge . . .

DD: That's true.

JM: . . . handling the case. Okay. Yes.

DD: That's right. And I briefly—because of my association on the federal beat—covered the Senate campaign in 1984 in which Ed Bethune ran against David Pryor. I hope I have my—my . . .

JM: Years right.

DD: . . . candidates correct.

JM: Yeah, that sounds right.

DD: Right. Bethune—Bethune . . .

JM: I was—I was in Oklahoma City [Oklahoma] at the time, but that sounds right.

DD: Right. And Bethune ran on—among the standard planks of his platform was to rail against the powers of federal judges.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And I remember [laughs] I was assigned to do a big Sunday piece on federal judges exercising all of this power. And so, of course, I'm as green as grass. And I got an—but I interviewed all of my sources about federal judges, the judiciary and the expansion of the federal courts into areas—into new areas over the previous decades. And essentially all the sources said the same thing, that Congress had expanded, you know, federal oversight in this area and in that area,

and that essentially the federal courts had—any increased power in the federal courts was simply a reflection of the, you know, federal encroachment [laughs] into areas previously reserved to the state—that sort of thing.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: It really wasn't that the federal judges were the bad guys.

JM: Yeah.

DD: But that it was a reflection of the trend in overall growing federal government power. So I did this story, and it was a pretty even-handed story. I think I included some folks on—included folks on either side of the issue. But [laughs] it ran in the Sunday paper, and it was a big, big take-out—a full page or a half a page—a really big graphic of a federal judge, as I recall it, pretty much dressed as Moses, handing down the law to the waiting masses. The graphic, of course, ran totally counter to the content of the story. But that was the *Democrat* in those days.

JM: Yeah. Who was responsible for the graphic? Do you know?

DD: [Laughs] I don't remember. It was a—but, I mean, that was—the story—the assignment was to do a story on federal judges overreaching their powers. And so they assigned a graphic to match that. But as typical of the *Democrat*, they assigned a story that fitted their preconceived notions as opposed to saying, “Find out what's going on in this area.” Now, I'm almost positive that assignment came from Starr.

JM: Yeah.

DD: Actually, I know it came from Starr [at least?] for that part.

JM: Oh, it—it fitted Starr’s preconceived [laughs] notions, but . . .

DD: Exactly.

JM: Yeah. I don’t know whether he’d had anything—whether he’d had anything in for [word unclear] Henry Woods for or not. Of course, Henry Woods went back to the [Governor Sidney Sanders] McMath Administration and . . .

DD: Exactly.

JM: . . . and leaped—they leaped all over [Governor] Orval Faubus when he called out the [National] Guard [during the Little Rock Central High School desegregation crisis in 1957]. But at any rate—so did you hear—did you hear anything after the story from Starr?

DD: No, I didn’t, really. And I expected to.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

DD: The other thing that I attracted some notice from Starr was at the time, Mike Masterson was the *Democrat*’s star investigative reporter. And he had a long and very visible series of stories bringing up the James Dean Walker case. James Dean Walker had been accused of—accused and convicted of killing a policeman, I believe, in North Little Rock.

JM: Correct.

DD: And Masterson’s stories turned up diaries and other things that purported to show that, in fact, James Dean Walker did not do it. And this led to a series of hearings in federal court under James Wood—Henry Woods, as it happens, to consider whether there was new evidence that justified opening the case. And Starr was very, very interested in that case. And, of course, that case got a lot of notoriety

nationally. One of the actors on “M\*A\*S\*H,” whose name escapes me at the moment—I’ll think of it later—I saw him just the other day [laughs] on the television. I was telling my wife this story. He and some other Hollywood types actually attended some of the hearings. And they seemed to clearly take the attitude that, “Gosh, it’s a good thing they were here to watch what these Arkies were doing to dispense Arkansas justice,” and that sort of thing. And in any case, I think that one reason I ended up going to the *Gazette* was because of that case, George Bentley told me, or someone told me that my very even-handed coverage of those hearings impressed Bentley, who told the editors at the *Gazette*, and so they—they smiled on my application when I applied. So I tried to cover that as even-handedly as possible because Masterson was alleging all of this new evidence, and I carefully said in my stories that it was purported new evidence and that the hearings were to determine whether the evidence, in fact, was truly evidence and deserved reopening the case. And the legal standard, as I recall, to reopen a case is quite, quite high. And I can’t remember exactly how that turned out, but there was a good bit of interest from Starr on that particular story.

[Editor’s Note: Walker pleaded no contest to the charge of manslaughter in November 1985 in the shooting death of a North Little Rock police officer in 1963. He was sentence to time served and walked out of court a free man]

JM: Uh-huh. Do you—going back just a little bit there—what happened to people when they did miss a story—that the *Gazette* beat them at that time? Was there any—do you remember any examples of them reaping the whirlwind, so to speak?

DD: Yeah. I mean, the—I can't remember specific examples of that, which surprises me. But the deal was you did not want to get beat on a story because people operated in perpetual fear that they would miss a story and just get the wrath of God from Starr or from some of the other editors. I remember—and I think the fellow's name was Ted Jackovics, who worked for the *Democrat* as state editor when I started. I heard he went on to work in Tampa [Florida] at the *Tribune*. I remember being assigned some routine brief just to rewrite. And I can't remember the nature of the story, but it struck me as just especially insignificant. I won't even hazard a guess as to what it was, but it was something that was just the most routine news item. Something about a—it might've been something about a—you know, a choir singing at somewhere or other. I can't recall. But I remember going to him and saying, "Ted, are we sure we really want to run, you know, however many paragraphs you've assigned me on this? I mean, this isn't—I don't know that this is something that we want to spend a lot of time on." And I'll never forget Ted looking and kind of scanning this press release for this very routine item thing. "I don't know, Dave. We don't want to get beat on this." And that was the attitude. I mean, if it ever happened—you don't want to get beat on that.

JM: Yeah. Who do you—who else was on the staff with you at the time at the *Democrat*? Anybody in particular that stands out? Can you remember?

DD: Well, folks that I really remember the most about were folks in my little area. Cary Bradburn, whom I've told you about remains my friend to this day. Covered the courthouse along with Bruce Kinzel, who died some years back. They

covered the—the county courthouse. Carl Hall—Carl T. Hall was his byline. He now works for *San Francisco* [*Chronicle*]. He was there. Stephen Buel, who went on to work at *Spectrum* and now is out in California—was there. Carl Hall, I think it was, I mean, got the job at the *Democrat*. I mean, he literally was crossing the country in a beat-up car or some such thing. And, you know, applying at newspapers all over the country and ended up coming there.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And I think he told Buel and Buel ended up coming there. And there was just all these young people who had arrived there by happenstance. Maria Henson, who later went on to win a Pulitzer [Prize] at the Lexington [Kentucky] newspaper. [*Lexington Herald-Leader*] She was there. Mike Masterson was, of course, the most well-known *Democrat* reporter at that time. Now he had an office in the other building and—and we didn't see him much in the newsroom. Bob Sallee had some presence in the newsroom—not a lot. The person I reported directly to was Roy Hobbs. Excuse me. Ray Hobbs.

JM: Uh-huh. Not the baseball player, Roy Hobbs, huh? [Laughs]

DD: Exactly. As soon as I said that I thought of Roy Hobbs. And Ray was consumed by, you know, that same fear of everyone else in the newsroom: getting beat. But I always got along with Ray, and, you know, he treated me reasonably well—treated me well.

JM: Yeah.

DD: There was another fellow who worked in—well, scratch that. I can't think of the fellow's name. Sorry. Maybe it'll come back to me. But it was a very young

newsroom—a lot of folks right out of school. It was at that point Cynthia Howell was covering education. She had worked at the *Democrat* since she got out of the U of A in 1979 or 1980.

JM: Uh-huh. They were hiring, as I remember hearing from other people—they were rapidly expanding the staff, so they were hiring a lot of people—a lot of people who were—who were maybe some good people there, but also some beginners. A lot of beginners, too.

DD: Exactly. And I mean, I probably fit in kind of that middle category. I wasn't quite a beginner. But I was pretty close. I mean, I had worked in newspapers for a couple of years . . .

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: . . . and in radio off and on for a couple years. But I was pretty green when I wound up in Little Rock. By the time I jumped to the *Gazette*, I was a good bit more seasoned simply because the *Democrat* gave me the opportunity of covering so many stories. And at—you know, my entire time at the *Democrat*, the workload was quite high. I mean, you were expected to turn out a good bit of copy.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And so I—because Little Rock's a good news town, and because I was on a beat with a good bit of news coming out of it, I had a lot of bylines and grew seasoned pretty fast.

JM: Yeah.

DD: Seasoned may not be the word, but I racked up a lot of experience in those two years. Probably a good bit more than I would have at a somewhat smaller paper.

JM: Yeah. Did they—let me go back to this one more time—but when you got beat on a story, was there any—was there any way of getting noticed? Did they post anything on the bulletin board or any—or anything like that—memos or anything?

DD: I can't recall. I sort of think there was some sort of regular message from Starr. And for some reason I just can't remember that. But I'm sure that if I bounced that memory off some of my colleagues from those days it would start to come back to me.

JM: Yeah—particularly if they were a recipient of [laughs]—of criticism.

DD: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm sure they would. [Laughs]

JM: They'd probably remember it. [Laughs]

DD: Uh-huh.

JM: I think I've—I've heard a few. But at any rate, so you stayed at—you stayed at the *Democrat* two years, right?

DD: That's correct.

JM: Okay. And then—then you went to the *Gazette*. What prompted you to go to the *Gazette*?

DD: Well, we all—I mean—see, I'm surprised I can't remember examples of pressure from above in the newsroom because we were all—many of us were just very unhappy. That is, there was considerable pressure. Your judgments were often second-guessed in the newsroom. Sometimes you were told to do stories that to

your judgment, weren't stories. It was an unpleasant place to work. And so everybody [laughs] aspired to go the *Gazette*, or to my mind, I won't say everybody—many aspired to go to the *Gazette*.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And I had had a run-in with the *Democrat* covering the James Dean Walker story, and it really doesn't speak that well for me, but I—I have to tell you in the interest of full disclosure—I was covering the James Dean Walker hearings, as I recall. And I was working, gosh, eleven-, twelve-hour days. I was writing, gosh, thirty-five, forty inches a day in the paper. And I may be exaggerating, but I don't think so because we tried to cover every word of those hearings—the idea being that Masterson had—Masterson's work had gotten those hearings into federal court in the first place. And so we were—we were sort of trumpeting our own horn by covering, you know, James Dean Walker.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: But at about this time, Starr became concerned that there were too many misspellings in the paper—the idea being that we were too careless. And so a policy came down that if we—if any of the reporters misspelled a name, you were—you were suspended for a day without pay. And [laughs] so I was covering this huge, huge, huge, you know, set of hearings. It's on the front page every day. And in—in the many, many names I had, I misspelled a name. And so they came in on a Thursday or Friday or whatever it was. Say—say it was on Friday's paper is the way I remember the story. And they said, "You know, Dave—you know, you misspelled this name, and so you're suspended for a day.

But we're not suspending you today because before you leave you have to finish the Sunday piece."

JM: Yeah.

DD: [Laughs] That just infuriated me because I had really been working hard all week. And, you know, I was young enough to be mercurial, and so I said—I think I actually—I—I can't remember exactly when I quit, but that day I said—I wrote—I had this wonderful, satisfying moment of writing out the note that says, you know, "I quit." And so I marched over to Ray Hobbs, who was very even-tempered and [he] said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yes, I'm sure. I quit." And he said, "Well, when you calm down, come back." And so to the *Democrat's* credit or to its demerit—I don't know which—they hired me back a couple of days later because no other job popped open.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And I recall that some of my colleagues in the newsroom—there was some gathering the next week, and somebody wrote a cake—made a cake—brought a cake that said, "Welcome back, Dave Davies." And Davies was misspelled.

JM: [Laughs]

DD: So [laughs] from that point on, I mean, I just felt like I had been mistreated. All of us worked very, very hard, and I just didn't feel, you know, very appreciated. I had always liked the *Gazette*. I had grown up reading the *Gazette*.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And, you know, I probably would've gone to the *Gazette* first to apply—and in fact, I did go to the *Gazette* first to apply. I just remembered that. But I

interviewed with Bob McCord, I think. And I—I mean, I just didn't have the experience to get a job with the *Gazette* at that point. And at that point I remember the rule—or what we thought the rule of thumb was—that you couldn't work at the *Gazette* unless you had three to five years of experience or something like that. Well, I didn't have that much newspaper experience, so I didn't even apply.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: So after the incident [laughs] involving the misspelled name, I hung on at the *Democrat* until I heard of an opening. And so I heard of an opening on the schools beat and went over and applied. And frankly I think it was on the endorsement of Bentley. George Bentley covered—George Bentley had noticed my coverage and—and passed it on. It may have been George Wells had noticed my even-handed coverage.

JM: John Wells. Or was it George? It was George.

DD: Well, George Wells was a federal reporter.

JM: John Wells—John Wells is a guy that used [laughs] to own the little alternative paper in Little Rock.

DD: Oh, okay. [Laughs] And, in fact, earlier I said it was George Bentley, but it was George Wells. George Wells had noticed that I was fairly even-handed in this and had mentioned that to my editors—to the editors at the *Gazette*.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And so when I went over to apply, they were very kind to me and after one interview or two—I don't remember—they called me in on a Tuesday and said

that I was hired and that I could have—and that, you know, could I start in two weeks? And I said, “Yes, I certainly could.” But I said—as—I remember telling Max Brantley, who hired me, “Max, you know that—you know, they’re gonna fire me as soon as they find out I’m going to the *Gazette*,” which was the standard *Democrat* practice at the time. And he said, “Well, okay. If they do that—you know, if you want to start Thursday, you can.”

JM: Yeah.

DD: So, sure enough, they hired me on Tuesday morning—said, “We’re hiring you.” And I told Max, “Okay, I’ll be back in two weeks or two days, depending on what the *Democrat* does.” But I knew what the *Democrat* would do. So I walked into the *Democrat*—did not even speak to any of my friends because I knew I was about to get kicked out of the newsroom. Told Ray Hobbs that I had been offered a job at the *Gazette*. He told me that—well, there was maybe a chance they could match my salary. And I said, “Well, I really am interested in taking this job.” And so he said, “Well, why don’t you go ahead and go before Starr finds out and there’s a big scene.” And I said, “That’s a great idea.”

JM: Yeah.

DD: So I walked—I walked back to the *Gazette* and said, “I’ll start on Thursday.” So I worked on Tuesday morning for the *Arkansas Democrat*, and then the same week I worked—on Thursday morning—for the *Arkansas Gazette*.

JM: Do you remember how much more—if there was a boost—boost in salary at the *Gazette*?

DD: It was a boost, but it wasn't much. As far as I knew, and as far as most of us knew, both papers paid fairly poorly in those days. I mean, even when I left the *Gazette* in the late 1980s—in 1989—I may have been making \$25,000, \$26,000, or \$27,000. I've always joked to my colleagues in higher education that I'm the only person on the planet who can become a teacher—who became a teacher and got a pay raise.

JM: [Laughs] What year was that that you switched from the *Democrat* to the *Gazette*?

DD: I switched in, as I recall, June of 1985.

JM: Okay.

DD: And, of course, the newspaper war was still at its height when I switched. And I took the federal beat. Excuse me. I took the schools beat, taking over from a woman whose name escapes me, but I'll be able to come up with that later. This woman had covered the schools for, gosh, five or six years and was very, very well known as, you know, just being everyone's expert on the convoluted Little Rock school case and the Little Rock schools and all of that. And so it was a little daunting to go into that beat because it had so much responsibility associated with it.

JM: Uh-huh. Was . . . ?

DD: But, you know, it was a chance to go to the *Gazette*. And, you know, I—I was ready to leap at it.

JM: Yeah. Okay. So what was it like working at the *Gazette*?

DD: Well, it was—at first, particularly, it was an absolute revolutionary change in world view. The *Gazette*—and at least in the early years—did its own thing and went its own way no matter what the *Democrat* did. And by that I mean the *Gazette* was pretty confident at that point that it was the leader, and the editors trusted the reporters and what they said the news on their beats was.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: So, I mean, I'll never forget Max Brantley said to me—was asking me something about some story sometime, and I asked him something to the effect of, “What should I do on this story?” And he said, “Well, you tell me. I trust your judgment.” And I found that very empowering, and it was typical of the *Gazette* early on. Because they trusted the reporters. It was kind of a reporter's paper, I thought. The reporters accused me—the editors once accused me that, “Davies, you don't ever take assignments. You just come in and tell us what you will do.” And that's really what they did. I mean, on a beat I had—I had real wide authority to determine what the stories, you know, might be. Particularly early on.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: Now that changed a bit after Gannett [bought the *Gazette*] and as the newspaper war continued to go on. I do not want to underplay the fact that to get beat by the *Democrat* was a really bad thing. [Laughs] And, you know, I was beat sometimes. My counterpart, Cynthia Howell, was very good on the beat. She was very organized. She had been on the beat longer than I had. And, frankly, she—she was just a really—she was—and is—a really good reporter. And so I

got beat, you know, more times than—than one or two, believe me. And that was always a big deal.

JM: At the *Gazette*.

DD: Sometimes—pardon?

JM: At the *Gazette* it was a big deal.

DD: Exactly.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

DD: Sometimes, you know, it sort of depended. If the papers thought—if the editors thought it just wasn't that big of a story, they didn't care. But if it was something they thought was a story, then they did care.

JM: Yeah. Well—but I guess Bill Shelton was gone by then, wasn't he?

DD: Shelton was on the copy desk by the time I got there.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. He was a—Brantley was the city editor by then?

DD: Right. Brantley was the city editor and he had this yellow stationery—these little notes. And by little, I mean they're probably five by eight inches—five inches tall, eight inches wide. And he would write notes to you with stories assignments. So there might be a clipping from, let's say, a legal notice or a—God forbid—a clipping from the *Democrat* with a yellow note attached to it. And we reporters called that “yellow rain.” And if you walked in and there was a bunch of yellow notes in your box, we said, “Oh, my God! My box is full of yellow rain.”

JM: Hmm.

DD: And that meant that, you know, you had a whole bunch of assignments from Max. The worst thing that you would want to see is—is a yellow note with the

*Democrat* story attached with Max's scrawl, and it always said the same thing in that situation, which was, "Why we not have?" Because, of course, he's doing hundreds of these [laughs] notes as he makes his—you know, gets organized day by day, so he writes them in shorthand. And it was always, "Why we not have?" So that was a bad day if you started your day with, "Why we not have?"

JM: Yeah, I—I think he may have inherited that habit from Bill Shelton.

DD: Oh, is that a Bill Shelton thing?

JM Yeah. Shelton used to hand out notes like that [laughs] for years—something like that.

DD: Saying "Why we not have?"

JM: Yes. Right.

DD: With that—that very thing?

JM: Yep.

DD: Oh, I—I had no idea that that was handed down from Shelton.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. But . . .

DD: A great story about that is a friend of mine, Cary Bradburn, who was a general assignment reporter, got one of those notes that [laughs] said, "Why we not have?" Well, Bradburn was a general assignment reporter. And [laughter] it wasn't his fault we didn't have the story. And he wrote on the note, "We not have 'cause you not assign. Why you not assign?" [Laughter] Which I thought was pretty good.

JM: Yeah. [Laughs] There were a lot of people at the *Gazette* at that time who had come from the *Democrat* originally, I think. Weren't there quite a few there?

DD: Yes, that's right. But when I came over—and then when Cary Bradburn came over about six months later—it was still very unusual for people to jump ship. I counted it one time. I can't remember how long it had been, but it had been maybe a couple of years since anybody had jumped ship. So when I jumped ship, it was kind of a big deal. Not because—not because I was such a loss to the *Democrat*—certainly not, but because it had been a good while. And while many had jumped over, it had been a while. The *Gazette* was very stable. People tended to get at the *Gazette* and then stay there. But a lot of the people . . .

JM: They had—they had very little turnover.

DD: Very little turnover. Some of the reporters there were many years my senior and had been covering their beats a good number of years already. Some were close to me in age but were much more seasoned in newspapers. So it was a much, much more stable staff, and for someone to jump from one to the other was fairly unusual when I did it.

JM: Well, there were . . .

DD: And it was fairly unusual when—when Cary did it.

JM: Yeah.

DD: But, of course, that began to change. That was in 1985. That began to change in 1987—I think it was—when Gannett bought us because one of their strategies was to hire folks from the *Democrat*.

JM: Yeah, I can remember somebody that I interviewed saying, you know, that they were just hiring people right and left and, you know, and making big offers and big increases in salaries and everything. I think maybe Alyson Hoge was telling

me what a—[laughs] how shook up they would get when—when they would—when the *Gazette* would raid them for another person and everything. But there were some, though, that made—this was probably even before you ever went to work at the *Democrat*—that jumped ship that were over there. I suspect that Mark Oswald was there . . .

DD: That's right. Mark was there.

JM: . . . when you were—and probably Brenda Tirey. And maybe James Scudder. And Garry Hoffmann. So all of those—all of those had—in fact, I had hired most of those myself [laughs] at the *Democrat*. And . . .

DD: Right. But they had been at the *Democrat*—they had been at the *Gazette* [?for years?].

JM: Yeah, they had been at the *Gazette* for a while. They jumped ship in 1978 and 1979 and 1980—along in there and everything. But, yes . . .

DD: Uh-huh.

JM: Yeah. But later on, after Gannett took over there, they—there was a big bidding war, right?

DD: Well, that's—of course, reporters are really bad about not—they'll discuss other people's money but not their own. So I knew we hired folks. It seemed to accelerate after I left the *Gazette* in 1989. Because we—we still did [not?] hire fairly regularly from the *Democrat*.

JM: What was the attitude, say, in 1985 and along in there as time went on about—the attitude towards the *Democrat* and about the war? Were they—were the *Gazette* people getting concerned? At what point did they start really getting concerned?

DD: Well, it's difficult to sort of place it now, so far removed. But at the time—I mean, it's difficult—maybe it's difficult to believe now, but at the time, I mean, the *Gazette* just seemed so clearly the superior newspaper in journalism that it never dawned on us that the *Democrat* was a threat to the *Gazette*'s livelihood.

JM: Yeah. Now, you're talking about in 1985 or 1986—that was the attitude?

DD: Right. And the *Democrat* would say, "That's *Gazette* arrogance."

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: But the *Gazette*—the *Gazette* truly was the better paper, I think.

JM: You had a lot more experienced people at the—at the . . .

DD: And I think that—you know, it was fashionable at the *Democrat* to . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: Okay. This is Jerry McConnell here with David Davies. This is side two of this tape, and just as the other tape ended, David, I think you were talking about the attitudes at the *Gazette*, and the *Democrat* would claim it was arrogance. But do you want to go on with what you were saying?

DD: Sure. I mean, the one reason the *Gazette* was such a pleasure to work for is that the *Gazette* folks had an idea really of what was news and they were willing to follow through on it. I mean, Brantley would say, "Well, you know, I don't know if that's a story or not. What do you think?" And your opinion sort of mattered. Whereas at the *Democrat*, it mattered more what Starr thought. It didn't matter what you found in the field. And so it was a pleasure to write for the *Gazette* in those years, and it was high pressure because you were still facing the *Democrat*

each day in competition. But your judgment mattered as a reporter. And that was very, very important. So, I mean, I do think that we had our own pet stories that probably we at the *Gazette* pushed to some degree. I mean, every editor has certain interests. But I didn't find it as offensive at the *Gazette* as I did at the *Democrat*.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: The *Democrat* was an especially difficult place to work.

JM: Uh-huh. Just because of all the pressure?

DD: Yeah. I remember saying—because at the time we'd all talk about these kinds of things—and I remember saying to somebody once—somebody might be running down the *Democrat*, let's say. Somebody else would say, "Oh, you're running down the *Democrat* because you—you work for the *Gazette*." And my response would be, "No, I'm running down the *Democrat* because I used to work at the *Democrat*."

JM: [Laughs]

DD: And people who came out of the *Democrat* and left for the *Gazette* had an incredibly negative attitude for the *Democrat*.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

DD: So . . .

JM: Okay. At what point did the staff attitude begin to change? What was the reaction on the staff when they—when the *Gazette* lost the [lawsuit] in 1986?

DD: Well, it's really interesting. I probably didn't pay as much attention to that as I should have. Of course, you know, hindsight is always twenty-twenty. [Laughs]

The thing I remember most about that is there was—you know, there was discussion of everyone's salaries and editors' salaries and all of this in the lawsuit. And that made us in the reporter ranks—I remember some people complaining about what some of the editors made because that turned out to be in the court documents. But, you know, we were more interested in the sort of, to us, salacious details about editors' salaries than we were in the substantive part of what was going on. It did seem pretty clear to us that probably the *Gazette* had a point in its antitrust case, but, you know, I didn't cover that case first hand. And it didn't seem like a—something that threatened the paper as it since has seemed in hindsight.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: So when Gannett came in and bought the paper, I mean, there was the usual worry about what a new owner was going to do. But I don't think any of us were just torn apart with worry. We were apprehensive. It was only when the Gannett folks came in that, you know, we really began to see a true threat to what the *Gazette* was. And the *Gazette* was a—a very—I mean, I think that one reason that attracted us to the newspaper is it seemed to be a very serious newspaper that cared about, you know, news and hard news. That was what made it attractive as a reporter's paper.

JM: Uh-huh. And so—one thing and then I want to come back to Gannett, but I think maybe in the trial one of the things that came out about salaries and everything, may have been—may have been the bonus that they'd paid Hugh Patterson one year that—that seems to me like that—that it was revealed that he'd got a

\$150,000 bonus or something like that in one of the years that he was suing for, saying [laughs] that times were real hard or something but . . .

DD: Right.

JM: But at any rate—so after Gannett came in, then—what happened as you began to see how Gannett operated?

DD: Well, there was—I mean, there were things that just began to rankle us in the reporting ranks. We brought in some new editors who, you know, were more like the *Democrat* editors, who tended to question us and push us. It was less of a reporter's paper. And, you know, these were Gannett editors who came in. There was an effort to begin sort of a neighborhood zoned edition that had a lot of chicken dinner news and that sort of thing that seemed to us very un-*Gazette*-ish.

JM: I remember that—and maybe this was—is some symptom of it and everything, but one person I worked with over there in the sports department said they would come in—after Gannett came in, Gannett would come in and say, “Okay, I want a story on this for Thursday, and it's got to be seventeen inches.” And he said it didn't make any difference whether it turned out to be a story or not—whether it turned out to be worth two inches or fifty-five inches, they wanted a story, and they wanted seventeen inches.

DD: Right. And that was—that's sort of what I'm talking about. And they also brought in—there was a trend to bring in younger reporters.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: I was there in the Walker Lundy years, and we brought in some people who, you know, to us just didn't seem to have the—the reporting jobs that tended to be—

sort of buy more into the Gannett way of—you know, short and sweet and peppy and that sort of thing. There was just a lot of—I mean, I think what we saw was a shift toward being told what the news was. That's the way I recall it.

JM: Yeah. In other words, they didn't trust the reporter anymore. At the *Gazette*, the editor decided what the news was.

DD: Well, yes, but I have to say it was that feeling generally. I didn't find that in my own beat. I think my worry with my beat was just sort of the standard beat reporter's worry that, "You know, there's too darn much work to do to get it all done."

JM: Yeah.

DD: And so I think there was a lot of dissatisfaction. But the funny thing was it never approached the level of anything I had ever seen at the *Democrat*. But the fact that you had been given such independence before—here, an editor is offering, you know, his or her judgment over yours. I think it rankled more because it was not something that we were used to at the *Gazette*.

JM: Uh-huh. Who came in first as the head editor? Was that Lundy?

DD: I think that was Lundy.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

DD: And I was there—Lundy was still editor when I left in the late summer of 1989.

JM: Yeah. Okay. So did—what was the attitude toward some of the things? I've heard, you know, being criticized for doing the type of stories they would play on page one and pictures with cheerleaders in Spandex costumes [laughs] and stuff like that.

DD: Yeah. Lundy did—yeah, well, I’ve heard Max Brantley say that he approved the [laughs]—the cheerleaders in the Spandex. That was the “Geez, those knees,” as I recall that headline.

JM: That was [laughter] . . .

DD: And, well, Walker sort of struck us as—he never understood the Gannett—excuse me—he never understood the Arkansas culture, and he never understood the *Gazette*. He thought the *Gazette* was boring and dull. He thought that the emphasis on comprehensive news—of, you know, public affairs and such—was not something that appealed to readers.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: Whereas, I think that—it’s not to say the *Gazette* was perfect. There was probably—there’s things in any newspaper that could be improved, but there was this sort of arrogant idea that “You Arkies don’t know what you’re talking about.” And there was a complete misunderstanding of—of what was important to so many folks.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: I’ll give you two examples.

JM: Okay.

DD: I remember once—you’ve probably already heard this story—the Gannett folks—you know, some consultant—somebody at Gannett said, “Why do you all have all this material on river levels? I mean, why are you putting all this material about the weather and the level of the river?” You know, they had no idea that that would be important to a lot of people.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And, I mean, I remember us passing that story around in the newsroom. That was just sort of a—an idea that they didn't understand things. And I remember—I mean, in the school case, which I covered for the four years, Central High just hung over the whole school case. And I remember Walker Lundy saying once, “Why do people still talk about Central High? It was thirty years ago.” I mean, he—and it's true it was thirty years go. But it's sort of part and parcel of what Little Rock is and the way Arkansas views itself, and he never saw that. And I—I don't know. I just don't think they understood what the *Gazette* was. And when they started changing it, they didn't realize what the *Gazette* was meant to people.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: It's sort of like when, you know, people go in and change cartoons or something—I mean, you know, that's probably not a good comparison, but my point is they care about . . .

JM: Sometimes that really shakes people up when you change the cartoon they like.

DD: Exactly. Well, I mean, and nobody—nobody thought that people would be, you know, that shaken up.

JM: Yeah.

DD: But, you know, they were.

JM: Did it seem to you that Gannett was trying to remake the *Gazette* sort of like—at least a little bit similar to *USA Today* and . . . ?

DD: Well, yes and no. And in retrospect—I mean, when we've looked at what's happened, you know, most recently. I mean, the *Gazette* still had long stories,

although the editors were trying to get us to get them shorter. But, I mean, when you look at *USA Today* and what's happened in—in newspapers is they've tried to emulate the *USA Today*. Most of the controversies at the *Gazette* had to do with the tone of stories rather than the length. And I think that there was, you know, a concern about that.

JM: What do you mean by tone?

DD: Well, I know that a reporter for the *Gazette* did a story about people who were committing suicide. And the lead was something like, “Arkansans are dying. On purpose.” And that was the lead. And it was a story—I mean, a story—I mean, a serious story—could've been a serious story about this issue of elderly [people] who take their own lives. And it just came off as flippant. And that just seemed to run so much in the face of the serious and literate take that the *Gazette* had on the news.

JM: Uh-huh. Yes, that would [laughs]—that would be a change. [Laughs]

DD: Yeah. Very much so.

JM: That would've never gotten in the paper in the old days. So you stayed until 1989?

DD: Yes, I stayed until 1989.

JM: Okay. So why did you leave?

DD: Well, I had always had this notion I wanted to teach. And I thought I'd—I had decided even a couple of years after [coming to] the *Gazette*, as much as I loved it, that I was going to go to grad[uate] school in 1989. And so I applied a couple of places and got a fellowship to Ohio State [University] that I found out about in

1989. In the fall of 1989. And I thought—you know, in those days people could teach college with a master's degree in journalism. And I thought that I was going to do that.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: And so I went off to Ohio State and—and got a master's degree. And I almost went back to the *Gazette* when I finished my time in Ohio in 1989—I mean, it's a good thing I didn't. The paper closed two months—would've closed two months after I got back. But I mean, I was considering—I really wanted a teaching job. And then found this teaching job at [the University of] Southern Mississippi in the fall of 1991.

JM: Yeah. Okay. And that was when the *Gazette* closed, wasn't it?

DD: Exactly. The *Gazette* closed, I think, in October of 1991.

JM: Of 1991.

DD: And I started at Southern Mississippi in August.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

DD: I was very tempted to go back to the *Gazette*. I had had some aspirations for, you know, mid-level editing, and I—I thought, you know, being an assistant city editor might be something that would appeal to me. And I can't remember the specifics, but I did have sort of an opportunity to do that. But decided to stay with teaching instead.

JM: Yeah. Then you got your master's at Ohio State, right? And then you—you joined the staff at Southern Miss in 1991.

DD: That's correct.

JM: And you've been there ever since?

DD: Yes—been here ever since.

JM: All right. Did you ever get a doctorate?

DD: Yes, I did. I went to the University of Alabama and studied with David Sloan, who ironically enough had been at the University of Arkansas. His area is media history, and so I studied media history under hm. I started writing about newspapers and their coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, which was something I was interested in because of my time at the *Gazette*. And so I worked with him and graduated with my doctorate ten years ago in 1997.

JM: Yeah. Have you read *The Race Beat* [by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff]?

DD: Yes, I have.

JM: Yeah. I figured you had. [Laughs]

DD: Yeah. Hank Klibanoff, in fact, came down here. Hank and I had corresponded some. He had read my book on Mississippi journalists in the Civil Rights Movement.

JM: Now, what was the name of your book?

DD: It's called *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*. And it's an anthology with essays from various writers. A couple are from myself. About coverage of the Civil Rights Movement. And then . . .

JM: It's called what—the name of it again?

DD: Sure. *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*. It came out in 2001, I think, and was published by University Press of Mississippi. And then my book last year came out from Praeger [Publishers] on newspaper

trends after World War II. And that was called *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965*.

JM: And that came out last year? Well, I'd be interested in reading both of them. The postwar decline in American newspapers?

DD: Uh-huh. 1945-1965. And I'm under contract with Northwestern [University] to do a book on the national press and the Civil Rights Movement—a synthesis. And that book will be—the title of that book will be *Reporting the Promised Land*. And that's due in 2009.

JM: You're doing that for whom?

DD: Northwestern.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Well, very interesting—very, very interesting subject that I've been reading quite a bit about that lately myself. Of course, I was in Little Rock for the integration crisis and everything. Recently read a book by Elizabeth Jacoway [*Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation*] about the Central High crisis. And then, of course, I read *The Race Beat*, which I was interested in because I—I just thought that was a fascinating story and the coverage and everything else. And I met Gene Roberts and, of course, Roy Reed, who's a friend of mine, was a character in the story, too, so . . .

DD: Exactly. Uh-huh.

JM: Yeah. So it was a—I thought it . . .

DD: You liked Hank's book then?

JM: Yes. Yes, I did.

DD: Yeah, he's just incredible. I don't know Gene Roberts, but Hank is just as nice as the day is long.

JM: Yeah. Yeah, I really enjoyed that book. And I particularly enjoyed their take on Harry Ashmore because I was at the *Gazette* when Harry Ashmore was there and . . .

DD: I would've loved to have known him or to have interviewed him, or both.

JM: Yeah, he was a fascinating man. But . . .

DD: Did you know Johnny Popham at all?

JM: No, I did not—*New York Times*—no, I . . .

DD: I was able to interview him a couple of years ago.

JM: Yeah, I heard of him, but I did not know him. But, at any rate, that was a fascinating era. You undoubtedly had something in your book about the Carters and—oh, no, I'm trying to think—what's the—Delta—*Delta Democrat Times*.

DD: Right. Uh-huh.

JM: Hodding—yeah, Hodding Carters and everything.

DD: Uh-huh.

JM: And I met young Hodding, or I think maybe last year that they—they have a Roy Reed Lecture Series at the University [of Arkansas] now during Journalism Week, and he was one of the speakers up there. But . . .

DD: I would love to come up for Journalism Week.

JM: Yeah, you—you should do that because . . .

DD: Well, I want to get your e-mail [electronic mail] address at some point, and I'll send you a link to these books and . . .

JM: Yeah, I'd love to have that. After we finish here I'll go ahead and give it to you, and I want to get yours, too. But anything else that you can recall that you haven't touched on maybe that you think was pertinent to the story of the *Gazette—Democrat*. Let me ask you one question. Say, when you left in 1999—1989—did you ever think—was there any thought then that the *Democrat* might win the war?

DD: Well, I would've thought that was about like the moon being made of green cheese.

JM: [Laughs]

DD: It never dawned on me. And maybe that is *Gazette* arrogance. I don't know. I mean, the *Gazette* was so established and was so much a part of the fabric of Arkansas. My journalistic life, which—I mean, it just—I couldn't believe it. When I first heard that the *Gazette* was closing, I mean, I was thunderstruck. I was absolutely thunderstruck.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And it was not because I had worked there, but because I had grown up reading it. It just seemed to me to be a part of Arkansas. I've since learned that that's not the case [laughs] in every community. I mean, there is no attachment to the *Clarion-Ledger* in [Jackson] Mississippi as there was an attachment to the *Arkansas Gazette* in Arkansas.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And so . . .

JM: Gannett bought the—Gannett owns the *Clarion-Ledger*, don't they?

DD: That's right. They bought the—the *Clarion-Ledger* sometime right before the—that newspaper won the Pulitzer back in the early 1980s. And, I mean, there was just an—this incredible attachment to the paper. I mean, we all had a fondness for it. I think one reason that we resented the changes that Gannett brought about is because the paper was ours, and we had much more of a sense of ownership of the paper than we would have for just an employer. And I've told people in Mississippi that it's just hard for you to understand the special place the *Gazette* had in Arkansas. And—and I think that—you know, and everything I remember about the *Gazette*—that comes into play. So it was an incredibly, incredibly special time. I wouldn't give my—I wouldn't give my experience in Little Rock for all the tea in China.

JM: Yeah.

DD: You know, for whatever I can say about the *Democrat*—I mean, it gave me incredible opportunities to report. And while I used to have a good bit of animosity toward Walter Hussman [Jr], I no longer have. I mean, he's a businessman and a good businessman at that, as best I can tell. And I've been able to sort of separate my own deep attachment to the *Gazette* from the bitterness I that felt after it closed. I mean, many people were very, very bitter.

JM: Yeah, I know.

DD: I was at the—I was at the—the unveiling of this new documentary that—on AETN [Arkansas Educational Television Network] about the *Gazette*. [Editor's Note: *The Old Gray Lady: Arkansas's First Newspaper*, by Donna Lampkin Stephens and Kevin Clark]

JM: Yeah.

DD: I mean, there were people [laughs] getting mad afterward. [Laughter] Just rehashing all those memories.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

DD: I can't imagine—I mean, I love where I work now and I love my colleagues. But there's not near the sense of attachment to any workplace . . .

JM: Yeah, I went to the—the first showing of it, I think, was in the Clinton [Presidential] Library and . . .

DD: Yeah, I was there.

JM: Oh, were you there?

DD: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Well, I was there, too. But Donna put all that together. I had about a five—five-second snippet in the film but . . . [Laughs]

DD: Oh, is that right?

JM: Yeah.

DD: Well, Donna is now studying at USM this summer for a doctorate in media history.

JM: That's what she told me. I saw her, oh, about, oh, two—couple weeks ago. Her husband was inducted into the Arkansas Track and Field Hall of Fame, and I'm a member of the board of that, and so I—I saw her there. But . . .

DD: Well, it's funny—she's been here in town for a couple of weeks, and I've been so busy I haven't seen her.

JM: Yeah. My only quote that they used in that was they asked me what I thought about John Robert Starr. And I said, "I don't know. John Robert may—he may have been a pretty good newsman, but I never did like him." [Laughter] And they—that got a laugh. Of course, I had known John Robert Starr or Bob Starr—I had known him since about 1955. And I hadn't liked him since 1955. [Laughs]

DD: Well, I'm encouraging Donna to do a book on the *Gazette*. And I just think it would be an incredible contribution to literature.

JM: Yeah.

DD: And it—to me, the *Gazette* is a perfect example—and I'm putting on my historian's hat now is a perfect example of the transformation in—in the newspaper industry over the last fifty years. And obviously it goes back even farther than that—probably to the 1920s and 1930s, when chain ownership began to increase. But the *Gazette* is a perfect example of the effect of, you know, the conglomeration of media ownership in this country. And it's not to say that the *Gazette* was perfect. But, you know, its mistakes at the hands of—what happened to it at the hands—in the hands of Gannett—and, frankly, at the hands of its competitor, which is also a media chain—is really significant. I was struck—remember, I left in 1989 and the *Gazette* closed in 1991. And I was struck in the—in the coverage of the Gannett—of the *Gazette* closing—that it was very much a David versus Goliath story. Of, you know, young Hussman—David—fighting Goliath, when, in fact, it was Goliath versus Goliath. It was one [laughs] corporation fighting another, and it just happened that one had stockholders to report to and the other didn't.

JM: Uh-huh.

DD: So, in fact, I think it's the perfect story of the effects of corporatization upon journalism, as I see it. And I realize that probably the *Gazette* is not as much the good guy as in my romantic notion I would like to make it. But those of us who worked there will have a fondness for it that, you know, we'll keep for the rest of our lives.

JM: Yeah. Okay. If you've never read it, you know, Roy Reed was in charge of the project on the oral history of the *Gazette*. And he did a long—and towards the tail end he did a four-hour interview with Walter Hussman [Jr] and they've got it online. And it is a fascinating interview.

DD: Oh, I'd love to see it. Now is that part of that same project?

JM: Well, yes—yes and no. They—they did the *Gazette* first because they thought—you know, David Pryor put up a lot of money [from unexpended campaign funds] to get this program started. And so they decided, "Well, we should do the *Gazette* because those people—you know, they closed. Most people—well, they're liable to be spread all over the country." So they jumped in right away and did it. And then about the time that they started finishing, they decided, "Hey, we ought to do one on the *Democrat*, too."

DD: Oh, I see.

JM: So it's kind of the same auspices, but it is a different project than I had.

DD: But Dr.—I mean, Mr. Reed had talked to me about maybe getting—you know, me interviewing Cary and Cary interviewing me. Do I need to continue to doing that?

JM: Well, you—he might . . .

DD: [Words unclear] consider my bases being covered?

JM: Well, he might still be [interested]. I called for Cary at the [North Little Rock] History Commission yesterday and he was out. They were having some big project. They were having some—somebody and some group in from Chicago or something. And celebrating, I think, a black jockey who had won . . .

DD: Oh, that's right. Yeah, he's been working on that project about a black jockey who was very prosperous after the Civil War.

JM: Yeah, and who came in and moved to North Little Rock and built a big mansion there. So I left word to tell him that I need to talk to him. They said he would probably be tied up yesterday and today, so I just told them I'd call him back later.

DD: Well, if there is anything I can do to help, please let me know. I don't want—because I'm so disorganized and busy—but everyone's busy.

JM: Well, yeah, you've got a lot of irons—irons in the fire.

DD: If there's anything I can do for you, let me know.

JM: Yeah, I will do that, and you have—you have covered a lot of bases here that I've found very interesting and I think is going to be very helpful to the story. And I suspect that somebody may wind up doing a book on this stuff, you know. So I've done a lot of stuff about the war, simply because, you know, I'm doing the history of the *Democrat*, but obviously the history of the *Democrat*, you know, has a lot to do with the war and what happened because nobody in the early days would've—you know, it—it would've—the *Democrat* beating the *Gazette*

would've been like Malvern High School beating the Green Bay Packers.

They're . . .

DD: Exactly. It would've never dawned on any of us.

JM: No.

DD: It just wouldn't have dawned on us.

JM: No, not me either.

DD: Now what is your e-mail address?

JM: Okay, my e-mail address. Well, let me hang up here, and then I'll give you all that. At any rate I really want to thank you for this—this interview. I've really enjoyed it. And so we'll exchange some information here now and—and thanks a lot. Anything else that you can think of you need to say?

DD: No, I think I've pretty much covered it. Thank you.

JM: All right. I thank you, too.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center Staff]