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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Tim Hackler
Fayetteville, Arkansas
12 May 2005

Interviewer: George Arnold

George Arnold: All right. This is George Arnold. I'm interviewing Tim Hackler today. This interview is part of the [University of] Arkansas [Pryor] Center for Oral and Visual History's Project on the *Arkansas Democrat*. We'll transcribe the interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We'll give you the opportunity to review the transcript, Tim, at which point you'll sign a release. All I need for you to do now is give me your name and indicate that you're willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and to make the transcription available.

Tim Hackler: Okay. I'm Tim Hackler, and I'm more than willing to do all of the above.

GA: Great. I thought we'd start out with some personal history. Tell us when you were born, where you were born.

TH: Okay. I was born in 1946 in Springfield, Missouri, because that was the nearest hospital to Mountain Home, [Arkansas] which was where my clan comes from. So essentially I lived in Mountain Home from the time I was born until about 1955 when we moved to Rogers. My father was in the car business. He had a Chevrolet-Oldsmobile dealership in Rogers.

GA: In Rogers. Your parents, what were their names?

TH: Joe Bill and Eloise. Martin was my mother's [maiden] name. Her father was a lawyer. My father's father was a doctor who died from pneumonia from being out and about in a horse and buggy in the winter. So he died [when] my father was just two or three years old. My mother's father was the municipal judge in Mountain Home for many years. We go back on my father's side to 1753 when my paternal ancestors came here from Germany.

GA: To Arkansas?

TH: No, to Philadelphia and then [they] moved to Arkansas in 1836, the year Arkansas became a state. My great-great, maybe great—I'm not sure—grandfather had moved across the state in conjunction with the removal of the Cherokee Indians from McMinn County, that's M-C-M-I-N-N County, Tennessee. We don't know what capacity he was in, but probably he was a flunkie. Maybe he was somehow related to the Methodist Church because his son, my great-grandfather, became a Methodist minister.

GA: Okay, you guys go clear back to the origin of the state.

TH: That's right. Yes, we came here on the same year. That's right.

GA: Brothers and sisters?

TH: I have one brother, Chris, who is four years older. He's the head of the ethics—what they call the department of medical humanities—at the Medical Center in Little Rock.

GA: Okay.

TH: He's a philosopher.

GA: Oh, good.

TH: I was just a newspaper man. [Laughs]

GA: That's a philosopher too. Okay, take me to the time you arrived at the *Democrat*, then, I guess, school [and] college, to show the sequence [of how you got there].

TH: Well, I was reading some of the previous interviews done by the *Gazette*. The *Gazette* Project looks very interesting. I enjoyed all those, and while I was reading one of those, I was reminded that I was the editor of the *Bomber* Newspaper in the first grade at Mountain Home, so I guess it was pretty much in my blood from a very early age.

GA: Started early.

TH: I was the editor of my high school newspaper and editor of the college newspaper, the *Profile*, at Hendrix [College in Conway, Arkansas]. And essentially Bob McCord recruited me to the *Democrat*. I had always just assumed that I would go to work for the *Gazette* because in northwest Arkansas the *Democrat* really had no presence to speak of. A few people may have gotten it by mail, but it was basically *Gazette*. I was twelve years old when the [1957] Little Rock [Central High School] integration crisis happened and that made a big, big impression on me. I think it was probably at that time that I decided I wanted to be a newspaper reporter because I really admired the *Gazette* for the way they covered it and the fact that they, in my opinion, did the right thing in spite of the fact they were losing lots of sponsors, advertisers, and then of course they won two Pulitzer Prizes. I thought that was really great. So I think that's probably the point when I decided I wanted to be a newspaper reporter.

GA: Did you pick up the information about the Little Rock crisis from the *Gazette*? Is that where you got it?

TH: Yes. Well, the *Gazette* and how well I remember sitting in front of the television set at 5:30 every night watching the David Brinkley report [“The Huntley-Brinkley Report]. How embarrassing it was to see what was coming across television as the national news from Arkansas. To me, it was really quite embarrassing. It was actually almost a mini-civil war in the state because people chose up [sides] on that.

GA: Yes. Picked sides.

TH: You were either in one camp or the other. My family was a big part of it because one of my favorite uncles—my uncle Hugh—worked for Governor [Orval] Faubus and was a friend of Governor Faubus. My father had been in the state legislature, and then had been kicked off of the state police board by Orval Faubus. [My father] was on the *Gazette* side of the integration crisis.

GA: Was that why he got kicked off the board?

TH: No, well, yes—I think that was the real reason, but that combined with the following. Shortly after that, there was a truck, the Arkansas—what do you call what they measure trucks—the weights, measures department?

GA: Something, yes.

TH: Something like that. Well, they built one of those stops in the middle of Springdale which meant that all of the Springdale trucking companies, of which they were many more then than there are now, could obviously in some way

avoid that stop very, very easily, and my father pointed that out, and Orval did not appreciate that.

TH: So he was kicked off the state police board. I just ran across his gold shield the other day. [Laughs] At any rate, my family had all been very close, so that was a very unusual circumstance for something like that to come between us. It was kind of a strange situation for a few months.

GA: Did they work it out?

TH: Yes, yes. It didn't take too long.

GA: It didn't take too long.

TH: There was too much history among all those people, but it just goes to show the level of emotion there was in the state at that time. I think it's probably hard for younger people to appreciate that.

GA: Yes.

TH: I remember we took a trip to California during that period of time and we were yelled at a time or two. I'm pretty sure I remember a few small stones were thrown our way because of the Arkansas license plate. I had the odd position of thinking they shouldn't be throwing things at us, but at the same time thinking I completely understand why they're doing that. You know, I'm embarrassed to be from the place where the situation happened that caused that. I've always loved Arkansas and still do, but that was a bad time.

GA: A defining moment for the state.

TH: A defining moment for a very, very long time.

GA: You would have been in grade school, I guess—twelve years old?

TH: Oh, let's see, this is 1957 so I would have been about eleven. In 1957, I would have been eleven years old.

GA: Probably more aware than most eleven-year-olds are of things going on in the world around them like that.

TH: Yes, I think my father was more aware than the average person probably [was] about events around the world, really. We didn't really talk about it a lot, but it was always there, and I didn't know until many years later that everybody in the entire country didn't get the newspaper and read the newspaper from cover to cover before they did anything else. [Laughter]

GA: Okay. What year did you graduate from high school?

TH: 1964.

GA: Then you went right to Hendrix?

TH: Right.

GA: Okay and you got out of Hendrix what year?

TH: 1968.

GA: In 1968. With a degree in . . .?

TH: Social sciences was what the name [was]. [It was a] very broad degree for people who didn't know whether they wanted to study history or politics or government or psychology. You could just do a little bit of all of them, and that's what I did.

GA: Were you planning to go into newspaper work during college?

TH: Yes.

GA: That was on your mind?

TH: Yes, right. It was an unusual situation at Hendrix. The board asked me if I would be editor of the paper. [They] asked me my freshman year if I would be the editor of the paper my sophomore year. So I did, of course. And I suppose from that point on I was pretty sure that's what I was going to do. And I was madly in love with a girl named Susan Sickel, whose father—she wasn't madly in love with me—worked at the *Gazette*. He was in the business department, Lloyd Sickel. S-I-C-K-E-L. So he took me up to the *Gazette* and introduced me to Bill Shelton. I knew enough about Shelton to appreciate the grandeur of the situation—not to take too much of his time—but he was very gracious and I was very excited to be in that newsroom.

GA: Yes.

TH: That was the first time I guess I'd ever been in the newsroom. They published an article of mine by that point because I'd spent the summer between my sophomore and junior years at college in Russia with a group of students, and so I wrote a piece for the Sunday *Gazette* and they published that. But this was the first time I'd actually been into the newsroom—the first time I'd been into any city room for that matter. So I was very taken by that, but then Bob McCord . . .

GA: When was it you made that trip to the *Gazette* newsroom—at what point in college?

TH: That would have been around 1966.

GA: Okay.

TH: So I suppose in the next year—it must have been shortly after that that Bob McCord came to Conway and interviewed me for some program that he had—had

for many years—a television program on AETN [Arkansas Educational Television Network]. I sure hope I never have to watch that interview because I’m sure I would be unbelievably embarrassed by whatever it was I was spouting off. But at any rate, I was very taken with Bob, and over the course of the next, I guess, year or so, he convinced me to come to work at the *Democrat*, and I was pretty sure that I was going to do that. Then he had me in to meet with Gene Foreman, and after the meeting with Gene I was ready to sign on.

GA: Now, what were their positions in the *Democrat*?

TH: Gene had just come from New York at that point, I think. I think this was the period when he came back. He’d gone to *The New York Times*. Or, no. It was another newspaper. I don’t remember. Yes, it was the *Times*, and they had a strike just after he got there, and he had a family and couldn’t stay there for the many months that it was going to take to work that out. He came back as the managing editor of the *Democrat*, and so I met him and, like everyone one who has ever known Gene Forman, thought he was just such a fine man, stellar gentleman. Paul Nielson pointed out that I was the first person that Gene Foreman hired, and it was right at that period—the old man had died maybe a year or two before.

GA: Mr. [K. August] Engel?

TH: Yes. The owners really wanted to turn it into a good newspaper. So the pitch from Bob and Gene was that “We’re going to turn this into a really fine newspaper.” Of course, at that point there was none of this, “We’re going to run

the *Gazette* out of business.” At that point there was no reason to think that two newspapers in Little Rock wouldn’t last forever.

GA: The *Democrat* at that time was an afternoon paper, too, and the *Gazette* was morning.

TH: Right, that’s right. So their pitch was, “You’ll be in on the ground floor on something really exciting, and you’ll be able to do all sorts of things. You can report, write editorials, you’ll be on the copy desk. You’ll be able to do a lot more than you could do at the *Gazette*,” which, of course, was true. Shelton would have had me writing obits, I’m sure, for many months. So that’s the reason I went to the *Democrat*.

GA: Okay. Well, then, let’s talk about the job you started at and what you did. This would have been?

TH: 1968.

GA: Summer of 1968 maybe?

TH: Yes. Summer of 1968. Straight from Hendrix to Little Rock.

GA: Do you remember what the starting pay was?

TH: Yes.

GA: Do you?

TH: [Laughs] Ninety dollars a week, and at some point during that first year I got my first raise to \$95 a week. [Laughter] And they still were paying salaries in cash in little brown envelopes that they distributed every Friday.

GA: Was that a tradition there?

TH: I have no idea. I assumed that it was, but I have no idea. You could always tell who worked at the *Democrat* when you went down to the bank on Friday, because we were the only people with little brown envelopes in our hands.

TH: And it included coins. It wasn't just the bills, but the quarters and dimes, too.

GA: Wow.

TH: And, of course, that was for six days. We worked five and a half days a week.

GA: What were your hours?

TH: 7:00 a.m. until—I forgot what the theoretical closing time was. I suppose it was 4:00 or something like that.

GA: Yes.

TH: But 7:00 a.m., six days a week, and then on Saturday we were off in the afternoon. I don't remember the first articles I worked on, but the first really major work I did there and probably still to this day one of the hardest things I ever did was covering the Constitutional Convention. That was 1970, so I would have been a couple years older, I think. The convention—the fact that I was an afternoon reporter with three deadlines starting at 10:30 meant that I had to phone in these times, dictate the article, but at the same time listen to what was going on, making notes for future articles. That was very hard work.

GA: Yes

TH: I remember an instance where I did something that in retrospect was really stupid. I didn't think so at the time. There was the current Little Rock mayor, Jim Dailey, whose father owned an office supply business. I'm not sure. I can't think of its name.

GA: I think that's right.

TH: But he was a delegate to the convention. The convention was [composed of] really, really dedicated, wonderful people in Arkansas. That was a great experience, but like any reporter, I decided that I'd go to the keepers of the records and find out who, if anybody, had missed a lot of sessions. It turns out that Mr. Dailey had. He was late to a whole bunch of sessions, and so, not really thinking anything about it, I just wrote this little sidebar, probably four or five paragraphs about the man who missed the most, or [was the] latest in most sessions. I remember coming back from lunch one day and my colleagues sitting there in the press section below the speaker's platform [in the] House chamber were sort of laughing, and so I could tell they were laughing at me, and I sat down. So Silvia Spencer, who was with UPI [United Press International] at the time, said, "Well, you missed a really good speech by Mr. Dailey who shared a lot of thoughts about you."

GA: [Laughs]

TH: And, of course, at the time being young and inexperienced and foolish, I guess I probably thought, "Well, you know, I was telling the truth. It's hard, you know, but that's just tough. Let the chips fall where they may." But in retrospect, as I recall his explanation [was] that he lived in Little Rock and he would go back and try to get some work done at noon and sometimes he was a few minutes late—something like that. But I have—I think he is a fine man and I think he has absolutely the best instincts and motives, maybe not political instincts, but the best motives, and I regret embarrassing people in that kind of situation.

GA: What was your beat when you started? Did it change over time as to what you were doing?

TH: It did. One of the first beats was the police beat. I had a tough act to follow because I think Bob Sallee was the police reporter for a long time.

GA: Famous name in the *Democrat*.

TH: And, of course, Bob was part of the police brotherhood. I remember him coming back on Saturday nights, because we put out the Sunday morning edition, and showing me photographs the police had of various incidents that would never get into the newspaper. I was there for probably a few months, but it was very educational and the only thing that I really remember from that stint was listening to the police scanner—this was in probably 1968, possibly 1969—the captain had issued an order that [there would be] no more use of the word “nigger” and so on the scanner you could hear cops referring to “colored niggers.” That was very educational to me. You know, some things never change.

GA: Yes. Wow. So you went from police to what?

TH: I don’t remember. Let’s see, I guess most of the time I was a general assignment reporter. I just did features. One feature, a series that I did, I have mixed feelings about now. I went around to most of the colleges in the state because I had noticed at Hendrix that the black kids were all sitting by themselves. I knew Hendrix well enough to know that the kids there were not going to be doing anything obnoxious or anti-black or whatever, so I couldn’t quite figure out why the black kids were off by themselves. So that set me off, and I went around the state and I wrote a three- or four-part series about how black students were, at that

time I probably said, were being isolated, but now I would say were isolating themselves. I think it was a good series in a sense that it brought out something that was worth thinking about that people were not thinking about at that time. But it's probably a much more complicated situation than I thought at the time, and I think that I was probably inclined to think it must be the administration's fault or someone's fault. I couldn't quite figure out whose.

GA: Yes. Whose [fault] it was. [Laughs.]

TH: But I had that chip on my shoulder, and I'm sure that came through in the series.

GA: Remember what year that would have been about?

TH: Oh, it would have been about 1969.

GA: About 1969.

TH: It was still an interesting transition period back then at the *Democrat*. When I went to work there, I was literally the first hire of all those people who would be coming over. Bob Lancaster, I don't remember what year he came, but he was there when I was there. Paul Nielson is at *The New York Times* now. A lot of people who would go to the *Gazette* later—a lot of interesting characters—were being hired by Bob McCord at that time, and so there was a certain tension with the old guard. For example, George Douthit was famous for having kind of been an extension of the Orval Faubus public relations' department when he was covering Faubus for the *Democrat*. He and I really didn't get along too well. Something was happening out at Cummins Prison farm. I don't know what it was now, but both of us were assigned to go out there for whatever it was. Well, we each took our own cars, and a few days later I hear Douthit just screaming as only

Douthit could do, just red faced—he was three or four desks away from me—he said, “Hackler, don’t you know how to fill out a goddamned expense report?”

GA: [Laughs]

TH: What had happened was that I’d put down the actual mileage. So I guess the business office had pointed out to George that we had different mileage going to the same place. I was sorry to have messed up George’s way of supplementing his salary. That was a very wild place.

GA: How big was the city desk at the time? How many reporters?

TH: I guess there were fifteen, twenty, something like that. Yes, at the most.

GA: And over time, how did the difference between the old-timers and the new young Turks, I guess . . . ?

TH: Yes, young Turks. Well, I guess by the time—two years later, I suppose, at least half of the reporters were new. Some of them just had come out of college. Most of them had come from another newspaper. Some of them from the *Gazette*.

GA: Oh, really?

TH: Yes. A few.

GA: Do you remember any of those?

TH: Of course, Foreman had been at the *Gazette*. I only have heard, and I don’t know that this is accurate, but the *Gazette* had some kind of policy that if [you went] to work for the *Democrat* you weren’t going to come back there. So Foreman went to New York from the *Gazette*. I don’t know if that’s the reason he came to the *Democrat*, or whether Bob hired him because he could be managing editor. I guess that would be something very appealing—inventing a new newspaper,

because they were very serious about that, and I think they did it. I mean, the *Democrat* became a much better newspaper—a much better newspaper in 1970 than it was in 1967, that's for sure.

GA: Yes.

TH: And it looked a lot better too. It was a pretty good-looking newspaper by 1970. They redesigned it. I don't remember who they brought in to do that, but it was redesigned. And I think—I don't remember the circulation numbers anymore. They've grown, but I don't remember what they were. It seems like the *Gazette* was about 100,000 weekday and 135,000 [on] Sunday, like that. But I don't remember what the *Democrat* numbers were. Maybe 60,000 or 70,000 during the week and 80,000 on Sunday, something like that.

GA: Any other familiar faces you recall?

TH: Paul Nielson was the slot man for a good part of the time I was there. Paul came from—well, he was the son of a professor at the University of North Carolina, and his family was very academic. Paul decided he wanted to change jobs. I don't know why. He went to the *Pine Bluff Commercial* first, and then I believe he went to the *Gazette* and then came to the *Democrat*. Everybody who worked there at the time will remember Paul. He was a wonderful, eccentric man who had a full, red beard. He really reflected the way a lot of us felt we were, as the old saying goes, we were serious about our jobs, but we didn't take ourselves too seriously. He had some standards, and he certainly wasn't going to put up with anybody who didn't meet them, and that led to some bruised egos, but I think he got a lot better, much better work from copy editors—which I thoroughly enjoyed

by the way. I really enjoyed it. I think I was a copy editor for six months. That sort of gave me that chance to see what that was like. I liked it. I really enjoyed that a lot. Of course, I was just talking to Paul in New York a few months ago, and a copy editor at the *New York Times* generally does one piece a night, so that is a little more luxurious use of time than we had at the *Democrat*.

GA: How big was the copy desk then? How many people were there?

TH: About five or six maybe.

GA: Okay. I guess the hours were different from your reporting hours?

TH: Yes. I got started later and finished up later. Paul once described the process of putting out the newspaper as a lot like making love. In the sense that over the course of time things will start off sort of slow and then they would get faster and faster with more and more intensity until finally the last piece of copy was put up in the matting tube and that was it. The paper was ready and it was out.

[Laughter]

GA: Go ahead.

TH: I was just going to say from a sort of cultural perspective, I guess [that it was] very different in those days from what I gather it was later, because in those years when I was there the reporters and editors from the *Gazette* and *Democrat* were just one big tribe. I mean, we went to each others' houses and partied, went to the Officers' Club together, and there really was no animosity whatsoever. Occasionally Ernie [Dumas] would say something to me like, "Tim, you really want to work for the newspaper that's a nickel's worth of news?" [He said that] because the *Democrat* was making a big thing [about being] sold for only a nickel

at the time, but it was good-natured and we just had a blast. Those were great times. It's hard to imagine—kind of depressing to imagine—how things ended up, but at the time there was no war. No one thought in those terms. It was just a newspaper—a city with two newspapers, and we were trying to make a better afternoon paper.

GA: When you went there, did you go with the idea that you'd go and stay? Did you expect to move on?

TH: I really didn't think about that. I left the *Democrat* in 1970 for graduate school at Columbia [University]. Bob was a Columbia graduate. That was just a one-year program. I went in the 1970-1971 term. I spent about six months back in Little Rock. Bob Sallee and I put out the Sunday paper, which was an interesting experience. He was the city editor and I was the assistant city editor, and I did a lot of reporting at that period and then moved to Washington in 1971 to be the editor of something called Dispatch News Service, which had been set up by *The New York Times* reporter that broke the [My Lai, Vietnam] massacre.

GA: Hersh?

TH: Yes. Seymour Hersh. He was a nobody in 1971. He had the goods and he couldn't get any newspaper to publish it, so he started his own news service and distributed [My Lai] articles from Dispatch News Service, and it worked. Kind of hard to believe that it did work and, of course, he ended up at *The New York Times* shortly after that. So those were interesting days in Washington. And then—you want all this continued in chronology?

GA: Yes, please.

TH: I spent a year or two just really traveling a lot, especially in Latin America. Then I moved to New York, where I did a lot of freelance magazine journalism. In 1980 I moved back to Washington to work for [Arkansas] Senator [Dale] Bumpers as his press secretary, and in 1986 I went to work for Senator [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan as his press secretary for two years. I did freelance writing and then went to work for Jody Powell at Powell-Tate, a public relations firm. I was there until 1997 and moved back to Little Rock. I now live in Fayetteville, where I am semi-retired and semi-academic, doing some research.

GA: Okay. Very good. What about the physical layout in environment there at the *Democrat*? That seems to ring bells for people.

TH: Yes. Very much a Front Page situation. The newsroom in those days was on the second floor, and the Linotype machines were all on the third floor so it was just like an old B-movie set from a 1935 Chicago newspaper—all these old beaten up wooden desks and old Underwood typewriters, and people yelling across the newsroom, and being an afternoon newspaper, of course, there were more deadlines than the morning. [There were] three deadlines when I was there—10:30, 11:30, 1:30, I believe. So when sports had their own, they were on the same floor but they were kind of off in their own part of the room. And then Bob McCord and the other editors had their own little offices—glassed offices—around the newsroom. But I tell you, I’m like everybody else who had a chance to at least spend a little bit of time around those old Linotype machines because you enter that room and there were fifteen or twenty of those old things going, and each one like a little scene from the industrial revolution.

GA: [Laughs]

TH: The hot lead pouring out of one side, turning to type on one side of the machine and these old guys and their paper hats turned our pathetic copy into hot type and people running around you know, “Kill that page” or whatever. It was so romantic, really, in a way. But there was definitely a real cut off between people on that floor and the news floor.

GA: What do you mean?

TH: Well, they were just from a different world. Most of those guys had been there forever, and they had their own culture, and they didn’t think much of us then, especially the young reporters. So they’d always give you a hard time and Paul Nielson, whom I referred to earlier, was the slot man. Part of his job was to—he was the interface between the news department and the Linotype guys in the layout. The guys were laying out the paper and, boy, there were some fierce struggles going on there about 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon on almost every day. At the same time there were these odd little cubicles in which young women were typing, doing something that was very mysterious. I didn’t ever really understand what it was, but, of course, in retrospect it was the very beginning days of turning the newsroom toward computerization. All those great old Linotype machines going away, dinosaurs, and the printers already—the Linotype guys knew what was going on. They didn’t like these new people at all.

GA: Yes.

TH: I couldn’t quite grasp it, of course. I didn’t even know what a computer was at that age in 1969, but, yes, those were—I just loved being out there.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

GA: Okay, you were talking about the Linotype room. Was it called the composing room at that point, or was that new terminology that came later?

TH: No, I don't [know]. There was also stereotyping—stereotype guys. That was always a big mystery to me. I didn't spend a lot of time up there, so I don't remember the various departments too well. But they were—I could see where the word "journeyman" comes from, because some of those guys have been all over the country. [They had] this special knowledge that not many people have.

GA: The old traveling printer.

TH: Yes. That's right. I just saw somewhere the other day this engraving of an artist's imagination of William Woodruff bringing his press into Arkansas Post in a keel boat in 1819. And, really, the technology of putting out a newspaper didn't change a whole heck of a lot from 1819 until the 1970s. Just a gradual evolution and then computers came in.

GA: You mentioned the divide between the Linotype room and the newsroom. Did they have a way of—did they just yell at you? Did they have a way of making you feel uncomfortable?

TH: Oh, no, they were more subtle than that. They just kind of looked at you out of the corner of their eyes to make sure you weren't going to screw anything up while you were walking through there. I always suspected that they probably—if they ever bothered to read the newspaper, which I'm not sure about—didn't approve of the changing editorial stance of the *Democrat*, and that might be worth

going into. Because, of course, Bob McCord, I think, was known and still is known as kind of a moderate guy. He was very intelligent and receptive, but a moderate, and I wouldn't characterize the previous tone of the *Democrat* as being moderate. It was pretty hard right, I would say in my opinion and, do you remember Karr Shannon?

GA: I remember that name.

TH: Well, he had been there forever. I believe if anyone had the title of editor of the editorial page, he did. He wrote editorials, but he also had a column, a side column. And he had a great phrase: "forward marchers." It was total sarcasm about people who were going to get out there and change the world for the better. I thought that was a great phrase.

TH: I got the assignment to write Karr's obituary. The column was already [written before he died]. I guess he was in his seventies, anyway, when I came to work there. That was my first obituary, you know, a major ahead-of-time, mini-biography sort of obituary. I was surprised they asked me to do that, but I really enjoyed the process of going back and spending a lot of time in the "morgue," as we used to call it, and talking to people about him, writing his obituary. There was something a little strange about sitting at the desk that I had where I could look across about twenty five feet away and see Karr in his old office whacking away at the typewriter, and I was sitting there writing his obituary.

GA: [Laughter] I guess he knew what was going on.

TH: Well, he was a newspaperman, so I'm sure that he knew that people were going to the trouble to write an obituary ahead of time, I guess. I don't remember how,

[but] I believe he died not that long after. He may have died back there at the end of the sixties [1960s], I'm not sure. But he had a following, and I imagine the guys upstairs in the Linotype machine room followed it and thought a lot more highly of his opinions than they did about some of *The New York Times* columns that Bob was picking up, one or two published in the *Democrat*.

GA: Yes.

TH: Bob McCord was the editor of the editorial page. I believe we had one or two assigned columnists on staff, but I don't remember who they were. Of course, there was Bob Lancaster also, but that was not an editorial page. I think around the front page that was human-interest material. But Bob [McCord] wanted, just as he did when he went to the *Gazette* later—he was a moderating influence. At the *Democrat*, he was moderating and moving the paper from the right to the left. And at the *Gazette*, he represented the moderate center. He was trying to modify the kind of knee-jerk liberalism [of the *Gazette*] into a more moderate position. So I think Bob has been a major influence in the history of journalism in Arkansas.

GA: Was he already there when you came?

TH: Yes. He'd just been there a matter of months. He had been the editor and owner of the *North Little Rock Times* for a long time. McCord had been a reporter at the *Democrat*, I think sports, when he was a teenager. He was just always—he just loved newspapers. And as I recall, he, in 1957 at the integration crisis, when the *Democrat* needed all hands that they could [get], became a full-time reporter. I don't know whether he was already a full-time reporter or not, but he, of course,

got fully activated at that point. I don't know whether he went from there when he bought the *North Little Rock Times* directly from the *Democrat* or not. I don't know when he bought that newspaper, but he was there for quite a while. At the same time, he was doing his television program "McCord's Arkansas" for AETN.

GA: Yes.

TH: I believe he was hired probably in 1968, maybe early in 1968, by the nephews [Marcus George and Stanley Berry], I think. I'm on shaky ground here. Engel?

GA: I believe that's right. I think it's those two men that took over after he died.

TH: Yes. That's right. Of course, hiring Bob was the first thing they did to achieve that, and then Foreman, Gene Foreman was a huge addition.

GA: I guess the atmosphere at the time at the *Democrat* with all the emphasis on rebuilding the paper or changing the paper—there was a really strong attitude when I was there a few years later of, "Okay, I'll work here for a while until I can get on at the *Gazette*." Was that kind of your state of mind?

TH: It really wasn't. It really wasn't. I know that's the way it was probably before I was there, and not too long after I was there, but, of course, when I think back, I think about the people that I knew the best, and my friends. I think we weren't really looking ahead. We felt like were part of a very interesting experiment, and we just enjoyed putting out a newspaper. I think that's all we—you know, we were very young and I don't think we were thinking in career terms yet. Ernie [Dumas] a couple of times tried to hire me for the *Gazette*. That's always good. I never even went back to the bosses at the *Democrat*, did the routine of "you know you'll pay more to keep me."

GA: Did you get a raise out of the deal? [Laughs]

TH: Yes, but, you know, it really was an extremely unusual situation. I probably, in a sense that I'm not just talking about myself, but other people too—we really admired the *Gazette*, and if somebody asked us which was the [better] newspaper, we would, of course, obviously [say the] *Arkansas Gazette* is a better newspaper, but that didn't seem to be a reason not to try to put out a better afternoon newspaper. It was kind of exciting to be part of a group of people who really had the owners' blessing. The owners were completely behind them. So, in fact, not only was it not a newspaper war situation, I think it was probably very unusual in how close the reporters from both newspapers were. Probably not true in very many places today. There are not too many cities with two newspapers anymore.

GA: Right.

TH: So, then, of course, I was always impressed by the old hands that have gone other places from the *Gazette*. I remember going to someone's house for a party one night and some guy I wasn't familiar with was there. He was a few years older, so I asked my friend: "Who's that?" "Oh, that's Bill Whitworth." And I said, "Who's that?" And he said, "Oh, let me introduce you. He's the assistant editor of the *New Yorker*. He has a girlfriend that he comes back here to see." I thought, "Wow, that is it!" That has got to be the ultimate life description I've ever heard. I'll never know anyone that has a better life than someone who is the assistant editor of *New Yorker* and flies back to Little Rock to see his girlfriend. I thought, "If I could only even approach such greatness and happiness," you know. Bill became the editor of the *Atlantic* magazine. He really turned that into some

magazine. He just recently moved back to Little Rock. So many people from the *Gazette* went on to do such wonderful things. Pat Crow was also at the *New Yorker*.

GA: At what point did Bob McCord become the editor, whatever his title was, after he had the editorial page?

TH: I don't know. I moved away from . . .

GA: It was after you were gone?

TH: Yes, I think so.

GA: Oh, okay. It was kind of an unusual situation that he was really running the newsroom with his title of editorial page editor. Is that correct?

TH: Well, no, I don't think you would say he was running the newsroom. He was pretty much . . .

GA: The editorial page.

TH: He was the editorial page editor, and I guess Gene Foreman was the managing editor at that point and running the newsroom.

GA: Okay, okay.

TH: Ralph Patrick was the city editor most of the time I was there, maybe all the time.

GA: He came from the *North Little Rock Times*, didn't he?

TH: That's right.

GA: Another Hendrix graduate. [Editor's note: Ralph Patrick graduated from Arkansas State Teachers College, now the University of Central Arkansas, in Conway.]

TH: [He was] a very educated guy who was also really excited to be part of this experiment, and, of course, he'd been—I don't know what year it was, but he started the *Arkansan*, which didn't last too long, and he ended up in Atlanta at the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

GA: Right.

TH: He was a fine man. He was a fine man to work with.

GA: In between the magazine and Atlanta he did a short stint at the Bentonville paper.

TH: Oh, that's right. You mentioned that. I didn't know about that.

GA: I had known him in Little Rock, and he hired me at Bentonville. I guess both of our departures were from Little Rock.

TH: Well, you made that transition from—you've been on both sides of that. But when you went to the *Gazette* after the war had started, or in those early stages, was there any socializing between the reporters at the two newspapers?

GA: I don't recall very much going on but there, the animosity had not yet begun I don't believe. I guess Ralph worked for Gene Foreman and directly under him.

TH: That's right.

GA: Okay.

TH: Yes, Bob, of course, was on the editorial board—whatever the official title was, so he certainly had major influence on the *Democrat* as a whole, but as far his the day-to-day work, he was the editor of the editorial page.

GA: Okay.

TH: He was—I believe this is right, that was the time when newspapers were starting op-ed pages around the country. And I believe he started the op-ed page during

that time. He was very meticulous, of course, about facts and figures and all.

From time to time, he would have some project that he was doing some kind of special research on, and I would help him with that.

GA: Well, anything else you can think of we ought to mention here?

TH: I kind of feel like being a young newspaper reporter is a favor that the community allows you to do because you don't really know a lot. Let's face it, half the time you don't really know a lot about what you're talking about, or you don't have the background to put it into perspective, but somebody's got to do it. It's like a liberal arts education to be a newspaper reporter, so I think it's a great thing for anyone. Having a few years as a reporter teaches you an awful lot about the way things work and [the way] people work that you're never going to understand anywhere else. So I'm really pleased to have [had] that chance and I just think back to the people that I worked with at the *Gazette* and the *Democrat*. I'm just grateful I had those opportunities and sorry I made all those stupid mistakes.

[Laughter]

GA: Okay, that may be a good place to stop.

TH: Okay.

GA: Tim, thanks very much.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Brenna Berry]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]