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Arkansas Democrat Memories

By Charles Hemingway
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Recollections of *The Democrat*

The *Arkansas Democrat* that I remember, in the period from 1962 to 1969, had the feel of the newsroom from Moss Hart's *The Front Page*. It was a loud, fast-paced, vibrant place, crackling with excitement. And it was a heady experience for a 15-year-old kid, which is what I was when the experience began.

The place was populated by characters all larger than life. *The Democrat* became like a second home for me. The sports staff, and later Roberta Martin and Johnnie Qualls of the Sunday Magazine, became a second family.

My presence at *The Democrat* came about as a matter of luck. I was running track at Little Rock Central High School. I was also a journalism student and on the staff of *The Tiger*, the school newspaper. Jimmy Wilder, who covered high school sports for *The Democrat*, was covering a home track meet at Little Rock Central and Gene Herrington, the managing editor, had come to the track meet to fill in as a photographer. Somehow that evening, after I had finished my race, there was some talk about how I was interested in getting a summer job at *The Democrat*. I went down to interview with Gene

the following week and he put me to work in the summer of 1962 under Jack Keady, the Sports Editor.

Let me first give you a verbal tour and paint a mind picture of *The Democrat* that I remember from the 1960's; then a review of the personalities that I recall.

The Place

The Democrat of those days was a block from what was considered the heart of Little Rock – 5th & Main. The newspaper was housed in a 3-story red brick building on the southwest corner at 5th & Scott. The main entrance was from 5th Street. It was a somewhat grimy place, hot and dusty in the summers, that had a comfortable lived-in, well-worn feel to it.

The first floor housed the Advertising Department and the business offices. The Advertising Department was behind a big counter, immediately in front as you came up a short set of stairs upon entering the building. The business office was an important place. It was where you showed up each Friday to get paid. Pay was in cash. The bills were folded in half in a small manila-colored envelope that you could stick in your front shirt pocket. Any loose change was always in the bottom. It was also where the offices were of the “old man,” as he was referred to – Mr. K.A. Engel and where Mr. Stanley Berry had his office. All I knew was that both were spoken of in reverent tones. I was told that Mr. Engel owned the paper but Mr. Berry ran the paper.

Also to the right as you entered the building was the stairway leading to the second floor, where the news offices were housed. I believe it also went up to the third floor because the hallway and stairs were always grimy and dusty. The typesetting operation, with the linotypes and the page-building operation, was on the third floor.

If you took the right hand door at the top of the landing on the second floor, that led to the Sports Department and the Society Department. The Society department had small offices in the northwest corner of the second floor. There was a small hallway that led into an open area where the Sports Department was located. Behind the Sports Department was the Photography Department and around a corner from the Sports Department was the news room.

But from the front of *The Democrat* building, if you took the stairway to the second floor and turned left (instead of right) at the top of the landing on the second floor, that led into the main news room area. To your immediate left, overlooking 5th Street, was a row of editorial offices. There was an office shared by the two staff artists (Jon Kennedy was the editorial cartoonist and his assistant was Deb Polston), Marcus George, who was the City Editor, then Karr Shannon, who was the columnist, had his office, and Gene Herrington, the Managing Editor, had the corner office overlooking 5th & Scott, I believe.

Next to Gene Herrington's office was an area closed off by a small wooden fence with a swinging door gate. This area housed the Sunday Magazine. Roberta Martin was the editor. Johnnie Qualls was her assistant. Johnnie's husband, Waymes Qualls, worked downstairs in Advertising. I knew Waymes because he came upstairs every Friday, dutifully turning over his little brown pay envelope to Johnnie.

As you came through the second floor doorway, with the suite of editorial offices on the left overlooking 5th Street, to the immediate right you caught your first glimpse of the main news room. As you walked into the main news room, the doorway into the

morgue was around a corner and on the right. The main newsroom was an open area dominated by the long news desk. On either side were work stations with telephones and manual typewriters for reporters and editors. At the opposite end of the news desk from the editorial offices was a U-shaped opening, the slot, where the news editor sat. Around the slot where the news editor sat were wire baskets for copy and headlines. There was a pneumatic tube system for sending copy to the third floor for typesetting. Along the wall overlooking Scott Street there were several desks. I believe this is the area where George Douthit, who had the Capitol beat; Bobbie Forrester and James Scudder, who covered city hall and other city news; and the state desk (where John Ward was) were located.

Behind the news editor's desk was the doorway leading into the wire room and the local offices of the Associated Press. Wick Temple was in charge of the AP operation for several years while I was there. Harry King was the AP sports editor. John Robert Starr worked there too and took over when Wick Temple got transferred with the AP to someplace like Kansas City. The wire room housed teletype machines for news and sports. There were stairs in back of the AP room that led to a dock where the printed newspapers were loaded onto delivery trucks.

The news editor (or slot man) would be sitting in the slot, looking down the long news desk toward the suite of editorial offices. To his left in an open area leading to the Photography Department and the Sports Department was a black spiral staircase that went to the third floor where the linotypes and typesetting equipment were located. One of my jobs was to run copy from the Sports Department upstairs to be set, so I got to know those stairs, up and down, very well.

Emerging from those stairs onto the third floor was a deafening experience. The

noise of rows of clacking linotypes hit you. Carbon and slag and metal shavings littered the floor. It was a hot and dirty environment. Chains, turned black from the carbon and soot, hung from above and to the side of the linotypes onto which were hooked long iron bars called “pigs.” Elsewhere on the floor were heavy carts of used lines of type from the pages that had been broken down and that were waiting to be dumped into boiling cauldrons of melted lead from which new pigs would be molded.

Beyond the staircase and away from the city desk slot man on the left hand side of a large hallway was the Photography Department. There was a waist high counter and behind the counter was the entryway, a black winding hallway, leading into the darkroom. O.D. “Dewey” Gunter was the lead photographer. Glenn Moon was his chief assistant and there were different photographers at different times. Three others I recall were Les Beale, Mac McCants and Hubert Smith.

Tucked around the corner from the news room, off in its own small area, was the Sports Department. There was a large, round desk with a small slot where the sports copy editor/make-up man, sat. The sport writers all shared places around the desk. Jack Keady, the Sports Editor, had his separate desk in the corner. There was another separate desk next to Keady’s that was typically where the outdoor editor sat. Later, when Jack hired Andy Morris away from Arkansas State to be the Assistant Sports Editor, that became Andy’s desk.

The huge printing press was at the back of the building behind the Advertising department, and there was a conveyer that the bundled stacks of papers would slide on and then be loaded onto delivery trucks. It may have taken up two floors. I was fascinated by the press and on occasion I’d go and watch as they set up the plates to run

the press. The chief press operator was a gray-headed gentleman. Every day he would make a new printer's cap that he folded a certain way and put on as the presses got under way. It was white when the presses started and at the end of the press run, it would be smudged with black ink. I can remember the red flashing lights and the bells going off as the presses started to roll, the high whine of the newsprint reeling off huge rolls and going through the press and the folded newspaper sections coming out the other end. Somehow every tenth paper or so the press would push one of the papers so that a corner tilted out. One of the pressmen would grab it and start flipping through the pages to check on page alignment or for some other problem.

This was the world, the physical environment of *The Democrat* and its sights and sounds that I came to know and love. Now for some of the personalities I remember and some of the stories.

The Sports Department

The sports staff when I started in 1962 consisted of Keady as the Sports Editor; John Moore, who was the copy editor and in charge of page makeup; Larry Rea, who covered North Little Rock high school sports; Jimmy Wilder, who covered Little Rock high school sports, and John Heuston, who was the Outdoor/Fishing Editor. John would also cover pro wrestling and boxing whenever those sports came to town. (Actually, we all got a chance to do that. The promoter would come around and drop off free tickets to see the wrestling matches or boxing matches that were always at Robinson Auditorium). I don't remember who covered Arkansas Intercollegiate (AIC) sports. Randy Coleman, later a lawyer in Little Rock, covered golf on a part-time basis. Looking back on it now with 40 years of perspective, we only covered sports from the white high schools in Little

Rock. If Philander Smith College had sports, we didn't know it. There was occasional coverage of Arkansas AM&N in Pine Bluff, but it was spotty.

The sports desk was a funny place to work, lots of practical jokes. My initial job was to be the copy boy, running copy, headlines and page dummies from the Sports Department, up the black spiral staircase, dropping it off to be set, bringing back galley proofs and page proofs for proofreading, and doing any other errands.

There are a couple of things that my job as "copy boy" included that have been lost in time with the changing technology. One of my jobs was to pull the wire copy, which would take me over to the AP offices. I would dally whenever I could, wandering down the row of wire machines, reading copy as it would come in from the various wires. This task also involved pulling photos from the photo wire. The photos would come off the wire wet and they'd have to dry out. Then the photos would be mounted on a poster board using an adhesive sheet. There was a small hot press that we'd use to glue the photo to the poster board so we could send it upstairs to have a cut made. Occasionally the bells on one of the machines would start clinging and I'd zip over to read whatever new lead was coming on whatever the lead news stories were that day. The copy paper for the wire machines was only about 5 inches wide. I got to the point where if I saw one of the machines running low on copy paper feeding from the bottom, they'd let me change it. That was fun because you took a bottle of this rubber cement and glued a section of the bottom piece of copy paper in the box that was about to run out onto the first piece in the new box. Funny what you remember now. We went through lots of jars of rubber cement at *The Democrat*. Articles were typed on single sheets of paper, but were glued together in one long story to make it easier for the linotype operators to set.

We also had a half-tone cut file of cuts [photos] of coaches and sports stars, local and national, that we'd keep for reuse. These would be pulled from the page dummies after they'd been used and returned to an envelope in an alphabetical file we kept.

A fellow named Norman, whose last name I can't recall, was the Razorback sports stringer up in Fayetteville. I later took Norman's place at Fayetteville as the sports stringer at \$200 a month. I learned from him a technique that stood me in good stead in my later work as a reporter writing on deadline – composing and dictating as you went along. Norman would call from Fayetteville and want to dictate his story and whoever was available would take the call. There were a lot of times I would take it. Cradling the phone on my shoulder I would listen as Norman dictated: “Frank Broyles said today comma quote period unquote.” Sometimes he would have had time to write up his story, sometimes not. The other way we got Razorback sports stories was by the bus. Norman would cover a practice or scrimmage that might end at 7 p.m., race home to write it up and then race to the Fayetteville bus station to get it on the 9 p.m. bus heading to Little Rock. The bus would arrive the next morning and me or another on the staff would go to the bus station and pick up the envelope. Inside would be copy for that afternoon's newspaper. Later, when I became the stringer, I would sometimes dictate my stories and sometimes race to the bus station, just like Norman did.

The mid-1960s, when I was a student at the University of Arkansas and writing sports for *The Democrat*, were a pinnacle in sports achievement for the Razorbacks that has not been matched to this date. Probably the greatest sports event I had the privilege to be involved in reporting was the 1969 Southwest Conference game for the national championship between the Razorbacks and the Texas Longhorns in Fayetteville.

Everybody came, from President Nixon down. I spent the first half in the press box and after halftime went down to the sidelines to take some color pictures, see if I could get some quotes and to be positioned to be on the field when the game ended. The sidelines were crowded with dignitaries of all sorts. I happened to glance up on one occasion and I was standing beside Billy Graham. I nodded and said “hi” to him. Hootie Ingram was an assistant coach for the Razorbacks and he was on the sideline too. He saw Billy Graham standing there, noticed I had my camera around my neck (the H1A Pentax I bought from Les Beale) and he came running over to get me to take a picture of him standing there with Billy Graham. I obliged but didn’t have the presence of mind to have him get a picture of me with Billy Graham.

Jack Keady

Looking back on it, I don’t think Jack had any idea he was going to be taking on a new, 15-year-old employee in that summer of 1962. Jack was quiet and low key. He was balding and not that tall. He tended to wear light colored broadcloth shirts and he wore a light colored straw hat in the summer. Just as Jon Kennedy, the editorial cartoonist, worked in the shadow of George Fisher at *The Gazette*, Jack worked in the shadow of Orville Henry, *The Gazette’s* sports editor. Keady seemed completely nonplussed and never seemed enamored of Frank Broyles and the Arkansas Razorbacks, which was the common complaint against Henry. Jack just seemed to take it all in stride. Jack loved golf and at one point built up an area in his backyard and put in a putting green so he could practice putting and chipping. Jack also covered Arkansas Travelers baseball and was the official scorekeeper for Traveler home games. I’d gotten pretty good at covering American Legion baseball and also got to be a fan of Traveler baseball. The summer of

1964, after I'd graduated from high school, Jack went out of town for some reason when the Travelers were in town for a home series. Jack asked me if I would cover the game and be the official scorekeeper for one night and I was thrilled to accept. Everything went well until about the 6th inning when the batter hit a stinging grounder past the second baseman, the center fielder dove sideways for it and it just glanced off his glove. I heard the play-by-play announcer saying something like, "Is it a hit or an error, we'll have to get a call from the scorekeeper," or something like that. My heart stopped. I gave the guy a hit and sweated bullets the rest of the night, hoping there would be no more calls like that.

In those days there were spittoons scattered around *The Democrat*, brass spittoons that always seemed to be about 3/4s full of a liquid that was light-colored on the surface – pretty disgusting stuff. Jack Keady had one. One of the first times Jack called on me to get some copy from him to take upstairs, I failed to notice the spittoon and managed to kick it with a foot. Thank God it did not spill. It tilted and a few drops splashed out, but it stayed upright. I always made sure I was fully aware after that about where that spittoon was located.

Jack was always a gentleman, hardly ever seemed to get upset. The only time I ever saw him angry involved John Heuston, the outdoor writer. Heuston wasn't in all the time and came in most often on the weekends to get his column turned in and do other articles for an outdoor section in the Sunday paper. Jack didn't typically come in on weekends. One weekend Heuston had an article about a championship bird dog that had died. Heuston accompanied the article with a half-column thumbnail picture of the dog and it ran in the Sunday paper. That article and photo did not sit well with Jack. What

upset Jack most was that it was not only a picture of a dog, but of a dead dog at that. The next time Jack saw Heuston, he laid into him – “Don’t you ever run a picture in this paper again of a dead dog.”

I was visiting my youngest son in Little Rock in 2001 and ran into Jack in a grocery store off Cantrell Road. I recognized him immediately. I don’t think he recognized me at first. He was well into his 80s by then. We visited briefly and he caught me up on his family. He didn’t play golf anymore and the putting green in his backyard was long gone. He had been a father figure for me while I was at *The Democrat* and I was glad that our paths had crossed this one last time, more than 40 years after he had put me to work under him in the Sports Department.

John Moore

John Moore was from Batesville and he’d gotten his start in journalism working at the *Batesville Guard*. He came to *The Democrat* from the *Guard*. John was hilarious. He regaled us with stories of everyday Batesville life: “Well, I remember the day that Miss Ida Mae” or “That reminds me when Mr. Smith, who lived down by Ivy Corners...” Then he’d reel off some warm and funny tale. He lived at the YMCA for a couple of years before he finally moved into a duplex near downtown Little Rock. Then John would regale us with stories about a couple of spinster sisters he had met who lived next door and we learned of their comings and goings. He was slender, had black hair and bushy black eyebrows, dark skin, always looked like he needed a shave even though he had just done so, and he had a sing-songy voice with a lilting southern accent that made him sound like Gomer Pyle. He didn’t seem to fit the image of someone who would be in a sports department, but he was a whiz at page make-up and editing. John

would dish out the wire copy for editing and jot down the headline size and type that we were to write. He'd also write the length he wanted on the copy. We had a formula we used with our pica poles to convert wire copy into the length it would be when set in type. So we'd edit the copy to size and write a headline on a separate sheet of paper, then both would go back to John. I'd gather up a batch at certain intervals and run it upstairs. At a certain point in the morning, or on Saturday evenings, after he'd done the page layouts, John would head upstairs to the third floor where the pages would be made up. He'd stay up there until the pages went to bed (when the pages, set in metal type, would be rolled over to be put on the press.) While John was up there, he would call down and I'd head up to bring down galley proofs and page proofs and we'd sit around the big table proofreading. Or, if someone had come back from a game and had gotten their story written up, I'd run it up to John and give it to him to be typeset.

The funniest story I recall John telling involved a mistake that happened while John said he was working at the *Batesville Guard*. John said that in those days the *Guard* was a four-page newspaper published on news stock that was a little larger than the page size of the *Gazette* and *Democrat*. Pictures were engraved in a rotogravure process and glued to a block of wood, then inserted into the page frames. Apparently the *Guard* had the same format for every edition: State and local news on the front page, society news and features on the second page, agricultural and farm news on the third and sports on the back page. John said that to cut down on costs, the inside two pages always had a two-column by 6-inch cut at the top of the page in the same location each week. Somehow one week the photos got reversed. On the second page was supposed to be a picture of a bride-to-be from a prominent Batesville-area family, all dressed up in her

wedding dress. On the third page was supposed to be a picture of a prize winning hen from the poultry judging show at a recent county fair. When the newspaper came out, on page 2 was the photo of the chicken and under it the cutline read: “Ms. so-an-so so-and-so, will become the bride of...” Under the photo of the bride-to-be on page 3 the cutline read: “Plenty of Meat Here”.

Larry Rea

Larry was short and extremely skinny. In tone and manner, he was like Don Knotts’ Barney Fife character. I remember one occasion when John Moore came back from a morning break and told Larry about great sale on suits going on down at Jimmy Karam’s Men’s Store, down around the corner near 5th and Main. John said he’d gotten a suit there for \$10, only problem was it had to be tailored to fit him. Larry took a break and went looking for a suit. About a half-hour later he stormed back in the office, mad as a wet hen and really upset. John got him calmed down and got the story out of him. Larry said that he found a suit he liked, but the pants were too big, so he checked on getting them taken up. The tailor told him that because Larry was so skinny if he took up the pants to fit him, the back pockets would touch. Larry also picked up the nickname, “Mr. Ree.” There was one particular coach during football season from out in the state who would call in Friday night game results. He could never get Larry’s name right. Rea is pronounced “Ray.” He apparently liked the way Larry took his game reports or wrote them up because he would always ask for “Mr. Ree.” Larry left *The Democrat* to go to the University of Arkansas and then took a job with the Sports Department at the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*.

Jimmy Wilder

I felt a lot of kinship with Jimmy. He was from a single parent home too, helping his mother out and helping to look out after his younger brother. I would see him all the time hanging out at the Central High athletic fields watching practices. Jimmy in those days drove an old Ford, the seats of which were always cluttered with athletic gear, dirty clothes, etc. Jimmy had thin blond hair in a flat top and he always had a reporter's notebook in his hand. Jimmy was not particularly fashion conscious and high school sports was his life. Jimmy was the most serious of the sports crew and at times could get a little exasperated with the cutting up and playing and goofing around on the sports desk. I can remember him saying, "Why don't you guys get serious?" The comeback was always, "C'mon Wilder." Jimmy left *The Democrat* to go to Arkansas State and I lost track of him.

Andy Morris

Andy Morris was working in the sports publicity office at Arkansas State when Jack hired him to come to *The Democrat*. He was a bundle of energy, with a lot of drive and great ideas for energizing the sports pages and taking on the *Gazette*. After I had finished my first summer in 1962 at *The Democrat*, Jack let me stay on to work weekends – Friday nights covering football games and working Saturday night on the sports desk. Andy was very supportive of me in continuing my sports writing and my track career.

Other Personalities and Recollections

If I had to focus on a tone or tenor that embodied the distinction between the *Gazette* and *The Democrat* in that era, I'd say that the staff at *The Democrat* operated with a slight inferiority complex toward the *Gazette*. Maybe it came from the *Gazette*

having taken the high road during the 1957 integration crisis. But it came down to matters as subtle as the quality of newsprint. The *Gazette* seemed to be printed on better quality stock while *The Democrat* was printed on coarser, cheaper paper. The *Gazette's* printing always seemed cleaner, crisper and easier to read and the ink and colors didn't seem to bleed together like happened on *The Democrat's* newsprint. But *The Democrat* writing and approach had more of a working man's feel with a news writing style that seemed harder-hitting and direct. The *Gazette* seemed to be more of a thinking man's newspaper, more intellectual in approach and less gritty than *The Democrat*. *The Democrat* news staff seemed cut from the mold of *The Front Page*. From afar it seemed that the *Gazette's* writers were blander and less inclined to the hard living that I had noticed among some on *The Democrat's* staff.

Gene Herrington

Gene Herrington was friendly and outgoing and could put you at ease quickly. I had no idea who he was when I met him at the track meet nor did I have any idea where he stood in the organizational structure at *The Democrat*. That realization only sank in when I showed up for the interview the week after the track meet. He was kind and interested and he told me he thought they could use me over in sports. He took me over and introduced me to Jack Keady. I felt that Gene took an interest in me. I was a poor kid from a single parent household. After I had gone off to college at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Gene let me have a standing arrangement to come down to *The Democrat* and work whenever I was in town, weekends included. That money helped me get by and helped me afford to stay in school. In college I got to be friends with Gene's son, David. I'll never be able to repay Gene's kindnesses.

John Robert Starr

Everyone who worked at *The Democrat* seems to have a John Robert Starr story. I am no different, even though my contact with him was minimal and limited to his AP days. Larry Rea had been in charge of taking the calls from the local ball parks on Little League and Pony League results. When I started in sports in the summer of 1962, Jack put me working under Larry writing up Little League, Pony League and American Legion results. Larry and I worked out an arrangement with scorekeepers at the ball parks around Little Rock and North Little Rock to keep statistics about the best hitters and pitchers in the various leagues. We'd write up a little synopsis of the highlights from the games, who hit home runs, etc. and then we'd have some agate copy listing league results, etc. Down at the bottom of a modified box score would be an agate line with something like, "Johnny Jones homered for the Wildcats" or something like that. As I recall, Starr was living out near Mablevale or some area of Western Little Rock and his son was playing Little League ball. One morning Larry and I were working as usual and here comes Starr, barging into the sports area, waving the previous day's sports section and mad as hell. His son had hit a home run and we had not put his son's name down as having homered. Starr told us in no uncertain terms we'd better not ever let that happen again. So the rest of the summer whenever the scorekeeper from that league called, whoever took the results (Larry or me) would always ask, "And how did little Starr do?"

Marcus George

I understood that Marcus George was related somehow to Mr. Engel. Mr. George was standoffish and removed, in contrast with Gene Herrington's friendly and outgoing manner. If Gene came out of the office and I was sitting there working in the Sunday

Magazine area, he'd say hello and ask how things were going. Mr. George was all business. If he came out of his office, he wouldn't really acknowledge anyone – he'd just go about his business, take care of what he had come out of his office for and then go back in.

Karr Shannon

Karr Shannon seemed a bit of a curmudgeon, always brooding and overly serious about something. His daughter, Judith Shannon, was a classmate of mine, quite a contrast from her father. She was red-headed and had a lively sense of humor. Mr. Shannon seemed too old to have a high school aged kid. He always seemed to have a pipe and his office seemed perpetually dark. As I recall, he also seemed to wear glasses with a dark tint and he had a shock of white hair. His reputation as a columnist among those of us of younger age on the staff was that his writing was somehow uninspired, as if he were simply going through the motions.

The Editorial Cartoonists

Jon Kennedy was the editorial cartoonist and he lived in the shadow of the *Gazette's* George Fisher. I recall him being thin, quiet and actually somewhat dour in nature. Kennedy's cartoon just weren't as funny and weren't as artistic as Fisher's. Polston was Kennedy's assistant. He was shorter and friendlier than Kennedy. I recall that he primarily did other types of artwork, for advertising, etc. It seems like Polston would do occasional art for the Sports and art for the Sunday Magazine.

The Photographers

Dewey Gunter was the chief photographer. He was another of *The Democrat* staff who wore a hat. Glenn Moon wasn't exactly the deputy, but he functioned that way

because he had seniority. Dewey and Glenn used 4x5 Graflex cameras primarily. It seemed that the newer and younger photographers (Les Beale, Mac McCants and Hubert Smith) used 35 mm SLR's, primarily Leicas and Pentaxes. The protocol for getting a photographer was that you had to fill out a slip indicating when and where you wanted the photographer to be and if you were going to be there or not. This would go in a box, Dewey would pull the slips out and assign the photographers.

Dewey assigned himself the big political events and did a lot of the society photos that were shot at *The Democrat*. Just outside the photographer's area was a backdrop where subjects would be posed. I remember Miss Thurston from Society trooping over young ladies to have their pictures taken and Dewey took a lot of those shots. Dewey liked the higher profile type of work and seemed to relish taking pictures of the "Miss Arkansas" Pageant contestants – that sort of thing.

Glenn got sent out to do a lot of Friday night sports. Glenn had a reputation as being a little lazy and basically a one-shot type of guy – he'd take one or two pictures at an event and that was it. Glenn took great offense (and complained loudly to Dewey who came to Jack Keady) at one gag that Larry Rea pulled off over a Friday night football game involving the North Little Rock Wildcats. It was typical that the photographers got a credit line under the photos they took when they went out on assignment. On the credit line under the photo that Glenn took from that particular game, Larry wrote: "Photo by Moonlight." Nobody caught it on the page proofs and it came out in the paper that way.

If McCants is the guy I'm thinking about, he was something of a risk taker. It seems like McCants and his girlfriend went into a nightclub where there were illegal slot machines and McCants took some photos. If McCants is the guy I'm thinking of, I

listened to him bragging about what he had done. He said his girlfriend's nickname was "Big Red."

The most artistic of the lot that I remember was Hubert Smith, who seemed to put a lot of care and craft into the photos he composed. Les Beale was a journeyman photographer, technically proficient but not that artistic. Les sold me my first camera, an H1A Pentax. I loved to spend time in the darkroom in the dim red light. I spent a lot of time watching Beale develop film and printing and processing pictures. I never got the hang of loading 35 mm film onto a Nicor reel while I was at *The Democrat*, but Les would let me load film into the enlarger and I learned to "spot" and "dodge" prints while they were under the enlarger and then put them through the developing and fixing stages, then put them on the large, heated shiny metal roller for drying.

Fred Petrucelli

Fred Petrucelli was one of the friendliest and funniest men I ever met. He had a wonderful sense of humor and was open and engaging. He was a fast writer and he could crank out the work. Fred always had a ready laugh, he had a rascally sense of humor and he was a master of the double entendre. For some reason, Fred always called me "Chas." I think he may have taken a liking to me because when things were slow on the sports side, I'd go over to the news side and offer to help. I didn't mind taking stories over the phone. I had gotten pretty good at it working on the sports side, taking calls about Friday night games and writing them up. Everybody's least favorite chore was taking obit calls. I didn't mind, so I'd help out in that way and got practice writing up obituaries called in by funeral homes.

Fred was involved in some legendary Saturday night poker games at *The Democrat* after the paper had gone to bed. Fred's task was to try and get rid of me before they could pull out the bottle and start the poker game. I loved hanging around the newsroom, listening to the talk and the stories and picking up what I could of the newspaperman lifestyle. But I was a 15-16-year-old kid. Some Saturday nights there'd be a bigger group of guys than typical hanging around when the paper went to bed. I know one of the regular guys was Bob Sallee, the police beat reporter, and maybe Bob Trout and John Scudder. I didn't particularly notice at first that it was being strongly hinted that I leave, but Fred would say, "Chaaaz, (drawing it out) don't you gotta be gettin' home?" At first I didn't take the hint and then he came up with a story about causing *The Democrat* to get in trouble with wage and hour laws if I didn't go home because I was so young and I'd been working so many hours.

Fred was great friends with Roberta Martin, the Sunday Magazine editor, and was always stopping by to kibitz and kid with her. Roberta was somewhat prim and proper but she loved Fred's kidding. In one particular Sunday Magazine, Roberta ran an article about a high school kid who went to Central named John Pagan. His hobby was collecting political campaign buttons. I knew John from Central. He worked on Stage Crew there. John had managed to collect campaign buttons from national and state campaigns alike and I think he'd check with people before they went to political conventions and ask them to bring him back buttons. Then he'd use the extra buttons to trade for ones he didn't have. Roberta ran the article on the front page of the Sunday Magazine under the headline, "Collector Sets Up Own Source of Supply." That got to Fred and for weeks he ribbed Roberta: "What source of supply?" "Is he getting

enough?” “Can he get me a supply too? “I’m feeling it Roberta, I need a source of supply.” Roberta’s face would turn red and Fred would break down laughing.

Roberta Martin

If I had a mentor at *The Democrat*, someone who took an interest in me and took the time to teach me the craft of writing, page design, and all other things journalistic, it was Roberta Martin. Roberta was the editor of the Sunday Magazine, which contained features of local and state interest. She was already a grandmother when I met her. She had two children, an older daughter and a young son. Roberta’s granddaughter had been diagnosed with leukemia and was being treated at Arkansas Children’s Hospital. Her son, Robert, was several years younger than me and Roberta recruited me to provide her with advice on what to expect as Robert entered and went through the years I had just gone through.

Roberta was an author with several books (romance novels) to her credit. She specialized in serialized novels. In the 1950’s and 1960’s, on the comic pages of many newspapers there would be a serialized novel that would appear in daily installments. Roberta had written a couple of novels that had been serialized in *The Democrat*, but when her granddaughter was diagnosed with leukemia, she quit writing for a time to devote her attention to her granddaughter.

When I went to work for her on the Sunday Magazine, she was kind enough to provide me with a great deal of responsibility at my young age. I had just finished my Freshman year. The expectation was a story a week, complete with photos. Roberta initially had a folder containing story ideas but eventually I was given the opportunity to suggest my own features. I was also able to put to use my new and growing skills as a

photographer, eventually reaching the stage where I no longer needed to fill out photo requests, but took my own photos and took them to the darkroom to be processed. Roberta also taught me how to do photo layouts, particularly double truck spreads that would run in the center of the magazine. She had an eye for balance and order in page design and she knew how to select photos for use with articles and how to crop them for best effect. There was only one occasion when she censored a photograph I took. I had gone up to a new winery in North Central Arkansas, not too far from Conway to do a story. Visiting the winery were a couple of elderly gentlemen who were sampling the wine, so I asked if I could take their picture. They agreed. When I got back and had the photographs developed, I included that photograph in the layout I submitted. Roberta looked at the photographs and gasped. "That's Mr. ___ and Mr. ___," she said. I agreed and pointed out their names in the cutline. One of the gentlemen was apparently a former Little Rock mayor and the other a retired prominent businessman. Roberta knew them and knew their wives. "Their wives didn't know they were up there," Roberta said. The photograph went in the trash can.

Bobbie Forrester

Bobbie Forrester was a thin woman with big glasses and reddish-blond hair. I looked upon her as the ultimate in being a reporter. To me she wrote hard-hitting news stories and always seemed on top of everything. She was my idea of what a newspaper woman should be. She smoked cigarettes, she talked tough and she looked tough. She covered city news as I recall.

My one experience with investigative journalism at *The Democrat* centered on Bobbie Forrester. On one of my summers back with *The Democrat*, I was working again

on the Sunday Magazine, but I would have dearly loved to get some experience as a beat reporter. I was still running track at the time at the University of Arkansas. I would typically go to Tiger Stadium to work out on the track. One day when I was at the track one of the ground crew who worked at the stadium came up to me. He knew I was working for *The Democrat*. He told me that he thought there was some possibly illegal activity going on involving extra school desks that were stored under the stands on the west side of Tiger Stadium/Quigley Field and he took me to see them. There were hundreds of desks under the stadium and the worker told me that a couple of coaches were taking them and selling them off to rural school districts and making a lot of money for themselves. I went back and reported what I had been told to Marcus George or Gene Foreman, I forget who now. I was hoping to be assigned to investigate it and write the story but Bobbie got the assignment, checked it out and wrote it. It turns out the coach that was involved was Bobby Hannon, who had been one of my coaches at West Side Junior High many years before. The coaches weren't taking the excess desks and selling them, as the worker originally thought, but they were buying them in some kind of a sweetheart deal that wasn't illegal but that hadn't gone through the proper procedures to get the necessary approvals. Hannon was in the hospital recovering from surgery when the story came out. He found out that I was involved and called me from his hospital bed really upset.

George Douthit

George Douthit was almost a caricature of himself. He always wore a hat, had a pooched-out stomach and he was loud. George was the capitol hill reporter and he had an air of self-importance and pomposity. His reputation around the newsroom was as a

Faubus apologist. It seemed that news that Faubus wanted to get out or when Faubus would want to get his own slant on something, he would have it leaked to George and George would write it up. From my recollection the two most important annual events to George were the Miss Arkansas Pageant and an annual junket that the State Fairgrounds Board took (and that George got to go along on) to Hollywood to sign up stars for the annual Livestock Show at the State Fairgrounds.

John Ward

I recall John Ward as a quiet, intellectual, big bear of a man. I recall that he was the State Editor, or if he didn't have that title, that he worked on the state news desk. It seems like John left *The Democrat* to go and work on a political campaign.

Bob Sallee

I remember Bob as having slick black hair and being the quintessential crime reporter like Bobbie Forrester was the quintessential city beat reporter. Sallee seemed to have an in with the Little Rock police and was always getting calls whenever some big crime was happening.

Bob Trout

Bob Trout, as I recall, was an investigative reporter in an era before there were investigative reporters. There was a big story that Bob broke involving slot machines. I think it might have been some club in North Little Rock, but it also seemed to involve some gambling that was still going on in Hot Springs. There had been a big State Police bust of illegal gambling in Hot Springs. It seems like Trout had been involved in documenting that it was going on, shaming the State Police into having to make a bust.

Bill Valentine

No history of *The Democrat* would be complete without at least some reference to Bill Valentine. Bill later went on to own the Arkansas Travelers baseball franchise. But Bill got his start as a baseball umpire, working his way up to the big leagues. In the off-season Bill came back to Little Rock to work as an advertising salesman for *The Democrat*. But he hung out a lot in the Sports Department. He had a million stories and was always good for a couple of Jack Keady's columns. Bill got involved in trying to unionize major league umpires and wound up being blackballed from big league baseball. He came back to Little Rock, went to work again for *The Democrat*, got involved with the Travelers and wound up owning the franchise.

Others

Unfortunately, I don't remember much about Gene Foreman, nor Bob Lancaster. It seems like both were brought in to try and improve the quality of *The Democrat's* newsroom. I recall both had impeccable credentials and reputations as solid newsmen. John Scudder I remember as covering city hall, but not much else. There was a big, heavy guy who was said to be a good writer named Maurice Moore that I recall being on the news staff. He was nicknamed "Mo" but there is very little else I recall about him.

The "Stuffers" at the "Crat"

Ever heard *The Democrat* referred to as "the crat"? That was the name the stuffers had for the newspaper. *The Democrat*, on Saturday nights in the early and mid-1960's was a fascinating place, with a culture all its own that has long disappeared. On those Saturday nights when Petrucelli would try his best to get rid of me, and on many occasions when he wouldn't, I would go to the back of the building, back where the conveyer was, and hang out with the "stuffers." High school guys could pick up some

quick Saturday night cash by going down to *The Democrat* at press time and lining up to be stuffers. These were the guys who stuffed the different sections that were being printed into one another to make a single newspaper. I ran track at Little Rock Central and it turns out there was a Little Rock Central track team connection. Ronnie Ishmael ran hurdles, Larry Puckett was a long jumper and ran some short events, and Larry Hebling and Tim Irby were journeyman track guys. On Saturday nights we'd hang out, talking track and girls, out in back of "the crat" while the papers got stuffed.