

Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
Special Collections Department
University of Arkansas Libraries
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-5330

This oral history interview is based on the memories and opinions of the subject being interviewed. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using this interview should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with
Gary Rice
Austin, Texas
14 August 2005

Interviewer: Denise Gamino

Denise Gamino: Today's date is August 14, 2005. We're in the Austin, Texas, home of Gary Rice. G-A-R-Y. R-I-C-E. He will be interviewed by me, Denise Gamino. D-E-N-I-S-E. G-A-M-I-N-O. This interview is part of the [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History]'s project on the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript, Gary, at which point you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is tell me your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcription available to others. Okay, Gary.

Gary Rice: This is Gary Rice. I have given permission for this interview and for use of the transcript—I turn it over to the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville]'s *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* oral history project.

DG: Okay, Gary. Tell me about your personal background first.

GR: Okay. I was born in Nowata, Oklahoma, [on] November 1, 1953. I grew up on a cattle ranch in southeast Kansas, outside of Iola. I spent most of my teenage years figuring how not to *work* on that cattle ranch, and that sort of led me to working at

newspapers. I started working at the *Iola* [Kansas] *Register* when I was fourteen. I got my first paycheck on my fifteenth birthday for \$15. I worked there most of my junior and my senior year of high school. I started doing correspondence work for the big papers in Kansas—Topeka, Wichita—the *Kansas City Star*, which circulated a lot in Kansas. Eventually, I started getting feature stories published pretty regularly in the Wichita paper. That led to a job interview when I was still a senior in high school. I was hired at Wichita at the age of sixteen, a week after I got out of high school. [They said] I was the youngest full-time reporter they'd ever hired.

DG: What paper was that?

GR: It's the *Wichita Eagle*, the largest paper in Kansas—the big state daily.

DG: What year was that?

GR: That was in 1970. I graduated from high school in May of 1970 and started to work in Wichita a week after that.

DG: Is it customary for newspapers to hire teenagers to be reporters?

GR: Well, they said it wasn't. It was sort of interesting, what led to that. I did this kind of personality profile on a carnival worker in a carnival that was playing in Iola, Kansas, and the *Iola Register* ran it. It was a really long story. It was about fifty inches long. It just went on and on and on. But the city editor said, "Why don't you go ahead and send it to Wichita? It just might be something they would run." And, lo and behold, they not only *ran* it, but they had their staff artist do an illustration to go with it, and they ran it across the bottom of the front page. The assistant state editor was impressed, and he called up and got the city editor on the

phone. They said they'd like to talk with me. And the city editor replied, "He's in school." The newspaper guy said, "You mean college?" And they said, "No, he's in *high school*." They went ahead and did talk with me. They said they'd like for me to come out and spend the weekend in sort of a job try-out. So I took the Greyhound bus from Iola to Wichita, and they picked me up at the Greyhound station and put me up in a local hotel. It was on a Friday. I worked for them Friday, Saturday and Sunday. On Sunday, I ended up doing an interview with a pharmacist who had been robbed and kidnapped by some drug-crazed person. It ended up being the lead story in the paper on Monday morning. Before I left town, I had the job offer to start at Wichita for \$82.50 a week once I got out of high school. So I had a job lined up when I was still a high school student.

[Laughs] Needless to say, I didn't pay a lot of attention in my high school classes for the rest of the year.

DG: That's a great story. Where did your journalism bug come from?

GR: Well, the way I remember it, when I was a kid, like a lot of young guys, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. I loved baseball when I was a kid. I just loved it. But I was horrible. I wasn't very good at all. I remember I had the starting position in center field, which was a pretty big deal to me because I'd been playing left field and right field, where they put the lousy players, but I'd gone over to center field. Some new kid moved into town, and the coach had never even seen him play at all, but he [laughs] replaced me with him. It was starting to become clear that I wasn't going to be a major-league baseball player, and I realized it at a pretty young age, so I decided I wanted to be a baseball

writer. When I was in the ninth grade, in Kansas at the time, you had to take this class called "occupations," and it was to introduce you to different career possibilities and get you thinking about what you wanted to do, which, looking back, having to do that in the ninth grade is kind of silly. But I decided I wanted to be a baseball writer. Since I can remember—as a kid, my parents always had newspapers around the house. The one that I grew up with was the *Tulsa* [Oklahoma] *Tribune*. My parents had subscribed to that, I guess, most of their lives. Even after we moved to Kansas, they kept that subscription going. We'd get the papers three or four days late, but I still would read them front page to back page every time. I was doing that when I was in grade school. I had favorite writers for the *Tulsa Tribune* from the time I was in junior high that I just sort of idolized. There was a baseball writer named Dick Suagee. S-U-A-G-E-E. I thought he was the cat's meow. I thought, "What a great job to be the baseball writer." I remember a guy who wrote news named Windsor Ridenour. I love the way he wrote those short leads and [his] off-beat kind of approach. I basically copied the way he wrote. That was when I learned to write news, from reading Windsor Ridenour. I taught myself.

DG: Didn't Windsor become editor of that paper?

GR: Yes. Well, he became a big-shot there. You know, like a lot of people, it's probably better to know them as your hero because other people will criticize them for different things, but he was always my hero because I learned to write from him. And that was how I wrote. I tried to write exactly like him. My parents got me a typewriter, I guess, about the time I was a tenth-grader—a Royal

portable—and I would make up stories and try to write them in a news style. I'd do that over and over again. When I was a junior, the local speech teacher—also, he was the drama coach—for the fall play he wanted some student to review it for the local paper. He asked if I'd do it. [I said], "Yes, a chance to get a byline in the local paper." So that was the very first thing I ever had published professionally—well, not professionally, but in a professional publication—a review of the play "Greensleeves Magic," when I was a junior in high school—it would've been about 1968. We started sending other stories down there. "Well, they ran one. I'll send some more." They didn't run the next two or three stories I sent down there, and I was a little depressed by that. But I got a phone call. Actually, the phone call came to the high school principal's office. They filled out one of those official memo things. You know, "Phone call—call," and it was to Bob Johnson, city editor of the Iola paper. So I was very excited. "What could this be?" I called and he was not there, so they put the editor on the phone—Emerson Lynn. EM-E-R-S-O-N. L-Y-N-N. He was the owner and editor, so he conducted a job interview with me. "What grade are you in?" and all that. I remember my favorite question he asked was, "Do you take pictures?" I said, "No, I don't take pictures. I just write stories." He said, "Do you have an index finger?" I said, "Yes, I do." [He said] "We can teach you to take pictures." [Laughter] So that's how I got my first paying job at \$15 a week. And I don't think they thought that I would be there very much, but I was starting to spend forty hours a week down there because I was trying—I found out about an award that if you got 10,000 inches published by the time you graduated from high

school, that you'd get this award called "The Big Inch Award," which sounds a little sexier than it really is. But it was given to anybody who had more than 10,000 inches published—pictures or stories—before they graduated from high school. I later did some research, and less than 100 people ever got this award. It's given by the National High School Journalism Honor Society based at the University of Iowa.

DG: Did it have to be inches published in a professional paper, or could it be a school paper?

GR: It didn't have to be professional, but as I later did the research, virtually everybody who won it—they were people like me. They were kind of these young, whipper-snapper prodigies [who] largely wrote sports, which I did—the bulk of mine was sports that I wrote for the local paper, although I was doing news, too, but it was mostly sports. Looking back at others who won it—the same thing.

DG: Well, it's interesting because while you were telling me about your teenage exploits, I was wondering if you had ever known any teenage peers, or whether you were sort of practicing in an age group by yourself—sort of in a category by yourself.

GR: Oh, I was strictly in a category by myself. [Laughs] There was no other kid as nerdy as this, probably, in the world—at least at our high school. I mean, it was a job, and, basically, school became secondary from that point on. And I was a hard kid to teach because I knew it all. I was already getting paid to write, and that was better than my English teachers. I would've been a real pain to teach. I

admit that.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: You know, "I got a job. Not only do I have a job *now*, I've got a *better* job right after I get out of high school." But the only bubble-breaking thing that happened on that—in September of 1969, my senior year in high school—I almost got killed in a car wreck. I was coming back from doing a sports story at night, which violated the terms of my restricted license, driving after dark. I hit a semi truck that was making a U-turn across a two-lane road at the top of a hill at night. It was his fault. He had that semi stretched across both lanes, and I smacked the rear dual wheels going about fifty-five [miles per hour]. I snapped my right leg and shattered my left wrist, and wrecked the very first new car my parents had ever owned. They had only had used cars up to that point.

DG: Oh, no!

GR: I remember the ride to the hospital. I was in a lot of pain because this leg was pretty hurt. But the saddest part was my parents—they were called by the hospital and they said, "Your son has been in a wreck," and didn't tell them how serious. And, of course, when they came racing into the hospital, they saw the car. So that one put me in a wheelchair for three months of my senior year of high school. The football team would carry me up and down the steps. The coach made them do it [laughs] because I'd been writing sports, and I knew all those people. When I woke up after the surgery, it was the day—I'm kind of hazy on that—but it was the day after their first game. The hospital room was full of football players and coaches, because I had been covering everything, and then I

got in this wreck right before the season started. So I missed the football season.

DG: Oh, okay. You didn't do any reporting?

GR: No, not really. It was kind of a depressing thing because I couldn't—I always prided myself in getting around and going everywhere. I had to depend on people to take me everywhere. I was in a wheelchair. I couldn't use crutches because I only had one good arm. I had a bad leg and a bad arm. They put a big steel pin in this leg, and this one was in a cast. It was quite a let-down because everything had been flying high up to that point. But I got out of there and I still was able to get my 10,000 inches done, because early I had been shooting—I was trying to get 15,000. But I still managed to eke out 10,000.

DG: Is that what you got—about 10,000?

GR: Yes, we got a little over 10,000. I was documented by the city editor. Each day he would take his ruler out and measure the column inches, and he maintained a notebook because it all had to be documented by your boss.

DG: Do they still give that award?

GR: They still do, but nobody has gotten it in years. It's still on the books. In fact, I'm doing an article about this. I'm tracking all the people who have won it to see what happened to them. One of them is Dean Singleton, the newspaper big-shot guy mogul.

DG: Oh, yes.

GR: Another one is a Texas guy whose name has slipped me, but I can check.

DG: Okay.

GR: Anyway, I had all this experience, so to speak, before I even graduated from high

school. Then I started to work full-time at the *Wichita Eagle*.

DG: Yes, let's talk about that—your first full-time job.

GR: Okay. Well, again, I was just a kid. I was sixteen. I left home and got an apartment [laughs] and started working in Wichita.

DG: What had you decided about college?

GR: Well, the plan was, when I got hired at Wichita, they said that I would work there full-time and I would go to school part-time. They wanted me to work full-time, but they said they would pay for half of my college. So I started to work there—it would have been right after Memorial Day of 1970. Then I enrolled in Wichita State University in the fall, but didn't bother to go to classes. [Laughs] The semester got off to kind of a rocky start because about the time school started around Labor Day weekend, the first and only rock festival ever held in Kansas was scheduled. Again, I was sixteen years old, and I wanted to go cover that really bad, but the boss—a guy named Jerry Ratts—said, "There's no way we can send a sixteen-year-old kid to cover the rock festival for the Wichita paper." And I basically pleaded, begged, pouted—everything I could do to get that assignment—and I got it.

DG: Excuse me. How do you spell Jerry Ratts?

GR: R-A-T-T-S.

DG: Okay.

GR: [I] flew over there with a staff photographer and spent about six days there before, during, and after the rock festival, missing the classes at the beginning of the semester. And that sort of set the tone for that whole semester because I just

didn't go to class very often. I ended up being on academic probation after that semester, but it didn't matter because I never went back to college again for twenty-one years as a student after that.

DG: Did you have to phone in daily dispatches from . . . ?

GR: From the rock festival? Oh, yes. I'd write stories and I had my little portable typewriter to type them up, and I would dictate them back to the state desk.

DG: Who were the headline acts there?

GR: Well, looking back, a band called Sugarloaf that did a song called "Green-Eyed Lady" was the only really big act. The rest of them were regional acts. Some guys who later became part of Lynyrd Skynyrd were there. There was a band called Fatty Lumpkin, I remember. [Laughter] But it was the time—you know, we're talking about 1970, not long after Woodstock. This thing was called "Peace at Pittsburg" because it was near the town of Pittsburg, Kansas. It was nicknamed "Cornstock" for obvious reasons, a play on Woodstock. I'll tell one story about that. I got there really early on. There were just a few hundred people at the most. I got to know the organizers really well—this big guy who always wore these white painters' coveralls, named Fulton Wilhelm, and Kenny Osana, a little skinny guy.

DG: You don't know how to spell those, do you?

GR: Yes, I do. Fulton. F-U-L-T-O-N. And then Wilhelm. W-I-L-H-E-L-M. And Kenny Osana. K-E-N-N-Y. O-S-A-N-A. They were the organizers, and I got to know them really well. Well, radio stations all over the Midwest were promoting this. It was coming up on Labor Day weekend. So just a paltry crowd in the

hundreds at the beginning—overnight, it swelled, and there were thousands of people there, and they were pouring in. The organizer put this in a county that only had a total of three sheriff's officers, so suddenly you had literally *thousands* pouring in from all over the Midwest. This was in conservative Kansas. I have never seen in my entire life as much open drug usage as I saw during that day. Never have I seen anything like that. The sheriff's officers—they said, "Look, three people can't do much. We're just going to direct traffic and try to keep people from getting run over." And they stayed out. I wrote all this stuff, and did a lot of stuff on drugs—not *me* on drugs, but I did a lot of *stories* about the drugs. [Laughter] It was quite controversial.

DG: Was it an open love fest, too?

GR: Everything you wanted. Everything was there. They were selling laughing gas out of the back of pickup trucks for a dollar a balloon-full. There were people walking through the crowds selling LSD, calling out the prices like a peanut vendor at a ball game. Well, anyway, I'll tell this little story. The next day the crowd had just exploded. There were thousands of people there, and I wanted to get a crowd estimate because I had literally no idea. I didn't know if there were 5,000 or 50,000 or whatnot. So I was trying to work my way up to the bandstand, which, by that time, became a pretty difficult job because there were so many people there—people just on top of each other. And there was mud and the whole thing. As I was working my way up there between band [performances], the announcer came on and said, "Would the reporter from the *Topeka Eagle* please come to the bandstand?" And that was a mistake. They meant the *Wichita Eagle*.

So I kept working my way through the humanity, and then he came back. "We have a correction on that last announcement. The reporter from the *Wichita Eagle*—would he please come to the bandstand?" [I said] "Yes, that's me." So I worked my way up there and get on stage, and there was one of the organizers. He said, "We're glad to see you." I said, "Well, I'm glad to see you, too, because I want to find out the crowd estimate." He said, "We want you to officially estimate the crowd." I said, "I have no idea." They said, "Yes, but you're from the Wichita paper—the biggest paper in the state. We want you to estimate the crowd." I said, "I have no idea." They said, "Just say anything." "Well, 14,000." [Laughter] So they immediately went back out there, and one of the organizers took the mike [microphone] and said, "We're a growing family. We're a growing family. The crowd has officially been estimated at 14,000 people by the *Wichita Eagle*." [Laughter] And everybody is hollering and yelling. I had no idea if it there were 4,000 or 40,000 or 14,000. No idea at all.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: Anyway, I wrote those stories, and there was a lot of stuff about drug use because it was so open. It became a political issue. In fact, the guy running for state attorney general used that as his major issue—the fact that open drug usage was allowed to go on. And I got letters—lots and lots of letters—from Christian **groups who wanted to save my soul and everything. It was just amazing. That's** sort of what really got me going, you know? That was something I'll never forget, getting to cover that rock festival.

DG: What was your reaction in the newsroom to sending you instead of someone else

who may have wanted that assignment?

GR: Well, I didn't really pay a lot of attention to that. I mean, I got to go. And they were happy enough with the stories—they ran them on the front page every day.

DG: And never sent any reinforcement out to help you?

GR: No, just me. Of course, we didn't do that heavy reinforcement kind of reporting as much then as they do now. It was sort of still one reporter and one story kind of thing most of the time. They did keep sending new photographers. One drug-crazed [laughs] rock fan climbed up on top of the *Wichita Eagle* staff car and stomped in the roof. I remember that. I remember spending the night—see, I stayed out there most of the time, but I didn't have a tent or anything. I'd just keep awake as long as I could and then find a place to sleep, usually just on the ground or something. I stayed one night in a tent operated by the Kaw Valley Hemp-Pickers Association. [Laughs] But it was a lot of fun.

DG: Did you learn anything on that assignment that prepared you for other assignments later on?

GR: Well, it all just seemed kind of natural, you know? I was going to go out there every day and try to get as much as I could and then phone it in. And that's just what I did. I'd tack on some kind of a clever lead and . . .

DG: Where did you find a phone?

GR: That was always a problem in those days. You always had to find phones. You had to think about that constantly. We had a college student at Pittsburg State University who was our correspondent. We paid him a little bit to transport me back and forth. It was a dumb idea to fly out there and me not have a car, but I

used this guy to kind of chauffeur me around. He would always pick me up, and sometimes it would take us an hour or two to get to a phone just because there were so many cars in the roads and everything. But, yes, that was a problem. I had a motel room, too, but I didn't stay there at night. I would go there in the daytime and maybe catch a little sleep sometimes. But I didn't get much sleep, so I would try to write there if I could.

DG: So you loved every minute of it.

GR: Oh, it was great! But, again, it sort of jaundiced my idea about school because my attitude was, "Why do I need to go to school? I got to cover the biggest story in the state. My name has been on the front page of the biggest paper in Kansas for a week here now. I'm not going to go pay attention in English I class," and I didn't. And, of all things, I ended up doing really horribly that semester.

American History, Political Science—I didn't care. I didn't need it.

DG: What did you cover after that?

GR: In Wichita? Other things? Well, I was [laughs] always trying to get big stories. I was on the state desk, and I worked directly under this state editor named Jerry Ratts. He was incredibly hard-nosed and cynical, and he had an almost brutal sense of humor. The other guy I worked under was the assistant state editor. He was a milder-mannered kind of guy. He was the one who actually wanted me hired. Jerry Ratts was a little bit suspicious about hiring a sixteen-year-old kid full-time, but, eventually, we went from not liking each other to really developing a strong relationship. To this day, I think he's the best news man I ever worked under. I learned more from him because he was really tough on the copy. He

would ask questions. There was a lot of give and take. I didn't give much and he didn't give much, and we were like that a lot, but it developed this pretty good relationship. In fact, I even started talking like him at one point because he talked in this really choppy fashion.

DG: What do you mean?

GR: "Who's on? Jerry Fetterolf? The ag writer?" [Spoken in quick, staccato phrases] He talked like that. "Put him on hold."

DG: [Laughs]

GR: So I somehow—I just sort of unconsciously adopted this style of speaking. People were noticing it around the newsroom. They were calling him Big Rat and me Little Rat. [Laughter] To this day, I have tremendous respect for him because I learned so much. In fact, I guess that's probably a good way—well, other things I covered out there—there was a bribery scandal involving the Miss Kansas Pageant that was investigated by the attorney general's office, so I went all over Kansas interviewing these babes who had been in the Miss Kansas Pageant. That was kind of a big deal when you're seventeen.

DG: And they were paying to place . . . ?

GR: Well, it turned out [that] one of the losing contestants made up the story that someone had put the make on her so that she would finish better if she would go to bed with him—some judge. And this launched this whole thing. Well, a lot of these girls—what's the proper?—were a little bit bitchy, so the other losers were happy to jump in and raise questions. [Laughs] Yes, there was something suspicious there. But it turned out that it was largely based on one girl's lies. At

the end, the attorney general said that, and that was how it all wrapped up. We had this big story. "Kansas attorney general investigates Miss Kansas Pageant for bribes." [Laughs] Everybody was going to read every word about that story. So that was one that I remember. There was an investigative thing that I did—it was based on a political thing. Southeast Kansas's Democratic stronghold in the state—kind of a corrupt Democratic machine, actually, controlled a couple of counties down there. The county commission chairman, a guy named Joe Saia. S-A-I-A. An old Italian guy—he was friends with a lot of the Chicago mobsters, including a mobster named Joseph Aiuppa. A-I-U-P-P-A. Joseph Aiuppa's nickname was Joey Dove. D-O-V-E. He got that nickname because he was on a vacation trip in southeast Kansas and he was shooting mourning doves. And he shot dozens and dozens of mourning doves, far exceeding the legal limit of mourning doves. Well, of course, he was under FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] surveillance, and they followed him all the way from southeast Kansas back to Chicago and busted him for interstate transportation of mourning doves or something like that. So he got that nickname, Joey Dove. But he had been vacationing with this county commission chairman. Well, the other political faction was trying to get rid of this corrupt guy. The county attorney was named Vernon Grassie. G-R-A-S-S-I-E. He became a source for a lot of stories I did. He would feed me information, and he would do it publicly. If it was confidential, he would just make sure I got the information and he'd point me in the right direction. So that was a hot story there for a few weeks. We got a federal probe going and they made the county give back some of the federal job

money because they were hiring relatives and violating [government rules against] nepotism. So that was kind of interesting. Any number of trials—I did a lot of murder trials. We liked to cover murder trials—big fires somewhere. Local controversies were the big thing. We were the Wichita paper, so if a small town was having a controversy, they'd send me. And I'd explore the story. I didn't have any axes to grind. I'd get every side in there and we'd run a comprehensive story. And we did that a number of times. That is what the paper did at the time. We considered the whole state something we covered. I spent a lot of time on the road going [to] every part of the state. I did primarily the eastern and southeast part, but I had been all the way to the northwest corner and the southwest corner. Elections were big. We tried to be really comprehensive on that. All kinds of features—I did a feature on this blind javelin thrower once. That was sort of—I guess you'd call it a “dancing bear” sort of story.

DG: A lot of these stories sound like they're high stakes—I mean, federal prosecutors involved in politics and people's livelihoods at stake.

GR: [Laughs] Yes.

DG: What was the reaction when you showed up and you were sixteen years old, asking questions?

GR: Well, I think I looked a little bit older than sixteen. If you look at some of those pictures—maybe I didn't, but I felt I looked older than sixteen. I think also it's kind of a psychological thing, that the sources thought that I *must* be not as young as I looked [laughs], that I *must* be older because they probably thought that the big paper wouldn't hire a kid to be a reporter, I guess. It didn't come up.

DG: It didn't come up.

GR: It never came up. I did carry a fake ID for getting into bars, but I rarely even needed it.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: I was rarely ever carded.

DG: Was that something that the paper got you or you got on your own? [Laughter]

GR: No, that's something I thought I needed for myself. [Laughter] But, actually, I *never* got carded. I can tell this one story now. Okay, this was when I was young. I was definitely under twenty-one, but to go to private clubs in Kansas you had to be twenty-one. Well, of course, I wasn't anywhere near twenty-one the three years I was in Wichita because I started there when I was sixteen . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

GR: Okay. I went to the club Four Aces, which was a twenty-one-and-up private club. Almost constantly—the time I was [laughs] in Wichita, from the age of sixteen to nineteen, I never was carded. Once it was raided by the police. They were checking for underage [bar patrons], and I heard a commotion and went in the restroom and climbed up on the toilet and stayed up there for an hour. If they had come in and opened that stall, they would've found me, but I stood up on the toilet so my boots wouldn't show underneath. I'd like to think the cops are more sophisticated now than then, but they didn't open that stall or they would've caught me. And I was scared to death that I'd get in trouble with my parents and where I worked and everything.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: But I didn't. [Laughs] So I guess that's the only time the age ever really was a factor, and I just ignored it.

DG: You had some creative solutions, I guess, to get out of some of the messes you got yourself in. [Laughs]

GR: You've got to consider, looking back—I mean, I was a pretty obnoxious little kid. I was pretty good, but I was a hard one to edit because I wanted to fight over every word. I didn't want anyone editing my stuff. I said, "If there's something wrong with it, I want to rewrite it myself. You tell me." That was kind of my attitude. But it sort of, I think, made me the editor I became later because I remembered how sacred that copy was to me. And when I became an editor, I liked to think that I could justify every change I would make in it. Anyway, I was a pretty hard kid, I think, to boss around, but they also knew I would get the story. They knew I would, and I knew I would, too. So I just kind of ran wild there for about three years under Jerry Ratts's *extremely* competent tutelage.

DG: Yes. What made him the best editor you've ever encountered in decades of being a journalist?

GR: Well, partly because he had a wide appreciation for different kinds of news, and he taught me a little bit of that, too—that this might be important to somebody. It might not be the big scandal, but it's something that they may really care about in Garden City, Kansas—the fact that somebody grew this eighty-five pound cantaloupe or something. I remember that all the time. If I ever curled my nose up at something, he would be *all over* me. "This is news. It can't all be big

scandal stories." But also the fact that he would give me these stories. He would give me the big stories. He didn't go around me trying to find somebody else, and I appreciated that because he knew that I would go a hundred percent and be pretty aggressive. So that, and also the fact that he was a hundred percent rebel in the newsroom. He rebelled against people above him. We had this one little controversy. We had this sort of a—well, he was an incompetent boob of an assistant managing editor, and he passed an edict that each day when we left we had to put our covers on our typewriters. Well, most of the newsroom covered their typewriters except for Jerry Ratts and "Little Rat." [Laughter] Finally, we both got called on the carpet for not covering our typewriters. We were in a lot of trouble. So what Jerry finally did—he finally started covering his. Well, I destroyed my typewriter cover. I stuck it in a wastebasket and it was carried off. And I put a *note* in there—"Not trying to be rebellious. My typewriter cover is missing." And that seemed to have the same effect as covering the typewriter. They quit bothering me after that.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: They just wanted to make sure that nobody was getting away with being rebellious—scoffing at their "cover the typewriter" rule. Well, anyway, all this stuff sort of leads up to the fact that they had a little upper-management shake-up. The guy who got real power was the one person who didn't like Jerry Ratts because Jerry Ratts was eighty million times the news man this guy ever could have been. And by association, I didn't like him, and he didn't like me. So his first big move—or one of his first—at least it was big to me—he was going to

move me off the state desk to the city desk. That meant I wasn't going to be working for Jerry Ratts anymore. So I responded to that by quitting. I didn't have another job. I guess I even stretched the—did I really give them two-weeks' notice? Well, I figured, "I've still got ten days of vacation coming. That's ten days' notice." So I gave them four days. That's how I got the two weeks' notice out of it.

DG: When was that, Gary?

GR: That would've been in the summer of 1973. Now, what I did—I didn't have a lot of savings then, like now. [Laughs] So I put myself on a conservative diet. There was a local restaurant that had a ninety-seven-cents breakfast special—scrambled eggs with ham, hashbrowns, biscuits and gravy for ninety-seven cents. I went to one meal a day there for a while as sort of a Spartan way of getting this mind-set of finding another job. Then what I did—I took off in my 1972 [Ford] Mustang—it was only a year old at that point—I still had the payment to make. I had a friend who had left the Wichita paper. He was in Memphis [Tennessee]. [He said] "Well, come on out to Memphis. I'll try to get you an interview there." On the way to Memphis, I stopped in Little Rock because I said, "Well, I am going to stop in any town that I think has a pretty good paper that I might want to live at." So I stopped in Little Rock, Arkansas—walked in off the street with my clippings I had glued in a book—walked right into the managing editor's office—Jerry McConnell. He looked at my clippings, and he said, "Well, if I had an opening, I'd hire you right now." But he didn't have an opening. So I went on to Memphis and did an interview there. And there I encountered an attitude that

probably was a little bit more typical. "Oh, so you quit your job without having another one lined up? Why did you do that?" So that [laughs] was a good question, but they were not interested in hearing about somebody making a moral stand or something like that. [Laughs]

DG: Had Jerry asked you that question?

GR: What?

DG: Jerry McConnell. Had he asked . . . ?

GR: He didn't ask about it. I don't know why he didn't ask. [Laughs] Maybe [he] asked somebody else. I don't know. But he didn't ask me. I think I just said, "Well, I decided it was time to move on," or something. I didn't go into the whole thing. But he said if they had an opening, he'd hire me. Well, I thought that was pretty impressive, but I went on to Memphis and didn't get anything positive there.

DG: Were those clip scrapbooks called string books?

GR: We called them string books. Yes. And, you know, I didn't make copies of them. I just showed them the book. I think I had some copies that I mailed out to places. But Jerry—I just showed him the clippings. Anyway, I got back and I didn't have a job after that little trip through Arkansas and all the way into Tennessee, so I had to do something. Well, I got a call from the Hutchinson, Kansas, paper—a smaller paper than Wichita, but one that was fiercely competitive with the Wichita paper. Going to work for them allowed me to actually fight back at the Wichita paper because they went head-on in southwest Kansas. So I was only there, I think, for about two or three months. I did lots of pretty decent stories. I

actually looked at them today and I was impressed with some of those. All the while, I was thinking about going someplace else.

DG: Was that still during the summer of 1973?

GR: Yes, still the summer. I was only in Hutchinson, I think, about two months at the most. I can't remember exactly, but . . .

DG: Had you only interviewed with two papers?

GR: Well, I interviewed with—at that time, Memphis had two separate big papers, and Little Rock had two separate big papers—the *Democrat* and the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*. But I decided at the time just by looking at the two paper boxes and reading the papers that I didn't want to work for the *Gazette*. It looked like it was a boring paper, while the *Democrat* looked like my kind of [laughs]— “They're doing something lively every day. That looks like *my* kind of paper. I could work for the *Democrat*. My stuff would run in the *Democrat* the way I write it now. Well, if I work for the *Gazette*, that looks boring.” So I didn't go to the *Gazette*, although the *Gazette* would've paid a lot more.

DG: Did you make that decision after you arrived in Little Rock and just looked at the papers?

GR: That's how I made it. I didn't even bother to go to the *Gazette*. I came back and I had a telephone interview at Corpus Christi [Texas], but I got black-listed because the guy down there knew the guy at Wichita that I had defied. In fact, he told me on the phone that he was going to call him, and he never called me back. Oh, yes, the guy in Wichita—one of the big-shots there said that he would black-list me forever in newspapers for not giving the full two-weeks' notice. That was one of

the last conversations we had.

DG: Oh.

GR: Well, I was a kid. Again, that didn't bother me.

DG: Was he bluffing, or do you think he was serious?

GR: Well, I know that he interfered with that one job at Corpus Christi because that would've gotten me to Texas a lot earlier. I didn't get called back on that. But that's okay. He might have been right. I didn't really give him the full two weeks' notice, but I was trying to make a point. I was a kid. Anyway, I was back in Hutchinson. I had been doing these stories, but I really wanted to go somewhere else. I called Jerry McConnell back. I guess I had been in Hutchinson maybe a month or six weeks. I wasn't there very long. I said, "Hey, this is Gary Rice calling back. I just wanted to see if anything ever opened up there." He said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I've got an opening now." I said, "You do?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'll come." We agreed on a salary, and away I went.

DG: What job was it for?

GR: It was a general assignment reporter. I remember the salary negotiation. "Well, how much do you have to have to come here?" And I said, "Well, I need at least \$150 a week." I remember him clearing his voice. "I don't think I can go more than \$145." I said, "Okay. Okay."

DG: [Laughs]

GR: He also added on there, "Please don't tell anybody else in the newsroom how much you're getting because that's one of our highest salaries, and you're going to be the youngest person there. Keep that confidential at the time."

DG: How did you arrive at your salary request?

GR: I think in Wichita and Hutchinson I'd been making about \$160 a week because I had been there—you look at it percentage-wise, when I started at Wichita I was making \$82.50 a week, but when I left there I was making about \$150 or \$160 a week. So that's not—in three years' time it doubled, although I started so low it didn't matter. So how did I arrive at it in Little Rock? Well, I just figured that's probably about what they'd pay, and that's what I wanted, and that's what I got.

[Laughs]

DG: Why didn't you mind taking a pay cut?

GR: Because I wanted to *go*. I wanted to go back to a big paper again. I just wanted to go. So I left Hutchinson—I was there such a short time that I didn't really even put it down on résumés because I was only there a couple of months. I didn't list it on my résumé. But I did quite a bit. I was amazed [at] how many because you had to crank out a lot of stories there. So I ended up in Little Rock. That's how I got there—would've been, I'd say, summer of 1973. Probably July or August—around in there.

DG: Yes. So tell me about some of your stories you remember the most about your days at the *Democrat*.

GR: When I got there, I think Jerry McConnell had told some people that he was hiring this hot-shot investigative reporter. Some of the stuff that I had put in my clippings—things like that Miss Kansas thing and the thing about the federal job money and whatnot. Some of that stuff was fairly, I guess, “sexy,” and that was the kind of stuff they liked at Little Rock. So he was telling them he'd hired this

hot-shot kid who's an investigative reporter. Well, you can imagine going in there and some of the older reporters were kind of looking at this kid—"What's going on here?" But immediately they started throwing me into big stories. I remember the first thing I covered was a trial of a county official someplace about sixty or seventy miles away, [who] had embezzled hundreds of thousands of dollars. He was an old guy and he was kind of senile, and he claimed to have given the money to all the poor people in the county. I went over and covered the trial, and I did kind of a spin-off, trying to talk to poor people. "Did you get any money from this guy?" and all this. So that kind of got it rolling there. People said, "Well, this guy can cover a trial," because I'd been covering a lot of trials in Kansas. There are several stories I remember, one that probably is most remembered by people down there who were around at the time was the Larry Pritchard story. Larry Pritchard was kind of a flashy oil broker. He had all of his staff driving these silver Lincolns that had "Pritchard International" on the side of the cars and all that. And he would throw these big society parties and give away door prizes that would consist of overseas trips. He was really putting on the dog. This guy was really immaculately dressed—the whole bit. Well, we got a tip there. The people at that paper probably got as many tips as any place I've ever been. And the way it usually worked . . .

DG: Really?

GR: Oh, yeah. They got tips galore. There was always stuff coming in there. And the way it would usually work would be that I'd be at my desk and the city editor would come over with this tip written on a scrap of paper. "Check it out." That

was usually the only direction I got—"Check it out." He might check back in a week or two to see if I was doing anything if I hadn't been back [in touch] with him. But I was given pretty much free rein. Of course, I would cover daily stories, too, every day. It was an afternoon paper, so I would show up at about 7:00 [a.m.] each day. And me and another guy—a guy named Bill Husted, kind of a prematurely balding guy with flaming red hair and a flaming beard. We sort of fashioned ourselves as the two hot-shot general assignment reporters. And there was a little bit of rivalry there, too, but I had a tremendous amount of respect for him because he is to this day the single best deadline reporter I have ever seen. He could write just—he was a *maniac* on deadline, and a great reporter and great writer, too.

DG: Is he still working?

GR: He's working at the Atlanta newspaper. I think he does their high-tech stuff now. I think he's fairly close to retirement now because he was older than me then. We'd show up for work every day at 7:00, and basically the city editor would give us the big story of the day because with an afternoon paper you had a deadline, like, right now. Everything had to be done by noon—and anything that was in the *Gazette* that we needed to follow and tell you the fresh angle on. So that was the usual daily thing, and you work like a maniac until noon deadline. Then you had kind of a breather after that—a leisurely lunch—then you worked on anything enterprising in the afternoon, unless you got pulled off or sent out of town. And that paper—even though they were cheap, they would send people anywhere in Arkansas. They didn't hesitate to put you on the road. So it was great, as far as

perfecting your deadline skills. We had these old Underwood typewriters, and they were famous for the keys sticking. They were always really dirty keys, and those things would stick all the time. We used to joke that they were Spanish-American War surplus, and that there was still grit there from [President] Teddy Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill. But you'd pound on those old Underwoods all the time—never buy a new typewriter.

DG: Don't you have an interesting typewriting method, Gary?

GR: Yes, it's sort of the Gary Rice method. It's, again, probably based on not paying attention in high school to the typing teacher. But it's not really the hunt-and-peck. It's sort of a modified form of that. You don't use all your fingers, but you go pretty fast. You have to kind of glance at them every once in a while to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to.

DG: But you could keep up with people who did learn the correct method?

GR: Well, I think at my peak I could probably do seventy-five or eighty words a minute if I was really going at it. You know, I can kind of—I'm not saying that I haven't lost a little bit of typing speed over the years.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: But I think I was actually better on the typewriters that had a little tension in the keys, versus the computer keyboards.

[Tape Stopped]

DG: Okay. Let's go back to the story about Larry Pritchard.

GR: Okay. Well, the tip came in that all was not as it seemed—that he had some questionable business dealings. The rumor was that he had been writing some

very large hot checks. The thought was that he was selling oil that he didn't really own, and had somewhat of a scheme going, but it could come tumbling down around him. So I was given this assignment to investigate Larry Pritchard. Of course, I didn't know anything about high finance or oil dealing, but that didn't bother me. I just jumped in there. I worked on it for several weeks. The city editor, Ralph Patrick—he'd come back—"Well, how's that Pritchard story coming?" I was having a hard time with it. I wasn't getting—I mean, I would ask these questions. People wouldn't talk with me, or I couldn't find what I wanted. I was actually getting a little bit depressed because I had been freed to work on this story. I had been used to cranking out a story every day and having my name on the front page, and suddenly I wasn't appearing in the paper, and I was working on this story that just was not panning out. I finally said, "Well, I think we ought to just give this up. I'm just not getting anywhere." And Ralph said, "Oh, work on it another week. Work on it another week." Suddenly, I started getting a few little tips that led to other things. I was able to find the person who got one of those hot checks and actually see the hot check, and suddenly we were getting somewhere. In the midst of this, I started getting strange calls at home and hang-ups. Somebody in the business department or the personnel office at the *Democrat*—I can't remember which one—said somebody was calling up and asking all kinds of questions about me. Then we got a tip that it was this guy who was sort of a crack-pot, self-proclaimed private eye [private investigator]. He was kind of a nut who was asking questions about me. So me and another reporter went and confronted him. "Why are you asking these questions, because we were

hearing it from a lot of people," and he wouldn't say. We said, "Who hired you?" And he wouldn't say. He said, "Well, if you don't like it, why don't you just leave town?" It was a really weird thing. We didn't take it super seriously because this guy was kind of a nutty fellow. Well, it rocked on and on, and we were finally, I think, getting enough to publish on this. But it was a little scary because this guy [the oilman] claimed to be rich. We were basically going to be saying he was a crook, and we had to have it really solid. About that time, the newspaper got sold. It went from this family who owned it sold it to WEHCO Media—Walter E. Hussman and Company. One of the editors said, "Well, we probably ought to put this on the back burner because the paper is in turmoil now and we can't really be doing this story." I said, "Well, fine." So it was just a worrisome story. Well, another editor, and that was Jerry McConnell—he started hearing, I guess, from some people in the community that he knew that we were really onto something here. He had heard that the district attorney's office was hot to trot on this guy, too, so he revived the story. He said, "We're going to do this story. We're going to get it in the paper." And we did. He actually—I give him credit—he kind of juiced that lead up there. He made kind of a featurey lead on it, and then we did this long line of bullets saying the things the guy was accused of—stretched it across the top of the front page. Every single word— ran it past lawyers— they approved it, and we ran it. As far as the story causing things to happen, within a few days this guy had filed for bankruptcy. I remember going to bankruptcy court when he did it, and sitting in that audience in that courtroom. His lawyer said, "That whole thing is a lie and there's going to be a big lawsuit out of it," waving it

[the newspaper] around. And the judge said, "Well, was *this* a lie?" He'd ask him about specific things in there. And they got to something about a big, giant hot check. This thousands-of-dollars hot check. He [the lawyer] said, "No, it's not true. Absolutely no hot check." Well, the guy who he wrote it to was also sitting in the audience there in bankruptcy court, and his lawyer was there. His lawyer opened up a folder of some sort, and in that folder was the hot check. I remember looking over there, and the guy had a smile on his face as Pritchard's lawyer said it was all a lie. And the lawyer for the guy that he wrote the hot check to was waving it at me, and he was smiling at me.

DG: I think you're referring to a \$87,300 hot check . . .

GR: That's it.

DG: . . . that's listed in your story. We're talking about an *Arkansas Democrat* front-page story that ran April 18, 1974. At the top of the page with the headline, it says, "Questions Are Raised About Flamboyant Oil Man." The story continues on the back page and takes up half of the back page.

GR: Well, in any event, I think—as I look back on my career—that's one of the stories that I will always remember. There were probably things in there that weren't 1,000 percent solid, but it was solid enough to force him into bankruptcy. A little while after that, the prosecutor filed a bunch of felony theft charges against him. Again, after our story—and, of course, their investigation had been going on, too—but we were out there in front with that one. We laid it out there in front of the people. That was the first thing that had been written about Larry Pritchard's business dealings. It ended up ruining him. He lost his company, went bankrupt,

and ended up going to jail. I'll put this in, too. I remember going to the courthouse when he was up for criminal charges, and his wife was a dynamite looker. She was wearing a mini-skirt and had [on] dark hose. She just looked killer. But I remember she was glaring at me—just really glaring at me. I still remember that to this day.

DG: How did that make you feel?

GR: I always said, "Well, if you don't want it in the paper, don't let it happen."

DG: Do you think newspapers today, thirty years later, are willing to give reporters the extra week when it looks like things are not turning out? In other words, if this had been today, do you think that the papers are willing to pursue these types of stories?

GR: You would hope that they would. Of all the time when I was a reporter—and I guess I was a reporter for basically seven-and-a-half or eight years—I never really had a complaint about not being given enough time to do a story, because I loved doing the daily stuff. And I liked doing it on a daily basis a whole lot more than doing those kinds of things because I was the kind of person who liked to have something in the paper every day. I also got a big thrill [that] I had one of those big ones in there, too. But, yes, you might be right. Reporters always complain about that, but it wasn't a complaint that I really had.

DG: How did this affect the other paper? Talk to me about the competition.

GR: Oh, the competition was wonderful. We were the smaller of the papers. Our staff was probably one-third the staff of the *Gazette*. The hatred between those two papers was just unbelievable. It was very competitive. We would show up at a

story and we'd have one reporter there. They'd show up with *three* reporters at that story. They would double-team stuff. You could tell they were just looking down their noses at us. So when we could do a story like *this*—and, man, this was a *hot* story in Little Rock, Arkansas—when that thing ran about this guy, you know, you could tell . . .

DG: The Pritchard story?

GR: Oh, yes. The Pritchard story was a hot one there, and you could tell that it upset the *Gazette*. And when they later filed charges against the guy, the *Gazette* was playing catch-up. But they never caught up with that. And that happened with a lot of things. We would take a big story, and through hustle, we would *beat* them on big angles of it. We didn't cover everything like they did, but if we were going head-on, we could beat them. And everybody kind of got a kick out of those—real unity in this staff, but it was paid very poorly. But we all got a real thrill out of beating the *Gazette*. That was the one thing that united the staff. You might not like the editors, [or] anything they told you. You might bitch about your low pay. You might complain about lots of things, but we *loved* to beat the *Gazette*.

DG: Were there people in town—sources-type people who also liked to see the *Democrat* get a scoop over the *Gazette*?

GR: Oh, yes, because a lot of people, I think, resented the *Gazette* because it was a lot more liberal politically and editorially than we were. So some people, probably because of that, wanted to help the *Democrat*, although I've got to say that there was never any sort of bleed from the editorial position and this conservative position into the newsroom. Never did they try to affect stories that way, which is

good because we were—that was one of things I remember the most—it was going after stories, and the editors were committed to going after stories that would beat the *Gazette*. Beating the *Gazette* trumped everything else.

DG: How does the underdog do that, by outsmarting, out-hustling . . . ?

GR: Hustle. Hustle. We would take one of their stories—I used to do this all the time. Okay, let's say there was a breaking story. They had the time break on it. They had the big story in the morning paper. I'd take one of their stories and I'd read it really carefully. I'd look for some angle that looked interesting that they didn't develop. I did that quite a bit. Or I would have some kind of a notion. "What can I do about this to bring the people out in this?" Or "What can I do to do something that isn't just typical news breaking—what can I do?" And everybody, I think, thought that way. The editors encouraged that kind of thinking, but you were given a lot of leeway as a reporter. Like, if I wanted to do something, I almost always could do it. And if I had some kind of oddball angle, they would go for it because I had a track record that this stuff usually panned out. But it was mostly kind of hustling. Later on, for example, when we started handling the refugee evacuation, that was used a couple of times. I would take things they might have mentioned in their story, or something, and I would turn it into a full story. Hustle.

DG: The refugees from Vietnam?

GR: Yes. That was in 1975. It was near the end of my time [at the *Democrat*].

Anyway, the Pritchard story—this guy got indicted. He went bankrupt.

Everybody loved that story, so it was a real—it was an investigative kind of thing.

That was one I do remember. Anyway, going back to the private eye thing—we worried a little bit about this nutty guy who was following me around, but not too much because he was a nut. Months later, me and that reporter, Bill Husted, were working together on a story about block-busting. That's where real estate people use race to try to lower property values to profit them. In Little Rock, they were saying, "Oh, if there is a black family who moves into your neighborhood, you better sell now while you can." So we were doing the story on block-busting. Part of that story—we were going into the mixed neighborhoods and just talking to different people [to see] if they'd had any experience like that with real estate agents and the like. We were going house to house. I knocked on a door. The guy answered the door. I barely opened my mouth to say, "I'm Gary Rice with the—" He said, "I know who you are." I said, "You do?" He said, "Yes. I was hired by Larry Pritchard to investigate you." And then he proceeded to tell me things about my life that he had found out, including that I was in a school play in junior high.

DG: You're kidding!

GR: No. No. And [there were] other things like that. He rattled off a bunch of stuff. He just got on the phone and did some work. He concluded by saying, "You know, I wish I had a background as clean as you. We couldn't find a thing on you." Of course, I was only nineteen. I hadn't had a chance to do a lot at that point. He said, "We didn't get anything on you. You had a very clean background." He acknowledged that he had hired this other guy, this weirdo guy, to do the legwork for him. This guy [who answered the door] was a respected

private detective. He was a legitimate guy. And he concluded by saying, "Well, you know, I gotta tell you, the joke was on us because he paid us with a hot check for that investigation of you."

DG: Oh, no! [Laughs]

GR: Yes.

DG: Is that the only time you've ever been investigated by a PI [private investigator] or tailed [followed]?

GR: That I know of. Yes. So that was kind of an interesting one. I'll mention another story that won't take quite as much detail. I covered this little town of Jacksonville, Arkansas. It's adjacent to Little Rock. It was one of the assignments that I had to do. The paper wanted the Jacksonville City Council covered every week. Those meetings were always at night, so it was overtime. The city editor was kind of looking out for us. I could go cover this meeting and get some overtime to supplement my paltry salary. My number-one memory of that was the meetings were always really controversial because you had a real split faction set up over there. The other thing I recall was the smoke in that room. You would leave there and you would smell like you'd been in a forest fire. You really would. No way could you wear any of those clothes again the next day.

DG: Was it cigarette smoke?

GR: Oh, it was cigarette smoke. It was thick. It was blue smoke in there, and it was always that way. The room was just full of smoke. Anyway, one night there was a controversy. One of the policemen showed up and claimed that traffic tickets

were being fixed, and he wanted the council to do something about it.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

DG: This is tape [two] of August 14, 2005.

GR: Well, this story had its beginning when a police officer showed up at a city council meeting and he was complaining because a number of tickets had been fixed by higher-ranking police officers and city councilmen. The city council responded by taking disciplinary action against him for [going] public with this. They also responded by sort of locking the doors on the supposedly fixed tickets. We went over and demanded to look at the tickets.

DG: What does that mean—locking the doors?

GR: Well, I'm using that as just a way of saying that they wouldn't let us see the tickets—these tickets that were supposedly fixed, because this officer had made reference to a cardboard box full of fixed tickets. We went over and demanded to see the tickets, and they said, "They're not public record. You're not allowed to see the tickets." And we said they were. The police chief said, "Well, I'll tell you what, we'll request an opinion from the attorney general. If he says they're public record, we'll let you look at the tickets." Weeks rocked on, and we got some little wire story that said the state attorney general had ruled that traffic tickets are *public*. So I hopped in the car along with a photographer named Robert Ike Thomas—a good southern name. I'll just take a little side-track here and talk about Robert Ike Thomas. Robert Ike Thomas is still the best photographer that I've ever had a chance to work with. Not only was he perfect as a photographer,

but he had an unbelievably orderly mind. He carried around a calculator that printed out, if you can imagine. Now, that's kind of the ultimate nerd. He would play with the calculator all the time. He was a mathematical whiz. He was very good at keeping things orderly. He also had an extremely dry voice, but he was fun to work with. You knew that guy was going to backstop you on everything. He'd ask good questions, too. He was a photographer that you didn't mind having along. In fact, you wanted him along. Well, anyway, he and I went over there. We were going to look at the tickets. The chief said, "Well, all right. If the attorney general says they're public, I can let you look at the tickets, but I am going to order that a police officer be with you at all times while you look at this box of tickets." So he gave us some higher-ranking police officer. He assigned him to stay in the room with us, and we thought, "Well, this guy is just going to be a pain the whole way." The door closed, and this police officer said, "I don't like that son of a bitch, either. Let me help you go through these tickets."

DG: [Laughs] You're kidding!

GR: He helped us identify some of the notations on the tickets, some that appeared to have a number on there for the person who fixed it—so a number one was the chief. That was the chief's number.

DG: No!

GR: Of course, we verified that number later. He would point out tickets that looked strange to him. He helped us a lot, this police captain. To this day, I don't think Chief Red Brickell knew that one of his own men was helping us nail him. But three of us went through the tickets faster than two could.

DG: So there were numbers or initials on the tickets?

GR: There were all kinds of things. You'll see if you look at the story. Now, this particular one that we reproduced on the front page had [laughs] the name of one of the city council members written on the ticket.

DG: Okay. We're referring to *Arkansas Democrat's* page-one story on September 19, 1974. The headline is "225 Tickets Become 'Warnings.'" Subhead is "Jacksonville Officials Deny 'Fixes.'"

GR: [Laughs]

DG: And there is a reproduction of a traffic ticket on here with the initial B. Lehman circled. So that was one of the council commissioners?

GR: That was one of the city councilmen.

DG: City council members.

GR: Bill Lehman. And we had others. We ended up catching some that had the mayor's name on them, and different numbers that meant the chief, and he acknowledged that he was number one, and other things. We nailed them thoroughly. We ran a copy of the ticket and the whole thing. This one got a lot of readership. People love to read about fixed tickets. Some of them were just outlandish speeding tickets that had been fixed. There were three DWIs [Driving While Intoxicated] that had been fixed. So it was a pretty good story. It was all basically done through FOI [Freedom of Information Act]. We got the documents, and we used their own documents to nail them to the wall.

DG: Now, what kind of repercussions did this story bring you?

GR: Well, I think that immediately the chief passed some kind of edict that no one

could change a ticket to a warning anymore except for a judge, so that was one of the things they changed. It used to be I guess anybody—if you were high-ranking or you were a city councilman, you could noodle in there. But the chief said, "Well, we're going to make sure this doesn't happen again." That kind of thing. It caused a flurry for a few days, but it didn't get anybody booted out of office or anything.

DG: This is a good story. Why don't you read just a couple of paragraphs into the record?

GR: Okay. Well, let's see here. Here's the lead. It says, "At least 225 traffic tickets issued by the Jacksonville Police Department this year were changed to warnings or dismissed before they were paid or the cases tried. The recipients paid no fines, and in nearly all cases were not required to appear in court. The city apparently lost thousands of dollars in fines. The tickets, covering the period of January 1 through June 15, are stored in a small cardboard box in Chief L. T. "Red" Brickell's office. In most cases, the tickets indicate they were altered by the officer who gave the ticket. However, some of the tickets indicate high-ranking police officers, city officials, and others had influence in changing the tickets." And then this one here. "Alderman Bill Lehman admitted to the *Democrat* he had talked with police about changing the ticket for a woman, he said, 'Called me up on the phone.' The word 'Lehman' was written on the face of one traffic ticket. Asked if he had been involved with this ticket also, Lehman said he didn't think so, but added, 'I'm not denying it.'" [Laughter]

DG: But you guys got this story by being present at a city council meeting?

GR: Well, we got the tip on it, but it was actually—what we did . . .

DG: An officer came . . .

GR: Yes. An officer made a public [statement], saying, "Hey, there's a box of fixed traffic tickets." And, you know, as often is the case, it's news at the time and then people just dropped it because they would not let the media look at the box. But we stuck with it and pressured the chief into getting the attorney general's opinion, and then when it came out, we were the only news media that went over there and got the box.

DG: Did the *Gazette* write about it in the beginning?

GR: I can't recall, but I know that we had this story, so we beat them. We just clobbered them. There was really nothing they could do after the story came out. We covered every angle of it, and I was really happy because that was not really based on confidential sources, which I used a lot down there. This was based on public documents. It was a really good one—getting a picture of the ticket and running it on the front page, I think, was pretty effective, too.

DG: Do you remember the reader reaction to this story?

GR: I think there [were] letters to the editor—that kind of thing. Like I said, it didn't lead to anybody losing their job or anything, but I imagine that the cop who got suspended for publicizing it felt a little bit better after this. So that was one [story] that I recall fondly.

DG: This is kind of in the spirit of the newspaper, being a public watchdog.

GR: Yes. You know, I think we all felt like that. We wanted to beat the *Gazette*, but we also felt that we were sort of answering to serve a higher power here, that we

were out to protect the people. I think I was sort of a Johnny-come-lately to southern journalism, but Arkansas definitely is a southern state. And some of the reporters down there had done just incredible jobs covering racial-related issues over the years. And, you know, that was a thankless task when you could get not only verbally threatened, but physically threatened for doing that kind of thing. So I admired a lot of those older guys that I hung around.

DG: At the *Democrat*?

GR: Yes, and the other paper, too, because they'd done a lot on the civil rights-related issues, and really laid it on the line there. And as one told me—I had made some remark about someone—"Well, how come this wasn't more aggressively covered?" Reporters set me straight really quickly that they didn't appreciate people from the North coming down to the South telling them how to cover racial issues. He was right. I was really speaking out of school there because they had lived it. So it was a good atmosphere, I think. I learned a lot in that regard, too.

DG: [Do] you remember any reporters in particular in that newsroom?

GR: Well, the one reporter I really admire is Bill Husted—the guy with the premature balding and fiery red hair and beard—because he was such a maniac. He was there every day doing the big stories of the day—either he or I—he had been there before me. He was just extremely colorful, too. He was a wild man in the newsroom. I remember one day he got there at his usual early-morning time, and it was fairly slow at the time, so he went into the broom closet and got a mop, and he cut out a horse's head out of cardboard and taped it to the mop. He started riding that mop around the newsroom.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: "Giddy-up, boy! Giddy-up, boy!" And the city editor [Ralph Patrick] was kind of a grumpy guy. You've got to imagine, it was about 7:00 in the morning then, too, and suddenly he saw his star reporter riding around the newsroom on this stick horse, chasing imaginary cattle and telling the stick horse to "giddy-up." I remember Ralph just kind of looked up, and he had a really angry look on his face. "Bill, you put that goddamn stick horse away right now!" [Laughter]

DG: This is Ralph who?

GR: Ralph Patrick, the city editor, who [was] also a very good, good news man. He could be a little grouchy, but with a staff like us, he probably had plenty of reason to be a little grouchy.

DG: Why did characters and episodes like that seem to occur in newsrooms?

GR: Well, I think part of it [was] you had creative people who are in one place. You also have a lot of tension there every day. We had to just work like *maniacs* between 7:00 [a.m.] and noon to get the paper out. Plus, we were in a competitive situation that added additional stress because if you got beaten by the *Gazette*, you *knew* that the editors were not going to like it. But you also had a lot of personal pride in not getting beaten by the *Gazette*, too. So there was a lot of pressure you put on yourself there. I think all of us were impish people, too. We were a relatively young bunch. None as young as me, but a lot of them were in their twenties and early thirties. So it was kind of a wild, wild bunch kind of thing. I liked Ralph a whole lot and I admired him, but he did have a temper. I recall once a veteran reporter had misspelled a name in a story, and it was a profile on

someone. The story was great, except he had misspelled the guy's name something like thirty times in the story. Ralph found out, obviously, and he called a staff meeting. He was just *livid* because the guy who did it [was] one of the veteran reporters, and Ralph laid the law down. He said that the next misspelled name that gets in the newspaper, he was going to *fire* the reporter responsible. He was going to fire whoever put a misspelled name in the paper. Well, lo and behold, a couple of days later, there was a misspelled name in a cut line. The cut lines at that paper, like a lot of afternoon papers then, were written by city editors and assistant city editors under deadline. And this particular cut line had been written by the city editor. Well, there was one kind of smart-mouth young reporter [who] thought it would be fun to take it over to the city editor circled and ask him how he'd go about firing [himself]. And I did that, of course.

DG: Who was the reporter?

GR: It was me. Yes, I went over and did that. He grabbed it out of [my hand]—"Give me that!" And I said, "Well, Ralph, I just want to know how you go about firing yourself?" And then I walked off.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: You know, that was really—youth, I think, sort of led me into that. I was kind of a smart-mouth. Well, anyway, he came over later and he said, "For the record, I screwed up." I said, "Okay." So he didn't ever fire anybody for misspelling a name.

DG: Is that why you're tough, though, as a journalism professor now, teaching students about misspelling names?

GR: Well, yes. What I tell them now is that "I'm going to be really hard-nosed about that, and I'm going to give you a zero if you misspell a name. And because, as bad as it seems to get a zero in my class, it's much better to get it out of your system now, and when you get out in the work force, you don't do it. It's just a matter of habit that you always double- and triple-check." So, yes, part of that. All journalists, I think, have mistakes that they still remember decades after they made them. You still can get a queasy feeling in your stomach just thinking about them, so I basically just try to help people avoid that queasiness as much as possible.

DG: In that newsroom were there any bottles of liquor hidden in desk drawers, or any contraband?

GR: Actually, every Christmas it was sort of tradition that the city editor would take the cache of liquor and—you know, we got gifts from different funeral homes because we ran all those obits free. Well, they would always send bottles of liquor down for the city editor and other editors, and other people would give bottles of liquor as gifts. It was sort of tradition that right around Christmas the city editor would take everybody that wanted [to go] into the back room, and he would break open the bottles of liquor, and we'd just drink it in the back room at the paper.

DG: [Laughs] That's one big party.

GR: Oh, yes. That was sort of a tradition there. It was a relatively poor bunch of people, too. We weren't making much money at all.

DG: But they didn't skimp on sending you out of town if you needed to . . . ?

GR: Never. That was the thing—we wanted to beat the *Gazette* on the big stories. And if there was a big story, we would go. They would be cheap on everything else, but, of course, you got a good motel room and the whole bit, and you got your meals paid. They would stay as long as it took. If it took more than one person or photographer, they would do it. It was just a given. You knew that if a big story happened, we weren't going to sit home and watch. We were going to go. We felt we could beat them on the big stories, and I think we did a lot of times. One example that I'll give, and I was pretty proud of this one. [In] 1975, the fall of Saigon—thousands of refugees from South Vietnam were flown to the United States. It was after that sort of chaotic collapse of Saigon—if you can remember the television footage of people clinging to helicopters—the last ones left Saigon, and all that. Well, there were thousands that were flown to the United States. They went to several different places in the U.S. There were refugee centers set up. One was at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, up in the northwest part of the state. When they were on the way, I got sent up for that along with another reporter and my favorite photographer, Robert Ike Thomas. We basically stayed there for about a week, covering breaking news out of that evacuation of refugees to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. That was one where we were vastly outnumbered, but it was sort of by choice, in a way, because we just basically functioned better. The other paper might send half a dozen people, and we'd send one or two. I remember—by 1975, I had been there almost two years. And at that point, all the city editor did was he said that I was going—I got no directive at all from him other than to "Do good stories." I thought that [was] really kind of a nice vote of

confidence. He wasn't telling me to do this and this and this, and he wasn't going to micro-manage. Just "Do good stories." We didn't have any pagers and we didn't have any cell phones, so it was just kind of a faith kind of thing that I would do the story and it would meet the deadline, and it would be what he wanted. We got over there and got into a pretty good sort of routine. The first day it was a media mob scene, with all the national people there—all the networks, all the big papers, all the Arkansas papers. I didn't do this story, but a reporter for the *Gazette*, the other paper, did a really good thing on the media. He really captured it. He said the national media were standing around talking about being in firefights in Vietnam and the fall of Da Nang and all that kind of thing, while Arkansas reporters were talking about covering the big lumber yard fire at Crossett. Everybody was trying to impress everybody else with their braggadocio and derring-do. Anyway, it was a mob the first day. Everybody was sticking microphones and notepads in front of this first group of frightened refugees. So I did that story. Then I said, "Well, we need to get in with the refugees. We've got to talk to some of them at length and whatnot." Well, by the next morning—I got up early. I got one of those army PIO [Public Information Officer] guys on the horn. I said, "Well, what time are you going to start serving breakfast?" "Five o'clock." I said, "Well, I want to go over there at five o'clock." So myself and Robert Ike Thomas, the photographer—we showed up at the barracks and walked in there. Lo and behold, the one reporter that I really respected from another paper, a guy named John Bennett, who worked at the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* paper—he was already there. "God, that s.o.b. [son of a bitch], John

Bennett. He's already there!" And he was an older guy with a heart condition. [He'd] had several heart attacks. But there he was. He was already there. I thought, "Well, that's not too bad. The only one to beat us here was John Bennett," because he was so good.

DG: Do you remember how to spell his name?

GR: Yes. B-E-N-N-E-T-T.

DG: And just for the record, spell the photographer's name, too.

GR: Robert Ike, just like Eisenhower. I-K-E. Thomas. T-H-O-M-A-S.

DG: Thanks.

GR: Anyway, we went over there, and we were just kind of working the tables. Robert Ike said, "Well, let's bring some film along because most of these refugees seem to have cameras. They may need film." So we basically would—"Hey, you've got a camera there. Do you need some film?" And we'd give them some film. That was sort of our entree with talking with people. We sat down at one table with a family—father, mother, a bunch of little kids—and I started talking to the guy. It turned out he was an assistant mayor of Saigon. He was telling us about all the gold wafers that had been brought out by refugees, including himself, and he went into great detail about that. We broke that story, at least from Fort Chaffee, about the gold wafers that were brought out by fleeing refugees, and the fact that they had converted anything they could into gold. That was a story that went national. That one got picked up and went national. I recall going to the daily press briefing, and one of the national network guys was bitching at the army PIO officer because they had not put out a release on this.

DG: A press release?

GR: Yes. So the officer said, "That's something I just don't know about." Of course, we knew about it. We got it because we got up there and hustled early in the morning. We waited until everybody else had gone on or were sleeping in. We went out and got it and ran it in our afternoon paper and beat everybody. Another one along that same line—the *Arkansas Gazette*, our main competitor, ran some kind of national column, and buried deep in that story among the refugees to flee was this guy who had the reputation as some sort of a thug. He was in the secret police in South Vietnam. Well, we were able to verify that he was one of the refugees who had been brought to Fort Chaffee, and had been given a little special treatment there. But we got that. They wrote about that guy in a column in their paper, but they hadn't bothered to check and verify that he was in the refugee camp, but I did, so I got that story. I got that [as] a tip from the *Arkansas Gazette* that this guy was somewhere in one of the refugee camps, and I found him here. So that's the kind of stuff we did. We tried to hustle on stuff.

DG: Do you remember how many people the *Gazette* had there versus you and . . . ?

GR: No, we were always going to be outnumbered. That was just a—we'd send one and the *Gazette* would have at least two. We never outnumbered the *Gazette* on anything. Never. They always outnumbered us, but it didn't matter, especially [to] me. I didn't like to work with anybody else except for Robert Ike Thomas and Bill Husted. Sometimes Bill Husted and I worked together. And I guess it's okay to tell this now, but you editors—if you assigned both Bill Husted and I to a story, we were so good we'd get it done early, then we'd spend the rest of the time

goofing off.

DG: [Laughs] Okay. For the record, let me note this refugee story. [It] ran in the *Arkansas Democrat* on Sunday, May 4, 1975, at the top of the front page. The headline says, "Saigon Official Brings Black Market Gold." So this was picked up . . . ?

GR: Yes, it got national attention, especially because all the national media was there. Everybody was scrambling around trying to get something different, and this story—nobody else had it. We had it first.

DG: Were there repercussions? Was this illegal that they brought the gold?

GR: No. In fact, the story points out it wasn't illegal. In fact, the state department people who were working with the refugees offered to help them convert their gold into U.S. currency. It was just the fact that it was a detail that hadn't been reported before. Everybody saw these refugees that appeared to just have the clothes on their backs or what they could carry in those overstuffed bags. But some of them had done a little bit of planning, and they arrived with some gold, which is kind of interesting.

DG: It sounds like the media had direct access to all the refugees. How did that . . . ?

GR: They had kind of a press briefing center. They had all these lower-level army PIO officers who would escort you to the place where the refugees were. They wouldn't let the media just go over by themselves and knock on the barracks where the refugees were. You had to take an army PIO guy with you. But they never were intrusive. The only thing I remember about the guy—when we got in his army staff car, he had not driven a stick shift before, and I remember him

scraping that transmission [laughs]. We just kind of lurched for the mile over to the refugee place. But once we got there, he just stood back. He didn't try to intervene, he didn't say to the refugees, "You don't have to talk to them." He just stood back, which I thought was fine. That didn't bother me.

DG: How long did you stay?

GR: It seems like we were there for about a week because there were all kinds of issues. You had the first arrival, then the community's reaction—how they felt about those refugees—they were worried they might stay there permanently. And lots of—we tried to get little feature stories about what it was like there near the end. We did some stuff, too, on the bureaucracy. There was some conflict, I think, between some of the different government officials on who was running the operation. I think there were some problems between the State Department and some of the others, and the White House. There was some political stuff we did [on] it, too. I remember there was one really helpful public information officer who was very frank. I remember he told us something to the effect of, "Well, this is obviously a mess because the same people running this are the ones who ran Vietnam." We got that in the paper, or some version of that, and he ended up—they shipped him out of there pretty quickly. They didn't want somebody that outspoken. But, again, it was a good experience.

DG: How did you transmit your stories?

GR: I transmitted stories the same way. I'd type them up on my little portable [typewriter] and dictate them over the phone. There was a clerk on the city desk—Mabel Berry—an older woman who was really good at taking dictation.

Sometimes you'd dictate them straight to an assistant city editor or, in some case, to the city editor if you were right on deadline. But we didn't transmit stuff any other way when I was there. It was all done that way.

DG: When you dictated, were you ever concerned that something wouldn't be heard right and it would be misconstrued?

GR: Well, you tried to enunciate clearly and you hoped that didn't happen. But when you work for an afternoon paper, you've got to have a lot of faith [laughs] that things are going to work. We had typos [typographical errors]. I look back at some of the stuff and I see a lot of strange typos there, but prose in a hurry is what they call it. That's journalism, especially for an afternoon paper.

DG: How did Robert transmit his photos?

GR: If I recall, on those photos, I believe the whole secret was putting your film on the bus or a plane. That's how I recall it being done most of the time. I'm not sure when. There must have been some portable photo transmitters. I think sometimes you might go to a newspaper that just might have one because [some] newspapers had the capacity to put a story on the wire. And if they had that capacity, they could transmit for you. But I don't think we had portable transmitters, and I know we were always checking bus connections, or [checking to see] if we had somebody going back, too—taking the film back.

DG: How far was it to Little Rock?

GR: Little Rock is in the center of the state, and this was at Fort Chaffee, which was in the northwest corner. It was at least two hours, and probably closer to three. It's a little bit off the beaten path.

DG: What were your impressions in general, just about the conditions of the refugees and this whole encampment?

GR: Well, again, at the time, I didn't think I was really historical as far as a perspective on anything. To me it was just, "Hey, this is a big story, and I'm here. I'm really excited about being here." I didn't think about the long-term aspects or the fact that being able to cover something like this—it was a thrill for me. To tell you the truth, I probably didn't have a lot of empathy for the refugees. They were people to give me information for my story. I tried to be thorough. Then it's on to something else. "What's the next story, Ralph?"

DG: So you got good stories?

GR: Yes, we got good stories, which was what Ralph said to do. "Get good stories." That's what we did. That's what I remember.

DG: Do you remember what John Bennett from Memphis got that morning early that . . .?

GR: He didn't get that one, but I'm sure he had a good story. He was somebody I really respected. If he showed up, I knew that [laughs]—that guy knew the business, and he could beat you eighty million ways because he was so good. I never really knew him that well personally, I just totally respected [him]—with John Bennett on the case. And you knew the kid was probably living on borrowed time, too. He was a guy with all these heart attacks and still out there doing this.

DG: So all you news people knew the reputations of each other. I wonder what your reputation was—what other reporters thought when they saw you coming.

GR: Well, I can't speak too much about me in particular, but it probably was "reckless kid." I think the *Gazette* generally would curl their nose up at us. They'd say, "Well, they didn't get it right" or "Well, they're not thorough" or "They didn't get everything." They just kind of looked down on us. I think they were always trying to prepare excuses for their bosses when they got beat, so they would try to run down what we did. But there wasn't a lot of fraternization. People didn't buddy up from those papers then, or at least I didn't. I didn't have a single friend at that other paper.

DG: Okay. This story on the refugees was written in May 1975. How old were you, Gary?

GR: Well, let's see. That would have been 1975. What's that? Thirty years ago?

DG: Yes.

GR: So I would've been about twenty-one. Probably about twenty-one—maybe not quite twenty-one.

DG: What's another story you remember?

GR: Well, this was a little bit different kind of story—the Nearly Home story. The Nearly Home was the center for homeless boys that had been funded by charities, and I think there was a federal grant involved in it. It basically was a place for runaways or homeless boys to stay at while they were getting themselves back on the ground or getting relocated. One of those charitable things with good intentions behind it. It had mysteriously closed. Again, I remember one of the editors coming over with this tip. "Hey, look into this Nearly Home. I think there's something funny that happened over there."

DG: Let me make sure—say the name of this place.

GR: Nearly Home. N-E-A-R-L-Y. Then home. H-O-M-E.

DG: Okay.

GR: I guess it means—it's one of those do-good, feel-good kind of names. It's not home, but it's nearly.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

GR: Well, this was another one of those stories where an editor came over with this tip that had just been scribbled on a piece of paper, and it was something to the effect that "Nearly Home has closed. There is some kind of suspicion of wrong-doing, and see what you can find out." This was one that they assigned to both Bill Husted and me. We worked on this one together. We started calling around. It's one of those kinds of things, you know, you'd call and call and call, and never get anywhere with it. Finally, I said, "We need to talk to this guy who had been on the board of directors." We made an appointment to go see him at night. We went over to his house—a pretty swanky part of town. We arrived, and the guy was drunk. He was literally drunk. We started asking him questions, and he basically spilled the beans on the whole operation—that the board of directors had caught this guy on several occasions, and that they had decided to hush it up. They gave him another chance a time or two after he had been caught molesting boys. Finally, they just closed it down, but they were mostly interested in keeping it quiet rather than trying to do anything for the boys who had been molested. And he was drunk when he told us this, but it wasn't as if he was a blabbering

drunk, he was a guy who was kind of a crying drunk as he told us this. He was obviously troubled by the whole thing. [Laughs] Well, we got back to the office, and we reported that to our boss here—everything. Then we gathered a few more things that pointed in this direction. A lot of people would not talk to us on the record, and other people flatly denied any of it. We had people who were saying it happened, and others who flatly denied it. And this got to the point that this was a hot potato because many of the people on the board of directors were well-known people around town—that is, money people who might sue. At one point, the editor of the paper, a guy named Robert McCord, called a meeting with us and the paper's lawyer, and I think there might have been some other editors in there. I remember to this day going to the meeting and the lawyers had read everything we were trying to get in the paper. The lawyer's words were, "Well, my advice as a lawyer is not to run this." And I remember McCord shooting up and saying, "It's not your job as a lawyer to tell me what I can run and what I cannot run. It's your job as a lawyer to tell me how I can run what I want to run without getting sued." I thought, "My God, that's all right!" [Laughter] So the decision was made. We had to run—they set the bar pretty high. They said, "Well, if you're going to run this kind of stuff, you're going to need to get some notarized statements. That is, take a notary public with you and type up what they told you and have them sign it in front of a notary." I said, "I don't know if they'll do it." They said, "That's what you're going to have to do or we're not going to run it." So Bill Husted and I did that. We typed up what these guys told us in kind of statement form, at least on two cases, including the drunk guy. We took it back

when he was sober. He looked at it and didn't change a word, and signed it. And we got that, I think, from either one or two other sources, and that was enough to get it in the paper. Before, of course, it was going to go in the paper, we have to have the confrontation with the guy. [Laughs] We were trying to figure out how to do this, and we both were a little bit nervous, too. This was kind of a touchy story. So we went over to the guy's house. It was in a—again, fairly upper-middle-class neighborhood—at least it looked that way to us, because I was living in an apartment above the Arkansas State Board of Nursing at the time—it only had one window and one door. But this house looked pretty upper-middle class. We went into the guy's house, and we were very cordial and he was very cordial. He invited us down into his basement, which was pretty swanky. It had a bar down there and the whole bit. We went down and we basically were lying to him all the way. We were saying, "We're just doing a story about different homes that have worked with young people. We're just trying to do kind of a comprehensive look on all those different homes in Little Rock, and which ones had worked and which ones didn't." And that was going to be our plan. We were going to kind of lead him on there and ask all these questions, and then I was going to put the drop on him with a tough question. The question was going to be something like, "Did you engage in homosexual relations with the boys at the home?" I was trying to [laughs] keep this in my mind—I was going to say this. And we rocked on there for about an hour—all these softball questions back and forth, back and forth. And then we sort of glanced at each other, and it was time for me to ask the question. It was decided ahead of time that I was going to ask the question, and

he [Bill] was going to—I think we had seen on television the good guy-bad guy approach in some movie or something, so we were going to try that. I was going to be the bad guy and Bill Husted was going to be the good guy—I was going to be the one to ask the hammer question. I stumbled on it. I was just off a little bit. I used a noun instead of an adjective. The question was supposed to be "Do you engage in homosexual relations with boys at the home?" And I said something like, "Have you engaged in homosexuality relations with the boys at the home?" [Laughs] It wasn't a really grammatical question, but he got the point. He got the point. I was almost stumbling with that because the tension had been building for an hour and a half. It was really intense. It makes me a little tense just talking about it now—it's been all these years. Anyhow, I got the question out, and he absolutely denied. Flatly denied it. Said it was not true at all. So I started hammering him. "Well, we have this and this and this." "No, it's not true. It's not true." Then, after a few minutes of this, he yelled upstairs to his wife. "Dear, come down." She came marching down the stairs, and I say marching because it was sort of a stiff kind of—almost looked like a march. Kind of a stiff, formal walk as she came down the stairs. She was a tall woman, extremely German-looking. Blonde hair, very firm features. Very stern-looking. And he said, "Dear, these two men are accusing me of having homosexual relations with boys at Nearly Home." And she started *screaming*. "Not true! Not true! It's all a lie! Why are you saying that?" Da-da-da-da! And she just spewed this stuff, and we didn't even say anything. "No, no, it's not true. It's not true." And he said, "Thank you, Dear." Then she went back upstairs. Very odd. Very strange scene that

was. We keep hammering away. I think at that point, you know, the initial tension had been broken, so we were determined we weren't going to leave until we got what we wanted.

DG: I wonder why he didn't throw you out of his house?

GR: I know. That's what I thought, too. But he didn't. I kept asking the question over and over again. This time I got my adjective word usage down correctly. He kept denying it until he switched at one point. Instead of denying it, he said, "No comment. No comment. No comment." I saw that as a little chink in this. It was a subtle switch in his attitude, and we kept hammering on him. Finally, he broke down in tears and admitted it. He said it was true, and we packed up and left. I remember we went to a diner—I think it was called the Kettle. I remember ordering a chicken-fried steak. Bill Husted ordered a full dinner, too. And once it came, we couldn't even eat it. We just picked at it because we were still so wound up and tense. And then we went back and we wrote the story and it ran. The only thing that I was upset about that—the lawyers would not let us use the guy's name. And my contention was, "Well, if it's a libel issue, there's no doubt that we've identified him by position and everything." But the lawyers didn't want to use his name. "Well, if that's the only thing that's not getting in there, I'm happy for it to be done." So it ran, and you always think that stories will bring reactions. I thought this story would bring some reactions because we'd mentioned that all these prominent people in town had let this happen. We had laid all this stuff out there. There was even some federal money. They had gotten a federal grant—the fact that federal money was being used by a molester—it had been funded by our

tax dollars. I thought there would be all kinds of outrage out of this. I thought there would be all kinds of reactions. I got one obscene phone call—[a] hang-up. That was all we ever got out of that. Before it ran, though, one other aspect was the guy had called up several times threatening suicide. He called me up on the phone and said he'd kill himself if the story ran. And I passed that along to the editors, but we went ahead and ran it. We didn't really give it a lot of thought, and he didn't. He didn't kill himself. As far as I know, he may be out running other homes to this day.

DG: What did you say to him when he called and threatened suicide?

GR: I don't think I really responded to that. I just said, "Don't do that." I think I just said, "Well, sir, we're going to run the story. It's my job to get the story." I didn't respond to his suicide threat at all. I did tell my bosses. Nobody seemed too troubled by it. And he didn't—he didn't kill himself.

DG: Okay. The story Gary is referring to ran on the front page of the *Arkansas Democrat* on Sunday, November 24, 1974, with the headline of "Homosexual Directed Home For Boys." Sub head is "Was Factor In Closing A Year Later, Officials Admit." And it's a double byline by Gary Rice and Bill Husted.

GR: Yes. During the interview, we got him to admit everything that we wanted—I mean, enough to verify what we had there. It was nailed down as good as we could nail it down. Now, there are obviously some holes in that story. We didn't have any kids. We didn't have any names. We had people telling us that he did this and this and this, but we didn't have the kids' names. We never did find them. The story did what we wanted it to do, which was to show that a number of

people in the community hadn't done a very good job of oversight. They really hadn't fulfilled their responsibilities. It showed this kind of thing can go on with an organization that's funded by charity and watched by volunteers without a lot of oversight. So I don't know—it was a good story in a way, and it was an exhausting story. But it had holes in it.

DG: But what about prosecution of this guy?

GR: Nothing ever happened. Like I said, there was no reaction on that story.

DG: But wasn't it a crime what he did?

GR: I'm sure [it was], but nobody got aggressive enough to go after it.

DG: I guess no victims came forward?

GR: No, because where were the victims? No one seemed to know.

DG: Because the home had been closed for . . .

GR: Yes, for a number of months, and without really good record-keeping to begin with, and a lot of these kids were street people. Some of them were adults out of the age range there—high teens and even early twenties. It wasn't as if having another hard knock was something they weren't used to, either. They were on the move a lot.

DG: Do you remember if the *Gazette* followed or tried to follow you?

GR: I don't think they touched it. I don't think they touched that story. But it was [laughs] a good one for that stressful energy, if nothing else. I remember that.

DG: Can you remember other times—was that the most nervous you were in an interview, do you think?

GR: I don't know. I don't know if it was the most, but it was one [where] I was pretty

darn nervous. I think you'd get kind of nervous if somebody is yelling and screaming at you, too. [Laughs] You don't really expect that. News people are a lot more comfortable being aggressive than they are being the target of aggression.

DG: Did you use a tape recorder back then?

GR: I used it not—well, a limited amount. As a standard, I didn't use tape recorders. We did not use a tape recorder on that one. We purposely did not because we thought he might be more relaxed if we didn't show up with a tape recorder. If you show up with a tape recorder, immediately he's going to be on the defensive. And you've got to consider, that was back in the early seventies [1970s]. You didn't see tape recorders as much, and they weren't the little tiny things [we have now]. They were bigger contraptions. As a general rule, I didn't use a tape recorder then. I did do a couple of things. I did Q and A's [questions and answers] down there. I did several Q and A's, and I used tape recorders on those. We went through a period where the editor really liked Q and A's, and I did a couple, and other people did them, too. I did a series of taped interviews with Governor [Dale] Bumpers when he was running against Senator [James William] Fulbright for that senate seat that Bumpers won. I used a tape recorder on those.

DG: What do you think of Q and A's?

GR: I love it. It's one of my favorite formats.

DG: Why?

GR: I think it's just kind of a personal preference. I love to read Q and A's. And I also think that readers will read a long Q and A, while they won't read a long story.

There's something about its broken-up and easy-to-read chunks. People like to read the personal words of someone, and whatnot. So I like Q and A's. I think they probably could be used more than they're being used.

DG: Okay. Do you remember another story, Gary?

GR: Well, let's see what we haven't talked about here. Oh, I'll talk about the [Arkansas Congressman] Wilbur Mills story. The "Wilbur Mills and the Poll."

DG: The poll?

GR: Yes. This is it. You've got the story right here.

DG: P-O-L-L? Poll?

GR: Yes. The Poll. Okay, the summary on this one—Wilbur Mills, the powerful chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, had been in Congress forever—had a drinking problem, and that manifested itself when he was caught in the Tidal Basin in Washington [DC] with a stripper. Her name was Fanne Foxe. One of her stage names was the Argentine Firecracker—a rather worn-looking stripper, as it turned out. He was a little looped one night, and I guess she was, also. They had an argument, and they ended up in the Tidal Basin—the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and the Argentine Firecracker. Of course, it became a big scandal. Wilbur Mills was running for reelection not long after that. He usually ran unopposed, but there was a Republican woman named Judy Petty, a college Republican, who decided to run against him. Her campaign actually seemed to pick up a little strength after all this. Wilbur had to come back to the state and face jeering crowds and tough questions and snickers and all that. Well, this was one of those sort of patented Democrat things. I got a call at home. I

was told to come in to work. I would not be doing police that day, as I had a special assignment to work on. I wasn't told what. We liked to do that intrigue sort of stuff. So I showed up for work, and what the story was was that the *Arkansas Democrat*, known for chintziness and not spending money, had hired this highly respected pollster to conduct several polls, including "What is the effect of the Tidal Basin incident on Wilbur Mills?" And he was also going to do a poll on the governor's race and some others. There were going to be four things, all told, for us. And it kept being stressed over and over, "You know, we're paying a lot of money for this. We want this to be just right." So I was going to be doing every story. I was going to be working directly with the pollster. I was going to take his data. I was going to interview him in depth, and I was going to do four separate poll stories. The big one, of course, was the Wilbur Mills one. He came up with this dynamite analysis that the Tidal Basin incident was helping Wilbur Mills by getting him back to the district. And this guy's theory, backed by his polling data, was that he was actually in danger of losing because he wasn't paying enough attention to the district. So he got involved in the Tidal Basin and it brought him back to campaign, and he had a narrow lead now, but he was going to save his job. So the Tidal Basin incident saved Wilbur Mills's political career. And, you know, that sounds a little haywire to me—a little flaky—but this pollster was extremely respected. In fact, I kept hearing "the most respected pollster in Arkansas." And we paid him a lot of money to do these polls for us, and I was to work with him. Well, I came in and I was sequestered so I could do this in private. And I got this story done. And we ran this on a Friday. Is that

right? Yes, one was on a Friday. And then the thing was—and I was going to have to work almost around the clock to do the next three because we were going to run them on consecutive days. And I think we even ran some promo[otional] ads in the paper talking about these poll stories we were going to be having done exclusively by this hot-shot pollster. Wrote this story up—we copyrighted it, as you see there, and when I walked out of the newspaper that night and got into my car—my 1972 Mustang—and I turned on the radio, lo and behold on CBS radio news, leading it was *my story*. And I thought, "Hot damn! Isn't this something?" It hadn't even run yet, but they said, "It would be reported in the *Arkansas Democrat* the next day, so we got it out." It got a hell of a lot of attention. Okay, so I was to go home, get a good night's sleep, show up at 8:00 on Saturday morning, and he would call in with the next polling information over the phone. We'd do the whole thing and he'd give me the numbers over the phone because he liked to work at home. 8:00, no call. 9:00, no call. 10:00, no call. 11:00, I started calling him. I got this babbling man on the other end. "Well, the poll shows that Judy Petty—" "No, no, we've already done the Judy Petty story. We're going to do—" "Oh, well, that's the one we're most interested in. I'm still working on the others. Call me back." The guy sounded drunk as a skunk. This went on until about 3:00 or so in the afternoon. Finally, the editor said, "What's going on?" I said, "I think this guy is out of his head. He's incoherent. He sounds drunk to me. He's not giving me anything to write these next three stories on. He's going back and recapping *this* stuff." This started to alarm people because we had promoted the hell out of this stuff, so the city editor guy called up

the big editor guy—the guy who had commissioned him—Robert McCord, the big-shot editor. The phone rang. "Robert McCord. Tell me what you're hearing." I told him what I heard. He said, "I'll take care of it." About thirty minutes later, the city editor came to me and said, "You might as well go on home." I said, "What happened?" He said, "He's not going to be able to come through." And we never mentioned it again, after promoting those three stories to come [laughs] and all this other stuff. It died right there. That was one of the strangest things I've ever been involved in. You know, I even wondered later if he really made this stuff up. I wondered if any of this stuff that he did on this was legit[imate]. But he totally collapsed on us. And I don't know—that might be a good subject of another oral history for somebody to talk to some editors involved in cutting the checks to pay for this one. [Laughs]

DG: This was a pollster named Eugene Newsom. N-E-W-S-O-M. [Editor's note: Newsom polled for Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus during the Little Rock integration crisis of 1957.]

GR: Yes.

DG: Did you not see any paper documents?

GR: I never saw anything. It was all done over the phone. But he had that kind of respect from all the editors that this guy was the best there is. And if you were running the campaign and hired him, you knew the numbers were right on. When he spoke—I guess it was sort of like what's-his-face—that dried-up prune, [Alan] Greenspan. If he says something, people always listen. Well, this guy had this same kind of reputation. If he said it, it's word from Almighty. Again, you know,

polling thirty years ago—everybody didn't do a poll. Doing a poll then was a really big deal, and us commissioning one—that was really something for a newspaper to do that.

DG: This is a story that was in the *Arkansas Democrat* on Friday evening, November 1, 1974. It's stripped across the front page. The headline says, "Poll Shows Mills Leading In A Close Race." Sub-head, "Tidal Basin Incident Apparently Has Not Hurt Congressman." And I did notice a copyright. How often did the *Democrat* copyright one of your stories?

GR: We rarely did it. Copyrighting a story was something we rarely did. So that was why [laughs]—that shows the importance that the big-shots attached on it, because looking at some of the other investigative stuff I did, we didn't copyright that. We didn't go to that extra thing and put the special little copyright bug below it. It's rare that that was done. I don't think I had another story that was copyrighted the whole time I was there.

DG: I guess this was the Friday before the election?

GR: I think so.

DG: What effect did it have on the election, if any?

GR: Wilbur Mills won handily. I don't think you could say this had any effect.

[Laughs] But I'm amazed that we didn't get fall-out after this because you promote something and say you're going to have it—and we never had it. I don't know. [Laughs]

DG: Do you remember if the *Gazette* picked up the poll results?

GR: They didn't run this. They wouldn't run this. "Those weirdos over at the

Democrat—what are they doing today?" [Laughs]

DG: You must have been a star reporter if they had you doing it. Wasn't there a political reporter who would have been doing this?

GR: Well, all I can say is, of my recollection of those times, if there were big stories to be done, that it was either me or Bill Husted who got to do them. The editors were not really concerned about crossing beats. If they had a big story, I think the theory was you put your best reporters on it because you want to beat the *Gazette*. That was always kind of the attitude. I don't recall any other reporter ever being upset if I did a story that was on their beat because usually—you've got to consider, we were all overworked, and everybody had lots of stuff going on. So it wasn't unusual that you'd see somebody doing something on another beat. I think there was a lot of scramble involved in it, too. At least nobody told me they were ever upset. I don't recall that happened as much. I think then most of the anger would have been directed at the other paper, not at the fellow staff members that much. That's how I kind of see it, but that might be sort of a Pollyanna look, looking back on it. But I don't recall a lot of reporters getting on each other's case like I've seen at other papers because you could direct it at the other paper so easily.

DG: Yes. It sounds like you were a pretty tight staff. I want to go back to the camaraderie in the newsroom, and whether newsrooms are famous for having some wild parties.

GR: Yes.

DG: Do you remember any *Democrat* parties that stand out?

GR: You know, I don't remember any that were just outlandishly wild there. I've been at other papers with wilder parties than we had down there. But I might have been a little bit of a—I wasn't a heavy-duty partier at that point. I remember a lot of smaller gatherings over at my house, and they usually would involve Bill Husted and his girlfriend, and sometimes Robert Ike Thomas. Sometimes we'd try to fix him up with somebody. And the other people I want to mention in this—my all-time favorite sportswriter of all time, Fred Morrow, who was one of the funniest people I ever met and one of the most incredible writers I remember. He was the sports editor. He would come over, too.

DG: M-O-R-R-O-W?

GR: Yes. M-O-R-R-O-W. That sort of leads up to another one of the events that I remember, and that was the sniper incident in downtown Little Rock. Now, basically, to kind of—do you want to stop and check on that one?

[Tape Stopped]

DG: This story was in the *Arkansas Democrat* Monday, December 9, 1974—about a sniper.

GR: Okay. This story—I remember I was at home, and I was cooking Hamburger Helper and drinking Annie Greenspring's wine. I think I was actually having some friends over that night. I got a call from the city editor. "There's a sniper. Downtown Little Rock. Need to get down there. The police reporter—he's already down there. Bill Husted's down there, too. You get down there. Be careful." [Laughs] So I loaded up and headed down there. Apparently, the story was this guy—some walk-away from the military mental hospital had climbed

atop a railroad bridge tower in downtown Little Rock. He was in some kind of an elevator room at the top, and he had a high-powered rifle and he was shooting at police cars and ambulances and other people walking around. Apparently, he had shot up some cars and people got cut by some flying glass, but nobody was seriously hurt. But he was ping-pong away, and apparently had plenty of ammunition. Well, I remember going down there, and, of course, the police had it all barricaded. You tell them you're a reporter, and they say, "Well, go ahead. You can go on in. We've set up kind of a media center and the headquarters is in a carpet warehouse." The guy said, "What you want to do is after you get parked, stay close to buildings as you work your way to the carpet warehouse. Don't be walking out in the middle of the street. Don't make yourself a target. Just kind of stay behind stuff." I knew that the other reporters were already on the way or there. The police reporter at the time was a guy named Bob Sallee, an older guy. He'd been around forever and worked at that paper for a long time. [He was a tall guy, but had a gigantic pot belly—just the biggest pot belly, and it figures in—I'm not making fun of him, but I was creeping around the edge of a building, and in the distance you could hear a gun shot once in a while. I looked around the corner of a building, and I saw this giant belly sticking out. [Laughs] And it was Bob Sallee's belly. Anyway, I joined up with him and worked my way into the carpet warehouse, where we joined Bill Husted along with the sports editor, Fred Morrow. Now, why was the sports editor at the sniper incident in downtown Little Rock? Well, he had been over at Bill Husted's house eating, and the city editor called Bill Husted and told him to go, and Fred went along just for the fun

of it. You've got to imagine this scene. This guy was up in this bridge tower. They were not exactly sure who he was or what they were dealing with. The police command center was in this carpet warehouse. And there were probably thirty media people in there, at least. TV and a bunch of people from the other paper, and we had four people—I guess five, counting the photographer. And radio—there were radio people down there, and the whole thing—and lots and lots of police, led by the police chief himself, a guy named Gale Weeks—a big, old guy, tough-looking. He sort of looked like he was out of M-Squad or something—big jowls, tough talker—and he was leading. And this is in the middle of the night. They were not sure what to do about this because the guy had got a really good command of the area, and he'd fire a shot down every once in a while. They ended up getting a search light from the Little Rock Air Force Base and they shined a light up there, but it would've been a tough shot to try to shoot up there and get him that way. I don't remember a helicopter coming and playing into this. I don't know if was considered and not used or what. I don't remember any helicopters. But I remember they got a bull-horn set up, and information was trickling in that this guy's name was Larry something. So the chief got on the bull-horn. "Larry. Larry. Come down, Larry. You haven't hurt anyone yet. Come down. Give yourself up. Don't hurt anyone." Well, nothing happened. I think Larry fired another shot down, and all these police were saying, "Well, when you don't hear anything that means they're getting ready to shoot. Stay behind those carpets and all that." Then they found out it was the wrong name. His name was *Barry*. So the chief got back on there. "Barry. Barry.

Come down, Barry. You haven't hit anyone. Come down, Barry." Well, he fired another shot and everybody was hanging around the [carpet warehouse] . . .

[End of Tape 2, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 3, Side 1]

GR: We were hiding behind the carpet, but it was almost kind of a lark, in a way. The police were hiding behind the carpets. We were hiding behind the carpets. The police chief was there with the bull-horn rattling something up there every once in a while. There were police snipers looking up there. The whole thing—we were right in the midst—we were right in the middle of the command post.

DG: How frightening was it?

GR: Not at all. It was almost like a lark. [Laughter]

DG: Why?

GR: I don't know. [Laughs] We didn't think we were in any danger there, and we had those rolls of carpet in front of us. I was not worried at all about getting shot. I was thinking, again, about the story—what kind of story I was going to get. In any event, they found the guy's psychiatrist—the guy from the military mental hospital. I think it was called Fort Root. I think that was the name of that hospital there. So they were going to put that guy on the bull-horn and let him call him.

DG: Where was the hospital?

GR: It's in North Little Rock. It turned out the guy was a walk-away from there. He had some major mental problems. He was a former military—he was an expert with a rifle. He was a good shot. In any event, they finally got his psychiatrist. You've got to picture this scene. It was very quiet—very quiet—and it was fairly

tense, so they gave the bull-horn to the psychiatrist guy. Well, the psychiatrist had a very high-pitched, very effeminate voice, and I couldn't hope to duplicate it years later. It was something like "Barry. Barry. Come down, Barry. You haven't hurt anyone. We won't hurt you." [GR speaks with a very feminine-sounding voice] And everybody was just looking at each other—the cops, the media. It took the sports editor, Fred Morrow, to kind of break the silence. He said, not in a loud voice, but loud enough that everybody in that area heard, "Hell, he'll never come down now!" [Laughter] And I remember holding my sides, and other people were just laughing out loud after that. [Laughter] It was so funny! Well, it kept rocking on, and finally they decided, "We're going to get him out. Let's fire some tear gas up there." Of course, it took a lot of rounds of tear gas. It was a hard shot. The police tear gas people had to fire almost straight up and hope that they could hit a small window that was open up there—try to lob some of that tear gas in there. It was at night, so you'd see these tracers going through the sky—a trail of sparks. You could hear the tear gas canisters hit on that metal building and then bounce down. They'd bounce on the ground and sparks would fly. But finally they got a couple of canisters of that stuff—I guess it's a canister—I guess a tear gas shell would be more accurate because they were shooting them with a fairly high-powered tear gas gun. They got a couple [shells] to go inside this small elevator room at the top through the window and tear-gassed the thing pretty good. Then we heard a muffled bang. We heard a muffled bang. Then we heard screaming coming from the elevator room up there, and the guy was screaming, "Oh, my God, I shot myself. My guts! My guts! I shot

myself in the guts! I'm dying!" And he was screaming. And the chief said, "Better fire some more rounds up there. It could be a trick." [Laughs] So they fired more rounds. It took them a while to get another one in up there, but they got another canister in. And the guy was screaming almost non-stop the whole time, that he was dying—he was dying. Well, the chief himself led a line of officers climbing up this ladder to the top of the bridge tower. Now, they couldn't take the elevator because the guy had disabled it, so they had to climb up the ladder. They got up and found out that what he had done. He had shot himself with a hand gun in his stomach. I guess he panicked when he got all that tear gas, but he was still alive. He was still totally conscious, screaming—screaming his lungs out. Well, by this point, we had all come out from hiding and we were standing down there at the bottom of the tower. They had to figure out how to get him down because the elevator was disabled and the only way to get him down was to strap him to a stretcher, tie a rope to it, and just lower it like that. All the while [laughs], it was coming down slowly, and the guy was screaming—screaming. And he was, I'd say, about fifty feet from the ground, and he was still moaning about how he was dying and his guts are on fire and all this. I was standing next to this effeminate-sounding psychiatrist who's standing with the media, and the guy was kind of funny, in a way. He'd been telling jokes and whatnot. He sort of won the media over. So the guy was about fifty feet from the ground—strapped to a stretcher, screaming that he was dying. So he [the psychiatrist] looked up there and said, "Oh, Barry, it can't be that bad!" [Laughter] It was about 3:30 in the morning by that point. It was finally over.

Another newsman that we all respected a whole lot—he was a colorful guy—a radio newsman—his name was Herbie Byrd. I need to double-check the spelling on it. I think it's B-Y-R-D, I believe. Herbie Byrd. Herbie was always at every story—always very good— but he missed this story.

DG: What station?

GR: One of the local radio stations. It was one that I listened to. If you were a news man in Little Rock, you'd listen to that station just to hear Herbie Byrd's broadcast. He was really strong on politics—always covered breaking news like heck. He was a one-man operation, and he was *great*. Herbie had missed that story, and he showed up at 3:30 when it was all over. I remember media standing around hooting at Herbie, "You missed the story, Herbie." And he spun his tires. He was pretty upset. Then we [the *Democrat* reporters] all came back and we split it up into stories. I remember doing a sidebar talking to relatives of the sniper, and that was my major contribution. I think I threw some other stuff into the stories, too. But looking back on some of this, the writing—the police reporter—the guy I talked about—his writing here, "Hunter Barry Shirley." He went by Barry. "The Sniper who held fifty policemen at bay from his perch in the seventy-foot tower of the Missouri-Pacific Railroad bridge near Markham and Rock Streets finally called it quits at 3:22 a.m. today after enduring ten hours of numbing, sub-freezing cold. It was the unbearable pain from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the stomach shortly after midnight and fumes from tear gas that finally got the best of him." I thought, "My God, is that really good police writing or what?" It was good. We had three stories here. It was a really good, strong

package. We actually got the break on this one—we clobbered the morning paper because it didn't end until 3:20 [a.m.], so this was our story. And this was, I think, a good example of when the *Democrat* really cut loose. We had really good pictures. Of course, Robert Ike Thomas—always there. I was there. Bill Husted was there, and the police reporter. We had three. Each of us did a story. We felt pretty good after that paper came out at noon. And follow-ups on that—it turned out later within that same week, someone else walked away from a mental hospital—that same one—another former serviceman. He took a cab and was [about] seventy-five or eighty miles away and killed his whole family and a policeman—from that same mental hospital. So we did a bunch of follows on security at that mental hospital. This was a good example, I think—the sniper coverage—of the *Democrat* really cranking it out.

DG: Did you think about Charles Whitman that night?

GR: I think we probably talked about it. As I pointed out, some of the relatives said this guy could have killed people, but he didn't really want to kill people. Who knows? But he didn't. He didn't kill anybody. He didn't even really hurt anybody seriously. He fired a lot of shots.

DG: You must have been freezing your butts off.

GR: Yes, we were all really cold. We had jackets and everything, but it was still pretty cold because we weren't moving much.

DG: Yes, and you're never prepared for something like that. You don't know what you're walking into.

GR: We didn't know it would last that long. I think I got called out there at around

7:00 at night, so it was about eight hours later. And we still came back and wrote our stories.

DG: Eight hours?

GR: I don't know if anybody went home to sleep or not. I don't know. I was going to talk about the switched bullet story. Do you want to look at that one?

DG: Okay. This is a story in the *Arkansas Democrat* on Saturday, March 22, 1975, across the top of the front page, by Gary Rice. The headline says, "Officials Think Bullets Switched," and the sub-head is, "The One Removed Did Not Come From Mother's Gun." What's that about?

GR: This story was one that I still tell in journalism classes and tell reporters when I'm sitting around telling war stories.

[Tape Stopped]

GR: This involved a situation where a mother and her teenage daughter were at home alone, and they were asleep, or at least in their beds, at night. The young girl had her window open, or at least it was not locked. A guy climbed into her bedroom and started to attack her in her bed. Well, she was screaming, and the mother in the adjoining bedroom heard the commotion. She kept a revolver in her bedroom. She came into the [girl's] bedroom, and there was enough light [that] she could see this guy who was attacking her daughter. So she fired at him—maybe fired at the guy as he tried to run away after the mother came. She thought she hit him, and there was blood found. The police responded to that. Well, at the same time, an off-duty policeman named Monty Montgomery—he showed up at the hospital and said that he had been checking some of his rental property, surprised an

intruder, and the intruder shot at him and hit him. Police examined him, but Monty Montgomery didn't want the bullet removed. It lodged into the fleshy part of his lower back. Police put two and two together and thought that Monty Montgomery might be a suspect in this case involving the attack on the teenager. Well, Monty Montgomery had a lawyer and, of course, if you watch these police shows nowadays, everybody knows all you've got to do is match up the bullet in Monty Montgomery's lower back with the bullet fired from Mom's gun, and you'll know whether Monty did or didn't do it. Even then we knew that, and so did Monty's lawyer, and so did Monty. So they did not want the bullet removed. Of course, the police and the district attorney wanted the bullet removed because they wanted it as evidence. They went to court and sought a court order, and this rocked on for several months. Finally, they got the court order. All of us in the media were waiting to see what the removal of the bullet showed. Of course, it could only show two things, right? It could show it was the bullet or it could show it was *not* the bullet. It was either going to show that he *did* it or it's going to show that he *didn't* do it. The story came out and they removed the bullet, but the district attorney would not say a word. In fact, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported that they were not going to reveal what the removal of the bullet showed. I had an excellent source at the time. He was a state legislator. In fact, this wasn't long after the whole Watergate thing, and talk about Deep Throat [pseudonym of person who leaked information to reporters regarding President Richard M. Nixon's role in the Watergate scandal] and meeting in underground parking garages. We actually did that a time or two. Sometimes he would say, "Let's

meet in the underground parking garage," and we'd go there, and the thing had exhaust fumes in it and it was dark and it was dank. I said, "Why don't we go upstairs to the restaurant?" So we'd eventually go up to a restaurant or a bar. But he just sort of did this for dramatic effect. We did actually meet in an underground parking garage a time or two, but then we'd usually go somewhere more comfortable to talk. He told me—this was one of the damndest stories he'd ever heard—that they believed that Monty Montgomery, or someone for Monty Montgomery, operated on him before the police got to him and switched the bullet—took out the original bullet and put another one in. And I was just dumbfounded with this. "This is one hell of a story! You mean he paid some butcher or some veterinarian or he himself operated on himself and changed the *bullet*?" "Yeah, that's what happened." I said, "Well, how did they *know* that? How can they be sure of that?" And the guy says, "Well, the original X-ray shows the bullet was going this way, but when it came time to take this bullet out, it was going the other way!" [Laughs] They had switched the bullet, but had them going different directions. I said, "My God, that's a hell of a story!" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Oh, yeah, I got it from somebody in the DA's [district attorney] office." This guy had always been reliable before. I put in a call that afternoon to a source of mine, an assistant district attorney, who I had met covering municipal court. He was a lower-ranking guy, but we got along pretty well. We got to know each other pretty well. I put in a call to him. He didn't return the call that afternoon. I went on home, but I left my home number. That night, I happened to have Fred Morrow over. I think I was cooking some

more Hamburger Helper or spaghetti or something—and we were drinking Annie Greenspring's wine—those different fruit flavors. Lo and behold, the phone rang, and it was my source in the district attorney's office. I said, "Say, isn't that really *something* about that Monty Montgomery bullet being switched?" And the guy said, "Yeah, isn't that something?" Then he proceeded to basically tell me everything that I had heard earlier. That was confirmation for me. I wrote this story up the next day. This all happened at night, and I went into work the next day—a relatively short story. We just told what happened and got it ready to go. I went and called the district attorney. Of course, they didn't want to talk about it at all, and they were *livid*. We told them we were going to run this story. The district attorney got on the phone to Jerry McConnell, the managing editor, and said, "You can't run that story. You can't run that story. You're going to blow the case." And Jerry said, "Well, we're going to be running it this afternoon." And, lo and behold, we did. It was a fun one because it had such a bizarre twist. We *really* nailed the *Gazette* on that one.

DG: How did they follow up?

GR: I can't even remember. It didn't really matter how they followed up because if we beat them, that was what counted. They would try something, but their usual method of following up—they would downplay the story is what they would do. They would *never* credit the *Democrat* for anything. Of course, we never credited the *Gazette* for anything, either.

DG: How do you downplay a switched bullet?

GR: I don't know. It was already at the top of the front page. "Well, we're not going

to put it at the top on the front," or something. But, no, they didn't—they couldn't do much with that because the DA still wasn't talking.

DG: Gary, you can't make up some of these stories you covered.

GR: The proof is in the pudding! It's right there in print from the *Arkansas Democrat*.

[Laughter] That was a good one. That was a good one. The sports editor guy, for months after that, he would call me up on the phone and he'd disguise his voice like a deep voice. "Gary, this is Monty Montgomery." He'd pretend [laughter] to be the cop coming after me, but it never happened. I recall how this one ended. The police didn't get the felony assault charge that they wanted against him. They ended up reducing the charge, and he pleaded to a misdemeanor because the evidence was a little shaky [laughs] because of this bullet. I think he left the police force.

DG: Yes, according to this story, when they went in to remove the bullet five months after the shooting, they noticed that there was some fresh scar tissue and it looked liked there had been an incision there.

GR: Yes. They switched the bullet.

DG: That's bizarre. How do you use this in your journalism classes?

GR: Basically, just to show how interesting this business can be. I think that's a legitimate use of confidential sources, too, because that's a story that you would not have gotten without confidential sources. And it showed that you've got to double-confirm this stuff, too. You don't want to be wrong on something like that.

DG: And you didn't name either of those two sources.

GR: Oh, no.

DG: Were you pressured to by your editors, or did you have to tell your editors who they were?

GR: Actually, sometimes they might ask, but they didn't always ask. It was the kind of thing that—I don't think we had as much of a formula down for dealing with those confidential sources. If you had the reputation of having good sources and your information was right, you didn't get a lot of questioning from the editors. By that point, they trusted me. My sources weren't wrong, or I wasn't going to use them. That was pretty much it. We didn't talk about it. We did rely on confidential sources a lot. You've got to consider the time period, too. That was right at the height of Watergate—a little bit after. People knew about confidential sources. Now, we might—"Did we over-rely on them?" Well, perhaps, but they were right. Being right, I think, was the real bottom line for us.

DG: What was your reaction when your editors would ask you who your sources were on stories?

GR: I can't recall there ever being any kind of a push and shove match on that. And they didn't do it as a standard thing. I think if I said, "Well, I can't tell you," they would've let it go at that. I don't think I ever told them that this came from so-and-so. I didn't tell them exactly who. They did not know who the sources were on this story, and they didn't ask. They knew that it came from me, plus the fact that the district attorney called up and he was all bent out of shape. They knew we were onto something.

DG: Did you find that your editors backed you up when people like the DA called

screaming, or people from the public might have called and complained about something?

GR: Yes. I think that of all the places I ever worked, the *Arkansas Democrat* editors backed up their reporters more than any other place. They would go that extra mile. They just assumed that if anybody called in and complained, they were wrong and that the reporters were right. [Laughs] And that was really a great feeling. Of course, you know, you had to be responsible. Your responsibility on that was being right. As long as you were right, they would stay with you all the way.

DG: Do you think that's a good attitude for editors to have?

GR: It was *my* attitude. When I became an editor, I definitely felt that. I think now people are a little bit more “touchy-feely” with the public and all that. Our thing was, we'd go out there and cover the news. We tried to do it well. We tried to write the stuff a little more colorfully than the other paper, and we tried to beat the other paper. We weren't really worried about focus groups or anything like that. We didn't do a lot of reader surveys. And, you know, you look at this stuff—it's a pretty lively paper. If I got this paper, I'd read this paper. [Laughter]

DG: Let's talk about one more.

GR: Okay, one more. This is one that Bill Husted and I also were involved in again. A little background on this—in the 1960s, the Arkansas Prison System was one of the most notorious in the country for sadistic conditions at the different units—Cummins Prison Farm and . . .

DG: There was a movie about it.

GR: Yes. And Tucker was the other prison. Cummins and Tucker were the two big ones. The movie, "Brubaker," was based on conditions in the Arkansas Prison System. They ranged from torture and beating of inmates to inmate trustees running the prison—you know, performing beatings at the behest of the guards, and that sort of thing. There were reports—and I think they were later verified—of unmarked graves. Inmates were just *murdered* and buried in unmarked graves. They just disappeared in the prison system. It was a horrible place to be. Probably one of the nation's worst prison systems—maybe the worst. This all came out later, during the Winthrop Rockefeller Administration. He was a Republican who went to Arkansas and was a reformer. He was a liberal Republican and went down and reformed—brought in new administrators to the prison—this stuff all came out. Well, one of the inmates down there at the time was a guy named Alvin Tyger. Alvin Tyger was in on a non-violent crime, some sort of burglary, doing prison time at the height of all this stuff about bad conditions. He was at the Arkansas prison at the wrong time. He was in some kind of work detail, and he escaped in the 1960s and disappeared. He was gone for years. Well, in 1974, he was captured down in Tucson, Arizona. Basically, he had gone to Arizona after escaping from the Arkansas Prison System. He started a new life, got married, had a little kid. He worked for a beer distributor—responsible citizen—well-liked in the community—people knew him—well-liked at his church, the whole thing. But he hadn't told anybody about this. I think he had just quietly lived—apparently, one of his relatives ratted on him or something. Well, it was kind of vague about how the police found out about it,

but he was arrested down in Tucson. Immediately in Tucson there was a community uprising of support for Alvin Tyger. "Why ship this guy back? He was serving time for a non-violent crime. He has come down here and hasn't had a bit of trouble with the law—model citizen. What purpose is there to ship him back to Arkansas?" Of course, the other end of that—in Arkansas, the officials said, "Well, we can't let people escape from the prison system without punishing them. What kind of message does that send out?" Governor Bumpers was very adamant that he was going to be returned to Arkansas to finish his sentence, and would be tried for escape, besides his original sentence he was serving time for. This became kind of a cause for us at the paper. Bill Husted, the red-haired, red-bearded guy, did a number of interviews with the family. [He] talked with Alvin on the phone and [his] wife, and people in the community down there rallied behind him. I had kind of a peripheral role in this story. It wasn't really my story, but I had done just a little bit on it. Alvin was fighting extradition. He didn't want to come back to Arkansas. It looked like this was going to rock on for a while. On a Tuesday, I guess it was, I showed up for work at my usual time. Bill Husted was off. We got a phone call. The city editor got it, and it was a guy claiming to be a representative of Alvin Tyger, who surprised us by saying that Alvin Tyger was in Little Rock. He was with them. Alvin Tyger did not want to surrender to the state police because he was afraid he'd be harmed. He wanted to surrender to the governor of Arkansas personally, but he wanted the newspaper involved in this to ensure his safety. So he basically wanted to surrender first to a reporter, and that reporter he wanted to surrender to was Bill Husted because

Alvin liked Bill Husted. He was talking to him on the phone and Bill Husted had been doing the stories. Well, Bill Husted was off that day, so Ralph Patrick, the city editor, said, "Well, Bill is not here today. Would Alvin be willing to surrender to Gary Rice?" "Sure, he'll surrender to Gary Rice." So I got called over there—grabbing Robert Ike Thomas, the photographer, again—and we were told to follow these sort of hokey instructions to go to a local motel and have a cup of coffee in one hand and a sack of donuts in the other, and go to such-and-such motel room.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: We did all that, and we found Alvin Tyger in there looking exasperated, and then we found this kind of wacko, weirdo guy—he was an older fellow—who claimed to be some kind of an advocate involved in police work, but not a policeman. It was just some kind of a—we call them a weirdo type. He was trying to handle the public relations for this thing. He said, "Well, we need to go down to the newspaper office, but we can't let Alvin be seen." So we loaded up Alvin in this Volkswagen mini-bus that Robert drove, and we put him on the floor of the mini-bus and took him down to the newspaper, and then I interviewed the heck out of both of them, getting everything I wanted. Not until then did we call the governor's office, after we had everything. We called the governor's office, and, of course, the governor was not going to come down to the *Arkansas Democrat* to take the surrender of Alvin Tyger as our photographers snapped away, but he did send the state police. [Laughter] And they came down and handcuffed Alvin Tyger in our editor's office. We were all standing around there, and this weirdo,

wacko guy from Arizona either faked a heart attack or was overcome, and he collapsed in a heap. So we had to call the ambulance on him.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: They took Alvin Tyger away. [Laughs] Of course, we wrote the story up there. "Surrender of Alvin Tyger . . ."

DG: Let me just note that this story ran December 10, 1974, in the *Arkansas Democrat*. On page one, the headline is "Tyger Surrenders to *Democrat*." Alvin Tyger's name is spelled A-L-V-I-N, last name, Tyger-T-Y, as in yo-yo, G-E-R. And that he had been at the Coachman's Inn in Little Rock.

GR: So they came down to arrest Alvin Tyger. I remember the rest of the day those of us at the paper were wondering, "When is this other guy going to leave because he kept hanging around the newspaper office." Finally, the city editor said, "Look, this guy is bothering everybody. Why don't you take him over in the back room and see what he wants. See what you can do for him." Well, he wanted help addressing his Christmas cards and putting stamps on them.

DG: What?

GR: It was December, see? It was right before Christmas, and he was sending Christmas cards to the president and senators all over the place, so I helped him do some of that—get his Christmas cards ready.

DG: He had them in a satchel, or what?

GR: Yes, he had them in a satchel. [Laughter] He was addressing them at the time. So that's what I spent the rest of the afternoon—helping this weirdo guy with his Christmas cards. We somehow got rid of him. I don't remember exactly how.

But he left the picture. The story, though, continued on. We'd run editorial after editorial saying, "Free Alvin Tyger. What's the use of this?" The paper really got behind us. We flew the wife and their kid to Arkansas so they could see each other at Christmas. The paper paid for that. Actually, the wife and the daughter had Christmas dinner over at my house. We fixed a meal for them and then we took them down to the penitentiary.

DG: More Hamburger Helper?

GR: [Laughs] I think I might have gotten a turkey or something. I don't know.

DG: This is a front-page *Arkansas Democrat* story [dated] Tuesday, December 24, 1974, with a front-page photo of Gary Rice and Bill Husted with Mrs. Tyger and her daughter arriving at the airport.

GR: And I want it stated for the record, in that photograph that I have rather conservative jeans on, while Bill Husted's look like they were made out of some kind of a tablecloth or something.

DG: They're plaid.

GR: In any event, we took the wife around. It was sort of a sad thing because we got to see her, but the Arkansas officials never did bend on this. I remember at one press conference—I sort of got emotionally caught up in this. I remember getting in a shouting match with the Arkansas governor, Dale Bumpers, over this thing. He finally just moved to another question. I was yelling at him.

DG: Oh, tell me about that.

GR: Well, I mean, it was just like—I asked a question and he didn't answer it, so I raised my voice and he raised his, and that was it. He was in control and he just

moved to another question. I was really—I shouldn't have done that, perhaps, but it was okay in our context. We were solely, completely behind this. We wanted to free Alvin Tyger. There was a country western record cut called "The Ballad of Alvin Tyger." It was one of the worst records I'd ever heard in my life. I remember a line in there was something like, "Alvin Tyger, do you like to hear that steel door go slam?" And there was a sound effect of a steel door slamming.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: The guy brought it down and he wanted me to do a story on it, and I thought it was so crassly commercial, I didn't even do anything on it. But that was all part of it. And I'd like to say that this story had a happy ending. It didn't. I left the paper. The story continued after that. Bill Husted went down there later. Years later, the guy did get paroled, but he had to serve a pretty good chunk of time before he did. His marriage broke up. I remember Bill going down there when their marriage was in sort of . . .

[End of Tape 3, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 3, Side 2]

DG: They guy had lost his job.

GR: Yes, the guy had lost his job. So Bill went down there later. Bill was going to do a story about whatever happened to Alvin Tyger? He went to his house. Obviously, they didn't have a lot of money and they weren't getting along, but Alvin Tyger wanted to do something nice for Bill, so he went to the grocery store and got some steaks. He was going to char-grill them outside. He didn't really know how to char-grill, Bill said, and he got these raw steaks and just slathered

them in barbecue sauce. The sauce burned and the steaks were bloody inside. Bill felt so sad for the guy. The guy was trying to be a good host and say, "Thanks for all you tried to do." And that was the last I heard of Alvin Tyger. But it was quite a deal at the time. That's the only escaped prisoner I ever had surrender to me, and it was actually by default because Bill Husted was off that day.

DG: What was it like to—was Tyger in an emotional state that day or . . . ?

GR: Actually, my recollection of Alvin Tyger was that he was just sort of exhausted by the whole thing and really exasperated. And you could tell that he was a little embarrassed by this wacko guy who was with him. Alvin seemed like an incredibly nice guy. The few dealings I had with him, he was very, very nice. He just seemed like he was caught up in this.

DG: What was it like to be a reporter but have your paper be an advocate for Alvin Tyger, because reporters aren't usually put in that situation?

GR: Well, it was just one of those special things, you know. We were all part of this event. The paper had decided they were going to be behind Alvin Tyger. And, by the way, the other paper didn't cover Alvin Tyger like we did. [Laughs] That was our story. We'd spend the money to bring the family there and the whole thing. You know, I didn't think about the ethics of it very much at all. It seemed like the right thing to do. And the whole paper was behind it. Nobody at the paper was going to question it. They *wanted* us involved. But they didn't have to prime the pump any. We were just ready to run with it.

DG: Hang on a minute.

[Tape Stopped]

DG: Okay, we're back after a short break. When did you leave the *Democrat*, and how did that come about?

GR: I left almost two years to the day, I think—well, about two years, so it would've been 1975. I went from there to the *Kansas City Star*.

DG: Why did you make that move?

GR: Well, it was largely money. Everybody at the *Democrat* [laughs]—all the reporters—we didn't get paid much money. Money is an important thing. I don't think I was making \$160 a week by that point. You do good work and you expect to get paid a little bit more, but at the *Democrat* you didn't get paid any more. I wasn't really crazy about living in Little Rock. It didn't really ever seem like a real home. I had a chance to go to Kansas City to work at a paper and make a lot more money. At that time, I thought it would be good to get back closer to the family—all those things. Everybody at the paper had been wanting to make more money. There had been a union movement that had failed. There were some bad feelings about that, I think, at the time. It was a really emotional place, too. Everybody there—for two years you'd been on the edge emotionally, and some of your best work you've done on emotion. Emotion had driven you to do these things. But you do that so long and you get a little edgy about things, too, so I decided to go. It was largely a money thing.

DG: Were you part of the move to unionize?

GR: Oh, yes, I would be—I would back that everywhere I've ever been. I would always back a union movement.

DG: Tell me why.

GR: [Laughs] Because \$145 a week. Need I say more? Yes, that was it. We needed it. Every place needed it. But it didn't happen. It didn't happen. That wasn't the *only* reason. But after that, well, what's the only chance of making more money? You've got to go somewhere else. And, you know, at that time, again—still young—if something doesn't go your way, you're going to move on. At least that's the way I've always seen it. Even getting older, if it doesn't seem right, mosey on. But having said that, though, I cannot think of any two years in my journalistic career that were as exciting and rewarding and action-packed as those. Maybe things looked better with the passage of time, but the stories that I got to tell out of those two years were just unbelievable. You look back on it fondly—extremely fondly. And I think those two years probably captured the essence of why I *still* believe in journalism. I can't think of anything more exciting for some young person who's aggressive and talented to go into. So I think that's a totally good feeling. And when somebody that worked there calls up nearly thirty years later, you're always excited to hear from them. I still look up some of those people once in a while, and they look me up. It's a good feeling.

DG: Maybe working for an afternoon paper with the intensity of meeting the deadline pressure is sort of a foxhole experience, in a way.

GR: Yes, it really was. I think the fact that we were the underdog, as well. When we won, it was very sweet. Every time we won, it was great. Everybody was happy. And when somebody beat somebody from the other paper, you were happy for them. It was a really kind of a rally effect every time somebody scored well.

DG: Speaking of winning—did you win any journalism awards while you were there?

GR: I didn't. I didn't win a thing there. I don't know. You know, I can't remember—I don't remember there being a lot of talk about awards. I don't remember who did or anything. I kind of thought, "Maybe it just wasn't good enough." A lot of what we did—there was some investigative stuff there, too, but a lot of it was just breaking news kinds of things that we just sort of did as a habit. We didn't have a lot of those really ponderous kinds of series. We didn't do a lot of that. Ours was pretty quick. Now, we did have some ponderous series before I got there, and people still talked about those. I don't remember a lot of talk about awards. At least I didn't win one.

DG: Why don't you go ahead now and kind of summarize your career since then.

GR: Okay. Well, let's see—after I left Little Rock, I went to Kansas City and worked at the *Kansas City Star* from 1975 to 1980. The first two and a half to three years of that, I was a reporter in the Kansas City, Kansas, office—general assignment, lots of police, covered the schools a little bit, covered the prison system. We had a lot of prisons near Kansas City—Kansas State Penitentiary, Kansas Women's Penitentiary, U.S. Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth, and the U.S. Military Disciplinary Barracks at Leavenworth—four prisons. I covered those quite a bit. I liked that. It was the most enjoyable thing I did. The best single thing that I did by far in Kansas City was right after I got there, we had a police and a fireman strike at the same time. That was a wild experience in Kansas City, Kansas. That was almost like the old *Arkansas Democrat* days because I was working for an afternoon paper. No, I wasn't, I was wrong. I was doing the morning side, but we

actually wrote for both papers in Kansas City. There was sort of a combined staff. I did it mostly for the morning paper, but it was breaking news because it was a police strike. I was pretty happy with that. *Kansas City [Star]* was a much, much larger paper. It was just one of those humongous, old-style newspapers with literally hundreds of employees. One of my colleagues at another paper said that if he ever got a job at Kansas City, he was virtually certain that he could just get lost there and get his paycheck and nobody would ever notice whether he did anything or not. And he wasn't that far off because I went from writing for the front page every day to not writing for the front page every day. Working for the Kansas City, Kansas, office, we were considered second-class citizens compared to the Missouri side. So there was a little bit of that. We still did good work, but it was a bigger paper, so you expected that. You got more money and whatnot, but it didn't have that sort of day-to-day excitement. But [it's] a trade-off. Maybe you couldn't continue the *Arkansas Democrat* level of intensity for more than a couple of years. I don't know. But that's the biggest thing I got out of Kansas City. That's when I started to become a supervisor and an editor and I sort of halfway in-between became the bureau chief for the Kansas City, Kansas, office. I think I would've been about twenty-three or twenty-four. I was the youngest person there, and I became the boss of that office. I think [there were] about ten reporters and clerks, all told. It wasn't a giant staff, but it was a good place to begin your supervisory career. I think they were a little worried what kind of boss I was going to be, but I became sort of a people-sort of boss. I looked out for the group. The first thing I did that made me popular—the *Kansas City Star* was

really, really deeply set in tradition. Traditionally, in that office, everybody wrote obituaries. Even though there were a couple of people who were clerks, if the phone rang and it was a funeral home and you were a reporter, you picked it up. You had to stop what you were doing and write an obituary. I hated that when I was a reporter. So the first thing I did when I became the bureau chief was to say, "From this moment on, no reporter in here is ever going to write an obituary." And I got cheers from that group. The clerks kind of glared at me, but I didn't care. [Laughs] That's what they were there for. So the clerks worked a little bit harder and the reporters no longer had to write obituaries. That's when I got to work with copy and edit and do a lot of story assignments. I sort of liked that. I did that for two and a half years. I was always into music along the way, and I started going to Austin [Texas] a whole lot on vacations and three-day weekends from Kansas City. I actually got to know the town pretty well. I applied for a job at the *Austin American Statesman*. I went down for the job interview on the day of the unsuccessful hostage rescue attempt in Iran. I heard about it on the plane back after the interview. I interviewed for that job, and several months elapsed before I got it. I found out I had it when I went down for the Willie Nelson picnic in July of 1980. The editor told me to drop by the paper. He wanted to interview me again. I thought, "What is this all about?" He knew I was going to be there. Then he said, "Well, I just wanted to tell you you got the job. Come down as soon as you can." It was a nice weekend. The next nine years [I was the] assistant city editor with the *Austin American Statesman*. The first year I was assistant city editor. I was responsible for the Sunday copy, and I think I ran the

desk a couple nights a week. After one year of that, I got the job that I was most identified with, and that was the night city editor, five days a week. I did that the next eight years. Then I started teaching part-time at Southwest Texas State [University], which is sort of a continuation of being an editor—working with young people—and I got in the classroom. In 1989 I was trying to figure out what I was going to do. I quit and was going to back to school, but didn't have enough money to do that. Then the job came along in Florida and I just sort of took it. "Well, this will give me a month to go out and have fun, then I'll know I have a job at a paper and having fun after." So I went down there. But all the while, I always knew that teaching was where I was going to go. I worked out a deal where I could come back to Texas [and] teach part-time, but it became full-time while I was going to school full-time, so I got my bachelor's degree in two years.

DG: Where?

GR: Southwest Texas State University, while teaching there. Then I went on and got my masters and my Ph.D. at the University of Texas, majoring in American History with a Cold War specialty. All the while, I was teaching. [In] December of 1998 I got my Ph.D. Earlier that year, I had won [Southwest Texas State] University's top teaching award, the Presidential Teaching Award, and got a \$5,000 prize. In the year 2000 I [was] named the department's—the Journalism Department's top professor that was voted on by students. Also, in 2000, I was named the Top Journalism Professor in the U.S. by the Society of Professional Journalists. Then I decided that—the dumbest move I ever made [laughs] [was

to] go back to Kansas and become the assistant managing editor and make the big bucks. I basically tripled my salary, but I hated it. One year later, I was trying to figure out a way out of that and ended up getting . . .

DG: Where were you?

GR: Wichita, Kansas, back to where I first went in 1970. And, as they say, "You can't go home again." Boy, that sure as hell is true. I hated that year. I had a lot of good stories to tell, but it was not fun and I knew I needed to get out of there before it drove me nuts. I applied for and got a Fulbright Fellowship in China, which was great because my minor field of study when I was working on my Ph.D. was Chinese history. So here was a chance to go to China, and I did, indeed, do that. I ended up staying a year—loved it. I got asked to stay a second year—did, and loved it. Then I got back into teaching. I applied for a job at California State University at Fresno. I did the initial interview from a hotel room in Bangkok, and ended up getting that job. Since then, I've been there for two years—teaching at California State University at Fresno. I started a community journalism program in three semesters. My students [have] published close to 300 stories and they're doing great.

DG: Published them where?

GR: In area newspapers in California—small dailies and weeklies. Some papers as big as Bakersfield, San Diego and Stockton. So that program is going. I spend a lot of time concentrating on writing—working with young people. I got a grant for a Dow Jones-sponsored minority high school conference. Got that one done. And that's basically what I'm up to. I just basically hammer away at writing.

DG: How do you use your experience at the *Democrat* in your journalism teaching?

GR: Well, I think that it sort of bleeds over into everything. At the *Arkansas Democrat* we didn't spend a lot of time talking about stuff. We just did it. So I sort of try to insert urgency into everything. You know—first day of class—"Let's do a story. Let's not talk about doing a story or let's not work on leads. Let's do a story. Let's get published. It's not enough. Now that you've learned how to write, let's get your story published. Now that you've got your story published, let's try to write a story that makes a difference. Let's try to write a story that might win an award. Let's try to write a story that makes something happen. And don't just talk about it. Everybody can talk about it. Let's just *do* it." I think that probably comes from the *Democrat* days because a lot of the stuff that we did wouldn't have happened without relentless trying. And sometimes just trying. A lot of people just wouldn't have tried the stuff we were doing. I think that's sort of what I try to get across to them. Hopefully, you can somehow inject people with that. Some people either have it or they don't, but maybe you can bring it to the forefront. Maybe you can show some people they have it, even if they don't know it. But, yes, it's an urgency kind of thing. And it can be fun, too. I still try to get across that it can be *fun* to do these things. Thinking back to last semester, I had this older woman who did a little investigation on a Strontium-90 Testing Center that's in a county park. It's now being used by grade-school kids as a picnic site without there being testing done on it. Well, she got all fired up and checked into that. Lo and behold, she made the county at least put a new fence around it and redo the rusty warning signs and promise full

testing. It made something happen, and she was excited. And this kid—average writer, but hard worker. I took a chance on him in my advanced class, and, lo and behold, he turned out to be an excellent feature writer and got published a number of places. He got paid for his stories. He would not—he would *not ever* have had this chance if I hadn't sort of grabbed him and said, "You can do it."

DG: So it sounds like you're successfully training an entirely new generation of Gary Rice reporters who are going to have *Arkansas Democrat*-type adventures.

GR: [Laughs] Well, you hope, I was telling one of my former students one time—I guess it was kind of a day I was a little bit weary—I said, "All I do is make people do stuff every day that they don't want to do. That's all I do is make people do stuff they don't want to do. I get really tired of this." This former student said, "Gary, that's what we all *expect* you to do—to make us do stuff. That's what you're here for." So I guess that's what I'm here for is to make people do stuff.
[Laughs]

DG: I can't believe you told all these stories without once using the phrase "bat crazy" [a famous Gary Rice saying].

GR: Well, it *all* was bat crazy. That whole two years in Arkansas was bat crazy. It's tremendous, the number of good people down there, starting with Jerry McConnell, who took a chance on somebody who walked in off the street. Bill Husted, as colorful a co-journalist as I've ever had a chance to work with. Robert Ike Thomas, who sort of set the bar for photographers. Not only was he crazy, but he was excellent. Ralph Patrick, the almost movie-style, grouchy, demanding city editor, who gave me [a] chance—who always gave me a chance, and the kind

of trust that just meant so much. "Just go out and do good stories." Well, God, what more could you want from an editor? Characters like that—there was another guy that I still think about, long since gone. A guy named Mr. Moon, just like the popular object that rotates in the sky. Mr. Moon. Glenn Moon. He was a photographer—an older guy. He had been in the Army Signal Corps in World War II and had a reputation of shooting a lot of good combat photographs. Near the end of his career—he had a little bit of a speech impediment—kind of a shrill-voiced old guy who you had to really, really concentrate to understand. It was hard to carry on a conversation with Mr. Moon because you couldn't understand what he was saying most of the time. You'd say, "Yeah, that's right. You bet." You didn't really understand him. You couldn't converse, but mostly it was do your part and he would say something and you'd do your part. There really wasn't much conversation. But I remember working with him. The guy would shake his keys all the time. He would walk around the newsroom—extremely nervous guy. He'd be shaking his keys. [GR makes a "choo-choo-choo" noise, mimicking the sound of keys.] [Laughs] Apparently, one night, Mr. Moon, who was a notorious bad driver—he'd be weaving all over the road. He wasn't drinking, he was just weaving. [Laughs] He got stopped by the state police after weaving along the road. The story goes that the state trooper comes walking up there to the car. He says, "Can I see your license?" Well, Mr. Moon, always a nervous guy—just extremely agitated—got his wallet and popped it open. Well, the first thing that popped out was his state police ID card. It was at night. Apparently, the trooper wasn't familiar with the state police press ID card, but he was familiar with the

state police ID card, and it looked identical to his. And he was thinking, "Oh, my God, I've stopped some big-shot in the state police." So the way the story goes, the trooper said, "How long have you been with the state police?" Mr. Moon said, "Oh, about thirty-five years." And the trooper said, "Well, sir, I'm very sorry to stop you here. You have a good night." I don't know if that story is true or not, but it's a good one.

DG: [Laughs]

GR: You know, characters like that, you remember from the *Arkansas Democrat*—very fondly you remember characters like that.

DG: I can't wait for the movie version of this to come out. [Laughs]

GR: I've got another story I'll tell you later, too.

DG: Is there anything you want to say that I haven't asked you about?

GR: No, I don't think so. Just the fact that what a two years it was—it certainly made my life exciting. And it's also sort of amazing to me how vivid these memories are after thirty years, basically. It seems like it just happened yesterday.

Truthfully, I don't feel like I've ventured too far from that young reporter of those days, but now I like to think that I would still do some of those same things—take those same chances—and not really worry too much about consequences and be just as sassy, just as arrogant, and just as intense then as now. I remember those years *very* fondly.

DG: Well, Ralph Patrick told you to go tell some good stories, and you really have.

[Laughter] Thanks, Gary.

GR: All right.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]