

Gazette Project

Interview with  
Gerald Drury  
20 July 2003

Interviewer: Julia Jones

Julia Jones: My name is Julia Jones and I am sitting here with Gerald Drury, former assistant news editor at the *Arkansas Gazette*. This interview is part of the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History Project on the *Arkansas Gazette*. To get started, tell me your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape to make the transcription available to others.

Gerald Drury: Yes. My name is Gerald Joseph Drury. You may do with it what you like and I will sign the paper later.

JJ: State your name and your birthplace and when [you were born].

GD: Gerald Joseph Drury. I was born May 15, 1939, in St. Louis, Missouri. My mother's name was Mary Elizabeth Price and my father's name was Joseph Milton Drury. I grew up in St. Louis and lived there until I was sixteen going on seventeen or about, when I moved to Richmond, California.

JJ: What was there in St. Louis for a young boy to do?

GD: I never went to downtown St. Louis, except once when I was taking accordion lessons as a child and we got to ride on the river boat *Admiral*, and play our accordion.

JJ: What I was trying to say was how did you occupy your time when you were a

child?

GD: I went to a parochial grade school as a child, and reading became a passion to me. I would read. I would ride my bicycle down to a local library. It was about a half way to downtown St. Louis. We lived on 21st Street and downtown began at 12th. I would go down to about 15th Street and there was a library there a branch library and I would read books a lot.

JJ: Do you think since then — do you think there has ever been a long spell in your life where you were not reading a book?

GD: There has never been a long spell in my life when I have not been reading a book.

JJ: Did anyone in your family read the newspaper?

GD: We read the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* a lot, at least on Sundays. We did not subscribe to a daily newspaper. Back in those days they came around with carts at night. On Saturday night you would catch the boy with his cart. It was a big, old wooden box with wheels. You would buy a newspaper from him.

JJ: I guess that would work in a big city like St. Louis, but I don't think they did that in Little Rock.

GD: Probably not.

JJ: What was your first job?

GD: My first job — I was about nine years old. I set up pins in the church bowling alley. We had two lanes. I had to get a Social Security number before they would let me do that. I think my first job lasted one weekend, and I said, "This work is too hard," and I made two dollars.

JJ: How did the family — what happened that made them all move to California?

GD: They didn't move in a bunch. After World War Two, one of my uncles settled in California, and he kept trying to get everybody to come out there. I had one uncle who lived in Philadelphia. He eventually got divorced, and when he did that, he moved out to California. My other uncles lived in St. Louis with my grandmother nearby. Sometime in the mid-1950s they decided "we are going to move to California, too," so they moved. My grandmother went with them. I lived with my mother for about a year, maybe two — probably not that much. Maybe a year and a half, then I moved to California. I lived with one of my uncles and my grandmother.

JJ: But now you were only out there long enough to finish high school, weren't you?

GD: I just went out there for my senior year in high school, then I got my first job as a telephone line installer, running the big cables in the telephone switching office. I did that for a few months, and then I joined the Air Force.

JJ: So what did you do in the Air force? What was your job?

GD: That is a very strange story. I started out my enlistment — I wanted to be an electronics technician, but when I got there, they weren't especially eager to have electronics technicians. They wanted people who had some foreign language training of some kind. I had been to a parochial high school in St. Louis, where we had to take German. It was a Lutheran church, so we had to take German. I said, "I studied German in high school." "Well," they said, "then you are perfect." So I joined two hundred guys, who it seems as it turned out that they

wanted us to study Chinese.

JJ: There is more than one Chinese language, isn't there?

GD: There is one Chinese language and a whole lot of dialects. The written language is universal, but the dialects are different, and Cantonese is totally different from Mandarin, which is the traditional language.

JJ: You spoke Mandarin?

GD: I would learn to speak Mandarin and I would learn to read a little bit of Mandarin, but mostly the spoken word.

JJ: Now that you know and understand and can speak some Chinese, what did they do with you?

GD: I was assigned to an air base in Taiwan. We lived out in the mountains. The base was up in the hills. We had a large antenna for them and we listened to radio transmissions.

JJ: Can you put a year on that?

GD: It started in 1959 and I was over there doing that until 1962.

JJ: And you did what?

GD: We listened to radio transmissions — civil air force, military — whatever we could pick up on short-wave radio.

JJ: You were a spy?

GD: Yes, I was, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I especially liked the woman controller from Nanjing. She had the most marvelous voice in the world on the radio. It was so sexy.

JJ: Did you see anything in Taiwan besides the airbase?

GD: As a matter of fact, I got to see a great deal of the island. We had a great schedule. We worked six great days and had three days off. So you would take three days off and you would get on a local bus and ride it down the east side of the island or down the west side of the island, to some town. Then you would get off and go to some restaurant and talk to some people and children. And lots of times we could only talk to children because the people didn't speak any Mandarin at all. They spoke Taiwanese or Japanese, since the Japanese had occupied the island for so many years.

JJ: Well, now, you were married and had a child while you was over there?

GD: Yes, my wife came over. We bought a ticket over there. I re-enlisted because when the months I re-enlisted I had more than 4 years in and that meant that the Air Force would ship my family back to the states. My son was born in the Naval Hospital in Taipei.

JJ: So, when that tour was up, you reenlisted and all, but when that [second] tour was up, what happened?

Gd: I went back to Yale University for a session to learn more Chinese, more complicated military terminology, and also to learn to write more Chinese and read more Chinese.

JJ: Then what did they want you to do?

GD: Then we would read what the Chinese radio operators would intercept and take their notes, and read what they had written.

JJ: Did they ever say anything interesting?

GD: Sometimes.

JJ: Was it all business?

GD: It was all business. The most exciting thing that happened when I was over there was when somebody left their coat on an airplane after loading the cargo, and the airways were busy for two hours. We had a lot of trouble translating because they were using words that were not really military. We finally got what it was. We all just enjoyed the daylights out of that.

JJ: In there somewhere, did they want you to go to another country?

GD: They wanted me to go to Korea, but I did not want to go to Korea, so I asked for a different assignment. I wound up at the Little Rock Air Force Base.

JJ: Had you heard anything about Little Rock before you landed there? Did you have any idea where you were?

GD: I knew where it was, and I knew it had been in the news six or seven years before. It was in the news in my senior year in high school. That was not one of the things that I paid a whole lot of attention to. I thought that I was more color blind. In California the schools are integrated and you never had any problems that I was truly aware of.

JJ: What did you do at the Air Force Base in Jacksonville?

GD: When I got to Jacksonville, Arkansas, I was assigned to the PR [Public Relations] office and placed on the base newspaper staff.

JJ: Did anybody care that you spoke Chinese?

GD: Nobody cared that I spoke Chinese at all. They only cared that I could write little news stories about things that were [happening] on the base. I was fortunately sent to Fort Slocum, on a little island off of New Rochelle, New York. I was there in 1964. I noticed that Ernie Dumas was up there the year before.

JJ: What were you up there for?

GD: That was where the Army had its school for public information staff and base newspapers. They teach you how to do that. That was my journalism training, right up there at Fort Slocum.

JJ: Well, how were you at the air base in Little Rock?

GD: I arrived at the air base in late 1963, early 1964. I didn't get up there until probably early 1964, then I spent some time at Fort Slocum, then came back and spent some time and took over the base newspaper. I wrote and edited it, laid it out and pasted it up, delivered it and did everything. It was well rated in the Air Force wing, and so I got noticed. Then along came 1965 and my wife was pregnant. My time came up, and I thought, "I want to get out of the service at this point." I went down, since at that time I was doing a lot of newspaper work and I spent a lot of time reading the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*, and tried to talk with people who were in the business when I would run across them. I did not particularly care for the *Democrat*. It didn't strike me as a very good newspaper. I read the *Gazette*, obviously in my mind it had quality. The writing was solid, the reporting was solid. I went down and talked to A.R. Nelson, the summer of 1965, and said, "I am going to be getting out in September, and I want to come to

work for you.” He said, “I will have to give you a try out and can you work on weekends on the copy desk.” I said, “Sure.” He paid me \$5.00 an hour, something like that. I thought, “Great, that would be a bonus for me, since I am being paid.” So on Saturdays and Sundays, I would go in, and it was very strange to me the people I didn’t know, which, it turned out, included Chris Kazan and Charles Portis. Apparently, the copy desk was very short handed. They had Frank Allen, Bill Rutherford and Jim Clark.

JJ: Was Caruthers on the copy desk?

GD: No. Caruthers was on the wire desk then. This was the summer of 1965. I just worked on Saturdays and Sundays, and there was a very small staff.

JJ: This was still when you were working on paper and Linotype?

GD: Yes, you had paste pots. The copy boys’ job was to mix up the paste pots every day and keep them fresh. We had an old guy, a drunk, really a nice guy who taught me a lot. Ray Kornegay came along and he was almost a mentor. He had a very colorful past, as I came to discover. Then I went to work full time in September.

JJ: You said colorful — you will have to explain that.

GD: I will, but maybe later. So I went to work there. I got out of the service there on September the 15th, and immediately went to work on the copy desk, although when Nelson offered me the job, he said, “I can’t pay \$5.00 an hour, but I can pay you \$80.00 a week. After three months we will give you a raise.” Well, a raise was \$5.00. After another three months he gave me another raise, and there I was

making \$90.00 a week, which turned out to be enough to buy my first house.

Then Frank Allen had a heart attack and died, and Chris Kazan left, and Charles Portis left around that time, too.

JJ: That was before or after he wrote the travel column?

GD: I think he was doing that at the same time. It seems to me that all he was doing on the copy desk was filling in on a couple of days a week because the staff was short handed.

JJ: Now, the copy desk — since you didn't have computers yet, was it in the old-fashioned u-shape and the chief sat in the middle?

GD: It was a horseshoe shaped. It had seven seats, but they took one of them away. The assistant copy editor or the news editor sat in the middle. I didn't go to work until 4:00 in the afternoon. So I sat down and went to work and didn't pay attention to most people in the newsroom. It took me years to learn everybody's names.

JJ: Did you think this was going to be your job forever or did you think about moving over to being a reporter?

GD: I never wanted to be a writer. Writing is the hardest thing in the world to me. I always did follow this belief, I may not be a good writer, but I can recognize a good writer. And sometimes I can improve bad writing, and so that has always been my philosophy, and I have always worked at that. When I come across good writing it is a joy to behold. When you come across bad writing it is a pain to read and I would choose not to.

JJ: Do you remember the old *Gazette* style book — did you all have to go look at that?

GD: It was a folder. It was a big manila folder with sheets of paper in it, and notes, a lot of notes from J.N. Heiskell about when we could spell Tokyo with a y, for example.

JJ: Aside from that one, do you remember anything else that you found hard to swallow? How about nation, and the use of the word nation?

GD: The ones that were the most difficult to follow were kids and stones and rocks. If it wasn't Gibraltar it wasn't a rock. A kid is a baby goat. The funny thing I remember is when that got changed. Charles Albright was the one who got — he didn't get the rule changed, but he got the waiver. He could use "kids." He wrote a column in which he used the word kids. I read it and I changed it to children, and he came in the next day and complained and Nelson and [Bob] Douglas and [Bill] Shelton agreed that a column was different from the rest of the newspaper, and if he wanted to say kids, he could say kids.

JJ: As I recollect, it was almost impossible to edit Charlie's stuff anyway. There was never a word you wanted to change?

GD: You couldn't. As I recall, that was the only thing I ever changed in his column, was the word kids, and after that, kids was okay in his column. Not anywhere else in the paper, but it was okay there.

JJ: You couldn't cut his column, they had to start with it?

GD: No. It went back to the composing room with a "key on this," which meant that

his column was the first thing put into the paper, and everything else was on top of that. You didn't cut his column. That column was always the key piece at the bottom of the page. The B-section page was built on top of that.

JJ: What do you think was the best and the worst of being a copy editor?

GD: The pace. The worst thing about it was the deadline, because there were always reporters like Jerry Garrison, who — this is an actual fact because I sat there and watched him — he cut it up into paragraphs, then he rearranged the paragraphs, then he sat down and rewrote his article before he turned it in to Shelton. I knew he did that at least once because he did it at least once. I saw him do it. But he was an absolute stickler

JJ: That one that he cut up got past Shelton?

GD: Oh, sure. Shelton was a marvelous copy editor, but he had his little quirks, too.

JJ: Now I forgot — we were talking about the best and the worst.

GD: The worst was always deadline.

JJ: Because you had the state edition that went out at an ungodly hour?

GD: I don't remember when the deadline was, but it was like something like 9:00 at night, because it had to be trucked.

JJ: Now they just shoot it up there to a satellite?

GD: I don't know what they do with it now, but back then, get it out into the states some of it. I think some of it may have gone on a train that went through to Texarkana, but mostly it went out by truck. So the trucks had to be there — they had to get up — Conway is only a forty-minute drive away — well, it has to be up

there and distributed and delivered, so it had to be in early. That was always the hard part, getting that first edition out. And you would fill it up, get it out, and then you would have time to do the final, which was 1:30 in the morning which was the 1:30 a.m. deadline. You could work until 1:00. We could get a lot of late news in, but you had to have people writing that could come in and hammer out a story, then get it back in to meet the deadlines.

JJ: Did the reporters argue with you about changes?

GD: No, they might have argued with Douglas — might have argued with Shelton. Once Shelton had sent something, over I didn't bother messing with it again because unless there was a typo that got past him there wasn't anything I could do with stuff that Shelton had gone through. I was always amazed at the city editor that he would spend that much time going through copies.

JJ: He was an extraordinary man.

GD: Yes, he was. We used to send out stuff blind. Douglas would say, "I have x number of pages I need x number of headlines, stories this big and this important, and so many of these and the rest of the stuff is filler, the most." Mr. Heiskell used to love the 12-point headline fillers, the one — this was one of the Portis boys wrote: "The water Chestnut is not a Chestnut." That was the filler, it was just a two line filler. "The water chestnut is not a chestnut."

JJ: Bob Douglas was news editor?

GD: I think he was called [something] like the news editor at that time. When I came in 1965, they had gone through a lot of changes in the newsroom. I don't

remember when Nelson retired, but it had to be probably the late 1960s.

JJ: And at that time Bill Rutherford was just another copy editor?

GD: Well, when I got there Jim Clark was the assistant news editor and the Sunday editor and Rutherford was the second assistant news editor and slots man, mostly just slot man. One of the funniest scenes that I recall — when I was there, Leroy Donald . . .

JJ: Leroy Donald?

GD: Leroy Donald was the state editor. He had a tendency to write really long stories. Now, Jim Clark is only about 5' 2" — he was really a short guy. One Friday afternoon, he was standing in the middle of the newsroom and he hollered at Leroy Donald, "Look at this story you gave me," and threw it out there and it was about 15 copy sheets, there were 18 inches long each. They went out there on the floor, and he hollered, "Leroy, I don't have room for all of this, so I am going to show, just how much of this I am going to run," and he stepped on it and ripped it. "Now, that is all I am going to run," he said. I don't know if that is all he actually ran or not, but that is what he did.

JJ: That was a heavy trim.

GD: I am trimming it from the bottom.

JJ: Did the personnel on the copy desk change a lot? Was there a lot of hiring and leaving?

GD: It did change a lot. We had a core group. When they hired Paul Johnson, they paid him \$110 a week, and I found out, I was still making \$95 at the time. I went

in to Nelson, "Look, I have been here a year already," or however long it was then. And I said, "You have given me this much money and then you went and hired this guy. He doesn't have that much more experience than I have, and you are paying him this much," which he was angry I even knew.

JJ: How did you know?

GD: I asked him. I asked Paul what they hired him at, and he told me, and so I went in. A.R. said, "Okay, I can give you some more money, but I can't give it to you all at once. He gave me a \$10 raise to \$105, then later on he gave me a raise. I don't think I ever caught up to Paul, because he was getting raises too. We worked together well.

JJ: Do you remember when the first women came on the copy desk?

GD: No, time is a problem with me. I can't remember. I was so into the job and it took up so much of my time that I am not sure exactly when. Mary Ann Mobley was the first one, I believe, and then she was followed up by Julie Baldrige. Mary Ann went off with George Carter to Washington.

JJ: I don't know if Mike Trimble ever got another roommate when George left.

GD: I don't think so. I don't think he ever got another roommate. We had all those parties out there every week, sometimes more often than that.

JJ: Do you think they used the copy desk for a training ground for the copy guys to move into another job?

GD: Not at the newspaper. They moved on to other jobs in other places.

JJ: You were working nights. What did you do during the daytime? You went to

school, didn't you?

GD: I came back from the Air Force. I was taking some classes at the University. Little Rock University, LRU, which became a part of the University of Arkansas system in the early 1970s. So what I would do? Under the G.I. Bill, I would go out and take a half load of courses, the G.I. Bill would pay for it. And I majored in English. I told Nelson, "They don't have much in they way of journalism classes at LRU. What do I do, because I am in journalism?" He said, "We don't care. Take English. It is better. We would prefer that you would not be a journalist. They don't teach you anything in journalism school," he said. So I majored in English and minored in history. And as a copy editor, I think I found that history is at least as important as anything else because you are not a good copy editor without a knowledge of history. First, you have to know your English — you have to know your grammar. Secondly, you have to know your context for the stories you are writing. You have to know people and countries and events, and what it means. Even if you are writing headlines, you have to know what it is all about. I think that is important.

JJ: When computers came, the *Gazette* was the third paper in the country?

GD: We got computers. I hated computers. I have always hated computers in the newsroom. I know it's the wave of the future and everything, but I started out with the paper and the line gauge, and you tear it apart and you put these paragraphs in and you could use a little bit of from AP [Associated Press] and little bit from UPI [United Press International] and a little bit from *The New York*

*Times* and you could have a better story than if you just used all one or the other.

When our computers came in we couldn't do that anymore.

JJ: Well, you sure couldn't do it after somebody had monkeyed around with it over the weekend and the program wouldn't work.

GD: Well, that, too. Carrick Patterson had a habit of doing something to the system on weekends, and the people who came in on Monday would be up a creek, for a while.

JJ: The hours that you kept is kind of hard on family life, isn't it?

GD: It was hard on family life, but back then I didn't much care because I was engrossed in everything I was doing. I had two kids. We did some family things and we took a few trips. The job came first, so I worked the hours that were required. Eventually we separated and got divorced in 1975.

JJ: Were you involved in any way in the efforts to organize a union?

GD: There is a good story there. Paul Johnson and I were asked to join and we were called into Douglas's office at that time. He said, "You guys are management," and we said, "What? How can you call us management? We were told that we could not be involved in this and we could no longer party with our friends because we were management and they were not." So we went to one meeting, at which point both Paul and I told them that "we support you, but we are stuck, and we have been told that we can't even associate with you in a social setting until this is over." And then during the depositions I said, "I can't believe that I am management." They asked questions like, Do you ever tell anyone when they call

in sick not to come in?” “Well, yeah, that is what you did. You are sick. I will tell so and so — tell Bob Douglas, or I will tell Bill Rutherford that you are sick and that you are not coming in, but I never actually said that you can’t come in.” It didn’t make any difference, the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] said, “You guys are management, then,” so we didn’t get to vote on the union, and the union lost.

JJ: But it made a significant difference in your own personal appearance?

GD: It did?

JJ: Isn’t that when you started growing your beard?

GD: No, no, I didn’t start growing my beard until about 1974. My wife and the children were off in Connecticut visiting her parents. And I said that while they were gone that I wasn’t going to shave, so I stopped shaving. When they came back I shaved.

JJ: Someone told me that you quit shaving the minute they told you that you were management.

GD: No, that wasn’t it. I stopped shaving, and my first wife said, “Shave or move out,” so I left and we got divorced.

JJ: Was there ever a point when you thought about leaving the copy desk, and you had been there for a while?

GD: There were several times I thought about leaving the copy desk. Once was when after Jimmy Jones died, the state editor. I said to Carrick, “I would like to do something else. I would like to be state editor if you are going to fill the job from

within,” but they gave it to John Portis instead because he was from Arkansas and I wasn’t. I think that was probably it. There could have been other more personal concerns there. I am sure John Portis was a good state editor.

JJ: No doubt. Did you try and leave the desk more than once? Did you apply for any other opening?

GD: I didn’t. Rutherford said he wouldn’t ever let me leave because I was too important to him as his assistant, so I stayed mad at him for a long time.

JJ: So Paul Johnson had already left to work in that feature section?

GD: I think it was just before Paul Johnson left. They were talking about having someone else go over there, but I knew it wasn’t going to be me. I talked to Paul about it, and he said, “Rutherford isn’t going to let you go, but he isn’t going to keep me.” That was it right then, but we had turnover on the desk. Most of our turnover was young people coming in and getting experience and moving on. Julie Baldrige is an example of that. She went on to other things. She got completely out of the newspaper business, pretty much.

JJ: You worked these terrible hours?

GD: The hours were bad.

JJ: You couldn’t even get to the party before it was breaking up.

GD: The parties always went on until about 3:00. Us late folks got there and kept everything going. Usually about the time I got there, after closing up the paper, they were starting to sing. Stuball was a race horse, or Stewball or whatever his name was . . .

JJ: You did finally leave the *Arkansas Gazette* of your own free will?

GD: I have to tell you there are several reasons behind that, and one of them was that I thought I could see the handwriting on the wall. I had heard the *Democrat*, when old man Mr. Engel died, it was run by a couple of guys — his nephews.

JJ: Marcus and Stanley.

GD: They did not do a good job, and the paper was dying. Then Hussman came in and bought it. Rumor was that he had offered or tried to get an agreement with the *Gazette* to do a joint operation, which in my mind was a really good idea because it kept the two papers alive, and it meant that the *Democrat* would never be a true competition for the *Gazette* and it wouldn't be published in the morning. But if the story was true — I didn't know that it was actually true at the time. Hussman apparently got someone in the family to dig deep into their pockets and let him take on the *Gazette*. Then when they brought in John Robert Starr, I knew things were going to be bad. I just knew it because John Robert was a gut-level fighter. He was a real hard ass. He was like that at the Associated Press, too, but when he came in, the whole thing changed. It was different. We kept trying to operate as if it didn't matter. But you could see that it did. You could see it in the circulation figures. You could see it in what that newspaper was doing, and you could see it in the advertising. Then I began to hear rumors about negotiations with *The New York Times* and negotiations with someone else to buy the paper. I never heard about Gannett at that time. But I started feeling that the paper was beginning to get to the point where it was in trouble. I can't leave because my

wife works for the paper, between us we have it good. We had all this stuff going on, but it was beginning to change even then from a family thing into being more business, more bottom line, and I didn't like that. I wasn't comfortable with that. I had spent more than fifteen years saying, "I am just a newspaper man. I just put this thing out. I put out a good a product that I can put out as much news as I can cram into this space and keep our readers informed. We are a newspaper of record," and I wasn't sure we were going to be able to maintain that. Besides that, I was still mad at Rutherford for saying that I would never get off the copy desk.

JJ: That is pretty restrictive.

GD: So then I left in spring of 1984.

JJ: Now you went to Phoenix because your wife had gotten a job?

GD: She got the offer in early 1985, and the liquor store I bought was going down the tubes. So rather than sink us all the way, I urged her to take the job. For one thing, it was more money than she could ever make in Little Rock, and by then the rumors about the status of the paper I thought were true and that it was not doing well, and the *Democrat* was making headway. Then the *Gazette* filed that tax lawsuit that the *Democrat* was throwing money away. The *Gazette* was going to lose that, and when they lose that, the Pattersons are going to lose their paper. At the same time, my wife was very unhappy with the some of the people she was working with and the kinds of pressures they were putting on her or trying to. So I said, "Take the job and we will close up here and move out to Phoenix." And

we did. But there are a lot of years in there 1975 – 1976 — and I was working 60 hours a week. We were short handed. We had a new computer system.

JJ: Tell me about Jack Bradley. He came in and he got hired, but he didn't know anything about computers.

GD: A lot of people didn't know anything about computers. He was hired. He was copy editor, and we had to teach him everything he had to know to operate on the floor.

JJ: I thought he came in after the weekend and knew how to run everything. I thought he had gone someplace over the weekend.

GD: I don't remember that.

JJ: Well . . .

GD: I don't remember that.

JJ: It was miraculous.

GD: He was really a copy editor. He went to Memphis and took one of our women with him.

JJ: They were married.

GD: I don't think they were married when they left. She was still chasing him.

JJ: We went to the wedding, I remember. How was the rest of your life in Phoenix? Did you get a job?

GD: I got a job in Phoenix and I worked as an editor. I worked basically as a editorial copy page editor. I did that for nearly five years.

JJ: That was during the period when they were putting women in every conceivable

position.

GD: Talk about affirmative action, the *Arizona Republic* was deeply into affirmative action.

JJ: They sent this woman over . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JJ: Stephanie had worked in the business department, and they couldn't stand her.

GD: She had worked on the copy desk, but they had gotten rid of her to the news side. They didn't like anything she did in business, so they put her in editorial.

JJ: So what did the copy editors do?

GD: I don't know what they did after that, but I went over to the copy desk

JJ: What did they say?

GD: They were happy to have me.

JJ: They said . . .

GD: What did they say?

JJ: "If Stephanie went over there and replaced you, you must really be a loser as a copy editor." Then they were pleasantly surprised.

GD: I think that is probably true.

JJ: Yes.

GD: I think the chief copy editor came over and said the copy desk was always getting dumped on from the other sections of people they didn't want.

JJ: And then they were happy?

GD: Then, later on, they were very happy to have me.

JJ: Then they discovered your actual background, and they wanted you to take some supervisory position . . .

GD: No, I never. . .

JJ: They wanted you to take the slot. They wanted you to run the desk

GD: I kept turning them down. I didn't want to that. I had done that. I would rather go back and talk about the early 1970s, myself, when the computers came in.

When the computers came in, the back shop was not set up. Our computers were set up to cut a paper tape.

JJ: Now, this is at the *Arkansas Gazette*?

GD: Yes, this is at the *Arkansas Gazette* — in the 1970s — early 1970, maybe 1971 or 1972. We had computers. Our computers were hooked up to a paper tape machine in the composing room. That paper tape that we would send out would go to another IBM computer that would cut a tape that would be a run on the Linotypes that were set up to run those paper tapes. They would read them and set the type. We had to send everything out in small pieces, so you would go through and read a couple of frames, then you would write dollar t, dollar something because the dollar sign not followed by a number meant stop. So we ran into a problem sometime when somebody wanted to write a headline that used a dollar sign. Some business story. And the machine would just stop back there. We couldn't figure it out until we found out what the dollar sign actually meant. But we did that for a long time. That came after that damn belt broke. There is a

Kornegay story that a lot of people remember — the worst thing is that it happened on one of my off days, so I didn't get to see it. It was pure Kornegay.

JJ: You said he had a colorful past.

GD: He did, saying, in 1974, he got a call from the general manager from Churchill Downs, who had apparently known him since the 1930s after long talks with Ray. He had spent a lot of time working on campaigns to get horse racing in Texas. He had spent many years in Houston. I think he had his own PR firm at one time. One time he and his partner got drunk, and his partner walked into the elevator shaft and fell to his death. I am not sure if Ray fell, too. If he did, he was lucky. Ray's wife owned a piece of land where she had a florist business. She owned three quarters of the lot, and a major oil company owned the other quarter. She finally sold out at a very high price. Ray wasn't really hurting for money, but he came back and worked at the newspaper. He was in his early sixties when he came. He was going to work until his pension plan was vested. We didn't have much of a pension plan at the *Gazette*, but he was going to work until that happened. In 1974, the general manager called from Churchill Downs and said, "This is the 100th Kentucky Derby, and did I want you to come." Ray and I were talking, and I said that was a great idea. I would take a week off and I would drive my Volkswagen camper up there, and I would go to the races every day for a week. And you can get me in free for a couple of days, on the really hard days to get into the track. He said okay, so the general manager got him a hotel room and parking passes so we could drive right through the gate even on Derby day.

It was a great trip for me. I loved every minute of it. They knew Ray and they treated him almost like royalty. It was like I knew you since 1935.

JJ: Do you think anybody at the *Gazette* knew anything about his background or did they just think he was a grouchy old man?

GD: Mostly they thought he was a grouchy old man. He was a good copy editor, and Rutherford just thought — and was angry with him a lot because he was a stickler, and would not work a piece of copy fast. He just had one speed, and that is what he worked at.

JJ: It is altogether possible that Rutherford did not approve of his extracurricular activities?

GD: That is true.

JJ: Rutherford had that problem.

GD: Mine either. Ray and I used to go down to Oaklawn every spring every chance we got. And we spent a lot of time playing the ponies and following the horses, and talking about them. Rutherford didn't like that at all either.

JJ: Puritan?

GD: Puritan. He had a puritan streak in him. I missed the wonderful day that Ray cut the belt. I remember when the Sports Department got the television set. Then they started Monday night football. Orville Henry got the television set for the Sports Department. We would run back there and watch Monday night football and then run back in and work some copy and then run back in and watch. I remember talking with Jim Bailego. He was a joy to talk with because he had

more facts in his head about sports, about anybody, than anyone I ever met.

JJ: I don't think we ever heard anyone speak against him. He knew his business

GD: He knew his business.

JJ: Is there any similarity between the *Arizona Republic* and the *Arkansas Gazette*?

GD: I mean, they are both newspapers.

JJ: I mean, they are both newspapers . . .

GD: They are both newspapers. I think that the *Gazette* ran into its heyday in the mid-1950s and that it lasted nearly 30 years. I think that the Pattersons' arrogance is really what caused their eventual downfall. I think if they could have got Hussman into a joint operating contract, instead of deciding that the Hussmans would fail, that the *Democrat* would fail, that it would still be there. It would still be a beacon in the world of journalism. Instead, it is gone. It is just gone. It is very sad to me. The *Republic* was still a young paper, and is still doing well. Gannett may have learned a big lesson about what happened in Arkansas. When they came into the *Republic*, they made very few changes, except at the top level. And before I retired, there had been virtually, as I could tell, no meddling in the newsroom.

JJ: I can't remember when Gannett bought out the *Gazette* — it was after the 1980s, somewhere in the 1990s — we were out here in 1985, then proceeded to kill it. That was the one thing that they did not do with the *Arizona Republic*. They didn't come in and start changing it.

JJ: I thought — I have read these interviews with the *Gazette*. They all mentioned

the red Spandex on page one. They couldn't do that here because the January paper has always had a front page picture of girls in bikinis taking sunbaths at Arizona State University. That is a tradition.

GD: Not on page one.

JJ: Yes, on page one. It was a tradition. The *Republic* had already taken that big step a long time ago.

GD: It's not that so much, it's that the *Republic* had already taken steps to look more like *USA Today*, in short stories and six inches on page one, and the whole story somewhere inside the paper. And boxes and illustrations, that *USA Today* tried to do, and they changed the "Old Gray Lady," the *Gazette*, into something that it wasn't. They tried to do it, and they couldn't.

JJ: Now, that was the *Arkansas Gazette*?

GD: Yes, that was the *Arkansas Gazette*. The paper had things that people had looked at and read their entire lives, personal funny stuff, that went down the left side of page one. I did that. I am the only one that put a dead person in there.

JJ: They were not keyed to stories somewhere else in the paper. It was just a brief.

GD: It was just wonderful little items, about somebody doing something to someone, but it was always all personal stuff you wouldn't normally see. But it was there every day. People had been reading that for 30 years. All of sudden one day you pick up your paper and it's not there anymore, and it doesn't make them happy. They don't have the product they used to have. It was no longer a newspaper of record, and it no longer took pride in what happened in the North Little Rock

Water Department.

JJ: I think every change that was made came up against that kind of resistance. It was a hard town to change.

GD: One of the things about Gannett — it doesn't leave people in jobs for a long time, it likes to have young people coming in — people with very little experience, so you bring people in who don't know Arkansas, who don't know the history of Arkansas — who don't know anything about the people, and they no longer care. It just all goes to hell. It is a crying shame.

JJ: You're retired now.

GD: I am retired now.

JJ: And so am I. You took an early retirement.

GD: When Gannett bought the paper, I was so afraid that we were going to wind up like Arkansas that I retired as soon as I turned 62. I retired.

JJ: Would you try to go to work for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* today if there was an opening?

GD: No, I wouldn't.

JJ: I wouldn't either. I guess it is better than nothing. I would take it to read Charlie Albright and Richard Allen, but I . . .

GD: I would subscribe since it is the only game in town. Just to be reading Charlie's stuff would make it worthwhile. I would go back and look at the different people — Leland DuVall. One of my joys of my editorship was the years I got to read Leland DuVall. He would write his farm and business column every week. I

stand amazed today that there was someone who could write about those things and make them interesting, to someone who didn't even care.

JJ: When you read his interview and you see what precious education he was able to piece together.

GD: It certainly is impressive. There are people who can write, and he could write, and think it was one of things that I enjoyed most when he said, "Take your computer and I am not going to do it." They bought an optic character scanner or something like that. He would type it out and then they would scan it in and they would read it in to the computer and I could work it then. It finally got to the point where I said, "Just give me the copy. I will type it in myself." I just did that for a while until we could work something else out. For a while there I typed his copy in. It was just like I typed in the oil field copy.

JJ: The oil copy may have been a burden or tedious to do than Leland's stuff.

GD: No, it wasn't.

JJ: I suppose they are not going to call us. Here we are, in our mid-sixties. They aren't going to call us to come to work anyway, so I guess it's time to close this tape.

GD: I guess so, unless you have some other questions you would like to ask.

JJ: No, I think that will do.

[End of Interview]