

*Gazette Project*

Interview with

Ken Parker,  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
April, 2002

Interviewer: Robert McCord

Robert McCord: You ought to tell me what your name is.

Ken Parker: Ken Parker.

RM: And I am going to read this sentence to you. I ask you to tell me your name and to indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcription available to others, is that right?

KP: That's right.

RM: All right, good. How long did you work at the *Arkansas Gazette*?

KP: Just a few months longer than ten years. I went to work the twenty-ninth of May 1950 and left, I believe, at the first of September or the last day of August 1960.

RM: Was this the first newspaper job that you ever had?

KP: No, I worked for two years for the *Log Cabin Democrat* in Conway while I was in Hendrix. I worked my sophomore and junior years. I did not work my senior year and came to work here the day after commencement, when I got my degree.

RM: What did you do at the *Log Cabin Democrat*?

KP: Learned a lot of journalism for one thing. I was a reporter, worked forty hours a week, but Mr. Robins was very generous in letting me work when I could.

RM: Now this is the senior Mister, not Frank?

KP: Well, both of them were there, yes. I did reporting on Monday and Tuesday nights, got the country correspondence in. The *Log Cabin* had over a hundred country correspondents. Usually we'd hear from fifty or sixty of them every week. One of them had a typewriter. All the others were written in long hand, and I would go down at night on those two nights and read the countries and edit them. And then just anything that needed to be done around the office. My "desk" was a typewriter stand between Mr. Robins, Sr.'s desk and the wall, and he and I shared a telephone. So I was right there where he could tell me what I was doing wrong and that sort of thing. I remember once I wrote a story in which a story was "very" something or other. He said, "Ken, the next time you feel the urge to use 'very,' use 'damn' instead. I'll strike it out because we don't use profanity, and you'll have a much better sentence." It was good training. That was my newspaper experience before the *Gazette*.

RM: So when you graduated from Hendrix, you went to work at the *Gazette*?

KP: Yes, the next day.

RM: Where is your hometown?

KP: Conway.

RM: Oh, were you born there?

KP: Yes.

RM: And grew up there?

KP: Yes.

RM: Went to the public schools there?

KP: Right.

RM: Who gave you the job on the *Gazette*?

KP: I had sent a resume down. I found out later that the resume didn't get to where it should have been, but you'll remember in December of 1949 the *Gazette* newsroom employees went on strike. I got a call from Sam Harris, sometime not too long after that, asking me if I could come down to talk about a job.

RM: Now, Sam was then the city editor?

KP: He was the city editor, and I had known him when he was with the AP [Associated Press], so I thought it was in response to my resume and found out that, no, he had not even seen a resume, but he was looking for some people to replace strikers. And I had no idea what a reporter should be making. On the way down I tried to figure out in my head, "Now, what will I need to live on?" And I decided I'd probably have to have about forty dollars to week to live, so I was going to hold out for forty-five, and they offered me fifty. Needless to say, I accepted.

RM: Were you married at the time?

KP: No. I might add that I was the envy of my class at Hendrix because I had gotten such a good job before I even graduated. Then I came back down sometime between then and the end of school. I just stopped by to say hello to Sam, and he took me into the library and said, "I thought you might like to know you've got a raise." And I said, "How did this happen?" "Well, Lee Hall worked here last summer, and Lee is graduating from Yale with a degree in Russian, and we've

hired him, and he held out for fifty-five dollars a week. And since you are both coming right out of school with about the same experience, we thought you should be paid the same thing.” And so I had a five-dollar week raise before I started to work. Lee then was living at home, had a car, had everything he needed.

RM: Well, sure, Graham Hall’s son.

KP: Yes, Graham Hall’s son. And after we’d been working there a month or so, Miss Greenhaw, in the business office, called Sam and said, “Would you ask Mr. Hall if he has cashed his first paycheck yet?” Lee dug around in his desk drawer and found every check he had received since he had been at the *Gazette*. About once a month Miss Greenhaw would call and say, “Mr. Harris, would you please send Mr. Hall to cash his checks.” He’d find them in the glove compartment of his car, his sock drawer. He was always the first person in line on Friday when they paid, but he never cashed his check, and he was the one who got me the five-dollar-a-week raise.

RM: So when you went to work, what did you go to work doing at the very beginning?

KP: General assignment reporter. And I remember this was during the strike, and John Fletcher was the weekend city editor. And it happened the first day I was there [that] John Fletcher was on the city desk. And the first story I did for him, as I recall, I rewrote it five times before I got it past John, which tempted me to call the *Log Cabin* to see if I could come back. We were working a six-day week then because of the strike, and at one time I was covering the courthouse, which

was open on Saturday morning, and I was filling in for Jim Meadows. And whoever covered North Little Rock, I filled in for them on Friday, and then I covered the police beat two days a week. So I had a sort of a mixed-up assignment. Bill Meehan was covering the police beat, and then Joe Wirges came back from the strike, and they put him over there.

RM: Was he one of the first to give up on it and come back?

KP: Probably so, and I think he was the only one that came back with the union's blessing.

RM: Oh, really?

KP: The guild gave him its blessing to come back, but Larry Obsitnik probably came back before Joe, but he would be about the next one.

RM: When did it finally settle?

KP: It never did.

RM: They just drifted back to work in ones and twos?

KP: Yes, the guild filed a complaint with the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] about the *Gazette*, and the *Gazette* won it before the NLRB, and the strike never ended. The newsroom people knew that one department couldn't close the paper down, and that the printers unions, the pressmen and such, could not go out on strike because they had a no-strike clause in their contract. And if the typesetters, as I understood it, had gone out on strike, the ITU [International Typographical Union] had a contractual obligation to send people in to fill in for them. So the only people they could find that they could take out with them was the circulation

department, which was not organized, and they told them, “Look, you come out with us, and we won’t go back until they take you back.” And so the circulation people took their records down and dumped them into the Arkansas River and started walking the picket line, and the *Gazette* wouldn’t even talk to them. And, as I understand it, the strike at one point was pretty well settled with the guild, but they couldn’t go back without the circulation people.

RM: And the *Gazette* didn’t want them around?

KP: No, they wouldn’t even talk to them. So when I first went to work, there was a picket line all the time and quite a few of the people were news people.

Gradually, they started finding jobs elsewhere, and it got down to where it was the circulation people, and then they’d have a couple of pickets out on an anniversary or something like that, but that was about it.

RM: But then just gradually they drifted back to the *Gazette*?

KP: Some of them.

RM: I think Spider Rowland was one they didn’t want to take back.

KP: I think so. Mrs. Heiskell told me once that was the one thing that hurt Mr.

Heiskell more than anything else about the strike. He had virtually taken Spider out of the gutter, put him to work, and made him a celebrity. Spider was writing for the guild paper during the strike—scurrilous things about Mr. Heiskell—and she said that hurt Mr. Heiskell more than anything that happened.

RM: But, as I remember, generally, many came back, didn’t they?

KP: Several of them did.

RM: Many had left town?

KP: Yes, some left town and came back. But, in the meantime, the *Gazette* had built up a pretty good staff of scabs.

RM: A bunch of young people, too, weren't they?

KP: Yes.

RM: Did they hire anybody from the *Democrat*?

KP: I don't recall anyone. A year, I guess, after the strike started, Mr. Heiskell and Hugh Patterson decided that they needed to get all of us together and meet us. And they had a breakfast on Sunday morning at the Marion Hotel, about the only time when no one would be working. Hugh wanted to have a bar, and Mr. Heiskell assured him that no one would want a drink before breakfast, and so they finally compromised and had beer. I think Mr. Heiskell was the only one who wasn't imbibing. Somewhere, I have a picture of the group at that breakfast.

RM: What a classic that must be.

KP: It was an interesting group of people. We had a good staff and a very conscientious staff, I think.

RM: Well, after the strike settled down, what was the spirit around the *Gazette*? Talk about what the newsroom was like.

KP: Very professional group. A group that had fun. There was a lot of joking, but when it was time to work, you quit joking and you worked. Probably some of the most creative writing done during that time was on the bulletin board in the newsroom. So many things that people wanted to say got put on the bulletin

board that they had to give us a special bulletin board for our stuff so that we weren't covering up all the official notices. It was a fun-loving group, but a very serious group when it came to working. Very proud to work for the *Gazette*.

RM: A lot of talented people among this group?

KP: Yes.

RM: Give me some examples?

KP: Oh, Tom Davis, Mort Stern, Jim Meadows, Ralph Leach, Bob Douglas, Martha Douglas, then Leslie. A good group of people.

RM: Now, Douglas had at one time been sort of the leader of the strike movement?

KP: Yes. He left and went to, I think, North Carolina or someplace and came back.

RM: Wasn't it all about money?

KP: I was not there. I have been told that there was no disagreement on money, that it was a job security clause that was the breaking point. And the main thing—and I think Bob or any of the others will tell you this—[was] that the guild sent in an organizer here to handle the negotiations, and he was determined they were going to strike. I think it was the guy [who] had led, I think, three or four locals into the same sort of thing. Lewis Webster Jones, the president of the University of Arkansas, had worked out a compromise and had gotten the two sides to agree to it, and the international would not go along with it.

RM: Was Jones a friend of the publisher, or was he just a concerned citizen?

KP: Just concerned, I think. But that's the story I heard. I was not involved in any negotiations or anything.



RM: But the attitude, the spirit there was good?

KP: Yes. I'm jumping ahead of myself here, but I think the high point of the *Gazette* staff during the ten years I was there was the tornados in March of, what, 1952?—Judsonia, Bald Knob and all that—I was assistant state editor at the time. Ralph Leach was the state editor. It was my day off, and I had gone to see Charlene, my wife, who then was my fiancée. I got a phone call at Charlene's house. Mary Grace, the PBX operator, was the world's best at finding people. She knew that if I wasn't at home, I was probably at Charlene's, so she called there. Ralph was calling to say there had been a tornado at Dierks. He and Gene Prescott were going down to cover that, and he wanted me to come in and fill in on the desk while he was gone. Well, on the way from Conway to Little Rock, I found out there had been a tornado at Mayflower, so I stopped off and got notes on it. I came on in, and when I got to the state desk, the phone was ringing, I answered it. [It was] someone reporting a tornado somewhere else. And before I could sit down, I had three calls from correspondents reporting tornados, and, of course, Leach and Prescott were in the wrong part of the state. They were in the right place at the time they were sent, but it was the last place that you needed a couple of staffers at the time. But that night there were tornados in Tennessee, Kentucky—all through this part of the country. Gene Fretz set up a tornado desk, and he was coordinating all tornado copy. I was handling the Arkansas tornados. Gene and I were probably the only two people in the office who had any idea what everybody was doing and what was going on. Everybody was working.

“Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do it.” And I’ve thought several times since that Jim Meadows, for instance, went to Judsonia and got a byline on a story that moved on the AP A-wire. Pretty heady stuff. Dean Duncan was at Baptist Hospital, counting injured as they were brought in, which was pretty grunt type stuff. Carroll McGaughey was at some HAM operator’s house in Sherwood, getting what he could from the HAM radio. No one ever complained, “Well, why didn’t I get to go to Judsonia?” or “Why am I being told to do this?” It was “Whatever you need me to do, I’ll do it.” And that was the weekend that Douglas MacArthur made his triumphal return home. Hugh Patterson made two mistakes that weekend. First, he came through pretty early in the evening Friday and was greatly impressed with how things were being handled, and he told Nelson, “Don’t worry about overtime. Let’s get this covered.” And the overtime that week was fantastic, as you can imagine. His other mistake was that he and Frank Duff, Hugh’s assistant, decided that there’d be a demand for *Gazettes* at Searcy. They’d get the first edition over there that night, and they would sell a jillion of them. So they went over and were delivering the paper, and Frank stepped out in front of a runaway car or something and ended up with a broken leg. But it got Frank and Hugh out of the way until we got things covered. MacArthur came to town then on Sunday with an entourage of national media people. Sam Harris was in the pressroom at the MacArthur deal. One of the national reporters said, “Well, you must have had a hectic time around here. How many people did you have covering tornados?” And Sam quickly counted up the number of people we

had actually out in the field, and he said, “Three.” And the guy said, “You did all that with three people?” And Sam said, “Hell, there were only three tornados.”

RM: It sounds like him.

KP: But it was a good performance.

RM: Well, that’s a night you’ll never forget.

KP: Right.

RM: Now, when did you move from reporter to the desk as an assistant state editor?

KP: I moved to the state desk as assistant about a year after I went to work, and then in 1953, I became state editor.

RM: You were well equipped for that job, I would imagine, by that time. That’s wonderful.

KP: I enjoyed it. It was a good assignment.

RM: The idea that the *Gazette* would have that much talent in the newsroom was always a wonder to a lot of people. How do you account for that? Were most of those people native Arkansans who just didn’t want to leave Arkansas? Is that what happened?

KP: Some were. I really never thought of it in that way. I don’t know if you ever knew Ted Craig or not, but he came here from Wichita, and the thing that prompted him to leave Wichita, I think, was that he had to write an obit on a large advertiser and the lead on the obit was, “John Jones, beloved department store owner, died.” And there’s none of that sort thing at the *Gazette*. If someone from the business office wanted something in the paper, he came to the city editor with

his hat in his hand, and he might or might not have gotten what he wanted, you know? But it was a paper that was free of what so many papers had gotten into, and the biggest part of it was the fact that J.N. Heiskell was still the editor of the paper. He never became the publisher. He said the owner should be the editor. And there was never any business office interference. I remember one time—and this called for a staff editorial meeting to decide what to do on it—but one of the Finkbeiner meat packers had gotten into some sort of trouble over sanitation or something. And most people, if they thought of Finkbeiner's, thought of Chris Finkbeiner, and this was not Chris's company. So Chris was concerned people would think that this was his company, and there was an editorial meeting in Harry Ashmore's office in which we all discussed the pros and cons of how this story should be handled. I don't remember what the outcome was, but rather than just say, "Well, hell, that's the name, Finkbeiner" and go with it, they did otherwise. But that's the only time I ever remember anything that might have smacked of business office input, and it wasn't . . .

RM: But that could have been as much for that person's sake as for anything else.

KP: Right.

RM: Now you went back and forth from Conway to Little Rock for a long time, didn't you?

KP: I moved to Little Rock when I took the job. A classmate and I had an apartment over in North Little Rock, and because I was being drafted, I gave up the apartment, and another a classmate of ours moved in in my place. And then I

wasn't drafted, but I had lost my apartment.

RM: You had a health problem?

KP: Allergies. But I decided—I didn't have a car at the time—I thought, "Okay, I'll buy me a car and start commuting to Conway," living at home that way. Then Charlene and I married in 1953, and I continued to commute until the summer of 1954. Then we moved to an apartment on Park Hill in North Little Rock.

RM: Why did you leave the *Gazette*?

KP: I sometimes wonder. I had an offer from Harold Snyder, who was the founder of Arkansas Valley Industries, a poultry company, and Harold was going public with his stock. Sam Harris was working for the Stephenses.

RM: Harris had left the paper?

KP: Right before that. Harold went to see Sam and said, "I'm looking for someone who can do for my company what you have done for Stephens and ARKLA." And Sam recommended me. Harold asked me if I'd like to talk about it. I told him I would, and we had a couple of sessions to visit on it. I decided to take the job, and I think I probably left at a good time. I enjoyed every day I worked there, but I never missed it for a minute after I left, so I must have left just at the optimum time.

RM: Sounds like you did, too. Sure did. That's interesting. What did you do after Dardanelle? Where did you go?

KP: Went to Crossett as division public relations manager for Georgia-Pacific. And then from there to El Dorado with Murphy Oil and then to Little Rock with

Reynolds Aluminum. Then I went into business for myself, starting the *Arkansas Legislative Report*. I quit the *Report* about three or four sessions ago. Now I'm publishing legal briefs and a monthly newspaper on workers' compensation.

RM: You're seventy-one now. Do you ever miss the newspaper business?

KP: I don't really think I miss it. I think the business has changed so much I'm not sure I could take the same pride in it today that I did then.

RM: What are some of the changes that you notice?

KP: Well, as an old editor, total disregard for the English language. And the things that J.N. Heiskell would never have stood for, you now see all the time. Mr. Heiskell made sure we all knew such things as there are no tugboats on the Arkansas River, only towboats. That's not a twenty-one gun salute they fire at a funeral for some retired military man; it's three volleys. A twenty-one gun salute is fired only for the President of the United States. Only yesterday in the *Democrat Gazette*, there was a report of a twenty-one gun salute for a veteran at Russellville. That sort of thing would probably make me jump out the window before long. Then, I think, the whole news business has changed with TV and cable, twenty-four-hour deadlines and all that. There's not the checking for accuracy as there once was. No one says, "If we can't be sure about the story today, let's hold until tomorrow and do some more checking." It's get it on the air now, and we'll check it out later. So I don't think I miss it that much really.

RM: Of course, the *Gazette* was always the biggest paper, but both it and the *Democrat* were doing pretty well because we didn't have much television. Do you feel, as

an interested citizen, that it has really hurt the town and the state to have only one newspaper here, or has it really made any difference?

KP: I think it has hurt. I think there's need for both voices. The *Gazette*, if it were still going—certainly, if Mr. Heiskell were still there—it would be a Democrat newspaper, which the *Democrat Gazette* is not. In 1948, when Truman and Dewey were running for president, Harry Ashmore told the story about being in Mr. Heiskell's office, and they were commenting on the fact that a number of Southern papers were supporting Dewey, and that morning the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* had endorsed Dewey. Harry said, "Well, Mr. Heiskell, I don't suppose there's any chance that we'll bolt the Party, is there?" Mr. Heiskell said, "We'll stay with the party." Harry asked if the *Gazette* had ever bolted the Democratic Party. He said that Mr. Heiskell looked around to make sure no one was listening and said, "Well, I don't like to talk about it, but we did go Whig one time." I think it would still be Democratic and Republican opinions expressed if we had two papers.

RM: Mr. Heiskell's role in actually producing the paper was still pretty strong when you were there, wasn't it?

KP: Yes, he was in the office five and a half days a week, and he spent most of his time on the editorial page. However, he read everything in the paper. He would always read *The New York Times* and the *Courier Journal* from Louisville and then the *Gazette*, or as he always referred to it, the *Arkansas Gazette*. It was never just the *Gazette*. And he would [find] things in the *Times* or the *Courier*

*Journal* or *Commercial Appeal* that were not in the *Arkansas Gazette*. Then he would clip things from the *Gazette* that he wanted to call someone on the carpet on. He'd come out about the middle of the afternoon with little handfuls of clippings. I think the most effective dressing down I ever had was about one of those. I was on the state desk, and he came out with a clipping about something at Marked Tree or Truman, a fairly minor story, but he'd seen it in the *Commercial Appeal*, and we had gotten it at the *Gazette* from AP the night before and decided to hold it until the next night. It was too late for the paper going to Marked Tree. And he said, "I saw this in the *Commercial Appeal* this morning, and I didn't see it in the *Arkansas Gazette*." And I said, "Mr. Heiskell, we got it, and it was too late for the first edition. We decided to hold it for tonight." He said, "Well, you should have used it in the second edition and in the city edition last night and then picked it up for the first edition tonight." Well, the story wasn't that important, but that's what he said we should have done. I said, "Well, I am sure you're right, Mr. Heiskell. It was a case of faulty judgment on my part." And he said, "It certainly was" and turned and walked away.

RM: Next to Mr. Heiskell, who were the people that were really responsible for developing the reputation that the *Gazette* had?

KP: Sam Harris, A.R. Nelson, Heinie Loesch, John Fletcher, Carroll McGaughey. It was just taken for granted that you were going to be professional. Speaking of Mr. Heiskell and his clippings, he came out to the newsroom one day with a clipping from the *Gazette* in which Fillmore Street was spelled with one L and



told Sam Harris that street was named for President Fillmore, who spelled his name with two L's. So Sam took it to Tom Davis, who had written the story, and Tom said, "Well, I looked in the phonebook, and it's spelled with one L there." So Sam said, "Okay, call the phone company and ask them why they're misspelling Fillmore." And he did and they said, "That's the way the city engineer's office gave it to us." So he called the city engineer's office, and they said, "The ordinance establishing that street spells it with one L." So Tom wrote a little feature story on it, and the next day the editorial page had an editorial saying we need to correct the spelling of Fillmore. The city council met in a couple of nights, and someone introduced a resolution to correct the spelling of Fillmore Street. Alderman Mills objected to the second reading. He said it was a bunch of foolishness, just something the *Gazette* was doing for attention. There was no need wasting time. Fillmore was dead, and he didn't care about how we spelled his name. So for the next two weeks, until the next council meeting, the *Gazette*, in the news columns and on the editorial page, mentioned Alderman Mills at every opportunity and spelled his name "Mils" every time. So the next meeting of the city council Alderman Mills moved that they adopt that resolution.

RM: That's a great story.

KP: But here, even, nothing was manufactured. Everything that was used was legitimate.

RM: When people across the country think about the *Arkansas Gazette*, they think about the desegregation crisis of 1957. What is your assessment of that in the

*Gazette's* history?

KP: Which one of my lectures do you want? It was, of course, a time of greatness for the *Gazette*. I was in a rather interesting position. As state editor I had responsibility for covering seventy-four counties, not including Pulaski, so everything was happening at Central High was off my beat. At the same time I was right there in the midst of what was going on. At one time we counted up that there was something like a hundred twenty-five out-of-state newsmen using our newsroom as their headquarters. Television journalists, who at the time were sort of getting started—people like Sander Vanocur and John Chancellor, and people like that—were using our newsroom. So I was getting to meet these people and work with them some on some assignment covering. I remember one time Chancellor and Sander Vanocur were trying to decide if Winthrop Rockefeller was going to Jonesboro for the opening for a new plant, a new factory. He was supposed to be there as chairman of the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission, and he and Orval Faubus had not met since Faubus called out the troops. So these national media people wanted to be there if there was going to be a meeting between the two. And they were trying to decide what to do. Finally, I picked up the phone and called Rockefeller's farm and told Win Rockefeller what their dilemma was. And he said, "You might tell them that I'm going to Jonesboro quite early tomorrow and tour the plant, but then I have urgent business, which will require me to leave before the governor gets there." They didn't go. But it was interesting having a chance to work with some people like

that. Really, my involvement in the integration thing predated Little Rock with Hoxie. In fact, I ended up getting subpoenaed as a witness in the lawsuit in federal court over integration in Hoxie. I had gone to Hoxie to cover a rally that the Citizens Council had there, and because this was all something very new, we had not seen this sort of thing. I took more notes than I ordinarily would've taken, and when I got back to Little Rock, I typed up all my notes and passed them around to other staff members, telling them what these people were saying as background for them. Well, then when the school board filed suit for an injunction against the Citizens Council and Jim Johnson and Amis Guthridge and so on, they had a hearing in Judge Trimble's court and then one in Jonesboro, and I was subpoenaed both times to come and read my notes into the record. Before Judge Trimble, I read my notes, and one of the defense attorneys said, "Now, do you feel there is anything there that you find to be incendiary?" And I turned to the judge said, "Your Honor, I was there as a reporter not as an interpreter, and I would prefer to confine my remarks to what was actually said." And he said, "Answer the question." I said, "Well, yes, I think so." And he said, "Well, for instance?" And I said, "Well, here Jim Johnson says our grandparents would have settled this sort of thing with a length of rope. I think that's rather incendiary," and I cited a couple of other things. Then the lawyer starts saying, "Well, in other words, you're trying to inhibit free speech?" And my Hendrix College education paid off, I guess, [because] suddenly I remembered the quote from constitutional law class when Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The right to

free speech does not give one the right to go into a crowded theater and shout fire.” The school board attorneys, Edwin Dunaway and Bill Penix, used that in their closing arguments, of course.

RM: Do you think that the *Gazette*'s reputation was mainly based on what it did in 1957, winning the Pulitzer Prize?

KP: A big part of it, yes. However, I think even before that, within the profession at least, J.N. Heiskell was well known and highly regarded. And then, of course, Harry Ashmore was well known and highly regarded and had made a name for himself before he won the Pulitzer Prize. During the peak of the problem at Central High, I went into Mr. Heiskell's office one day for something. As I passed the switchboard, it looked like a Christmas tree, and a lot of it was people calling to cancel their subscriptions. So, while I was in his office, I said, “Mr. Heiskell, I want you to know how proud I am to work for a paper that stands up for what it believes.” And he said, “Well, you know it's costing us money.” And I said, “Yes, and that makes me even prouder.” And he said, “Well, I appreciate your saying it, and I can tell you that if we had to do it over, we'd say the same thing again.” And I know he would have. I don't think most people realized how close the *Gazette* came to going under at that time.

RM: Did you lose any county correspondents because of the *Gazette*'s position? How many did you have?

KP: We had around a hundred. There were a couple who didn't quit, but I just quit hearing from them. No one wrote in and said, “I'm quitting.” I had the same

problem that some other people had: some friendships I had with some of these correspondents became more frigid. Matilda Tuohey, who had covered the Capitol for years, asked to be taken off the Capitol beat because of the hostility. People who had been her close friends were having to shun her now. There was that. We had a couple of staff members whose neighbors didn't know where they worked, and they wouldn't let them know. Barbara Ashmore, Harry's wife, once said she had quit using her credit cards because if she went into the department store and charged something on the card, there was always a delay and, virtually, you were waiting for the other shoe to drop. Sometimes they would say, "Oh, your husband's doing a great job." In other cases, they'd said, "Oh." She said she finally just quit using the cards. I think all of us encountered that, where you didn't know what the reaction was going to be when you told someone you worked at the *Gazette*.

RM: There were a lot of people those days, Ken, who, as you know, said, "Well, the *Gazette*'s news columns are just as bad as the editorial page. They're so wrapped up in this thing that they're distorting the news," what have you. I'm sure you heard that probably every day. Was there any basis to that?

KP: I can truthfully say that in ten years at the *Arkansas Gazette*, no one ever told me to write a "policy story." It was always write the story and write it accurately and fairly. During the strike, for instance, the bus drivers and people like that were pretty hostile toward the *Gazette*, but then as they started having their own strikes, they realized we were covering them fairly, and they changed their attitude

toward the paper. We always felt that if you had both sides angry with you, you probably were doing a pretty good job, and we succeeded in that a lot of times. Even during the 1950s, I think I had a pretty good relationship with Jim Johnson, Amis Guthridge and some of the other segregationist leaders. They knew that the paper didn't agree with what they were doing, and they probably knew that I didn't agree with them, but we were always fair with them. I think they recognized it, whether they would say it or not.

RM: Well, even though you were gone from the newspaper at the time of the so-called newspaper war, I know you followed it with much interest, and I also know that you followed the paper after it was purchased by the Gannett Corporation. When did you feel like you first noticed the *Gazette* changing, or did you ever think that it was changing?

KP: Well, certainly during the Gannett era, there was less emphasis on news coverage and more on bells and whistles. Until Gannett, I'm not sure I noticed much difference in the news. Now I think things like free classifieds and that sort of thing, I would have gone ahead with— what I had been doing well all along, rather than trying to outdo or at least equal the *Democrat*.

RM: The Gannett people came in and said the company had “deep pockets.” That led me to believe that they were going to see it through, no matter what it took.

KP: I thought they would.

RM: Well, is it your opinion that the *Gazette* might still be in operation if it hadn't been sold to this chain newspaper?

- KP: Probably so. I think Gannett gave up before it had to. Here you get back to the J.N. Heiskell thing—the owner should be the editor and not the man looking only at the balance sheet and making decisions. It's a different era of journalism we are in, and it's becoming more and more the prevalent thing. Of course, during that time I was not closely associated with either paper, so I could not be considered an expert on the daily war.
- RM: Do you have a feeling about what kind of a job the surviving newspaper is doing? Is it as good as we could expect?
- KP: They're doing a better job than I expected them to, but not as good a job as I would like to see them do. And, of course, I disagree with all the editorial policy, but I also think the news is not covered as well as it could be and should be. But, as I say, they are doing better than I had anticipated they would.
- RM: Did you feel like the Gannett product that the *Gazette* was putting out did not concentrate on news, but on other things?
- KP: Yes, I did, and I thought the news coverage they did was good, but there was not enough of it and [there was] too much of the frills.
- RM: Well, is there anything about your time at the *Gazette* or your feelings about newspapers that we haven't talked about that you'd like to say?
- KP: I think we've pretty well covered it, but, of course, there are a jillion Heiskell stories.
- RM: Well, if you think of a good one, why, let's put it on the tape.
- KP: Well, I think J.N. Heiskell probably had as much to do with molding public

opinion in Arkansas over a period of seventy-five years as anyone in our history. You could walk down the street in Little Rock when he was still the editor of the *Gazette* and ask the first hundred people you saw, “Who is J.N. Heiskell?” and they wouldn’t have known. And that’s the way he wanted it. His name was not on the masthead. You came down the hallway on the second floor, and here was photographer Larry Obsitnik's name on his door, but then you get to the end of the hall, and Mr. Heiskell’s door said, “Editor,” with no name. He admitted that Harry Ashmore was more visible than he was because it took a lot of heat off of him. But there were people who, at that time, were of the opinion that Mr. Heiskell was probably bound and gagged somewhere in the basement of the building, or he would not be letting the *Gazette* say the things it was saying. What they didn’t know was that some of the editorials that Harry Ashmore caught the most hell over were written by Mr. Heiskell himself. As he told me, “If we had to do it over, we’d say the same thing again.” Mr. Heiskell served in the United States Senate. I covered the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association meeting at Hot Springs one time and was surprised to find that everyone there addressed him as “Senator,” but here no one did. The only time I ever heard of him capitalizing on it in any way was when MacArthur made his “Old Soldiers Speech” to Congress. Harry and Hugh Patterson and Mr. Heiskell were in Washington for an editorial or publishers meeting of some sort, and, of course, everybody was trying to get tickets to get in to hear MacArthur speak. Harry had Senator Bill Fulbright working to get them tickets and, finally, Fulbright told



them, “Look, I may have three tickets. I’m not sure. Won’t know until the last minute, but meet me on the Capitol steps, and if I have tickets, I’ll pass them to you.” So the three of them were in a cab driving to the Capitol, and one of them said, “What are we going to do if Bill hasn’t gotten us tickets?” Mr. Heiskell said, “I don’t know what you two plan to do, but I plan to take my seat on the floor as a former member of the Senate.” That is the only time I ever heard that he spoke of this service in any way. Fulbright had the tickets, so he didn’t have to do it, but he was prepared if that’s what it took. Of course, he served only a brief time in the Senate, but most people who had passed through the Senate door would have insisted on being called Senator for the rest of their lives. He was a great character. Had a very unusual sense of humor. It came out at the most unexpected times. I remember once he was leaving on a trip to Europe. He got to the door as he left that afternoon and said, “Well, I’m going on vacation. I’m going to Europe. I’ll be gone for three weeks and, in the meantime, to hell with the *Arkansas Gazette*,” and he was gone. You didn’t expect these things from him, and, suddenly, he would hit you with them. He kept up with what was going on, but he also trusted his editors to do it. There was a time when he had a rule that his picture was not to be used in the *Arkansas Gazette* except for his obituary. But when they rededicated the old State House, he was the master of ceremonies, or something, and he was in practically every picture our photographer made. It was a choice of either getting no picture coverage or having Mr. Heiskell in some pictures. He put a notice on the bulletin board the next day, saying that this

“continual” use of the editor’s photograph was not to be repeated and his picture was not to be in the *Gazette* until his death. Then he came around to each of us in the newsroom and made sure we had read that note and that we understood what it meant. The only time I know it was ever used after that, he and W.J. Lemke and August Engel were honored by the Arkansas Press Association, and we had a picture of the three of them. Nelson called him at home and said, “We have this picture and would like to use it, but I’m not going to without your permission.” And he said, “Well, do we look cadaverous?” And Nelson said, “No, you all look very healthy.” He said, “Well, I don’t want my picture to be used, but I don’t think I should penalize Mr. Engel and Mr. Lemke just because they happened to be associated with me.” So he gave permission to use it.

[End of Interview]

### **Addendum**

Below are additional observations made of people who worked at the *Gazette* added by Mr. Parker to this interview:

**Morgan Beatty:** Morgan Beatty was gone from the *Gazette* before I arrived. In fact, when I was in school, I heard him on NBC Radio, where he was one of the top newsmen. Beatty was from Benton, if my memory is correct. He was a reporter for the *Gazette* before going to NBC. When he left, he owed the *Gazette* for quite a few long-distance telephone calls he had made to his girlfriend. Since he did not have the cash to pay for the calls, he gave the *Gazette* his camera. It was the first camera the *Gazette* owned, and it was assigned to Joe Wirges.

**Nell Cotnam:** Nell Cotnam was around the *Gazette* for years and, at one time, was the society editor. When I went to work at the *Gazette*, Nell was editing a weekly column called “Among Ourselves.” It was quite exceptional to get mentioned in that column.

No one knew Nell’s age. It was rumored that she had dated J. N. Heiskell before he married and that she was a bridesmaid at the marriage of J. N. Heiskell and Wilhelmena Mann.

Joe Wirges went on a hunt to determine how old Nell was. He would get Nell into a conversation and, in the course of that discussion, would ask, “Do you remember the opening of the Main Street Bridge?” Nell would reply that she did, and Joe would go walking off saying, “Okay, she’s at least that old.”

**Richard Davis:** I don’t recall all of Richard Davis’s background. His parents lived at Little Rock, and he had gone to some fancy university, although I don’t think he graduated. He had had polio, and one of his hands was withered. He was hired at the *Gazette* and was assigned to the City “crap desk,” writing obits, market reports and that sort of thing. Among his skills was Greek.

One evening, soon after he went to work at the *Gazette*, Richard was on the phone talking with someone about river stages or something, and as most of us did, he was doodling—only his doodling was in Greek. Someone from the Associated Press office passed by and saw Richard talking on the phone and doodling in Greek. By the next evening, the word was out that the *Gazette* had a new side man who took notes in Greek.

After some time at the *Gazette*, Richard left and went to New York. There, he contracted some illness and died as a young man.

**Clyde Dew:** I never knew Clyde (“Count”) Dew. He was gone before I arrived at the *Gazette*, but I heard enough stories that I felt almost as if I had known him. He was the managing editor for a number of years.

It seems that Mr. Dew smoked a cob pipe, which required frequent lighting. He used wooden matches, which he tossed into the waste basket, not always making certain the match was out. A fire in Mr. Dew’s waste basket was almost a nightly occurrence.

The printers loved to tell about one time when Mr. Dew and a printer got into a disagreement while making up page 1. They finally agreed that, as soon as they got the page locked up, they would fight it out in the newsroom. Reporters started moving desks and chairs and putting typewriters where they would not be damaged. Sure enough, as soon as the paper was locked up, the two went to the newsroom and exchanged a few blows.

**Frank Duff:** Frank Duff was administrative assistant (or something like that) to Hugh Patterson. He was from Mobile, Alabama, and had an extreme Southern accent. He handled a number of things for Hugh, largely personnel matters. He was one of those individuals that everyone on the staff went to when there were problems. He would listen to your complaints and then would say, “Are you telling me this just to get it off your chest, or do you want something done?” Frequently, the plaintiff would decide that just telling it to someone was sufficient. The rest of

the time, Frank would follow through as indicated.

At one point, the *Gazette* did some remodeling, including a project to turn the marble steps on the back entrance to the newsroom. These steps had been worn in the middle. While they were being turned, Sam Harris said to Frank Duff, “Frank, in St. Peter’s there is a statute of Jesus, and people have kissed His big toe for centuries with no sign of wear. If that is so, why are we having to turn the marble steps on this stairway?” Frank replied, “All I can tell you is that Mr. Allsopp did not pay for the marble in that statue.”

**John Fleming:** John Fleming was a copy editor. He was also known to fabricate stories he told in the newsroom. However, he was considerate in that, when he was telling one of his tall tales, his inflection changed. That way you knew that he was telling this one for entertainment and not for historic accuracy.

**John L. Fletcher:** John Fletcher was one of the better writers at the *Gazette*. He was a relative of John Gould Fletcher and of Bishop Albert L. Fletcher. In his early years at the *Gazette*, he was primarily a political writer. During World War II, he worked as city editor, and he had the title of day city editor at one point. Later on, he was assigned to write a daily column on business and agriculture. Fletcher was good for only one article a day, but when he finished that article, it was flawless. Some times his column would run a few lines long, and the makeup man would bring it out for someone to cut out the necessary words. It was virtually impossible to cut even a word without the entire article collapsing.

**Gene Fretz:** Gene was for several years the telegraph editor of the *Gazette*. He was a

brilliant individual who was handicapped by a terrible speech impediment. He stuttered and would not let the listener complete the words for him. He stuck with it until he got the words out.

The *Gazette* newsroom was remodeled in the early 1950s, and to give the telegraph editor easy access to the AP office and the UPI printers, the telegraph desk was the first a visitor encountered when he entered the newsroom. It didn't take long for management to realize that Gene Fretz with his stuttering was not the best person to be acting as receptionist.

I remember a story Gene turned in after one of the British parliamentary elections. It was all typewritten with no wire copy pasted in, and it showed that it was from "*Gazette* Press Services." A. R. Nelson commented that it was a very good article and asked Gene where he got it. "I just interviewed myself," Gene replied.

**Betty Fulkerson:** Betty Fulkerson was the *Gazette's* society editor during much of the 1950s. She was the daughter of Circuit Judge Gus Fulk and married Baucum Fulkerson. They had two daughters, one of whom died while just a child. Baucum Fulkerson had a fatal heart attack after returning from the daughter's funeral.

Betty lived in the old Fulk home, a three-story mansion near the Governor's Mansion. The third floor was a ballroom. The house came complete with a ghost. Betty was always glad to have staff parties at her home if the *Gazette* or someone would pay for the food and drink.

Betty was a good society editor. She knew the prominent families in Little Rock,

but she realized that there were also prominent people in the state that she did not know.

**Mary Grace:** Mary Grace was the world's greatest PBX operator—no question about it.

She was a widow with a son. Her husband had died when the son, Wesley, was a small child. When I went to work at the *Gazette*, Wesley was in school learning to be an optometrist. Wesley finally graduated, and Mary went to Florida for his graduation. As soon as he was a licensed optometrist, Wesley fitted Mary with glasses. She was so proud of them! Sam Harris said, "Mary, I think this is wonderful, but I can tell you where you could have got those glasses a helluva lot cheaper."

Mary was without equal when it came to finding people who didn't necessarily want to be found. When I was state editor, there was an embezzlement at the Bank of Dierks. The person with the information was a bank examiner who had faded from sight. I called Mary and told her I wanted to talk with this guy, and he was a bank examiner, and he would be in a motel in the Nashville area. In a few minutes, she called and said, "Parker, is he driving a black Chevrolet?" I replied, "Mary, I don't know if he has a car." She said, "He is coming to the phone." The man answered, and Mary said, "Mr. so and so?" He said, "Yes." She said, "You didn't think we could find you, did you?" Then, she left the line and left me to talk with this astonished bank examiner.

Mary's regular nights off included Tuesday. Elections are on Tuesday, and there is no time to ask for the name of the caller, and get approval of the callee, etc.

We arranged for Mary to work every election night.

Mary had been at the *Gazette* years when I went there, as had Joe Wirges, and they were great friends. When he came in from the police station each evening, Joe would stop and visit with Mary, and if one could hear the exchange, it was priceless.

On one occasion, Mary said, “Joe, do you know it’s only two months until Christmas? You’d better get my present ready.” To which Joe replied, “Thanks for reminding me. Nowadays, it takes me about that long to get it ready.” On another occasion, Joe stopped in the men’s room, and then stopped to talk with Mary, who noticed that his fly was unzipped. She said nothing but pointed to it. Joe said, “You’d better be careful. Something may jump out of there and bite you.” Mary replied, “Something may fall out of there, but nothing is going to jump out.”

Mary was great about covering up for employees. If a wife called, she would lie if necessary. But if she found out that the employee was cheating on his wife and was probably out at the moment with his significant other, she would not lie.

**Elmer Upchurch (“Ma”) Grant:** Ma Grant was the senior man on the seniority board of the *Gazette* Chapel of the ITU—and as I recall, there was about a 30-year gap between him and the next person. When he finally retired, he had more than 60 years at the *Gazette*.

Ma’s other claim to fame was that he was the only person in the *Gazette* building who addressed J. N. Heiskell as Ned. He was at the *Gazette* when Mr. J. N. and



Mr. Fred came there, and he called them by their first names. Mr. Heiskell addressed him as Mr. Grant.

In the 1950s, Ma Grant worked the day shift, primarily setting editorial page copy. He would occasionally insert his own editorial comments concerning the editorials, such things as “HELL, NED, YOU DON’T BELIEVE THIS CRAP ANY MORE THAN I DO!” He always put his editorial comments in capital letters so the proofreaders would be sure to take them out before they went into the paper.

Ma drank on the job. Every afternoon when Ma left, the porter would remove an empty liquor bottle from the cabinet next to Ma’s Linotype machine. I never saw him drunk, although there were occasions when he had a bit of trouble hitting the door as he left.

**Sam G. Harris:** Sam Harris was one of the better newsmen I ever worked with. It was a pleasure to watch him get information for an article.

Sam grew up in Oklahoma, the son of a physician father and a Christian Scientist mother. He worked on papers at Fort Smith and in Mississippi before coming to Little Rock with the Associated Press. During World War II, he was a hospital corpsman in the Navy, returning after the war to the AP at Little Rock. He was then hired to be city editor of the *Gazette*, later being assigned to the Capitol as a reporter and then leaving the *Gazette* to handle public relations and other chores for Witt Stephens. He then returned to the *Gazette* as public relations man.

Sam chewed on a cigar most of the time, periodically using his copy shears to cut

off the chewed-up end and give him fresh tobacco.

**Heinie Loesch:** Henry W. Loesch was nicknamed Heinie. He started as a sports writer and eventually moved to the copy desk. When I arrived at the *Gazette*, Heinie was the slot man—and a very good one. Heinie wore a green eyeshade, as did Nell Cotnam and Bill Bentley.

As his health deteriorated, Heinie became the day slot man. Nelson would talk him into working on election night, but only after he guaranteed there would be a cooler full of beer in the managing editor's office.

Heinie had a couple of strokes. He always said his first stroke was caused by Charlotte McWhorter walking through the newsroom in a tight sweater.

**Inez Hale MacDuff:** Inez Hale MacDuff started out as a state employee of some sort. In some way or another, she started writing a weekly Capitol gossip column which appeared in the *Gazette* as a letter home from “Cousin Lou.” Inez left her state job and joined the *Gazette* staff before anyone but a couple of editors at the *Gazette* knew who Cousin Lou was. The older members of the staff addressed her as Lou, but she would not allow us younger staffers to do so. We usually addressed her as Mrs. MacDuff, and only in later years did I feel comfortable calling her Inez.

Inez was editor of the Sunday feature section, which meant she always had books that needed to be reviewed. It was important to stay on her good side so she would give you a book to review, which meant not only a free book but a check for \$5 for writing the review. For people making \$50 to \$60 a week, that \$5

check was good.

**Carroll McGaughey:** Carroll McGaughey was J. N. Heiskell's grandnephew. He was from North Carolina and came to work at the *Gazette* in the late 1940s. When I arrived at the *Gazette* in 1950, Carroll was the state editor, and a very good one. He was later promoted to managing editor, but he was not effective in that job. He became interested in television and had a program on one of the Little Rock channels and later moved back to North Carolina, where he worked in TV until his premature death.

When Carroll arrived at Little Rock, he did not really know Mr. Heiskell, having seen him at family functions a time or two. He told Mr. Heiskell they needed to decide how he should address and refer to his granduncle. He did not think it would be proper to call him "Uncle Ned," and he didn't feel quite right calling him "Mr. Heiskell." Mr. Heiskell replied that he understood he was known around the *Gazette* Building as "Mr. J. N." and that might be as good as any form of address.

**Jim Meadows:** Jim was one of the newsmen hired during the *Gazette* strike. He covered the Courthouse beat. Jim was an alcoholic who was dry for a number of years, but he eventually fell off the wagon and left the *Gazette*.

Jim's wife was Louise Hale, who married William Faulkner's brother Dean.

Dean Faulkner died in an aircraft accident four or five months before his daughter Dean was born. Jim later married Louise and reared Dean.

**Bill Meehan:** Bill Meehan was one of the newsmen hired during the *Gazette* newsroom

strike. He covered the police beat until Joe Wirges returned from the strike and then was assigned to cover North Little Rock. Bill was an alcoholic who had been on the wagon for several years. During a vacation, he had a beer one evening and decided he could drink one and quit. Of course, it was not long until he was back to his old drinking ways. He left the *Gazette* and I never heard where he ended up.

**James Street:** James Street, after a short-lived career as “the Boy Evangelist of Mississippi,” wound up some way at the *Gazette*, where he became state editor. This was in the 1920s.

At about the time of the 1927 floods, Street heard for the first time of buffalo gnats, and the name struck him as funny, a buffalo being a large creature and a gnat a tiny one. He learned that buffalo gnats were particularly numerous after heavy rains and that they pestered cattle. He decided it was probable that the state prison farm, being in the area that flooded, was infested with buffalo gnats, and he wrote an article about the problem. The next day, the superintendent of the prison called to say he had not seen a buffalo gnat in years.

Street was on the verge of being fired when he was hired by the Associated Press and sent to the Atlanta bureau. There he ran across a surname that he thought was amusing, especially when linked with the amusing name of a town in Georgia. I don't remember either name. Street wrote an article about a family with that surname which lived in that Georgia town. AP decided to pick it up for the A-wire, but they wanted a photo of the people in the story. It was Street's day off,

so someone else in the bureau was assigned to find the family and get the photo. After phone calls, the reporter determined that there was no family by that name in that town and never had been.

Again on the verge of being fired, Street was hired by the Hearst papers. It seems Hearst was having a meeting of his editors and had copies of all his papers spread out on the floor and was going around making comments. "What we need is more writing like this," he said and pointed his cane at random at one of the papers. As soon as the meeting was over, all of the editors got down to see what the article was. It was an AP story out of Atlanta, so they called the Atlanta bureau to ask who had written that article. They told it was written by James Street, who was just about to be fired. He was hired by the Hearst papers and had a contract.

His assignment left him with the time he needed to write the fiction for which he was obviously suited, and he saved up enough money to buy his contract and become a full-time writer of fiction.

During the 1950s, Street showed up unexpectedly at the *Gazette*. He was in town a couple of days, spending most of the time in a tavern across the street. Joe Wirges and other old timers in the newsroom and older printers would take turns going over and talking and drinking with him. Some of us youngsters joined them and delighted in the stories they were telling.

Street said he was in town to write an article on the *Gazette* for the *Saturday Evening Post*. He did visit with Mr. Heiskell while he was here.

After Street's death, his son, James Street, Jr., compiled a book called "James

Street's South." In the introduction, the son said all of the articles had been published elsewhere except for two articles about the *Arkansas Gazette*. I suppose they were written after that unannounced visit to Little Rock. In one of the articles about the *Gazette*, Street discussed the Heiskell brothers and summed it up by saying something to the effect that "Fred Heiskell was our Gungha Din, a better man than we, and J. N. Heiskell was our Buddha."

**Tom Swint:** Tom Swint was a copy editor from Georgia. After leaving the *Gazette*, he went to Washington State, where he worked for a paper before retiring to an island, where he subsequently died of cancer.

Tom's immortality was assured by his fight with Ray Moseley. It was Friday night, and Swint was making up a feature section for the Sunday paper. A. R. Nelson and Bill Shelton had gone home early, as they usually did on Friday night. Before leaving, Shelton told Swint that Moseley was still working on an article for the section Swint was making up.

When Shelton left, Moseley moved to Shelton's desk and continued working on the article. Swint came by from time to time trying to hurry Moseley.

I was on the state desk, which was nearby, and I saw what was happening.

Apparently, Swint's prodding was becoming more pointed, and Moseley was becoming irritated. Swint came by with one more pointed remark, and Moseley told him to go to hell or some such, and Swint took a swing, knocking Moseley to the floor.

Bob Douglas, who was in the copy desk slot, helped pull Swint off of Moseley

and took him out of the building. Moseley was lying unconscious on the floor with blood coming from his mouth.

It suddenly occurred to me that I was the ranking man on deck, so I had someone call an ambulance and assigned Bill Rutherford, a former Navy hospital corpsman, to accompany Moseley to the hospital. Then, I called Nelson at home and told him what had happened. He said he would be right down.

Rutherford told the people at the hospital emergency room that Moseley had just fallen out of his chair and hit his head against a filing cabinet. The doctor seemed to doubt the story, but Rutherford stuck with it and thought he had the doctor convinced. But just at that moment, Moseley opened his eyes and said, “Bill, why did Swint hit me?” “See,” Rutherford said, “he’s delirious.”

Moseley left soon after that incident, reportedly unhappy because the *Gazette* had taken no disciplinary action against Swint. Soon after that, Swint left because he was being shunned by many staffers.

**Matilda Tuohey:** Matilda Tuohey was a member of an old family in Little Rock. Her father was a grocer and had been a Little Rock alderman. When I first knew her, her mother was dead, and she lived with her father, an arrangement that continued until his death.

Tuohey, as everyone called her, worked for the *Arkansas Democrat* and then moved to the *Gazette* and covered the Capitol beat. During the 1957 school desegregation upheaval, Tuohey asked to be taken off the Capitol beat. Many of her longtime friends at the Capitol were shunning her because they were afraid of

retribution from the Faibus administration if they were friendly with anyone from the *Gazette*. She was then assigned to the City Hall beat and later was on the state desk.

Tuohey was an excellent reporter and a good friend. At her funeral, the rector of St. Andrew's Cathedral told of meeting Tuohey soon after his assignment there.

A couple of weeks later, he said, as he went up the aisle during the recessional, a clenched fist came out of a pew and in front of him. It was Tuohey's. He held out his hand, and a \$20 bill dropped into it. "What's this for?" he asked. Tuohey replied, "A bottle of scotch. You look like you could use it."

**James Warren:** To fully understand James Warren, one must be a white Southerner born before 1950. James was the head janitor of the *Gazette* Building. The story was that he had been born on the Tillar Plantation in Southeast Arkansas. When Waldo Tillar was born into the family, James (a small child at the time) was assigned as Waldo's servant. When Waldo Tillar married, James dressed him for his wedding. However, there was a change. Waldo's father was in a poker game with Fred Heiskell and, after betting himself out of ready funds, put up James Warren. Fred Heiskell won, and James Warren became Fred Heiskell's servant. Fred Heiskell turned him over to the *Gazette*, and he remained there until he retired.

Again, one must be a white Southerner born before 1950 to understand this, but James Warren never worked for white people; he made them work for him.

At some point in the 1950s, James received a call from someone at Philander



Smith College. They had a student from Africa who needed work, and they hoped James might be able to help. James went to his superior, Frank Duff, and got permission to hire this student.

Needless to say, the janitorial staff (all black) had never before met someone from “the old country,” and they were intrigued.

A few days later, James was in Frank Duff’s office and was telling him about the outstanding janitorial work from this African student. “He never heard of labor-saving devices; he just works,” James said.

“Yes,” Duff responded, “but this guy is from Africa, and they do have cannibals over there. Do you have any idea what he is eating?”

“No, sir,” James Warren replied, “but we count each other every morning.”

**Fred Webster:** Fred Webster was a *New York Times* copy editor who had vacationed in Arkansas. He and his wife were separated for several years, and Fred wanted to marry again. Because divorce was easier in Arkansas than in New York, he took leave from the *Times* and got a six-month job at the *Gazette* so he could establish residence and get his divorce. Just about the time he had his residence, Arkansas clamped down on quickie divorces for non-residents, so he extended his leave. Fred stayed on the staff for probably two years. He died a few years ago in Arizona.

Fred always carried a brief case, and we younger staff members speculated as to what he carried in it. No one ever saw it opened. He always put it on the floor next to his chair.

**Joe Wirges:** Joseph B. Wirges was one of the most colorful characters who ever worked at the *Gazette*. Joe started as a copy boy when he was about 16 years old and then became the police reporter, a job he held until he retired. Joe had a phenomenal memory for facts about crimes he had covered. He once wrote a series of Sunday features on some of the more famous crimes he had covered. He would write the article from memory at home and on his days off. The next day in the office, he would go to the library and look through the microfilm to verify his dates.

Joe was rather rough-looking character with a crew cut. He had a deep voice. When I first knew Joe, he had been the *Gazette* police reporter for so long that he had “seniority” over every cop in the state. Most of them addressed him as “Mr. Joe.” At one point, I was Joe’s relief man on the police beat, and he let the cops I needed to know understand that I was okay and they could talk to me. When I went on the state desk, Joe told Lee Henslee, the superintendent of Arkansas prisons, that I would likely be calling from time to time, that I was trustworthy and that he should help me.

Joe was born in MacArthur Park, where his father was superintendent. Joe said that General MacArthur was not born in the Arsenal building at the park but in a smaller building that was later torn down. Joe, however, was born in the Arsenal, and he joked that it was thoughtful of the city to preserve his birthplace.

While he was an excellent reporter, Joe was not an accomplished writer. He had permission to phone in notes for rewrite if he was not going to be in the office within the next hour. When I was doing city desk rewrite, it was not unusual for

Joe to stop at the phone booth on the first floor, phone his notes to me for rewrite and then come strolling into the newsroom.

On one occasion, Joe gave me a story that would have been a wonderful “bright”—one of those funny two- or three-paragraph items that ran in a box and under a 14-point italic head. The only problem was that the whole story hinged on one guy calling another by a name that was not used in the *Arkansas Gazette*. I worked and worked to find some way around using that word, but it couldn’t be done. While I was struggling with it, Joe walked past my desk and winked.

Despite his rough appearance and mannerisms, Joe was an accomplished musician, playing the marimba. He and his sons frequently played the marimba for midnight mass on Christmas Eve.

For some reason, I stopped by Joe’s home one morning. He and his wife were in the living room, each of them at a sewing machine. They were sewing bandages for some group.

Joe fished a lot, but he usually took the fish to the nuns at the Carmelite monastery because they never ate meat and looked forward to a good meal of freshly caught fish.

And, yes, I have it on good authority that the most famous Joe Wirges story is true. I am told that, while writing a story on the solution of a spectacular crime, he did shout across a crowded newsroom to Sam Harris, the city editor, and ask, “Sam, is c-----r one word, or is it hyphenated?” Sam said a hush fell over the newsroom, and he knew he had to say something to break the silence. He shouted

back, “We don’t use that word, Joe.” To which Joe replied, “It’s okay. I’m going to put in quotes.”

Joe had the distinction of being, so far as I know, the only *Gazette* employee Mr. Heiskell addressed by first name. He started when Joe was a 16-year-old copy boy and continued it. I think Joe and Mr. Heiskell died on the same day. I know their funerals were on the same day.

**Mildred Woods:** I think Millie Woods was from Pine Bluff. She had a proper education, married and had two children. I think her husband died. He was not there when she was at the *Gazette*. Millie was the food editor of the paper and had quite a following. She always arrived at the office wearing a hat and gloves, as was proper for a lady.