

*Gazette* Project

Interview with

Roy Reed,  
Little Rock, Arkansas,  
9 March 2001

Interviewer: T. Harri Baker

Note to users: most of this interview deals with the writing of Reed's biography of Orval Faubus, Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville; University of Arkansas Press, 1997. Pp. 408, illustrations, notes, index, hardback and paperback). Most of the interviews and other material Reed developed for the book is, as is referred to in this interview session, on deposit in Special Collections, Mullins Library, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Harri Baker: This is March 9th, in the year 2001. I am Harri Baker, in my home in Little Rock, Arkansas. This is the continuation of the interviews with Roy Reed. Roy, we have agreed that this will probably be our last session. The main subject would be your writing of the Orval Faubus book. So why don't we start at the beginning? When did you start thinking about writing a biography of Orval Faubus?

Roy Reed: Let me interject here, today is our daughter's birthday. Cindy Buck is forty-eight years old.

HB: How about that?

RR: Yes, I can't believe it.

HB: That is a little bit older than my daughter.

RR: The Faubus book began in the 1960s. That takes a word of explanation. A fellow reporter at the *Gazette*, Patrick J. Owens, and I got interested in doing a book about Orval Faubus while we were both at the *Arkansas Gazette* in the early 1960s. We actually did some work on it. I did some of my research at Harvard as a Nieman Fellow on radical politics in the early part of the twentieth century. We knew even then, or suspected, that Sam Faubus, Orval's father, was a Socialist. I got interested in populism because Faubus liked to talk about populism.

HB: It wasn't much of a secret about Orval Faubus because his father wrote those letters to the editor to the *Gazette* under the Socialist pen name.

RR: "Jimmy Higgins." Interestingly enough, Orval never would say publicly that his father had been a Socialist. He did later on. That was much later. At that time, he refused to say that. He thought it would be damaging politically.

HB: He was probably right at that time.

RR: I am sure that it was. He had been suspected of being a rank integrationist and maybe a Communist back in the early part of his career.

HB: As I recall, Sam was writing those "Jimmy Higgins" letters even while Orval was governor.

RR: He was indeed. That became a matter of some contention between Orval and Sam.

HB: I interrupted you.

RR: Pat and I started to work on a book and actually did a little work. We didn't

actually get any writing done. We did a little research. Pat did some research in Little Rock, and I did some up at Harvard. Then Pat and I went separate directions and left the paper. That was the end of the book until the late 1980s, by which time I had left *The New York Times* and moved back to Fayetteville.

HB: Let me mention here, did you ever hint [this to] Faubus, himself, back in the 1960s?

RR: No, I don't think we ever talked to him about this at that time.

HB: It would have been difficult to write a biography sort of in mid-stream in the 1960s.

RR: In fact, we weren't calling it a biography. It would have been a biography up to that time, but it would have been a very special kind of book about a notorious figure.

HB: A profile or that sort of thing?

RR: Yes. Almost certainly, he would not have cooperated during that time because he would have seen these two *Arkansas Gazette* reporters as his enemies. We had no use for him and had not made a secret of that, although we got along with him personally. We would see him on a day-to-day basis. He was never anything but friendly. We all understood that. Something else, it would have been a far different book.

HB: It is worth mentioning here, too, for anybody using this in the future, for them to check back in the correct chronological place in this series of interviews. You never actually covered Faubus as such.

RR: I covered some of his election campaigns, and I was a Capitol reporter for several years while he was governor. I saw quite a lot of him then. Even then, Ernest Valachovic was the main reporter and covered Faubus on the day-to-day basis. When I covered him, it would be some political issue or something else.

HB: It was described pretty thoroughly in an earlier interview. Back there in the 1980s, you got to thinking about it again?

RR: Yes, in the late 1980s. I guess it must have been 1986 that I worked on it, or maybe it was 1988.

HB: You mentioned one place that you attended a convention on biographies, Arkansas State University at Jonesboro.

RR: That was what tipped me. Earlier --- I don't know if I have told this or not --- I had been writing some kind of an article about something in which I needed Orval Faubus's birth date. I was enraged to discover that he was not listed in the standard *American Biographical Dictionary*.

HB: *Dictionary of American Biography*?

RR: Yes. I said to myself, "I should get serious about that book again." It was just one of those momentary things. Then I went to that conference on autobiographies at Jonesboro. Bill Berry was at that time teaching at ASU. He put it on. I went up there as a participant, and it got me interested in the Faubus project again, the idea of a biography. I decided that while this was on my mind, I would move on it. On the way back, I stopped at Conway and picked up the telephone to call Faubus. By then he was living in Conway with his third wife,

Jan. He was at home. I don't know, if he had not been at home, if I might have cooled off by the time I reached Hogeys again. He answered the phone. I said something like, "Governor, I am going to write a biography of you. How does that grab you?" A little to my surprise, he said he thought that was a good idea; he would cooperate any way that he could. It was more or less settled right there on the phone. I went on home and told him I would be back in touch. I went home and I forget what kind of preparation that I started to make, you know, a little elementary research. Very quickly, I got in touch with him again and started setting up interviews. We did the first of those interviews within a matter of a few weeks after that initial phone call.

HB: Was it that early stage that you tried to contact a publisher, that your agent tried to contact a publisher?

RR: I can't remember the sequence of events. It must have been. I contacted an agent in New York, somebody that I had known and dealt with on some other matter. He spent about thirty days feeling out the New York publishers. He got back with me with the word that there was no interest in a biography on Orval Faubus. He had been out of the news for too many years. They did not see it as a seller. At that point I contacted Miller Williams, a friend of mine. He was the director of the University of Arkansas Press in Fayetteville. He said, "Yes." He was very enthusiastic about this and encouraged me to go on with it. I said, "Okay, I will get the book to you in about four years." Miller said that was fine. Even then, Miller probably suspected that was an optimistic deadline. As it turned out, it was

eight years.

HB: I don't know. As newspaper reporter, I am surprised that you did not say you would get it off in a year or two.

RR: I probably thought that secretly. We did the necessary documents. I signed some kind of agreement or contract. I think it was a contract. He took it to the press committee, and they said, "Yes, go on with it." I started the interviews with Faubus first. I don't remember who else I started to interview at the same time I was interviewing him. From the first I tried to get other interviews going with both his friends and his enemies. I have no memory now as to who the others were, but along those lines, I interviewed other people such as Henry Woods, [later a] federal judge, then both a friend and an enemy. First a friend while both he and Orval worked in Sid McMath's office in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Then later, during the school integration crisis in Little Rock, Henry had become an enemy. People were like that. People like Clarence Thornbrough, who had been the head of the Labor Department under the Faubus administration, the old *Arkansas Gazette* printer. He stuck with Faubus right through everything. He was a Faubus advocate until the day he died. There were dozens of people on both sides of the Faubus issue.

HB: Including wives and relatives.

RR: Orval's first wife, Alta Haskins Faubus, who had been long divorced from him, who was obviously still in love with him on alternate days when she wasn't torn up with anger at him. It was too late to interview Beth [Elizabeth "Beth"]

Westmoreland, Faubus's second wife] because she had been murdered in Houston in the early 1980s. I did a number of telephone interviews with the third wife, Jan [Janice Hines Wittenberg Faubus]. It was only after Orval died that I did anything like a formal interview with Jan. Until then, I had conversations with Jan. I think the only word to describe them would be furtive. There were things she wanted me to know about Orval that I am still not willing to talk about publicly.

HB: This is interesting. Are these conversations also recorded?

RR: No, none of them recorded. None of them. I am not sure that I ever did record an interview with Jan. They would have been typically telephone conversations with me making notes. I have kept those notes.

HB: You still have those personally?

RR: I still have those notes. They may never see the light of day. I don't know.

HB: That is interesting.

RR: She talked about very personal things.

HB: By the time that you were talking to her, she was probably ill, too.

RR: She was. No, that was before she found out that she had cancer. She outlived him by a year and died of cancer. He had prostate cancer, and hers was breast cancer. Two of his three wives were interviewed.

HB: Did you find the people cooperative?

RR: Yes, almost unfathomably. There was one pretty funny case with William J. "Bill" Smith, Judge Smith. He was Faubus's main advisor all through his twelve

years in office, legislative liaison, all around close ties, close and personal friend. When I called him to get an interview with him, fairly late in the process, I could tell he was reluctant. He said, "Yes, come on down on this certain date and certain time." At that time his office was in the bank building, Bill Bowen's bank, First Commercial, up on one of the commercial office floors. When I got there and parked in their parking garage, I realized I was about ten minutes early. I decided that I would just go on up and sit in the outer office. I don't like to be terribly early, but I don't like to be late either. I got there and noticed that Mr. Smith's secretary seemed a little uneasy. She went in and told him that I was there. He came out and was clearly uneasy. He said, "Uh, uh, Roy, I know you won't mind, but I have asked Governor Faubus to join us." [Laughter] I had beat the Governor there as it had turned out by three or four minutes. They had arranged for Faubus to be there on the spot when I got there. I had beat him there, and it threw a spanner into his plan. What could I say? I interviewed the two of them together. I would ask Bill a question, and he would answer it and then say, "Now, Governor, how do you remember this?" [Laughter] It was so funny and very quaint. It was obvious that I was not going to get anything of any real value from Bill Smith without the Governor. I made up my mind, without telling them, I would not attempt this again. They had such a good time that they said as I left, "Well, let's do this again." I never did call back for another session. They had some things to say that were fairly interesting. It would have been much more enlightening and much more valuable if they had told me separately without

having the two of them obviously ganging up on me. For example, they told me that Virgil Blossom --- both of them had told me the fact that Virgil had become fairly panic stricken as it became time for the opening of the schools in September of 1957. The story was fairly believable. Virgil was dead by this time. There was no way to check it out except through his book and what he had written [Blossom, *It Has Happened Here*, Harper & Brothers, 1959]. I have reason to believe that he had not told the whole story, Virgil, things he had done and telephone calls to the Governor. Bill actually added to this with the story about Blossom coming to his house --- they were neighbors --- in a state of panic. He was demanding that Smith do something to help him. He became threatening to the point that Smith said he had picked up a water pitcher and told Virgil to leave his house. The water pitcher was for defense in case he needed to hit Virgil. Anyway, Faubus backed him up in everything he said, and he backed up Faubus with anything he had to say. Your question was, "Was everybody cooperative?" That was the only case where I can remember where people were plainly just not cooperative, if you could call it that.

HB: Did you catch anybody lying to you or not telling you everything?

RR: Other than Faubus, I can't remember offhand anyone that just out and out lied. Right now I am stuck with whether or not Faubus did. I can tell you this, two or three times after he and I talked about a particular subject and I sensed he was not telling me the truth, I would go back to his own papers at the university library or some other source I had and find out that what he told me was at variance from

what the other source did. I would go back to him at the next interview and say, "Governor, I have here a piece of paper," --- maybe one of his own letters that showed me he had not told me the truth. He would say, "Okay." which was more or less acknowledging that he had not told the truth about that and he would go on and tell the truth then.

HB: Was it a matter of just not telling all the truth or deliberately doing it wrong?

RR: I took it to be just not being truthful the first time around. I am not going to use the word "lying" because I can't remember what it had to do with. He was not truthful. When confronted with it, he would own up to it.

HB: It was kind of disarming, wasn't it?

RR: It was, when a guy says, "Yeah." Like Earl Long, when somebody came to him after his first election and said, "Governor, you promised the teachers that you would do such and such. What about it? Are you going back on this?" Earl said, "Tell them I lied."

HB: Did you trust "Justice Jim" [Johnson]?

RR: With certain reservations. I had several interviews with Jim, several hours all together. He had some fascinating things to say. I sort of trusted my instincts on when to believe he was telling the whole truth and when he might have put some personal spin on something. For example, he made it very clear from the beginning that he had no use for Sid McMath and Henry Woods because of personal enmities. I took things he told me about them with a grain of salt. As it happened, I didn't feel this was information I had to have in my book about Orval

Faubus anyway. It didn't make a whole lot of difference. He had some other things about people like [W.R.] Witt Stephens that were not totally pertinent to what I was doing. With things about Faubus, I had no reason to believe that he told anything but the truth. For example, when he told me after the second or third interview, --- I guess he had felt he wanted this known --- he said, "This business about the caravans at Central High. There weren't any caravans, and there were not any armed men descending on Central High. We were hustling Faubus." He told me about having this long list of thousands of people who had signed this petition for an amendment to get on the ballot. He said, "We organized telephone campaigns statewide. We had people calling Faubus at his office and people calling Virgil Blossom. We had Virgil believing that the sky was going to fall. We had to get Faubus to believe, to get him on board." I had no reason to doubt that. There were some qualifications, as it turned out. Faubus had told me several times that a person he refused to identify, a law enforcement official in east Arkansas, had stopped a group of armed men headed to Little Rock to cause trouble. They disarmed them. I was so curious about that that I decided to make a guess as to who it was. Damned if I didn't guess right! I got the guy's grandson to tell me the whole story. It turned out that the grandson was there the night that it had happened. He told me about these two carloads of armed men that had stopped at England, [Arkansas], where ol' Joe Foster was the law enforcer. He persuaded them to leave their guns while they went on to Little Rock.

HB: That's getting close to Little Rock.

RR: Yes, just twenty miles or so. It turned out to be a little of this and a little of that.

I think that Jim was probably right. They had this organized telephone campaign, and it had been more or less effective. On the other hand, there were some guys that were still mad enough to come to Little Rock with their guns.

HB: Is that when Virgil Blossom panicked?

RR: It was about that time, yes. He was getting all kinds of other information. I forget, I think some of Jim Johnson's people were calling. There was a pretty funny interview in the FBI file about all of this, the day that the police were called to Blossom's office because he had been getting all these phone calls. The interviews were all over the spectrum, the political spectrum. There was stuff in the Faubus Papers in Fayetteville [at Special Collections, Mullins Library, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville] backing it up. There was a wild man from northwest Arkansas that wrote letters to the governor all the time. He was always offering to bring guns and help him. People not just from Arkansas, the South, but people from the North, offered to come down and bring a group of armed men to help fight the fight; California, Illinois, New Jersey. Some semi-literate guy from the northeast offered to come down to fight the "niggers." This just underscored my long time contention that racism is not a Southern problem. It is an American problem.

HB: When you were doing these interviews, for certain kinds of persons looking for this record, did you find yourself deliberately moving into an oral history mode

instead of a newspaper reporter mode?

RR: I don't think so. I don't think so. I was after a story. Since I have done some oral history in the past year myself, I have been aware of the difference. You are looking for the person's whole story, their side --- If I had been doing oral history, this would have been, "Okay, Orval, this is your history. You have the right to change it any way that you want to." This is part of the understanding. This is your story, your interview. I was still operating as a newspaper reporter. I wanted to get information, and reporters go at it a different way, as you know. You've been both. To quote an old friend of mine, an old newspaperman named Sonny Rawls, Wendell Rawls, who spoke to my class one time. He caused a commotion when he told my students, "Your job as a reporter --- when you go into the newspaper work, your job is to get the story. I don't care how you go about it. You can lie, cheat, or steal. Your job is to get the story and get it into the newspaper." I never had them going quite that far as to steal or cheat. There is some of that mentality that you want in dealing with a guy like Faubus, who in some ways is on the other side, adversarial. I wanted him to tell me things that he didn't necessarily want to tell me. As in the cases I was telling you while ago when I would present him with a document [to get him] to tell me the truth. He told me in the first or second interview, he knew he had to come clean about his father being a socialist. He not only came clean about it, but he actually gave me his father's socialist party card. I think I made a copy of it. No, it was in the papers, and he told me where to find it. I was operating more as a reporter.

Frankly, I had never thought about that. The difference it might have made if I had gone about it as an oral history thing instead of a journalist. I don't know. It is an interesting question.

HB: Probably not much, I suspect. You must have been very thorough. You did seventy-seven interviews with Faubus. Were each of those an hour at least?

RR: At least. More like two or three.

HB: I have interviewed him myself. One question was all it took.

RR: Frequently, we would go for a morning session, break for lunch out at Shoney's or someplace in Conway, and then come back and do some more after lunch. He was talkative.

HB: How was his health and stamina?

RR: That became a problem towards the end. I mentioned that this went on for eight years, but he did not last for eight years. He died in December of 1994. The book was published in 1997, which meant that I finished it in 1996. He was pretty seriously ill during all of the last year of his life, but he went on with the interviews. We would have to be aware of his illness during those. They would not go on as long. The last interview that I --- I can't remember if this was a recorded interview or a visit for some particular reason. He was in the hospital, very ill. It was in the Baptist Hospital. Surely there was another one after that, but I --- He was not really --- his stamina had gone down a lot during the last year. Before that, he felt pretty strong. He had this cancer, but it was in remission. He was able to go on.

HB: Did you get the impression that he enjoyed the interviews?

RR: Yes, very much so. He told me so a number of times. We became friends, in the fairly awkward way that it would have to be. We both understood that this was a professional relationship. In spite of this, we became friends. I became concerned about the old man and his health and his well being. I think I wanted to be sure that I didn't do anything that would hurt him mentally or physically during his last, kind of painful year or two of his life. He wanted me very much to finish that book and get it published before he died. He said that to me many times. At first, when he started saying that, it was in a joking way. Then later on, I could tell that he had stopped joking about it. He tried to make it sound joking, but I knew he was serious. He wanted me to get that book finished. Then it became obvious to him that I was not going to get it finished before he died. Then he stopped talking about it. He knew it would not happen.

HB: In view of what you said about not wanting to hurt him, would you have been reluctant to publish the book as it ended up while he was still alive?

RR: I want to talk about that. I would have been --- I have no idea whether the book would have been different if I had gotten it finished before he died. My guess is that I would have had to fight myself to avoid pulling punches. I would have to remind myself every time I sat down at the typewriter that this book was not being written for Orval Faubus but for history, for generations not yet born, you might say. In the same way that newspaper reporters sometimes have to remind themselves that their obligation is not to the person being written about, but to the

readers. This is a very difficult thing. A writer named Marshall Frady, who used to be a friend of mine, --- I haven't seen him in years --- We were fellow reporters at the same time in Atlanta. He was at *Newsweek*. He has written biographies on George Wallace and Billy Graham [Frady's books include *Wallace*, World Publishing Co., 1968, and *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness*, Little Brown, 1979.] and maybe some other people. Somebody asked him once, "How do you manage that? You are writing about this person and he is still alive. You have said that you have become friendly with the person." --- In much the same way that I have said that I became friendly with Orval Faubus. --- Marshall acknowledged all of that and said, "Yes, you do become friends with them. You like them. I liked George Wallace." He traveled all over the state with George and stayed in the Governor's mansion. He ate his food. He said, "Yes, you do become friendly. Then you sit down at the typewriter and you remember what a son of a bitch he is." I don't think I ever came to regard Orval as a son of a bitch. I certainly regarded what he did at Central High as thoroughly bad business. I certainly disagreed with him totally. I would never go so far as a person who shall be unnamed here, as to tell Orval, "I don't want to be in your presence because I don't want to be in the presence of evil." I never regarded him as evil. I might have regarded what he did in some of his politics as wrong and wrongheaded and misguided and hurtful to a lot of people. I don't know what kind of book it would have been had it come out before he died. I hope it would have been the same book. I really hope it would have been the same book,

written honestly as I saw it.

HB: All the reviewers were a pretty distinguished lot and remarked one way or the other on your lack of bias and fairness.

RR: That was not an easy thing. I had to also put out of my head the young reporter that I was in the 1950s and 1960s, and the thought that he despised this man. I had to put all of that out of my head. I had to be fair to the man.

HB: There was the opening paragraph in your introduction about whether or not Faubus was good or evil. "I thought I knew once, but I was young then."

RR: Yes.

HB: You know I am going to ask you about the person that is unnameable.

RR: I don't want to call him by name because I had access to some private communication that he doesn't know about.

HB: That is fair enough.

RR: He has not appeared in any papers anywhere.

HB: We are almost at the end of this half. Let me stop this and fast forward. We will take a break.

[End of Tape 10- Side A]

[Beginning of Tape 10 - Side B]

HB: The recorder is on, and we are resuming. When did you start the writing? Are you one of these who has to have all the research done before you start writing? Or do you start writing along the way?

RR: I had a lot of research done because that is my impulse, to get it all researched

before I sit down to write. I knew that was going to be impossible, so I started with the part that I thought I had researched enough, which was his early life, his boyhood and growing up at Greasy Creek, going off and working at the fruit harvest, and the years approaching his becoming governor. I felt that I had done the job in researching that. I started writing those chapters. I guess that was five or six chapters. I had those pretty well in hand and written within the first, probably, three years.

HB: That was starting in 1988, and you had it in hand by 1991 or so?

RR: About that, probably, yes. It is a little hard to remember. I didn't keep a journal on the writing or anything.

HB: It is important to remind people that you are teaching in the journalism department at the U of A at Fayetteville at this time.

RR: I was teaching what was considered a full load. The writing had to be done over Christmas holidays and during the summers. I do remember working pretty hard on it during all of that free time from 1988 and on. I am not a fast writer, but I can plod along. I had five or six chapters done. No, I think seven chapters by the time I retired from the University in 1995. I turned sixty-five and decided to go ahead and retire. I didn't have to and always thought I would go on teaching until I was seventy. I came to understand that I was not going to get this book finished unless I worked on it full time. After I retired, I was able to wind it up with the writing in a little over a year.

HB: Do you do a lot of rewriting?

RR: Yes, a lot of rewrite. Not in the way that you would expect, in the way that you write a chapter and then go back and write another draft. I rewrite as I go. When I open up the computer --- and that is a whole other story. I was always used to writing on a typewriter. In fact, I think I started this on a typewriter. --- When I sit down to the typewriter or the computer, before I start writing that day's writing, I will go back to the previous day's work. In the early stages this was easy because you are on Chapter 1, say, you get a third of the chapter done, and you can start at the beginning. Later on, you can't just start at the beginning all the time. You have to start with the previous day's work and rework that. To me, that is the most satisfying part of writing, rewriting the previous day's work. That is where you polish and make elementary corrections. Things or words that are misspelled, or a syntax that has gone crazy. It is also where you tone up the writing, where a metaphor will come to you that had not occurred to you the day before. Or maybe that metaphor you used the day before wasn't just right, so you fine tune it. That is the most satisfying part of writing to me. It is not just a one-day thing. I suspect that there were passages in that book that were written six or eight or ten times. I can't point to any, but I suspect that is the case.

HB: That is a luxury that you do not get with newspaper reporting.

RR: That is the truth. That is why book writing is more fun.

HB: The computer age would have dawned while you were in the process of doing that book. Computers make it so much easier to do the rewriting.

RR: I actually came to computers very late. I had never owned one until I started

working on this book. I got a laptop, thinking it would be convenient to carry it with me when I went to do interviews. Well, that was a mistake. The thing died on me within a couple of years. The hard drive went out. Then I got a proper computer. Meanwhile, I slowly and very painfully learned to use the thing. I never used it for anything other than a glorified typewriter. For example, the notes --- Norma transcribed my interviews from tapes. Every one of them.

HB: Wow! Every one of them? Really?

RR: Yes. That was a mammoth job.

HB: Wow!

RR: It was tedious work, tedious work. She nearly went nuts doing it, but she got it done. I am very much in her debt to this very day. At that point, when she started transcribing, she used an old electric typewriter. She was used to an electric typewriter. She never used an old manual like I did. We got her a good electric typewriter. At that time, for her to type it into a computer would have been so complicated that it did not seem worth the effort. She typed out typescripts on an electric typewriter. I used those typewritten notes of hers in my writing on the computer. Now, it would be a piece of cake. Before we finished it, it was easy enough. She did not want to learn a computer. At least she could have typed it onto a disk, a computer disk, and I could have inserted it. We didn't even have that. This was laborious every step of the way. The computer was hard for me and still is difficult. I have just within the past couple of years learned to use e-mail.

HB: This is not directly part of our story. I often wonder what must have gone on in the newspaper offices about that same time that newspapers were converting to computers and reporters were required to learn them. I can't imagine doing it without them, but at the same time, it must have been difficult.

RR: I have had young reporters tell me that they could not do it without their old Radio Shack laptop. I think they weigh six or seven pounds, and it has a device where they can press a button and send their stories off to New York or wherever.

HB: It should be mentioned here, by the way, for the record, all of your research material, except I assume some things you mentioned earlier that are confidential, --- Aren't your research materials in the Special Collections in the Library at the U of A in Fayetteville?

RR: I have turned them over to Special Collections. They have not yet been processed, but they are there. If somebody needs to use it.

HB: That includes the interviews, the tapes, Norma's transcripts? It is an impressive collection.

RR: Yes. A time or two I have given special permission for someone to look into those for particular research projects.

HB: Special permission is only necessary because they have not been processed and formally opened to people. In the future, that will not be necessary. Also, just for the record, we ought to mention that, based on your bibliography, in addition to the interviews that you tend to emphasize, you used the Faubus papers and [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower Library.

RR: Yes, in Abilene, Kansas. I went to the ---

HB: The traditional sources?

RR: Yes. I went to the Walter Reuther Library at Wayne State University, Detroit, for background on the Socialist Party and Communist influences in the labor movement, Commonwealth College background. They really have a lot of stuff on Commonwealth up there. I did interviews as far abroad as Chicago, where I interviewed an old couple that were actively involved in Commonwealth College in the early 1930s. Interviews in California, Washington State, where there were sisters of Orval Faibus. I went to Washington [D.C.] to interview the widow of Brooks Hays. That might have been where I interviewed J. William Fulbright. I did a fair amount of traveling. I had some grant money from various sources to help out with expenses.

HB: According to your introduction, Norma also served as an editor.

RR: She read every chapter and made suggestions. She is pretty tough. She will say, "I don't think this is clear," or "You are getting a little too fancy with your words there." She gave me a pretty hard time, as did my daughter [Cindy Reed Buck] about the opening paragraph of the book. I eventually rewrote it a little bit to accommodate those two people. [Laughter]

HB: Well, you need a tough editor.

RR: My daughter, who is a professional book editor up in Massachusetts, gave it a pretty thorough going over before I finally turned it in to the editor at the University Press, Debbie Self. She was a wonderful editor.

HB: Did John [Reed] do some reading of the manuscript, too?

RR: No, he didn't do any of that. He helped me in some other ways. For example, the single best anecdote that I had for the book, which is too long to tell. It has to do with State Representative Lloyd George, from Yell County. It was an episode that he was involved in back in his freshmen year in the legislature while Orval Faubus was Governor. That came about because John had heard this story from -- -- by then John was working for the Legislature. He set me up an interview with Lloyd George. I am grateful for that. It was a wonderful story.

HB: Once you got the book out, did you do the book tours and that kind of thing?

RR: A fair amount, yes. Around the state of Arkansas --- bookstores, book signings, libraries, this, that, and the other, all over the state. I did at least one beyond the state to Washington to be interviewed by CSPAN [cable television news channel] for their Book Notes. Bryan Lamb, the owner of CSPAN, does that himself. I was privileged to be interviewed by him for CSPAN. I think that was the only thing beyond Arkansas. That was a pretty active time for several months after the book came out in 1997.

HB: Did you enjoy that?

RR: Yes. Mostly, I did. You meet a lot of people, bookstore people. A very interesting lady at Fort Smith, a fascinating woman about my age. --- I won't call her an old gal because that would date her. She was about my age. She put on a really good book signing down there. Over in Blytheville, That Bookstore in Blytheville had a book signing. As far as selling books was concerned, that was

a total failure. The publicity had not been handled right. Nobody came out. Some workmen managed to set fire to the store while I was there. The fire department had to come, and the police department came out in full force with two or three fire trucks. It was a great deal of excitement. It broke up the boredom of waiting for people to come in.

HB: The publication of your book coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the Central High crisis of 1957. Was that deliberate or was that just timing?

RR: No, it was just happenstance. I had been kind of lucky because the book received attention because of that.

HB: The story in the *Arkansas Times* said that an aide had gotten your book in advance to Bill Clinton, President of the United States, who had apparently read it in three days and wanted to talk to you about it. Did you ever talk to Bill about it?

RR: Well, that was a curious thing. He made a trip. I guess it was when he came down for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Central High. I was on that program, but not on the same day. It was on another panel or something like that. Yes, he wanted to see me, so I went out to the airport along with --- You know he always has a big group of people that like to see him off, friends, family, that kind of thing. We stood out on the tarmac and talked. It turned out that he had read the book. He had just a brief comment about the book and that kind of thing. Then we started talking about our mutual hometown, Hot Springs. We spent the rest of the time making chitchat about old days in Hot Springs. He and I grew up a generation

apart. We compared notes on the town. He had read the book. I have no idea whether he liked it. Whatever he had to say about it was politic and polite. You can be enthusiastic about a book without saying --- the reason I was a little curious about what he thought was because he was mentioned the book in a not very flattering way. In two different places. One having to do with his way of dealing with the legislature, contrasting his relation with the legislature and Orval Faubus. It was making the point that Faubus was always much better prepared. He did his homework with members of legislature better than I thought Bill Clinton did. Second, in a reference to Orval Faubus's sex life. The point there was that Faubus had been terribly discreet in his philandering, unlike Bill Clinton, who was not very discreet. This was before Monica Lewinski, so I was kind of out on a limb.

HB: I was rereading the book the other day in preparation for this. At the conclusion, you have what I regard as a really fine analysis of Faubus. I was struck by your comments about Faubus regarding politics as a grand game and always surprised when other people didn't. You did not make the direct connection, but I immediately thought of Bill Clinton.

RR: Yes, and especially nowadays, when he is continuing to play the grand game even when he is out of power. I guess that is right. I was struck by that from the beginning that Faubus did see it as a game. He talked about it and used that term. It was clear that he enjoyed that aspect of politics.

HB: You mentioned that in a private interview --- you and I were discussing this. You

mentioned that towards the end Faubus tried to make contact with all of his old friends and foes to mend fences, I suppose. Did he? More exactly, not did he, but did the others? That is, those who had been his enemies while he was Governor, did they come around?

RR: I doubt it. I think he might have softened some hard feelings here and there. This case is off towards one side. He and Jim Johnson became fairly friendly. A big part of their careers, they had been enemies. Somewhere way back there, they made up. They never became close friends. They lived in the same town. They never became close friends, but they became friendly. That is a little bit beside the point. On the other side, whether he ever made up with, say, Brooks Hays, I rather doubt it. Brooks would have been an easy guy to make up with. I never had a chance to ask Brooks that because he was dead when I started working on this book. One of the people that I interviewed in Washington was Brooks Hays's longtime administrative assistant when he was in Congress. He, to this day, is very bitter towards Orval Faubus. He has not forgiven him an inch. Whether that reflects Brooks' feelings, I don't know. Mrs. Hays never knew Faubus very well. She did not have any use for him, but whether it was a personal antagonism in the same way as this aide, I don't know. I tell you what he was successful at, I think. He went out of his way to speak to every group of young people that he could get to listen to him during his last years. He made more than one trip to the University and spoke. I remember one particular time he spoke to the young Democrats and really wowed them. He had them eating out of his hand. Young

people were crowding around him afterwards.

HB: We had the same experience at UALR.

RR: You know how he was. He was very good at that kind of thing. Of course, these younger folks do not have the background. Mainly they do not have the deep-seated animosity that a guy like Henry Woods would have or Sid McMath. Even these guys, McMath --- Faubus was smart enough not make an overt attempt to make up with them. He would be in public places with them at the same kind of gathering with former governors. They were friendly up to a point.. Even Daisy Bates, he showed up at a gathering with Daisy Bates where she was being honored. He got up and spoke. Daisy --- I don't know if it was before or after that that I interviewed Daisy --- He had made other overtures to her. She said, "Oh, yes, we get along okay." I ought to make it clear that if he ever ran for office again, of course, she would vote against him.

HB: What about Harry Ashmore?

RR: Harry was a little different case. Harry moved away from the state in '59, I think it was, and never came back here to live. I don't suppose he ever saw Orval again. There might have been one time up at Fayetteville when they were both on a program. I don't recall that they spent any time together. Anyway, just logistically, he was never thrown in with Harry where they could have sat down and talked through their differences. I interviewed Harry more than once for this book and saw him several times down through the years. Judging from his conversations and his writings, I don't think that Harry ever gave an inch on

Orval. He held him responsible and that was it, without any forgiving change of language right up to the end. He just held that Orval was totally cynical in what he did, an opportunist. I don't think that Harry ever forgave him. On the other hand, Harry was the kind of guy who never took any of this totally seriously. He was a very humorous guy. As I have been reminded recently, he saw the world as "theater of the absurd." He saw Orval as a major player. I don't think he was ever personal in his attitude towards Orval. He just saw Orval as a public figure who had a point of view. Harry thought he was absurd with it and dead wrong. I don't think there was ever anything personal about it, unlike some other people.

HB: Just to keep from making an incorrect inference, I am assuming that Harry Ashmore was not the unnamed person that you referred to earlier.

RR: That's right. He was not.

HB: I have read a bunch of the reviews of the book and all of them are very favorable. Did you get any bad reviews?

RR: I don't think so. Well, I don't remember any bad reviews. Even John Robert Starr.

HB: I was going to say that John Robert Starr faulted you on one minor thing and was very favorable. [The Starr review is "Controversial Figure Given an Evenhanded Treatment," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, June 29, 1997, p. J1.]

RR: Yes, they were all pretty favorable. There were mentions of the book in other writings that were not book reviews, editorial columns. Paul Greenberg at the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* described the book more than once as an apologia for

Faubus. It is of some interest to me, by the way, his use of that particular word as opposed to “apology” because that gives you a little wriggle room. You can be a little ambiguous, and it can mean whatever you want it to mean. I was also on one or two panel discussions, and I know that Paul was not too high on the book. He thought it was plainly too lenient on this old scoundrel.

HB: The characteristic all the other reviewers referred to was “fair.”

RR: Yes, I guess that was right. The reviews, by and large, were favorable. I was very grateful that it was reviewed in a number of national publications, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, I think maybe *The Wall Street Journal*. I am not sure about that. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* had a long favorable review. A number of others, and the *Atlantic Monthly* might have been my favorite of all. This came a long time after the others. My old friend Bill Whitworth, who was then the editor, got one of his best writers to write a long, long review. It was the lead review in the magazine of that month. I was very grateful for that. Bill Whitworth is back living in Little Rock.

HB: Well, believe it or not, after what has been fourteen or fifteen hours of this, I have run out of questions. Do you have anything that you want to add?

RR: Well, just one very minor thing. The book never was a runaway best seller. It never appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list. It did sell pretty well during the first months after it was published. My recollection is that it sold between four and five thousand copies very quickly.

HB: I can assure you that it is a very large sell for history books.

RR: It went through two printings. It was originally printed in hard and paperback. It went through two printings; then the sales plummeted. For the last year or so, my royalty checks have just been barely enough to take Norma out to dinner with. I had word from the director of the University Press, Lawrence Malley, a couple of weeks ago that they are getting ready to do a third printing. It still sells slowly, but steadily. They are about to run out. They have long since run out of the hard backs and just have the paperbacks. They are going to reprint the paperback. I don't know how many copies. It is easier to do now rather than years back because they can run off a few hundred copies in no time. It is now going into its third printing. I guess it will stay around for a while longer.

HB: As they say in the history profession, it is the definitive biography.

RR: I suppose someday someone will get to looking through my papers and the Faubus papers and say, "How on earth could a reader miss this?"

HB: Actually, Roy, if you write a book that encourages other people to write another book, that's pretty good.

RR: I guess so.

HB: I don't know anybody at this stage who is working on a biography of Faubus.

RR: I guess it would not be profitable yet. Somebody, incidentally, is doing a biography of Harry Ashmore.

HB: Oh, how nice.

RR: She asked me to read the draft. It is a master's thesis at UALR.

HB: Probably in the journalism department.

RR: Her name is Nathania Sawyer [Sawyer's thesis was a part of her work in the UALR Masters in Public History Program]. She is really good. I hope that she can expand this into a full-length biography at some point and get it published.

HB: She may be in the public history program. I don't know. I will check and see.

RR: She mentioned Sonny, as one of her advisors. [Luther W. "Sonny" Sanders, UALR Department of Journalism.] Anyway, that is something to look forward to. Did you want to talk any at all about that Fay Jones house?

HB: I think that it is interesting. I will leave that up to you.

RR: There is not a whole lot to say. I could probably do it in a very few minutes.

HB: Okay, why don't we? As I say, I think it is an important subject, and there is not too much on it.

RR: Norma and I are on our way to El Dorado when we leave here for a Fay Jones occasion.

HB: There is an exhibit that is opening down there.

RR: The Old State House exhibit on Fay Jones's work has been moved to El Dorado, his home town. This is where he grew up. We are going down for that.

HB: Let me introduce it. The house you live in in Hogeye was designed and built by Fay Jones. He at least supervised its building.

RR: Yes, he designed it.

HB: Fay Jones, of course, is Arkansas's cream of an architect.

RR: He designed our house at the same time he was designing Thorncrown Chapel in Eureka Springs. You can see similarities between the two structures. He

designed both of them about the same time. He won national awards from the AIA, American Institute of Architects. It is a very modest house. It came about in a very funny way. When we left Arkansas in 1960s to move to Atlanta, we knew the name Fay Jones. He had just started to become known outside Fayetteville, a little bit, as a promising young architect. I had actually seen one of his houses on Highway 16, just outside of Fayetteville. The house is still there. I thought, "What an interesting house." Years go by, and I had thought if it ever became possible, I would really like to have that guy just design a house for me. Little did I know that in the interim fourteen years that we were gone from Arkansas, he had become very well known and very expensive. He had got used to designing houses for millionaires for big fees. Luckily, I did not know that, or if I knew it, it did not make an impression. I wrote a letter to him from London when we were getting ready to leave to move back to Arkansas to hit him up to design a house. I named a figure that we could afford to spend. Looking back on it, I can imagine that Fay --- I can see him passing that letter around among his staff and them getting a big laugh out of it that you could build a house for so little money.

HB: This was not just a figure for architect fees, but the whole house.

RR: The whole house. He wrote back a very cordial letter and said, "Yes, he would do that." I now believe --- I have never been able to get him to confirm this --- but I believe he took it on a dare. That he might have been a little unsettled at the reputation that he knew that he had acquired as being a designer of houses for rich

people. He wanted to prove that he could design a house for ordinary people, much like his own house. He has told the story many times about designing his own house which cost something like sixteen thousand dollars. He wanted to prove that he could still do that. He did. It came out not anywhere near the figure that I had quoted, more like twice that figure, but still a bargain. It is a wonderful house. I am glad that he took the dare.

HB: Did he meet with you and Norman before he started designing to talk to you?

RR: Yes. It was the better part of a year before he could start because he had to work us in. We went up to his office and spent quite a little time. It was a lengthy interview, a couple of hours. He wanted to find out all about us. We thought he wanted to find out what kind of house we wanted.

HB: That is interesting.

RR: Very little of that time was spent on that. In regard to that, before we left London, I had drawn a sketch of a house that I thought we might like. I didn't show him that. That was what I had in mind, and Norma said it was kind of interesting. Damn if he didn't --- his first draft was very like this sketch. He calls it an Ozarks barn as being the inspiration. It does look like a barn. Most of that interview was spent by finding out what kind of people we are and what our tastes were. I can understand that now, looking back on it. He was designing a house for two individuals with particular ideas and tastes and notions about who they are and how they see the world.

HB: Folks would have to see it, but you might mention here that it is kind of long and

sets into the ground on a little ridge.

RR: It is like a barn. It is more vertical. It has a very steep pitch. I think the roof has a ninety-degree angle.

HB: It is open inside.

RR: Very open. It is a departure from his typical house, which is long and low with a long overhanging eave. Ours is more like Thorncrown Chapel, for those who have seen it. It isn't anywhere near as high as the Chapel. The Chapel is more vertical. It is almost gothic in its reaching through the trees on the side of the hill.

HB: Did Jones supervise the construction?

RR: Yes. He had a young contractor who had never before built a Fay Jones house. He was a regular contractor. He got this young guy and a bunch of college dropouts to become carpenters who wanted to live in the Ozarks. I suspect to also grow their own marijuana. He had a whole gang of these young carpenters who were very good and very creative and very excited at building a Fay Jones house. They had some pretty funny --- I remember the day they came to me. They were getting ready to put some diagonal batten boards on the south wall of the outside. Fay had designed these things. I don't know if I can describe exactly how they --- the idea was to cut boards about a half an inch thick and about two inches wide in varying lengths. All the way from six or eight feet to twelve or fifteen feet. They would run on the diagonal across either side of the house and meet in the middle around a huge diamond shaped window. The contractor, Steve Schoene, came to me and said, "Roy, I don't see how this is going to work without costing a lot of

money. They don't go in there flat against the wall. They have to go in the narrow edge down into the wall and two inches protruding out into space. This is going to be very expensive. I am afraid it will run the cost up." We had a conversation with Fay, and Fay had a conversation with Steve. The upshot was they would try it. They had been on the job trying it for about an hour when Steve came back and said, "This is easy. This is a piece of cake." That sort of thing happened several times during the course of the construction. They eventually were carried away with the idea of doing this Fay Jones house. Everything was different. We said something about some light fixtures on the outside, wooden fixtures. They were terribly afraid it would be a cost overrun. They tried it out. One of the carpenters took the plans home with him one night. In his own workshop, he put one together and came back the next day, terribly excited. He said, "This is not only wonderful, it looks great, and it is dirt-cheap. You make it with scraps."

HB: When Jones first laid out a plan for you and Norma, did you change it?

RR: Only in minor ways. The basic outline never changed. Only details here and there. Odd details inside. He likes to design furniture. We didn't want him to do that. We had a bunch of furniture we wanted to keep. We didn't have him to design the furniture. I am sure there must have been a few thousand changes, but none of any basic kind.

HB: Well, we are about to run out of tape.

RR: This is a good place to end it. I want this on the record. You are one terrific

interviewer! I thought I was good at this. I have been clearly outclassed.

HB: Well, you are one terrific storyteller. It has been a bunch of fun.

[End of Tape 10 - Side 2]

[End of interview]