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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Cary Bradburn
Little Rock, Arkansas
June 23, 2007

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is June 23, 2007. Here I am in Little Rock, Arkansas, and I'm preparing to do an interview with Cary Bradburn for the oral history of the *Arkansas Democrat* which is part of the Pryor Archives—the Pryor Oral History Center at the University of Arkansas [at Fayetteville]. Cary, the first thing I need to do is ask you if I have your permission to make this interview, and to turn this tape over to the University of Arkansas?

Cary Bradburn: Yes you do.

JM: Okay, very good. I will start with one question, and then we will go back to the beginning. You work now for the North Little Rock History Commission. Is that correct?

CB: Correct. Yes—also for the North Little Rock Historic District Commission.

JM: Okay.

CB: They are actually two commissions.

JM: Oh, okay.

CB: Most of my work is with the History Commission.

JM: Okay, great. You, however, at one time worked both for the *Arkansas Democrat* and the *Arkansas Gazette*. Is that correct?

CB: Yes.

JM: Okay, great. All right.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, Cary, now let's just start at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

CB: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on January 17, 1951.

JM: January 17, 1951. And where did you grow up?

CB: Well I grew up in Little Rock. My parents were both from Arkansas originally. In fact my father was a graduate of Little Rock [Central] High School. He was in New Orleans studying to become an urologist. He practiced for fifty years in Little Rock after moving back in 1954.

JM: Okay, so you went to school in Little Rock?

CB: Yes, I went to school at Jean Anthony's school.

JM: Okay.

CB: [It] was my first stop. It was when it was located pretty close to Pulaski Heights, which is where I went to elementary school and junior high. I went away to school for the 10th and 11th grade in the St. Louis [Missouri] area, and then did come back and graduate from Catholic High School [for Boys] [Little Rock] in 1969.

JM: What school did you go to in St. Louis?

CB: It was a military school, Western Military Academy. It was at Alton, Illinois.

JM: Okay, I've heard of it.

CB: I had a grandmother who lived in St. Louis and an aunt and uncle who were in Carlinville, Illinois nearby.

JM: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: So you graduated from Catholic High in 1969, and then what did you do?

CB: I went to Hendrix College in Conway [Arkansas]. I went there four years, and graduated with a degree in history. Then I, actually, lived for about six months in Moscow, Idaho. I had a girlfriend, Sheila Horan. [I] went up there with her, and she was attending school there. We married in early 1974, and I went to work for Jacuzzi Brothers in the personnel office. I was there for about a year and a half, and then went to graduate school at the University of Arizona in Tucson. And got a—ended up with a master's degree in history.

JM: Okay. How did you get interested in journalism, and how did you get into journalism?

CB: Well see, my interest in journalism probably goes back to really as a kid, particularly what I remember from by the time I was in junior high. My parents subscribed to both the *Democrat* and the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette*. I read those avidly, particularly the sports pages. You know I was interested in writing—I guess—going back to high school, but I never actually worked for a school newspaper or anything. When I returned to Arkansas in 1978 with a master's degree—well there just weren't that many teaching opportunities available. I had an option to

get a teaching certificate and go into the secondary school level, but I wasn't that interested in that. I also contemplated going into law school. I took the LSAT. But my father-in-law at the time, Ray Horan, was a friend of William [H.] Bowen, the lawyer and president of Commercial Bank. He said, "Why don't you go and talk to Mr. Bowen about law school." I got to talking to Bowen and just sort of expressed my interest in writing. He said, "I know a newspaper man up in Cabot [Arkansas]. Would you want to work up there?" And I said, "Sure. That would be interesting." So anyway, I wound up going to work at the *Cabot Star Herald* where Cone and Betty Magie owned the paper.

JM: Excuse me for stopping you for a minute. Magie is M-A-G-I-E, I believe.

CB: Yes.

JM: Cone is C-O-N-E.

CB: Yes.

JM: While I'm at it, I better go ahead and get you to spell your name.

CB: It's Cary—C-A-R-Y Bradburn B-R-A-D-B-U-R-N.

JM: And your father and mother's name?

CB: Curry C-U-R-R-Y Bradburn and Jean J-E-A-N Bradburn.

JM: What was her maiden name?

CB: Her maiden name was Moore.

JM: Moore. They were from Little Rock?

CB: My mother was from, actually, Fort Smith [Arkansas].

JM: Oh was she? Okay. All right.

CB: Yes.

JM: And so, we will—now you've gone to Cabot and gone to work for Cone and Bet-

Betty Magie at *Cabot Star Herald*, and then take me on from there.

CB: Yes. That was in June of 1978 when I went to work for them. I just kind of—I really enjoyed it. I just fell in love with that line of work. You know each day there would be something just a little bit different happen. Wasn't getting paid much, but, you know, that didn't matter. Cone moved me over to the *Lonoke Democrat* after about six months. I was *de facto* editor [and] writer. I delivered the paper. I actually worked on the press occasionally on press day. I got a really good grounding in journalism. I worked for the Magies for about three years. I suppose again—going back to reading the newspapers—I always I guess wanted to work at the *Gazette*, really. That was still—as I worked there and liked it working with the Magies—I was interested in eventually maybe some day working at the *Gazette*, but it was easier to get a job at the *Democrat*, frankly. I just one day called up Bob Starr. I knew him from his column in the newspaper, and respected his writing. He told me to get in touch with Garry Hoffmann, who was the city editor at that time. I did. I went in for an interview and was hired. I went to work there on October 18, 1981. Oddly enough that was to the date ten years later—October 18, 1991—when the *Gazette* closed, and I was working at the *Gazette* at that time. So my newspaper war experience lasted exactly ten years.

JM: Okay now Garry—I'll stop you there for just a minute, because we haven't interviewed him and we got one scheduled. I hired Garry to his first newspaper job at the *Democrat*. Garry is a lot of doubles. G-A-R-R-Y—if I remember—and it's H-O-F-F-M-A-N-N.

CB: I believe that's right.

JM: I think that's correct. Okay

CB: Yes. Yes.

JM: But at any rate, okay. So you started work for the *Democrat* October 18, 1981, and they were apparently just getting into the war pretty good at that time.

CB: Yes. I think the famous *Arkansas Times* photo on their magazine of Starr on the newspaper box with a knife in his mouth—street fighter. I want to say that had come out maybe a year or so earlier—maybe a little earlier. I don't remember the exact date, but, yes, the newspaper war was definitely on. Although I have just vague recollections now of the first staff meeting I attended, it was probably within a couple of weeks of being hired there and—of course I was new to the whole thing. I kind of just observed and listened. As those things do, you know, they turned into people raising a lot of complaints about various things. One thing I guess I remember most of all was Starr kind of just laying out the basic strategy for trying to win the war. He said that the *Democrat* would operate out of left field. I took that just to mean [it] would be more of a risk taker, would go after some unusual stories, [and] would try to push the envelope—and, of course, Starr was doing that in his column. But he said the strategy was to lure the *Gazette* into left field and then abandon it, and be the more credible paper, and win the war. To some extent that did occur as I reflected back on it later, particularly with Gannett's penchant for animal stories and some pretty superficial stuff. It seems the whole newspaper industry, though, was going that way anyhow. But anyway, I do have that recollection of that early staff meeting there. In January of 1982 I started working on the Pulaski County Courthouse beat. I replaced Omar Greene who had been working that beat for a year or so, and he went over to the [Arkansas] State Capitol beat. There were two of us working over there in those days. I

days. I for the most part covered the courts, and my first partner over there was Jeff Wagoner. He didn't stay real long as I remember, but he would cover more of the county government. We just split up the workload, though, on a daily basis, but I primarily covered courts. I covered the courthouse for three years, until I believe it was December of 1984. And it was—well I can ramble on and on for a long time about that.

JM: Please go. Go ahead.

CB: The big case then, of course, was the Mary "Lee" Orsini, the Alice McArthur murder case. That was—I think—for about a two year period—I think—I wrote at least one story every day concerned with that case. In fact we slugged it "Dial M." That was Ray Hobbs' idea. He was an assistant city editor, [and] later did become city editor there at the *Democrat*. Ray helped—I was still pretty much a young reporter and pretty green. There was a lot coming pretty fast at times [on] certain days. Some of those days lasted twelve hours. I guess the first hint that something was brewing—I was just up in the prosecutor's office. It was pretty early on. I had only been working the beat for maybe a month. Lee Orsini came out of the Sixth District Prosecutor's office, and I knew I had heard it through the paper she had the previous summer escaped a grand jury indictment in her alleged murder of her husband, Ron Orsini. After she left, I interviewed the prosecutor. He wouldn't say much, but he indicated that she said somebody had fired some shots at her as she was driving on Batesville Pike. The sheriff, Tommy Robinson, used that as a means to investigate the case. It had been a North Little Rock Police case up to that point, because the murder of her husband had occurred in North Little Rock. Not much happened until about May—as I recall. Somebody

set—or placed—a bomb under the car of Alice McArthur, and it partially detonated. She was not injured, but it brought the full scope of the case down. I mean Robinson started feuding almost immediately with the Little Rock Police. They were trying to keep him out. It was their jurisdiction. The murder occurred in—or the bombing had occurred in Pleasant Valley. I was only—I had met Bill [C.] McArthur in the courthouse coffee shop. Actually, we spent a lot of time in the coffee shop in working the beat, because lawyers and judges would come through there. You would find out what was going on, but, of course, we also made our rounds to each of the offices. Some of the best sources, of course, were the—just the regular old peons working there and people that you never quoted in the paper but they would tip you off to things. Certain cases I would spend the time in the courtroom covering the trial. It was the "Southwest Little Rock Rapist" case—I guess—was the first one I covered from start to finish, but that was rare to cover a case like that. Scotty Scott, he was a young man who was the son of a state police trooper who was charged with killing a lady in a convenience store. I remember covering that wall to wall. There were probably a couple of others. Of course lawyers—or even the judges—would tip you off as to when some important testimony might be coming up in a case. I would be sure that I would be up there to listen to that. I got a good legal education in those three years. I felt like at that time I could have gone out and practiced law at that point. [Laughs] But getting back to the McArthur case, it's just like that thing just started getting bigger and bigger all the time. I believe it was July 2, 1982 when she was murdered.

JM: Who was murdered?

CB: Alice McArthur was murdered.

JM: Okay.

CB: There were three people ultimately convicted in that case, including Mary "Lee" Orsini. She was portrayed as the—basically the ringleader of that murder. This is where it is easy to ramble at this point. I guess it was in September of 1982 and it's before Orsini would have come to trial—because her trial was in October of that year—there was—well, we knew that there had been a confession made in the case by a man named Eugene "Yankee" Hall. Carol Griffee for the *Gazette* wrote a story—as I recall—one day. There might have been two days running. She appeared to have been getting portions of the transcript. I did not personally witness it, but, apparently, Starr went on a bit of a tirade and got Tommy Robinson to turn the entire transcript of the confession over to him. Now as I say, I don't know that first hand. Starr was questioned at length in court about the source of the leak. I just believe that it was probably Tommy Robinson.

JM: Did he ever reveal his source?

CB: No. He never revealed, and in fact at one point he said, "You can play twenty questions with me all day long. I'm not going to tell you."

JM: Yes.

CB: I believe he was being questioned by Chris Piazza, who is now a circuit judge. Chris was a deputy prosecutor at that time. So we ran the entire confession in the newspaper. There were a couple of things that were taken out—deleted. I don't remember specifically, but they were potentially libelous issues—I believe—things that reflected on people who were really probably innocent. Their name just—it was part of it. I also wrote a story about it that day, so we ran with the whole confession. That generated immense enormous interest in the case. It

seemed like it was the conversation every day. I suppose even now it's probably still been the most publicized murder case in the state's history. Well, there was a doctor up in Searcy [Arkansas].

JM: Yes, Porter Rogers.

CB: Yes. There was quite a bit of publicity over that case.

JM: Yes.

CB: Anyhow, yes, that confession was pretty interesting. It suggested in the confession—again, this was coming from Yankee Hall—but he was saying that Mary "Lee" Orsini was promising to pay him some money to have Alice McArthur killed. You know, frankly, I have forgotten the exact dollar amount. It was something like $20,000 or $25,000. She implied to—or Hall said that she implied to him—that the money was coming from Bill McArthur. Hall went out and recruited a man named Larry McClendon, who was identified as the actual trigger man. McClendon was later convicted, but as I recall he got a twenty year sentence. I may be wrong about that. They might have actually reduced it to second degree murder, which is pretty odd, but it was clearly not his idea to do it. He just did it for money. Yankee Hall, of course, made his confession, and he plea bargained with the state, and was to be—and did testify in Lee Orsini's trial. Yankee tried to go back and have his confession removed from the record. He said that he was induced by a promise from Robinson—Tommy Robinson the sheriff. He said that Sheriff Robinson told him that, when he got elected governor, he would pardon him. He tried to make that case in court, but the—I believe Judge Floyd Lofton presided over that—he just dismissed the petition. He didn't find it credible. I think Tommy probably did tell him that of course, but I can understand that

would still be flimsy grounds for vacating his confession. Lee Orsini was convicted in October of 1982. If I had imagined that things might slow down, I was wrong, because it seemed liked they just picked up after that. Tommy Robison drove much of our news coverage. And Starr, of course—he was writing columns quite often about the case, although his main source of information seemed to be the sheriff and not anybody else. I had far more sources than Starr did, and was getting I thought more of a complete picture of what was happening. It did reach a point where I really believed—based on interviews and what I knew—that Bill McArthur really did not have any direct involvement in the murder. Starr was—I don't know that Starr was ever exactly convinced of that, but he wrote more than once that he ought to—if there's a question, let's just put him on trial and have the jury decide. I didn't think that was right. I know the prosecuting attorney Wilbur C. "Dub" Bentley had to endure quite a bit of criticism from Starr in his column, but Bentley was always pretty firm in his conviction that there was not credible evidence that he could as a prosecutor ethically take to court and present a case against McArthur. Of course, Tommy wouldn't give up, and we all called him "Tommy." That was just what he went by. Just another aside, Tommy would call—it seems like mostly reporters—he would either call you a "worm" or a "squirrel." Sometimes I was—I was mostly a squirrel, sometimes I was a worm, though.

JM: Yes.

CB: My courthouse partner at that time Bruce Kinzel who is now deceased—he always called Bruce "worm", though.

JM: How do you spell Kinzel?

CB: K-I-N-Z-E-L.

JM: Okay.

CB: Bruce was actually—he wasn't a good writer, but a very good reporter. He had great rapport with people. Bruce dug out a lot of information. I was always impressed with what he could come up with. Anyhow, let's see as I try to think of a thread here. Robinson would not give up trying to prosecute Bill McArthur. The Orsini case—just backing up—had been assigned originally to Judge Floyd Lofton. It turned out that all of the judges recused from the case. Lofton had been a law partner of Bill McArthur's at one time—I believe—and gone to law school with him. So they appointed a special judge for the Orsini case. It was Randal Williams out of Pine Bluff, once described as a bear of a man. Before the Orsini conviction, Tommy pursued—was trying to get Dub Bentley to file a felony information in circuit court against McArthur, and Starr was trying to pressure Bentley to file that charge. There were all these implications about the "good old boy" system and lawyers looking out for each other. In fact, at the Christmas party of 1982 in the prosecutor's office, as well as the circuit clerk's office, and other offices there at the county, back in those days they'd have a big Christmas party. It would involve alcohol, food, and just a good time. They don't do those kind of things now, of course. Bill McArthur had been showing up to those Christmas parties. The first one that I ever attended, well, he was at that one. I didn't necessarily think that it was that big of a deal that he was there. I recall that Larry Dill, who was Tommy Robinson's chief deputy, was there. You know, there were a lot of people there. I don't even recall that McArthur stayed very long, but the word filtered back to Starr. More than once I would be summoned from the courthouse

from the courthouse back to Starr's office if he had a tip that he thought was really, really important. He passed a lot of them on through Ray Hobbs to me, but, if he thought it was really big, I'd get a personal summons from him. I argued with him at that point that I didn't really think it was a story that McArthur attended the prosecutor's Christmas party. I thought it was just playing into the Pulaski County Sheriff's office propaganda, basically. Well anyway, we ended up—Jan Cottingham was working with me on the beat at that time—we both—it was a double byline. We did write a story, and it had some play in the media. I think it served to incriminate McArthur, and played right into Tommy Robinson's hands. The *Gazette* did not carry a story about it interestingly enough. They had a veteran reporter, George Bentley, working that beat. In fact I learned a lot from George. George and I are still friends today. Chuck Heinbockel was the other reporter for the *Gazette* during that time.

JM: H-E-I-N-B-O-C-K-E-L, is that correct? Does that sound right?

CB: That sounds right. Yes. Yes. He would go by C.S. Heinbockel. [It] was his byline. And let's see, after—so Tommy was bound and determined to get McArthur in some kind of court. They appointed a special prosecutor. I don't remember now, but that might have been Judge Langston that actually initiated that. I'm not certain, but the decision was made to—because Bentley officially he recused—I think the way it would have worked Dub Bentley recused from the case, because I think he said in good conscience he couldn't prosecute it. But he still was the only one who had the power—*the only one*—to file a felony information, so the special prosecutor, who was Sonny Dillahunty—who I believe had been a former U.S. Attorney . . .

JM: That's right.

CB: Dillahunty took the case. It was before Judge David Hale, later of some White Water [Scandal] notoriety. And it was in the Pulaski [County] Municipal Court, which doesn't have felony jurisdiction but can certainly remand cases to circuit court. But again, you have to have a prosecutor file the felony information. The other way is through the grand jury—a grand jury indictment. Prosecutors only—at that time—and I don't think they use grand juries much anymore on the county level—usually, if a prosecutor didn't want to have to make the hard political decision, he'd take a case to the grand jury and sort of let them make a decision about it. Dub Bentley had done that in the Ron Orsini murder case, but he was just convinced that there wasn't enough evidence to take McArthur to a grand jury. So he refused to do that, although a judge could have convened a grand jury and appointed a special prosecutor. But that's not how it happened, because I think, actually, a lot of the judges were pretty skeptical of Tommy's evidence, such as it was. We had about a three or four day hearing right before Thanksgiving—as I recall—of 1983 by then. I could be messing some of these dates up to be honest with you. It could have been actually 1982 when the special prosecutor presented his evidence to Judge Hale. And it wasn't—it was a very weak case. Judge Hale who was not known for having a lot of backbone—that's just what the other lawyers said about him and the other judges. Hale was very wishy-washy in his conclusion. He said that he believed that it was extremely weak case, but he was going to go ahead and remand it to circuit court anyway. So it lands right back in Dub Bentley's lap to Tommy's frustration—great frustration. I might add that Dub off the record in those days would say that there was some harassment going

on. He lived out on Highway 5 as I recall. Somewhere out there—some acreage out there. Someone either fired shots at some of his dogs, or maybe even shot one of his dogs. Some people would drive by at night, and he felt like there was some intimidation going on. He couldn't prove that Tommy Robinson was the source of all of that, but I know he believed it. The more I talked to him he painted a picture of really a thug who happened to be sheriff of the county. You go back early in Tommy's career, they actually—under the guise of a sting operation, they would actually setup people, and then come in and arrest them like gangbusters. And then put out a press release about, you know, "Well, one of our officers just happened to be driving by, and somebody was breaking in a business." Later there was a sting in which it turned out that one of Tommy's chief deputies was actually fencing some of the property, and was involved in a criminal operation. That was a man named Bobby Woodward. I know that the prosecutor actually believed that the sheriff's office, to some degree, had involvement in the McArthur murder. There were rumors at one time in—probably about 1984—that there would be some kind of federal indictment of Robinson over the case, but, of course, it never happened. In fact, there was a settlement between McArthur and Robinson that was never—the amount was never revealed publicly—but it was a substantial settlement.

JM: Who paid who?

CB: The county's insurer paid Bill McArthur.

JM: Yes.

CB: So anyway, after that municipal court hearing—the more I think about it I think it was right around Thanksgiving of 1982 when that thing came up, because in 1983

it was in January and it was Super Bowl Sunday and I'm sitting at home watching the TV and on comes Bill McArthur in a orange jumpsuit handcuffed. He's been arrested for allegedly plotting to kill Tommy Robinson. Tommy had some old boy who supposedly said that he met McArthur in a gravel pit in Malvern, Arkansas, and McArthur offered him money to get rid of the sheriff. The guy retracted any kind of confession. In fact when he showed up again in David Hale's court that case was thrown out. As soon as it—I mean there was about a three or four hour hearing on it, and it was thrown out. In fact as I recall, Tommy Robinson and Larry Dill were held in contempt of court for even bringing that before the judge. It's just a measure of how desperate Tommy was getting. But to my astonishment, Starr backed him all of the way. Starr even showed up for a Sunday afternoon hearing when they first—that Sunday when they arrested McArthur, and then wrote this glowing column how Tommy was standing up for what was right and all of this. I don't know. I didn't have very many conversations with him about the case after that point, but I didn't know why he was so adamant in backing Robinson except the general public believed Tommy. It was sort of a populist position to take, and there was a newspaper war on. Starr was the most read columnist—I believe. Maybe Wally Hall had more readers. I don't remember now. But he was a very accomplished columnist. As I said, Starr had a very nice writing style, but his columns—they had less to do with the facts and with the truth. They were little morality plays almost. There was bad and good in them. I really, actually, admired how he would craft those things and put them together. I could see why he had great readership. So anyway it's funny. I admired Starr on one hand, but then didn't really understand why he seemed to be

going off the deep end on the other hand. But, you know, you didn't tell Starr anything. He told you.

JM: Yes.

CB: [Laughs] He was a very strong personality. Anyway, 1983 McArthur was arrested for allegedly plotting to kill Robinson, and then it was quickly dismissed. Now somewhere in there—and again I apologize the dates get kind of scrambled up now. But, I was summoned back to Starr's office one day, and he had a hot tip. It was that—now, Tommy had gone ahead and arrested McArthur in August of 1982 for the murder of Alice McArthur—against the recommendation of the prosecutor, and that's what led to the hearing in Judge Hale's court in November of 1982. So it was in February of 1983 coming up—it had been about six months since the arrest—and Starr's hot tip was that Dub Bentley was going to get McArthur off on a technicality, because the Speedy Trial Rule would expire in February of 1983. I was familiar with the Speedy Trial Rule. It had come up in a couple of other cases that I had covered. I knew that Starr's tip was not right. The law at the time, if you were out on bail—as McArthur was—then they would have to try you in about eighteen months. If you were in jail, they had to try you within a year. I think it has since changed. I think it might be a year—I'm not sure what it is now. I immediately told Starr that it was eighteen months. He said, "Well go check your facts. I don't think you are right." He was saying that he wanted a story about it, so I went over and interviewed a couple of judges. I made a photocopy of the state law—Speedy Trial Rule. So I went back to the office that evening to write the story up, and I really wasn't sure of what I was going to write. I couldn't figure out what the lead was. My information told me that the Speedy

Trial Rule wasn't going to run out for another year. I told Ray Hobbs that, and he said, "Well Starr wants a story though, you know." And I said, "Well." So I was over at my typewriter, and I was just kind of sitting there scratching my head. Starr was standing there. I hadn't even noticed him at first. He said, "Don't worry about it. I'll handle it." He said, "But write me up some notes." I said, "Okay. Okay. I'll do that." I left him about a page, maybe a page and a half, of some notes that I had talked to—I believe I talked to Judge Langston. I talked to Judge Lowber Hendrix. I had talked to the prosecuting attorney [and] a couple of other lawyers—defense attorneys that I knew from hanging out at the coffee shop. I believe this was a Friday afternoon. I just left it in Starr's mail slot, and went home for the weekend. That Sunday I see the paper on the front page there is this story by Starr that the Speedy Trial Rule was about to run out [and] that Prosecuting Attorney Bentley was pulling shenanigans to try and get McArthur off. I didn't like how he was using some of the quotes that I had given him in the notes. They were used in a way to make Dub Bentley look like he was pulling something over on people. I knew the story was wrong. I knew that there would be repercussions. I was sort of concerned that maybe some of the fallout was going to hit me. That somehow I would—well, I actually worried that I might lose my job over that. But the very next day, Monday, before I had even gone into work that day there was this front page correction that Starr wrote. I believe he even addressed it in his column. He said, "Well, my brain slipped a notch", or something. But as I recall the correction just said "his source." I never knew who his source was. I suspect it was Tommy Robinson, but I don't know that. He just said that his source had called him and said, "Well no, actually, the Speedy Trial Rule won't

Rule won't run for another year." Fortunately, that was all there was to it. I went on my way covering the courthouse. Starr went on his way.

JM: He'd already been told that, but . . .?

CB: Yes. That just reinforced it. I didn't understand why he just wouldn't listen to reason or facts. I understood he was caught up in the newspaper war. So I don't know. I started thinking a little more about maybe seeing if the *Gazette* would be interested in my employment, but at the same time I liked the people at the *Democrat*. I was enjoying the work. It was hellaciously hard at times, but I was—it was almost like everyday being on an adrenaline rush. It certainly was better than just working as an accountant or something in some office somewhere. My mother always wanted me to be an accountant, so I mentioned that. [Laughter]

JM: [Laughs] Okay.

CB: Although, she was caught up in it, too. She was always calling me up wanting the inside information on this case. Her friends were all interested in it and everything. It was something else. There were some other things that occurred. Dub Bentley did charge Lee Orsini later on in 1983 with the death of her husband, Ron Orsini. I believe that murder occurred in March of 1981. You know, that would be the subject of the grand jury. It was about a—good gosh—I mean about a four week trial. Dub Bentley actually prosecuted the case himself in court, and he threw everything and the kitchen sink at her. She was convicted. Now it was overturned by the [Arkansas] State Supreme Court later. Part of it was that some of the evidence that was allowed in—as I recall—they considered to be prejudicial. It was part of just Bentley's overkill you might say on that. So that conviction was vacated. She had been convicted and given life without parole for the

death of Alice McArthur.

JM: Yes. Okay.

CB Lee—I think—died a couple of years ago in prison at age fifty-three or four.

JM: Yes, I remember that. She did die.

CB: Yes. I do remember that Lee Orsini was represented by Jack Lessenberry. Lessenberry later became a circuit judge. Jack was a very accomplished lawyer, but he was kind of an old grouchy guy. I think that case made him grouchy, too. But, again, I got one of these summons from Starr sometime after Orsini's conviction in October 1982. He said that he wanted me to go over to the sheriff's office and get a copy of a letter that Lee Orsini had written Lessenberry to fire him. So I go over there, and Tommy Robinson is having a press conference over there. He saw me, and he just kind of motioned over to me. I came over there, and he said, "Hey, how are you doing?" And he slipped me this letter through a handshake. I just went on my way and wrote up a story. I called up Lessenberry, and, oh, he got so mad. He wouldn't speak to me for a while after that. Basically he told me that it was none of my business—his contractual relationship with his client. That he hadn't heard from her, and that he resented the fact that the *Democrat* had a letter addressed to him that he hadn't even received at that point. I don't know who wrote the letter to tell you the truth. I'm not sure that Lee Orsini actually wrote it. I did question its authenticity after talking to him. But, you know, we ran with the story, and he was in fact fired. So I guess it was authentic.

JM: Yes.

CB: I couldn't have said a hundred percent at the time I committed it to print, but that's kind of how it went. So anyhow those were the highlights of the court-

house. I do want to add though that the coffee shop—it sounds like at times that we just would be sitting around there real lazy. There were some slow days where I didn't earn my pay.

JM: Sure.

CB: I'll be honest on some of those days, but I more than earned it on many other days.

JM: I can imagine.

CB: I got to know a lot of the lawyers, and I would ask some questions about particular points that might have come up in a case I was hearing. I got to where I would go around on Friday afternoons to visit some of the judges, and just kind of talk to them—you know—in general about things. I actually became pretty good friends with John Langston, the circuit judge. But I also remember Darrell Hickman had been a chancery judge in Pulaski County Court and was then on the Arkansas Supreme Court. He and George Bentley were pretty good friends. Old Judge Hickman would—his thing was just after lunchtime on Fridays he would come down to the coffee shop. It got to where it was sort of really a legal seminar at times, and other lawyers would come down and listen and talk about things. That was very interesting. Things tended to slow down on Friday afternoons most weeks at the courthouse. It was just a good time for a session like that. I always felt privileged in a sense to be able to experience that. But anyhow, I left the *Democrat* in late December of 1984. Oddly enough I was going to go to work for a banking investment firm. I had never sold anything in my life. Now, I look back on it and I don't know why I was doing that, except a neighbor—actually a good friend of my parents, a man named Joe Powell—was one of the principals in

Powell and Satterfield Investment Banking. I had dated his daughter some in high school, so I had known him since I was about seventeen or so. He had always said—it seems from the first day that I met him—he said, "You want to go into investment banking, don't you?" He always would say that I needed to do that. So I don't know. I guess one day I just called him up and said, "I think I'll give it a try." I lasted about seven weeks in the business in the early part of 1985. And just was miserable—missed the newspaper. So I called old Garry Hoffman up one day and I said, "Garry, will you have me back?" So I went back to work for the *Democrat* in February—I believe it was—of 1985. So I had been gone six, seven—well, maybe eight weeks all together. I was a general assignments reporter. In some ways I guess those were some of the best days that I look back on now. I got some pretty good assignments—news feature type assignments. I know I wrote one on Tommy Robinson. I wrote one about . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: This is Jerry McConnell here again with Cary Bradburn. This is side two of this tape. Cary, you were talking about going back to work at the *Democrat* and on general assignment. As I remember, you were enjoying that. And you had written some stories—one about Tommy Robinson and one about Henry Gray. Just go on with that.

CB: Well, like I said, I guess there were two levels of GA's [General Assignments] at the newspapers. You'd be the GA when you start that would get all the night assignments, and that's actually how I started there in October of 1981. Well anyway, I had pretty much a day job and was getting good assignments. Now the—

and trying to come up—you know, would mine some stories that I could think of myself. Probably the most memorable thing though was I came into work on a Sunday. This would have been in April of 1985. I got a call from a man who was asking for Gene Nail. Nail was an investigative reporter at the *Democrat*—a very aggressive reporter. But he had been fired or let go. I don't know for sure. A couple of weeks earlier he got into a dispute with Starr, because—well, Gene was one of these kind of constitutionalist guys. He had gotten a bunch of parking tickets, and he wanted to go to court and fight the parking tickets. He wanted to appeal it to the highest court if necessary. Starr told him, "No. You are going to pay those tickets or you're fired." The story is that Nail told Starr to forget it, and they parted. This man called up for Nail, and I told him that Nail wasn't working there anymore. He said, "Well, I still like the *Arkansas Democrat*. What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm a reporter. I'm working today." He wanted to know if I wanted to drive up to Harrison and meet him. He said that he—and I should back up. At this time there was a federal—the federal government had surrounded a camp up near Mountain Home—the Covenant, Sword, the Arm of the Lord. They were one of these white supremacist groups up there. They had four fugitives. They were wanted for some bank robberies and murder out west. So it was a pre-Waco type situation up in the beautiful mountains of Arkansas—you know, around Mountain Home. I had done a couple of stories just from the Little Rock office at that point early the previous week. We had a couple of reporters up there covering the standoff. This guy said that he could put me in touch with the camp by shortwave radio, if I'd drive up there and meet him. So I called Ray Hobbs and said, "I don't know who this guy is." And Ray said, "Do it. Go for

it." So I drove up to Harrison, and he was where he said he was going to be. So I followed him for a ways, and then got in his Jeep and we drove up into the woods. Along the way he said, "Oh, here's a friend of mine." It was Tom Robb who was the [Supreme] Chaplain—I believe at that time—of the Ku Klux Klan. He chatted with Robb, and we're up where these survivalist are living in the mountains. Finally, at one point I got in to his—he had some sort of Jeep Land Rover thing as I recall [and] a couple of big old dogs in the car. I believe they were German Shepherds. We drove on further up to the top of a ridge, and then he said, "Okay. I think we can get contact." He has this short—you know, this CB [Citizen's Band radio]—well, or short wave—see I'm not even sure of the difference. But he was—finally, this guy comes on who said that his name was—and I forget the first name, but—Ellison. And [James] Ellison was the leader more or less of the CSA [The Covenant, The Sword, and the Arm of the Lord]. He and another guy named Kerry Noble—I believe was his name. But I talked to a man who purported to be Ellison by radio. The short of it is that he told me that they were going to surrender the next day [and] that there were some people within the camp that did not want to surrender. They wanted to fight it out, but that he didn't want bloodshed. And that he had persuaded enough of them anyway to surrender the next day. I finally that night got back to a phone where I could call the newspaper and tell them what I had. I essentially just dictated over the phone a story to them that the *Democrat* ran the next day—a copyright article. The CSA, in fact, surrendered the next morning. I felt satisfied that I had probably really talked to Ellison. I have to say that I can't say a hundred percent. I just know that what he said was going to come down happened, so that is the only proof I have that we in

fact made contact. There was—I know particularly a couple of the *Gazette* reporters didn't believe it. They later—you know, they're friends of mine today—Stephen Steed and Michael Haddigan. They were covering for the *Gazette*. They were a little bit skeptical and resentful of the story, and just thought that's just another crazy *Democrat* story—you know.

JM: Yes.

CB: But as I said, we did scoop the world on that one. That was the most memorable thing about my return to the *Democrat*. I guess it was in—well, I went to work for the *Gazette* in December of 1985.

JM: Let me stop you one—one question there. I was out of state at this time working in Oklahoma City. Didn't somebody get killed trying to go in to—was that the survivalist that they had a shooting, and they killed a policeman of something? Or was that a different . . .?

CB: Well that was a different situation as I recall. I know the one that you are thinking about, and it was during that time—because I remember getting kind of a hysterical phone call from the man's wife before all of this. She said that—was alleging harassment, but now I have forgotten his name and even the location.

JM: Okay. Okay.

CB: But it was in that same time period. Yes.

JM: Never mind that. That clears that up, but this Ellison did—he did—they did surrender.

CB: Yes.

JM: And verified your story.

CB: Yes. Yes. And I believe they were later convicted as well, too.

JM: So let's now—get me on—get me to the *Gazette*.

CB: Yes, well—anyhow, yes, I continued there at the *Democrat*. I remember another story from that time. There was a man named Palmer who—I forgot exactly—he was in some line of work where he travelled overseas. He was one of the Americans—I believe it was in Beirut [Lebanon]—they were on the tarmac. The plane was seized by terrorists, and it was a hostage situation. There's always an Arkansas person in these international things.

JM: Yes.

CB: And there was a—as I recall—a U.S. Marine who was shot and killed, and just thrown out on the tarmac. It was a pretty serious tense situation. They did release them. Palmer was able to return home. He went to Germany first. His wife went over there and met him. Well as that was—and I don't remember some of the details, because I wasn't working on that story. It was a Saturday night I believe when word came that they had been released. There was an assistant editor named [Patrick] Casey that—Pat went to Oklahoma City sometime after that to work for the AP [Associated Press]. Pat was really pursuant. I mean he was really pursuing that story, and he had been talking to Mrs. Palmer. He called that night, and got an interview with her. So he had something in the paper the next day. An interview where—and I don't remember if she was about to leave to go to Germany, or maybe he got her over there. I don't remember for sure now, but that made their son mad—because he felt like—well, for one thing his mother hadn't been getting much sleep, and that they felt like that she had been under some duress in the interview. Now, I don't know what the case was, but I came into work the next day. It was—actually, that would have been a Friday night,

because it was a Saturday. I came into work on a Saturday. Larry Ault was—and he recently passed away—he was an assistant editor at that time.

JM: That's A-U-L-T?

CB: A-U-L-T. Yes. Larry had been a federal courthouse reporter for the *Democrat*, and then he was an assistant editor at that time. Larry kind of—you know, he had an ambling way. He ambled on over, and he said, "Well, try to get—let's try and get a follow up story on the Palmer thing. Call out there to the house." Because I guess what it is—now I'm remembering—she had gone to Germany, and had come back. He was there. But Pat had gotten her on the phone that night trying to get Palmer himself, but couldn't. I think he was asleep or something. So I called out—I called to their house, and got their son as it turned out. He just cussed me out. First of all, he thought I was Pat Casey of course, and I clarified. I said, "No. No. I'm not Mr. Casey, and I'm just calling to follow up on this." And he said that they would not talk to the *Democrat*—in between cuss words—that he wouldn't talk to the *Democrat*, and that we—the paper—owed the family an apology. And that they would have no interview unless there was an apology, and maybe not even then. So I passed that along to Larry, and thought I was going on to something else. Larry came over. He had called Starr, and Starr had told him to send a reporter out to the house, knock on their door, and kind of insist to talk to them. And that the paper didn't owe them any kind of apology. And I said, "Larry, you got to be kidding. The guy threatened to whip me. And I mean I don't know if he will, but you got to—I'm not going to go over there alone." [Laughs] I was really trying to talk him—but I understood. I mean Starr had said—you know, Larry had no choice. So I said, "Okay. Okay. I'm going out

there." He said, "Well, okay, we'll let one reporter go with you." Well, it's Judy Gallman. She's this small woman! But the theory was we'll let Judy knock on the door. The guy is not going to beat up little Judy, and I'll just be kind of standing there—you know, lurking. And that's what we did. We got him at the door, and he said, "No way. I told you. I'm going to call the police on you, if you don't leave." So we went back and said, "This is what happened, Larry."

JM: Yes.

CB: So that was that.

JM: Yes.

CB: It was kind of a crazy little thing. But, yes, I did go to work at the *Gazette*; in fact I think my first day there was December 26, 1985. It was still owned by the Patterson family at that time.

JM: Yes. Okay. Now then, before we get to the *Gazette*, did Starr at some point in time ever have a falling out with Tommy Robinson? I can't remember the denouement of all that.

CB: Yes, he did. Again, my memories may be a little hazy here, but I believe it was after Tommy had gone to Congress.

JM: Okay.

CB: And I don't know why there was a falling out, but I think—my recollection is that, when Tommy ran for governor in 1990, Starr was very much against him, and had—I think—probably something to do with Tommy not getting the nomination on the Republican side. Starr, you know, he flip-flopped with [Governor Bill] Clinton that way, too. He started out just on Clinton's case in the late 1970s and probably had something to do with Frank White winning the 1980 governor's

race. But by 1990, Starr was I believe supporting Clinton at that point, but then he got mad at him when he decided to run for president in 1992.

JM: Because he thought he promised that he wasn't going to run for president?

CB: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay. Yes, all right. But all through the McArthur thing and everything, Starr is—you think—being fed tips by Tommy Robinson, and he is really pushing all of the reporting on that and everything, and pushing you—in some cases—pushing you against what you are finding out on the other side.

CB: Yes. Yes.

JM: So do you know—you don't know how—why he was that strong on the story? Do you? I mean . . .?

CB: Well, he sensed it was a big story, of course.

JM: Yes.

CB: And that there was, again, quite a bit of interest in the story. But why he saw it in strictly black and white terms—maybe you could say that about me. I don't know. I felt like I had—I just felt like I had a more realistic view of what was going on.

JM: Yes.

CB: I had more sources than he did.

JM: Okay. Now then, wasn't there some conflict between him and Gene Lyons over—wasn't Gene Lyons saying that Starr was off base when he was writing—or do you remember that?

CB: Well, you know, Gene had a column in the *Arkansas Times* as I remember, and he did clash with Starr. And not just over the McArthur case. I know that one time

Starr suggested that, "Well, let's just compare our college transcripts to see who is the smartest." [Laughs] But they would get into some fairly ridiculous arguments, actually, when it boiled down to it. But yes, Lyons was writing his column in the *Arkansas Times*. Starr was writing his in the *Democrat*. You had to read both to keep up with what was going on.

JM: Yes.

CB: I found them fairly entertaining, usually.

JM: Lyons later wrote a book about that.

CB: Yes, he wrote the book *The Widow's Web*.

JM: Yes. Okay.

CB: And he did interview me for that book about the front page correction.

JM: Yes.

CB: You know, and just be inside on what happened there, which I think probably made some people mad at the *Democrat*.

JM: Okay. Do you—and, of course, he's of such great interest in the newspaper war—do you remember any other examples of Starr's reign—rule? How he ran the paper? How he drove the staff? I've had a lot of people say—you know—he's really pushing coverage and everything.

CB: Oh, well, yes. He had critiqued—he would critique the newspaper almost every-day. I believe it was called "Random Thoughts" or "Notes", but, yes, it was one—I think "Random Notes". Oh yes, I mean I came in for some serious criti-cism in those and so did others. And you—well, you just developed a second skin. You know, you realized it was Starr's way, though, of pushing how he wanted things done. If he thought you blew the lead, he's say you blew the lead.

It should have been this. He always told me, "Look for what's new and exciting." That's what—I never heard him say this, but Dub Bentley told me that he said this to him and another reporter—it, actually, might have been Gene Nail, though—said that Starr once commented to him, "Well, don't let the facts get in the way of a good story." Now, he was probably—I'm sure he was being facetious when he said that. But, yes, really through his editors and this critique of the paper was the way that you knew how he wanted things done. I mean he didn't have to tell you directly. Now, he also—and this is just an impression that I had—he had a great deal of respect for reporters, though, the people that were out on the street as he would say. And I think that that's really where he really wanted to be. And I don't know that he had as much respect for his own editors. I'm not sure. I'm just—that was just an impression I had, and based on some things that he would write in his column, also. But I do know this too, though, you had to kiss up to him if you were going to get anywhere in that organization. You know, I mean you didn't have a chance otherwise. But I do think, even though I did at times disagree with him, I never had any big Donnybrook argument with him or anything.

JM: Yes. Yes.

CB: I would just kind of state what I thought was—you know, what I thought, and he would say what he thought.

JM: So, okay, what was the pay and the working conditions like at that time?

CB: Gosh, I think that I was probably making about $15,000 a year through that time.

JM: Okay.

CB: There were a couple of raises. I'd get an annual raise. I don't remember the

weekly pay, but that's—I guess we were paid every two weeks. It was after I went to the *Gazette* that it was weekly—the pay. Well now, as I said, with the courthouse beat that—the hours could vary, but the—it was—you know, you'd have to say long hours low pay. I wasn't—for those three years on the courthouse beat—I wasn't in the newsroom all that much, except usually in the evening. A lot of the—usually, Starr had left by then. Anyway, I'd—a lot of times we were writing the stories between about 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. But, as far as conditions there, I liked most of the people I worked with and got along. We would go out for some drinks and dinner at certain times, particularly on Fridays. That's what I remember.

JM: Yes, okay. Now then, tell me about the *Gazette*, and what it was like working at the *Gazette,* and what you did over there.

CB: The first day I was there Max Brantley came over and said, "Well, this is what everyone does on their first day." And he handed me this big pile of just memos, and notes, and stuff. They called it the "Style Pile." It was memos that [John Netherland] Heiskell wrote establishing the style of the *Gazette*. There was no style book, except this "Style Pile." I spent the day reading through it, and it was pretty interesting. I think some of those memos went back to the 1940s. Anyway, a lot of them—at least that they shared with me—were from the 1960s and 1970s. They were more recent. And, of course, he I guess died in 1971—I believe.

JM: That's right 1971 or 1972.

CB: Yes. I was a general assignments reporter at the *Gazette*, and worked—I believe my hours initially were 12:30 [p.m.] to just whenever you got off.

JM: Yes.

CB: A lot of times, if nothing was going on, it would be about 8:00 [p.m.] or 8:30 [p.m.] I was a night GA [General Assignments Reporter]. Oh, I covered the Wrightsville City Council. I went up to some meetings in Sherwood [Arkansas]. I would—now when beat reporters would go on vacation, I filled in for—I know I filled in for Mark Oswald.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Now, you were telling me about what you did at the *Gazette*. Go on and talk a little bit more about that.

CB: Yes. I was a night GA. When beat reporters would go on vacation—it seemed like often—I would cover for the week or the two weeks that they would be off. I know I did for Oswald—Mark Oswald—some on the Little Rock beat, and also some planning commission meetings. I would cover North Little Rock when John Woodruff would go on vacation. John used to take about a—when he would leave, it was usually in the summer about two weeks. I was going over there during the Terry Hartwick administration. I became an environmental beat reporter. I believe it was 1989—I guess, sometime in late—in 1989 and 1990 for a while. Then, I was later an education reporter in 1991. You know, the first—I started in December of 1985—in the first year there, it was owned by the Pattersons. They sold it in late 1986 as I recall, or at least announced it.

JM: Yes. I think that's right.

CB: Then for the next year, 1987, Carrick Patterson continued on as the chief editor, and things went along like they had. There really weren't too many internal changes. I mean some of the Gannett people would show up in the newsroom from time to time. But, they hired Walker Lundy to be the editor at the start of

1988 as I remember, and that's when things started really fundamentally changing in the news coverage. They wanted shorter articles. They wanted off beat little feature stories. I think one I had to write was about a pig that was suckling a little cat. What was it? A pig was suckling a dog? I don't even remember it now.

JM: Yes.

CB: But, it was just something that would have been laughed at—you know—even a year earlier. I didn't have much contact with Walter Lundy, though. I mean I continued to—Max Brantley was the city editor and he was the person I usually had communication with, and got assignments from, and talked about news coverage or whatever. One day Jean Kirkpatrick, the [United States] ambassador [to the United Nations], was over at the—then the Excelsior Hotel. It's now the Peabody [Hotel]. She was in town for a speech of some kind, and there was a press conference. Max sent me over there. And I just remember the emphasis was now—you know, we joked light, bright. We competed to see who could write the shortest lead. Somebody, finally, just came up with "Wow." You know, nobody could beat "Wow." Of course, it could work for any story! [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

CB: You know, just about. So I just—I'm a fan of the comics. "Bloom County" was one of the strips, and they had—and Jean Kirkpatrick was characterized in that strip. There was this crazy cat named Bill the Cat. He was kind of—I think a take off of Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols kind of guy. You know, kind of guy always drunk and just crazy looking. Well, Bill the Cat had a crush on Jean Kirkpatrick in the comic strip. I was just in that mood, so I started asking her questions

about the comic strip and whether or not she loved Bill the Cat, also. There were other people with more serious questions there at the press conference. Anyway, I wrote a story the next day, and I lead in with all of that. It went something like, "Jean Kirkpatrick does seem to have a sense of humor", because she kind of laughed about it. She played along with me, but after a while there I think she was ready to move on. I actually—a reporter that I knew, JoBeth Briton, who later worked at the *Gazette*—but at that time I think she was working for *Spectrum Weekly*—she commented to me later, "I thought you were drunk or something", you know, with that line of questioning. Well, the next day I was over there at my desk, and Walter Lundy came over. He told me that was one of the best stories that he had ever read and for me to keep on doing stories like that. That's the only time he ever said anything to me about anything.

JM: Yes.

CB: Then in—it would have been 1990—Keith Moyer came in, and replaced Lundy as the editor. Lundy was not popular with the staff. In fact there was some kind of—as I recall now—a survey that a couple of people initiated among the reporters that was very critical of Lundy, and Gannett, and the way things were going. That may have had some influence with the higher ups to replace Lundy. I don't know. There was also—well, it went beyond the survey. I think we were actually surveyed or at least asked to critique the paper. Write it out, you know. I think I wrote a little something when I did the survey. But, I don't know all of the decisions behind it. But anyway, Keith Moyer came in. Now, I was—as I said, I was assigned to the environment beat. It was the first time the *Gazette* had designated—actually designated—an environmental reporter. Now they—James

Scudder had been covering a lot of the Vertac issues up in Jacksonville, because Jacksonville was one of his beats. So there had been environmental coverage of course in the paper, but they never designated somebody. And I had a column, too—a Sunday column. But I ended up getting fired from that beat, because Keith Moyer took something that I wrote in one of the columns to be criticism of him personally, which I didn't see it that way and wasn't thinking it when I wrote it. It may have been a little bit snide. I don't know. But, I just—it was a column about really how Wal-Mart and some of the other corporations were jumping onto this green bandwagon and suddenly becoming environmentalists. Hey, you know, that's fine. It's good. There's some self awareness occurring there, but you have to be a little bit cynical, too. They're marketing. You know, this is marketing. I wrote something to the effect that "even the *Arkansas Gazette* has now got an environmental reporter that it never had before." And it's just becoming an important issue. He took exception to that. And I still don't—he never said anything to me about it. I was—I think Max called me in to tell me, "Well, you've been kicked off the beat. You'll go back to GA." I just said, "Look. This isn't fair. This is terrible." And the day the *Gazette* closed Max did tell me that he thought I got a real raw deal out of that, but, you know, life goes on. I did end up covering the schools for about the last I guess ten months of the paper's existence. Of course, school issues can keep a person up all night long.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

CB: I covered some six and seven hour Little Rock School Board meetings—incredible. It was just turmoil all the time over there at the district office.

JM: Yes. So how was the—anymore about how the paper was operating under Gan-

nett? Are there many more examples that you remember, but just . . .?

CB: Well, I—yes. You know, I think in some ways I've tried to blot some of that out. I don't know. You know, we were getting a lot of criticism from the public at large, too. I just always had such mixed feelings, because I had a great deal of respect for the *Gazette*. As I said, I'd always wanted to work for the *Gazette* from going back to I guess when I read it as a kid, although I didn't have any specific plans about that. But, at the same time I didn't like the Gannett people. They sent a guy down by the name of Jeffrey Stinson, I believe was his name. He was supposed to be a hotshot investigator reporter. He'd just go out and drink with people, and just write crap, basically. He didn't investigate anything. He didn't add to anybody's knowledge or understanding of what was going on locally. I know that. I'm not saying that Jeff was a bad sort or anything. He was friendly enough, you know. I just had doubts that Gannett knew what they were doing. Well, I guess they do know what they are doing, because, I guess, the newspaper industry has gone to that style of coverage anyway. Of course today, with cable news, it's completely different. But most of the time—you know, I always felt like when I worked during the Patterson period that the editors would send you out somewhere to cover something, but, when you came back, they'd want to know, "Well, so what's the story?" You know, they left the judgment with the reporter who was out there. Once Gannett firmly got a hold, it was more of a top down [management style]. It was, "This is the story. You go out, and write us this." And they didn't seem to want to know what we thought. They didn't care about institutional memory. They promoted some of the younger reporters. They were good people, and they were good writers. Phoebe Wall Howard was one of the

young—she was about twenty-four or five—but she would write some of the silliest, most frivolous stuff. And they loved it. They had her in the TV ads talking about how serious the death penalty is and things like that. There was another young writer—a very good writer—Scott Bowles. But, they—and I just mentioned those two, because I guess they were the two darlings of the Gannett people there at the *Gazette* in those days. They had the attitude that they didn't want to know what had happened before. They wanted to go on first impressions, and that was their idea of covering a news story. And there's no need to go back and check the clips or talk to any of the old timers.

JM: Who is this now that you are talking about?

CB: Well, the younger reporters.

JM: Yes.

CB: And they pretty much had decided—that was the attitude of the Gannett people in general is that it didn't matter about the paper's past or its—it was a new day and this was the way it was going to be.

JM: Yes.

CB: You know.

JM: Yes.

CB: That is the best way I can characterize what I perceived to have been the management style. People at various levels fought it, but there wasn't anything that a reporter could do about it. You just try to write the most honest account of whatever you were out doing. Max can speak for himself, but there were some people toward the end who resented Max getting on board with an attempt for an employee buy out of the paper to try and keep it alive. Max suddenly turned real an-

anti-Gannett, where see Max had tried to create the best of both. He recognized Gannett had taken over. They were going to—but he wanted to save as much of the old *Gazette* as he could. But, some people considered him a bit of turn coat at times.

JM: Yes.

CB: You know.

JM: They thought he was sort of going Gannettish? You mean . . .?

CB: Yes, that he was too accommodating to Gannett.

JM: Yes. Yes.

CB: He needed to stand up to them more. Now, I don't know the circumstances of why Carrick Patterson left in late 1987, but I suspect that there was a little bit of an argument along that line.

JM: Before Gannett took over, did you ever notice any concerns that the *Gazette*—that they might be losing the war, that the *Democrat* might be winning the war, or was there much talk about that?

CB: Not in the newsroom. The attitude that I encountered when I first went to work there was that the *Gazette* was the better paper. Hands down, people will recognize that. If we just go on and put out a good newspaper that will take care of itself. Now, in 1985 there had been a little bit of an influx of former *Democrat* people going to the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

CB: You know, David Davies was one. He started working there a few months before I did.

JM: Yes.

CB: Jan Cottingham had gone over there, and there were some others—and more to come later, of course.

JM: Yes. I understand that, after Gannett came, there really was a big exodus over there. I remember Alyson Hoge telling me that she just dreaded the day—okay, here goes some more, because they got in sort of a bidding war, I think at one stage.

CB: Yes.

JM: And then, of course, there was the suit that the *Gazette* filed against the *Democrat*.

CB: Yes.

JM: I think filed it in 1984, but, actually, it went to trial in 1986.

CB: Yes.

JM: I think early 1986. What was the reaction around the staff when that suit came down?

CB: Well, they called a meeting. Hugh B. Patterson spoke at the meeting, and basically said, "Well, we lost the suit." I remember that it was sort of somber. I mean that was the first indication to me that some people might have some concerns about what was going on.

JM: Yes.

CB: But there was still, though, that attitude that the *Gazette* was the better paper. And—you know—if we just kept on doing what we were doing, we'd be all right. But it was—I don't remember exactly—but it wasn't long after that then it was announced that Gannett had bought the paper. But there was a lot of optimism. There was the belief that now we have the deep pockets to really be viable and

don't have to worry. I mean we didn't—at least I didn't know what was coming down, though. Like I said . . .

JM: I don't think anybody did.

CB: Yes. There was about a year that we kind of lived in a sort of honeymoon, or an unrealistic—you know, we thought that it wasn't going to change. And again, it was when Walter Lundy came in that things started really changing.

JM: Yes. At some point in time, I understand that the *Democrat* had really opened up as far as space is concerned, and they'd hired a lot of people and everything. Was the *Gazette* at this time, when you first went over there, were they pretty competitive in space and everything else?

CB: Yes, I think there was still more space in the *Democrat*, but the *Gazette* had a pretty good sized local paper.

JM: Yes.

CB: There was never—I found it to be very similar as far as the lengths of stories that they wanted when I was at the *Democrat* and then later at the *Gazette.* I found that it was pretty similar. I did.

JM: Was there any point in time that, before the *Gazette* closed—how far ahead did people have any idea that something was going on?

CB: The first time that I was for sure that something was going on—I mean there were little rumors but nothing credible, because, interestingly enough, people were still migrating from the *Democrat* to the *Gazette*. Now we are into 1990 and it's still occurring, and I know the circulation numbers were not so good then. They was starting to be an obvious concern. Let's see if I—yes, I kind of lost the thread of what I was going to say there. It was—I guess the first that I heard of any poten-

tial sale or—yes, of the paper—was a Channel 11 [KTHV] report. I remember we gathered—I watched it there in the newsroom. Several of us gathered. In fact I have a picture. Somebody took a picture of us watching the screen. I believe Joe Quinn was the reporter there at Channel 11, and he was reporting that in fact there had been a sale. It was a done deal awaiting approval by the Justice Department. I believe that was how the report went. You know, several people just kind of laughed and thought, "No. No." You know, and there was a lot of denial. There was a lot of denial. I wish I could remember the exact date of that. It was sometime in 1991.

JM: Yes.

CB: And then, there was one night—it was around—it was just before Labor Day 1991. Just before the Labor Day weekend, I was at the Capital Hotel having a drink with Scott Morris. And there might have been somebody else there, but I know it was Scott and I. And we ran into Skip Rutherford. And see, I knew Skip from—he had been on the school board. Before I was even the school beat reporter, I did cover a lot of school news. I filled in for Davies when he was on vacation—you know—during that GA period. But Skip told us. Yes, he knew. He had heard on really good authority that the paper had in fact been sold, and that it was just a matter of weeks probably. And that was the first time that I realized, "You know, the paper is going to close." Again, there was a lot of denial, and I know a couple of people, though, who did go ahead and find other jobs and move on. I just decided, "Well, I'm just going to go down with the ship." You know, I just don't feel like trying to—I didn't necessarily—I didn't want to move really, you know. I just wasn't interested in that really, and so—but still we heard noth-

ing. We heard nothing, and I actually went on vacation the week before the paper closed. I was really worried. I thought, "It's going to close while I'm on vacation." But this is something that had been scheduled. And I think I checked back a couple of times, "Well, what's going on back there?" So I got back that next Monday, and the paper was still there and everything. It was pretty much a forgone conclusion, though, for most people. Although, I still remember talking to one lady—and I've forgotten her name now—and she says, "No. It just can't be true." And I said, "Well, I'm afraid it is, though." You know.

JM: Yes.

CB: And then, it was that—you know, that very last day. But, I guess it was—the employee buy out had fallen through, and it was pretty clear that that wasn't going to happen. And I don't know—I think it was early—when I came back from vacation, Morris—and Morris had been one of the ones involved in that—Morris just said that no the buyout had fallen through.

JM: Scott Morris, you're talking about?

CB: Yes. Scott Morris. "We're just waiting for when this thing goes down." But we still—we didn't know it was going to be that week.

JM: Yes.

CB: And then, I guess it was—now, it was a Friday, I believe, when it closed. I think that was the day—the day of the week. I know that Wednesday night it was kind of surreal up there in the newsroom. It was almost like—I mean people were taking—well, they were pulling some things out of the library. It was almost like it was Paris right before the Nazi occupation.

JM: Yes.

CB: And people were taking some things out of the newsroom. In fact, I think the Pulitzer—the actual prize—was taken over to the UALR [University of Arkansas at Little Rock] Library or the archives over there. I think Hussman has since worked—you know, made arrangements with them about the actual property there. But, I know that people were pulling out photographs. They also gave us—you know, they compiled everybody's clippings, and we were getting our folders from the librarians. "Here. This is yours." You know.

JM: Yes.

CB: And then, that day that it closed I had covered a school board meeting, actually, the night before. It was—you know, I didn't write very much. There wasn't that much to the meeting. I think they were going to restrict public comments in their meetings, and that was the lead to the story. But everybody there was wishing me luck, and saying that they hated to see that the *Gazette* was closing. It seemed like everybody knew that it was going to close, but we still had no official word. I came into work that morning. And there was an expectation, "Okay. It's Friday. This may be the day." I don't think I did any work that morning. It was just—you know. I had a lot of adrenaline running, but it was hard to even sit down. I went to lunch with Jan Cottingham. We went over to Wallace Grill, and came back. It was sometime right after that. Maybe it was after 1:00, the computer in the first—you know, the computer just went blank. And then, it was clear that it was over at that point. And then, I think Moe Hickey was the acting editor at that time. Oh, it was still probably an hour [or] an hour and a half before he came out into the newsroom and made it official that the paper was closed. But everybody just sort of gathered around and talked. And people pulled out some

bottles of whiskey. It was very sad. You know, there were people crying. Nobody was mad at anybody, though. You know? We were all just patting each other on the back. It was a very unusual day.

JM: Okay. So was it that morning that Jerry Dhonau's editorial had run—he did write one—saying that the *Gazette* might close or something?

CB: Yes, it was that last paper. There was a paper printed that day—October 18.

JM: That morning.

CB: Yes.

JM: Yes. It was printed that—because there wasn't one the next day.

CB: Yes.

JM: But there was one that morning. Was it that morning, also, that George Fisher's cartoon ran . . .?

CB: Yes.

JM: With the tear on it . . .?

CB: Yes.

JM: Running from the eye?

CB: Yes.

JM: But at any rate, so the paper closed on that day. And that was October 18?

CB: 1991, yes.

JM: 1991. Okay, so what did you do then?

CB: Initially, I didn't do anything—initially. I started exercising a little more, and trying to figure out—I really—I had—we had severance pay. And I . . .

[Tape Stopped]

[End of Tape 1 Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2 Side 1]

JM: This is tape two in my interview with Cary Bradburn. And, Cary, the *Gazette* had just closed, and we were talking about what you did then. And then, I think maybe you said you started working out, and you had some pay that would last you until the end of the year or something like that. But at any rate, go ahead.

CB: Yes. I think my health insurance went through to the end of the year, also. But, I started taking in January of 1992 I took some classes at UALR. I did draw unemployment, after the severance ran out, for about six months. I took some classes that I guess I—just trying to take some things that I had not really pursued much earlier in school. I took algebra, and geometry, and trigonometry, and even got into calculus. I also was taking a lot of chemistry courses. You know they were science courses that I'd never—I just took the baby chemistry and stuff like that when I was in college. I was always a humanities major. But, I was just doing that for my own personal satisfaction. I didn't have any pretensions about being anything, except that I wanted—one fantasy that I always had was to open a book store. Well, that's one of the most unrealistic things you can actually try to do. I just kind of rocked on there taking classes. I believe it was 1993 when I finally—you know, funds were running a little low, because I was paying my own way to go to school there. So a friend of mine, Art Holiman, was interested in opening up a bookstore. And I said—you know. Art asked me if I'd just join him to help him run the store—you know, get it open and run the store. So, you know, I did that. We opened in late 1993. I was there until about January 1995 working in the bookstore. Really enjoyed the work, but there was some really depressing days where we didn't sell anything.

JM: What was the name of the bookstore?

CB: The bookstore was Clearwater Books & Kites. We also sold kites. I learned a little bit about kites. We were in Lakewood Village over in North Little Rock.

JM: Okay.

CB: I was living in Park Hill at the time. Oh, I enjoyed—I would go out and fly kites in a lot that was open. It's now been developed since then. We sold boomerangs as well. I enjoyed that time, but I wasn't—Art was paying me about $5.50 an hour. That's all—I mean, we were losing money there in the store. And finally, I just told Art I was going to get back into newspaper work. I was taking the *North Little Rock Times*, and saw an ad in the paper for a reporter. And so, I called over there and talked with Kitty Chism. I went in for an interview. And anyway, she hired me, and I started work at the *North Little Rock Times* in . . .

JM: How do you spell her last name?

CB: C-H-I-S-M.

JM: Okay, all right.

CB: And her husband, Dave, they were the owners of the paper. Kitty had worked at the *Washington Post* as a writer and copy editor. And Dave was an ex-military guy, and I think more recently had worked for one of the defense contracting companies. They were living in the Washington, D.C. area. Kitty told me that she had always had this dream about having a little old newspaper in a county seat. But anyway, they shopped around and found the *North Little Rock Times*. The *Times* itself was just about to go under. It had suffered greatly during the newspaper war. The ad rates had been just savagely cut, and it was very difficult for them to get along. John Thompson and Riley—Mr. Riley—Tom Riley were

over there.

JM: Tom Riley. I know them both.

CB: Yes, and I believe they still own the building where the *Times* is located now. Mr. Riley would come by all the time—you know.

JM: I had—let me ask you a question about that.

CB: Sure.

JM: And this is maybe one that I need to explore, but I would suspect that the newspaper battle over ad rates really impacted the small papers, too—the outlying papers, and the weeklies and everything, and particularly maybe even the free classifieds and then reducing the—you know, I think they were also offering cheaper rates to department stores and everything else. Had that been a factor? Do you know?

CB: Well, that's what I heard. Yes. In fact, John Thompson told me when I was first there that it was a miracle the paper was still—had survived all of that. Even after the newspaper war ended, they still—they struggled quite a bit. The Chisms came in and added a lot of energy to the paper. They came in in late 1993, so they had been running the paper for a little over a year when I started there. Kitty relied on me for institutional memory—just for the experience I had. I covered all the beats. I mean it's a weekly paper. Someone once asked me—you know, one of the younger reporters—"So what's it like working for a daily? What's the difference?" I said, "Well, a daily is like—just look at it this way. You go to the doctor's office. Things are calm. You wait your turn when your appointment is up, and then you go in and see the doctor. Working here at Kitty Chism's weekly newspaper, it's like the emergency room on Saturday night." [Laughs] Kitty was just—had boundless energy. She—you had to work on her schedule. It was very

frustrating. We would—we got into this—well, the pattern was that Mondays and Tuesdays you really didn't do anything but work those two days—and Tuesday especially. We would be up there in the newspaper office until 4:00 in the morning, sometimes. And then turn right around and be back down there about 9:00 [a.m.] on Wednesday, because our deadline was actually about 2:00 that afternoon. And we would finish up things, but by Wednesday afternoon I was just walking dead. It was tough to get much done the rest of the week, actually. I tried to get Kitty to change her ways as much as possible—you know—set some more deadlines for some things, get some things done earlier, but she just ran it the way—that was just her body rhythms, I guess. But she—as I said—she had quite a bit of energy. She pursued stories. We got a lot of criticism from the people that said, "Oh, we just like our little own *North Little Rock Times*. Why are ya'll trying to be a big city investigative paper?" We would—yes—I know that Kitty and Mayor [Patrick Henry] Hays clashed initially. We had a pretty good working relationship, though, by the time I was there. Oh, I covered [North Little Rock] City Hall for about five years there. I covered the school district for a couple of years. I covered the police at one time. Like I said, we had a small staff. There were three of us, initially. They did expand the staff to four by the time I left.

JM: Okay. So how long did you stay with the *Times*?

CB: I left the *Times* in February of 2002, and went to work for the North Little Rock History Commission. The background on that, I was covering some of the History Commission meetings, but not on a regular basis—because they met on Tuesday nights, and that just wasn't a good night, and they didn't generate that

much news. But, I developed a real—I really became interested in the local history there in North Little Rock. I always liked history and had majored in history in school, but I always studied European history [and] ancient history. I never thought about local history that much. I just got to looking around. The *Times* was coming up on a one hundred year anniversary in 1998. So I started writing a weekly history column going back researching North Little Rock history [and] the newspaper's history. And I really enjoyed writing those columns, and got to know Sandra Taylor Smith through that. She was the director of the North Little Rock History Commission and the Historic District Commission. And so, I was going over there and checking their files to develop stories. And there was a North Little Rock history book written by Walter [M.] Adams in 1986. I came to learn that there was some dissatisfaction from the black community, because they felt like they had been ignored in that history book. Curtis Sykes is a member of the North Little Rock History Commission. He was an educator for many years, and is one of the—well, in fact, now, still is chairman of the Black History Advisory Committee of the Arkansas History Commission. [He] has been for many years a promoter and proponent of African American history.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, we were talking about—oh, what was his name, Curtis Sykes?

CB: Curtis Sykes, yes.

JM: Okay.

CB: Well, yes, I had interviewed Mr. Sykes from time to time—anyways, part of just doing a history column for the *North Little Rock Times*. Kitty and Dave were big supporters of the city's history, and they wanted to be a part of all that. Anyway,

I became aware through—primarily through Curtis Sykes and then another commissioner, Greg Yielding—that they really were not happy with the earlier book, because—not because of what was in it, but because of what was not in it. So I got to thinking about it, and so I went over and talked to Sandra Taylor Smith, the director. And I suggested with the city's centennial coming up that, "Why don't ya'll hire me to write a book? And we'll get some of this in that Greg and Curtis aren't happy about. We'll publish another book, and see the city through its one hundred year anniversary." They thought it was a good idea. So they hired me to do that, but they also offered me a staff position at the same time. Now, I'm not a city employee, though. I'm a—technically a vendor—but I'm self employed, and—which means I pay my benefits. It's what it is. But, that's my relationship still today with the city.

JM: Okay.

CB: I was initially hired to write the book, which was published in November of 2004. The title is *On the Opposite Shore—The Making of North Little Rock.*

JM: *On the Opposite Shore*?

CB: *On the Opposite Shore*, yes.

JM: Okay.

CB: It—as I said, I made a special effort to get the black history experience in the book. Of course, I continued to research. I wasn't sure—you know, initially I thought that probably, after the book was published, I would move on to something else, but the commission wanted me to stay on as a staff position. It seems like—I don't know—you know, maybe it's that principle that the work expands to the number of people—Sandra had been working in that position by herself for

years. Now, all of the sudden, it's like we can't get by without two of us.

JM: Yes, and then need another one.

CB: [Laughs] Yes. We actually work out real well. She's an architectural historian, and I'm more of a general historian. I find myself frequently—you know, we get calls from people doing genealogy research, so I help them research their family through city directories, and the newspapers, and some of the census records. That way I learn more about the city's history.

JM: Okay, very interesting, Cary. We're probably getting close to winding this up, but let's go back a minute. Is there anything else you can—and since this is particularly a history about the *Democrat*—well, it's going to be a history about the *Democrat* and the war with the *Gazette*, also—is there anything you can remember about your stay at the *Democrat* that you haven't covered? Anything particular, or do you think that we've covered most of the stuff?

CB: Well, yes. Most of what I'm remembering right now, as I said, I'll probably think of a couple of things when I drive off here.

JM: Well, I hope you write them down, stick them on . . .

CB: You know, I think—the thing is I think about the people I knew.

JM: Yes.

CB: That's what I remember most of all. I could go in to some of them I suppose, but I . . .

JM: Talk about anybody who really stands out.

CB: But I might think of a story in that relationship—in that relation. Well, let's see. Yes, again, I guess I think of Bob Starr's personality. You were asking some questions earlier about his management style. But, I guess it was probably about

the—it was the first week I had been working there. I saw him coming—I was clear across the newsroom, but I saw him. You know, he came out of his office, and he walked toward where the city desk was. He was real red faced and just mad about something. I had no idea. But there was a female clerk, and he was screaming at her—he started screaming at her. Apparently, she had messed up a phone call or something. I don't know what it was about, but that put me on notice real early that Starr was something to deal with.

JM: Yes.

CB: And I didn't want to cross him. I just wanted to kind of do my job, and stay out of the way. I remember Bob Sallee working there. He was an editor. He had been a courthouse reporter. Heck, he had covered a lot of stuff over his time.

JM: A police reporter at one time.

CB: Yes. Yes. In fact, he wrote a headline—I mean a lead on a story that I ran across going through clips one day. I don't remember all of it now, but just something about, "robbers with guns a blazing" going into—I believe—a liquor store or something to rob it. But, I always liked Bob. Oh, he had—you know, he could talk about the old days. I enjoyed hearing those stories, but sometimes I would want to hide from him, though—because, he could come up with some lulu assignments at times. I remember one day I go in there on a Monday and Bob is just kind of sitting there. And I said, "Hey, how are you doing?" and everything. And he says, "What is wrong with everybody? Nobody wants to work. We're just not getting anything done here, you know? We got a newspaper to put out!" I don't know what set that off.

JM: This is Sallee you're . . .?

CB: Yes. This was Bob Sallee.

JM: Oh, okay.

CB: Yes. Yes. There was a man—I didn't know him that well—Si Dunn. Do you remember Si?

JM: Oh yes, I remember him. I worked with Si.

CB: Yes. Yes. You know, again, I just—I don't remember now the content of the conversations. I just remember a couple of enjoyable conservations with Mr. Dunn. He seemed—I just had the impression that he'd worked there forever.

JM: Yes, just about.

CB: [Laughs] I would add this. It's maybe not relevant to much. I grew up on Ridgeway. And three doors up a good friend of mine, Keith Berry, his father was one of the owners—I believe—of . . .

JM: Stanley Berry?

CB: Yes, Stanley Berry of the *Democrat*. I knew that back then, but I—you know, it didn't have anything much more to do than that. That was just—I knew his son, who I believe is still an economics professor at Hendrix [College].

JM: You may be right.

CB: Oh, I'll think of some others probably later on.

JM: Well, when you think of them, be sure to add them to your interview, because it's been a fascinating interview. And I've learned a lot from this one. I really appreciate it, and I want to say thank you very much, Cary.

CB: Well, you're quite welcome.

[End of interview]

[Transcribed by Geoffery L. Stark]