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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Bill Eddins
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
22 July 2005

Interviewer: Gerald Jordan

[This is an interview for the University of Arkansas Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History's project on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat*.]

Bill Eddins: I don't remember you from Little Rock.

Gerald Jordan: I worked on sports and I worked half a tour on [the] city desk because I had to go ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] camp, so I was in and out.

BE: Yes.

GJ: Bill, tell us your name and spelling for the transcriber here. If you go by Bill, you can say that.

BE: Well, Bill is what I go by, and it's officially William. Middle initial B. Eddins.
E-D-D-I-N-S.

GJ: Okay. Where were you born, Bill?

BE: Pine Bluff.

GJ: Pine Bluff. Go ahead and do all the "for the record" stuff—birth date . . .

BE: Oh, okay. [I was born on] July 28, 1947, [at Davis Hospital, between Linden and Cherry.]

GJ: Looks like you've got a birthday coming up.

BE: Yes, I do.

GJ: Yes.

BE: Let's see, I went to grade school at Gabe Meyer, then junior high school, [and] Pine Bluff High School.

GJ: Home of the Zebras.

BE: That is correct. Graduated from there in 1965. I spent one year at Memphis State University, [Memphis, Tennessee], then the next three at Hendrix College in Conway. Gene Foreman already hired me by then—right out of high school.

GJ: Oh, okay.

BE: The summer after I graduated from high school.

GJ: This was when he was managing editor at Pine Bluff?

BE: [The] *Pine Bluff Commercial*. Correct.

GJ: Yes. What was your early interest in journalism? What got you jazzed on journalism?

BE: Well, two things. It's kind of weird, but I had a dream, though I don't remember a thing about it. I just remember remembering some kind of dream. The other thing I was always struck by—was it [Thomas] Jefferson [who said] if he had to choose government or a free press—a democratic government or a free press, he'd go with the press? That's that idealist bullshit you were talking about earlier . . .

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: . . . that doesn't exist anymore. I had met Foreman in the spring of 1965 on the stage of the auditorium at Pine Bluff High School.

GJ: This is Gene Foreman, who was the managing editor.

BE: Yes, of the *Commercial*, and later he had the same job at the *Democrat*. He presented me with a check for \$100 from E. W. Freeman, the publisher of the *Commercial*, in recognition of my having been named MVP [Most Valuable Player] of the high school newspaper . . .

GJ: [Laughs] That's great.

BE: . . .which was called the *Pine Cone*. So, basically, for having met Gene there, being the recipient of this \$100 check, and having had this dream of some sort—I forget about that—but anyway, I went down there to the *Commercial* soon after that and applied for a job the summer after I graduated from high school. Foreman signed me up for ten hours a week—changing ribbons on the Teletype machine, cleaning out the staff Volkswagens—those were probably two [of my tasks]—and helping a lady in the library clip out mug shots.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: That was my beginning. Gerald, you know, once you start on this, I'm not sure the level of detail you are interested in. [Laughs]

GJ: Whatever gets you down the road and to the *Democrat*. Now, this was with Foreman, and you were still in high school, right?

BE: No, I had graduated.

GJ: You hadn't graduated when he gave you the \$100.

BE: This was shortly before graduation, at an awards ceremony.

GJ: Okay.

BE: So that summer I started at the *Commercial*. Well, anyway, I guess, having shown my incompetence changing the Teletype ribbons . . .

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: . . . when Brenda Tirey left [the *Pine Bluff Commercial*] for somewhere in Louisiana, [Editor's note: She went to Louisville, Kentucky] they gave me her job on the "crap desk," as it was called. It involved obituaries, the daily record, collecting lists from Jefferson Hospital about births and whatnot, police reports, [and] times that movies started. Anyway, from then on I was on staff. In the morning, you'd look at the *Gazette* to see if anybody in your circulation area had died, and, if so, you'd call the funeral home and basically rewrite what the funeral home said. I guess, I don't even remember that much. Anyhow, that summer, the next summer, the next summer, the next summer—all during college, I was returning to work for Gene there at the *Commercial*. Now, my reportorial highlight was probably covering the Miss Arkansas Pageant . . .

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: . . . in either 1967 or 1968, one or the other. 1967?

GJ: Was that Donna Axum?

BE: I don't remember.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: Are you talking about who won?

GJ: Yes.

BE: I have no idea. No idea. But, you know, you got to stay over in Hot Springs.

GJ: That's right.

BE: You got to stay in a hotel. You know, the one there where the newspaper traded off ads for lodging and whatnot. So even during college, I'd sort of thought of

myself as a guy who worked for the newspaper who just happened to go to college at the time. So after that was done, I mean, I did think briefly of graduate school, and then passed over that without any lingering questions or thoughts or whatnot.

GJ: Yes. So when he [Foreman]—well, I guess he left the *Commercial* and went to the *Gazette*—or was it that he had worked at the *Gazette* . . .

BE: He had worked at the *Gazette* . . .

GJ: . . . then he went to New York, and that's when the strike—and when he went back, there was nothing at the *Gazette*.

BE: That part I don't know about, the “nothing at the *Gazette*.” I don't really know about that, but if he did come back, he came to Pine Bluff . . .

GJ: Yes, I think that was during the newspaper strike.

BE: Yes, I remember hearing about that. The New York experience was—him and somebody else, too. Maybe one of those guys you know.

GJ: It was one of the Strouds, I believe.

BE: Really?

GJ: I think one of the Strouds.

BE: That's interesting. Probably an older brother or something.

GJ: Anyway, all of that—I can't remember how Gene got from Pine Bluff to Little Rock with the *Democrat*. But at what point did you make the move? You worked there—you worked at the *Commercial* in the summers.

BE: Right.

GJ: Did you ever work there full-time?

BE: No.

GJ: Okay.

BE: Some holiday fill-in, Christmas or something.

GJ: Yes.

BE: It was full-time in the summer.

GJ: Oh, sure.

BE: But I don't know exactly when he went to Little Rock. He went to *Newsday* after the *Democrat*, I think, but he wouldn't have been up there before.

GJ: Okay.

BE: So it was probably just from Pine Bluff to Little Rock, although he'd know better. In any event, he was there. Some of the same crowd from the *Commercial* worked there.

GJ: Yes.

BE: Not nearly all of them, but Stroud hung out there for a while. I don't know who was there. One of those summers at the *Commercial*, Bill Stroud was the bureau chief of the *Southeast whatever-whatever* and the political writer. He would drive in the staff Volkswagen and wound up driving somewhere down to south Arkansas, where he interviewed David Pryor. I went with him one time.

GJ: Okay.

BE: Then getting to the *Democrat*—it must have been the summer of 1969. I graduated from Hendrix that year, but I had to take—in order to graduate, I owed them a credit or two.

GJ: Yes.

BE: It might have been that summer. Anyway, I went to what used to be [Arkansas] State Teachers College over in Conway.

GJ: Oh, yes, Conway. Yes.

BE: I don't really remember, but I may not have gone to work immediately for the *Democrat* while I was finishing at State Teachers. I did get married, and I moved into an apartment in North Little Rock, and I started working at the *Democrat* full-time, which must have been by the fall.

GJ: What job did you go into?

BE: Well, that's when Gene Foreman turned me into a copy editor.

GJ: Yes. [Laughs]

BE: Yes. Yes, he did.

GJ: How was that experience for you? Did you have dreams about . . .?

BE: Probably not dreams about [it], but I probably hadn't thought much about copy editing. I took to it like a duck to water—just being sort of a in-the-office person kind of thing. You know, come to find out, over the years, it turns out I'm not like the top-notch, grade-A copy editor. Literally, I'm not. But, you know, I had other strengths, I guess, that allowed me to get by at any job, even without being able to actually type quality work, I believe. I guess I got along well enough to get by in the newspaper business.

GJ: So you finished your credit, graduated, started at the *Democrat*, and Gene eased you over to the copy desk.

BE: Yes. I don't remember any easing over.

GJ: [Laughs] He said, "This is it"? [Laughs]

BE: That's right.

GJ: The copy desk clerk worked—the *Democrat* was an afternoon newspaper. And the copy desk had to get in and get things done in a hurry, so you must have been getting up at the crack of dawn.

BE: Well, I don't remember that. I don't remember what time I started, but, I mean, it *was* an afternoon paper, and we *did* work in the mornings. The only time—memory of things that I had . . .

GJ: Yes.

BE: . . . is—well, I assume Gene—somebody had built a humungous copy desk . . .

GJ: The universal desk?

BE: Yes. It was multi-layered—it was huge, it was like the prow of a ship or something.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: Then, right behind it, like a—not a pneumatic tube in a department store, but a belt . . .

GJ: Oh, I remember it.

BE: Like a conveyer belt, it would run up . . .

GJ: You'd put the paper in it.

BE: You'd stuff the copy . . .

GJ: Yes.

BE: . . . in a wad up there, and it would take it up to the typesetter to the composing room.

GJ: Yes, I remember that.

BE: Clear as a bell, Gene Foreman was standing beside that—maybe he was stuffing some paper up there or maybe he was just being a presence there, and he looked around and went, “It’s high noon.”

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: That’s exactly what he said. “It’s high noon.” So there’s the time memory. You know, we were working—must have been working—and I don’t know if it was a deadline or if it was, you know, maybe close or late or who knows? “It’s high noon,” he’d say.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: He’d discovered this.

GJ: [Laughter] The desk is famous for collecting just terrific stories from the newsroom. Do you remember any quirky characters or any people who stand out?

BE: I was thinking last night about Leon—I don’t know his last name. I believe his name was Leon. He was sort of shortish, and heavyish, and balding. And he may have been your stereotypical old rim guy.

GJ: Yes.

BE: To me, I guess, he was old—probably fifty, somewhere in there.

GJ: You don’t remember his last name?

BE: No. I’m not even sure his name was Leon. [Editor’s Note: It was probably Leon Hatch, a former Associated Press reporter.]

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: There was a woman, but I don’t remember her name. At any rate . . .

GJ: Well, what did they try to teach you? Would they lean on you for not being skeptical enough?

BE: I have zero memories of anything like that. Paul Nielsen was the slot—he'd come up from Pine Bluff, from his *Commercial* days. He was the slot and I was working on the rim there, sitting on the lower of the two levels. It was a U-shaped—horseshoe-shaped thing, and copy editors sat down here, and up above you was a shelf with spikes on it.

GJ: Yes. Yes. Big lead spikes. And you'd plant copy, your headlines, and whatnot.

BE: As far as what I've learned, Gerald, I don't—I've got no memory of learning anything. I don't feel like I learned much about this business before I got to Philadelphia.

GJ: Yes.

BE: I feel like I learned whatever I know basically up here.

GJ: Yes. Well, I imagine that the production schedule for an afternoon paper—everything was so compressed and they needed to get the paper out on the street. You probably didn't have the expanded time or even much *dead* time as you would working on a *night* staff, where you'd come in at, say, 4:00 [p.m.], and you have a little time before the machinery engages and you have to get jumping. Because even if you work at night, then you have, 10:00, 11:00, 11:30, midnight deadlines, you *should* have some time there—to get that kind of time in the *morning* for an *afternoon* newspaper, you have to roll. Some staff arrived around 4:00 a.m., and I think that was a hard sell. I bet there were some wire editors or folks who got in at 4:00 . . .

BE: Probably.

GJ: . . . to check the wire, and check it for new stuff. But I think that the bulk of our shifts were either 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. or 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Somewhere in there.

BE: That's why I was getting up early and getting off in the middle of the afternoon, walking home in the afternoon.

GJ: In sports, we worked basically 7:00 to 3:00.

BE: Yes.

GJ: But that was—there was no pro[fessional] sports in town or anything like that, so it was all stuff off the wire. In the fall, you know, when the colleges and the high schools started there was stuff, but I wasn't there for that. One of the funny and, I guess, sort of lasting memories I had was payday at the *Democrat*. Do you remember payday at the *Democrat*?

BE: It was a check in an envelope?

GJ: It was *cash* in an envelope.

BE: *Cash*? Lord, have mercy! Wow, I didn't . . .

GJ: [Laughs] You'd go downstairs and sign for it.

BE: I did not remember that.

GJ: Yes.

BE: Clearly, I was not in it for the money.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: Could you punch that thing off. I've got to . . .

[Tape Stopped]

[Laughter]

BE: I don't really think of these stories you're wanting, or characters, or whatnot. I've got a few isolated memories of stuff—one being the time Nielsen cussed out the publisher because the publisher had the word—it was either “slut” or “harlot” or I forget, something—one of those sort of words out of the—had it chiseled out of the headline when he saw the paper come up.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: Now . . .

GJ: This was Marcus George?

BE: Is that who it was?

GJ: Yes. He was, by the time I started.

BE: I don't remember the names of these characters, but it must have been a little bit of impish playfulness in trying to get that word into a headline.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: But Nielsen said, “Oh, no, that's fine,” you know? I forget whether it was “slut,” “harlot”—something. It was appropriate to the story.

GJ: Right.

BE: Yes, I remember seeing them chisel it off the lead.

GJ: Do you remember Bob McCord?

BE: Sure. Yes. I mean, I never really knew him or talked to him much, but I knew who he was.

GJ: Yes.

BE: He'd been—I think he'd been in North Little Rock for a while.

GJ: Yes, he used to own a newspaper there.

BE: Because I had talked to—Ralph Patrick tried to hire me when I was still in college.

GJ: What about Maurice Moore—Moe Moore? I guess he was state editor or something, or state political correspondent. The reason I remember him is that [on] Saturday nights—that was the only time we'd work at night because of the Sunday paper.

BE: Yes.

GJ: Saturday night there would be a big ceremony when Moe would bring in his copy. Remember the days of the paste? He was—well, rather than sit there and paste and spread it, he would just take a roll of AP [Associated Press] paper and he'd rig this coat hanger and he'd run the paper through his typewriter, and his copy would just go on *forever*. And the smart-asses on the sports desk would say, "Drum-roll. It's time for Moe Moore to bring in his copy." You know, he'd walk over—he was a mountain of a man, he was a massive character—and he would just hand them this many-folded—this *mountain* of paper that he took to the copy desk guy. And I'd think, "Oh, God!"

BE: I used to use that paper in college, for papers or whatever.

GJ: Do you have any recollection or any sense of competition with the *Gazette*?

BE: No. No. I guess the assumption was that they were the established—you know, [the] gray lady west of the Mississippi, and we were sort of upstarts, I guess. I didn't have much consciousness of that sort of thing then, as now, probably. Just hoeing my row, or whatever you call it.

GJ: That's kind of the sense of the *Democrat* that I had, too. I mean, here, now, you get competition in beating the guys, and "Don't let so-and-so get this story." I don't remember a lot of that in the *Democrat*. It was almost as though there was a knowledge that "the *Gazette* had this franchise, and we have this, and our readership doesn't really cross." I guess a lot of that was residue from [the 1957 integration crisis at Little Rock] Central [High School]—those who stayed with the *Gazette* just for Orville Henry and sports coverage and those who hung with the *Democrat*.

BE: Yes.

GJ: I'm not sure that until maybe Gannett bought the *Gazette* there was really a strong push to knock one off, you know? It seemed as though there was almost . . .

BE: Well, I mean, why did the *Gazette* go to hell? Who knows?

GJ: Yes.

BE: I don't know why that happened. Why did it go to Gannett? [Laughs]

GJ: Now, there's a little injustice right there. Why didn't it go to Knight-Ridder—back in the good days?

BE: Yes. I guess my point of view from the copy desk—you know, I wasn't involved in "Oh, let's get this story before somebody else does."

GJ: Yes.

BE: I wasn't—I didn't generate anything.

GJ: Do you remember Fred Petrucelli?

BE: Who was he?

GJ: City editor. He was—I don't know how he got there. I think he was nearly an Easterner. Anyway, he just had this manner that was atypical of Arkansas. He was smooth. In fact, he's still at Conway.

BE: Really?

GJ: Fred Petrucelli.

BE: Mary Lowe Kennedy worked on the city desk after she got out of college. She's the only memory I have of that part of the room, over there at the city desk.

GJ: Yes. And that might have been because, as I said, the ten minutes I was on the city desk, some of what was on there, it *was* sort of to one side. It wasn't out in the middle with everything orbiting around it. The city desk was over here, the copy desk way over there, and sports was around the corner, back in there.

BE: I remember sports being around the corner

GJ: Yes.

BE: Foreman talked to me one time, I remember, about going over there and fixing it up, and I never did.

GJ: Do you remember Bob Starr—he was with the AP?

BE: Yes. John Robert Starr.

GJ: Before—he was just plain *Bob* Starr back then.

BE: Really?

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: I guess I thought he was a total yahoo.

GJ: Don't think that you were in the minority. [Laughs]

BE: . . . the minority.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: Yes, I had forgotten about him.

GJ: Can you remember Jon Kennedy's cartoons? Kennedy was so quiet—really a good cartoonist.

BE: Of course, after the fact, I guess.

GJ: Well, in fact, when I met Mary Lowe, I thought they were related, but they're different Kennedys. Well, how did you get from the *Democrat* to the [Philadelphia] *Inquirer*?

BE: Well, I didn't—I mean . . .

GJ: Oh, you had a stop in between?

BE: Yes. I retired in 1971.

GJ: Retired?

BE: Yes.

GJ: You would have been, what, twenty-three?

BE: About that age.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: I was not in the newspaper business for five years at least.

GJ: What did you do?

BE: Bicycling.

GJ: Oh—see the country.

BE: Bicycles and various other recreational aspects of the time. After I got through with the bicycle stuff, I worked as a carpenter's helper for a few years. I worked my way up in the carpentry business.

GJ: Yes.

BE: It wasn't until one January, I remember. I was helping a guy put a tin roof on his chicken house. I was trying to drive nails with frozen hands.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: I was doing damage to myself in a number of ways. I thought, "Well, shoot, why don't I go back to work indoors?"

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: So, I wrote Foreman a letter not too long after that, told him I'd like to work for him again, and I'd like to see about a three-month job. He wrote back and said, "Well, nice to hear from you. I don't have any temporary desk jobs, but I'll let you know." It was a year—I don't remember how long. Some time later. By then I was in Little Rock. I was living upstairs—in some kind of upstairs loft at the Territorial Restoration there in Little Rock.

GJ: Yes.

BE: We had just moved a log cabin there from down the road a piece. It was a log cabin for the Territorial Restoration—and we were "restoring" it. My father called [and] said Gene Foreman had called.

GJ: Yes. When you say that you learned more newspapering here—and I certainly can second that—but from my experience I learned how to write a headline from that kind of place.

BE: Yes.

GJ: What sort of contrast can you draw there from stuff that you did here or what you were expected to do or required to do here that maybe didn't exist back home,

whether it was honing new stories or calling reporters and saying, “This just isn’t going to fly,” or . . . ?

BE: Well, as long as I was copy editor, I didn’t do any of that stuff. You know, you’d go back and question, I guess, the timing of it. Whoever had it, from where the story had come to you.

GJ: Yes.

BE: I guess there was one other episode at the *Democrat* that might be historically notable for the public.

GJ: Yes.

BE: That was the day that [Paul] Nielsen stormed out in a fury—I don’t even remember why—and Foreman had to fire him on the spot for—he essentially left his post there in the middle of the day.

GJ: Yes.

BE: You know, Paul was a volatile fellow. Anyway, Gene—as soon as he fired him, he got him hired at *Newsday*. That was when I became the slot. I was quite proud of that. I guess I was sort of a youngest slot man in the history of—whatever, whatever. The best memory I have about that was when there was a visiting college teacher sitting in—in fact, they’re probably—more or less what you’re doing now—you know, he came to work in the summer and he described being impressed with—I can’t believe he told Foreman this, but I heard it from Foreman—with the way I *orchestrated* the production of the paper.

GJ: Yes.

BE: And that would be, you know, you have four or five rim people to do this, that or the other, and all that stuff. So maybe, in that case—in comparison, maybe I was a *little* bit bigger fish in a smaller pond.

GJ: Do you remember Ashley Higgins? Does that name ring a bell?

BE: No. Sorry. [Laughs]

GJ: Ashley would have been—I think he was about a year older than you. I think he was in your age range.

BE: Yes.

GJ: He was kind of a wunderkind around the place the second time I was there. I think he went to LRU—remember, it was Little Rock University before it became UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock]. I think he did, and I seem to remember that he had plans to go to seminary or something. People were trying to get him to stay around. I don't know whether his plans to go to seminary had to do with heartfelt conviction or just staying out of Vietnam. [Laughs]

BE: Yes.

GJ: You know, there was *that*. There was *that*.

BE: Yes. You know, I don't know that name, but it does remind me—it popped into my mind—the name of Larry Gordon. Did you know him?

GJ: No. Was he a photo[grapher]?

BE: No. I think he might have worked on the copy desk as well as—oh, there was another guy that worked on the copy desk. He had long hair and went up to *Newsday*. Anyway, Larry Gordon died real young.

GJ: Yes. Did y'all [you all] edit for the whole paper or for news and features? I'm wondering if you remember [Lelia] Maude Funston? Remember the women's department?

BE: No.

GJ: [Laughs] [Lelia] Maude Funston [and] Jackye Shipley?

BE: That name is vaguely familiar. I know we didn't [edit] any sports because that was separate.

GJ: Yes, the sports guys—when you weren't writing, you were editing, which was a perfectly lousy system.

BE: I mean, I don't remember—wire copy, local copy. I don't remember. I surely handled both.

GJ: I can't remember who the wire editor was, but it was somebody who . . .

BE: Bill Terry.

GJ: Oh, was it? Okay.

BE: Was there a guy named Bill Terry?

GJ: Could have been. I know that somebody over there in that cluster of machinery was tearing wire copy. Then, of course, later on they would tear it carefully to leave the code on there so that they could use the tape.

BE: Yes.

GJ: Yes. But I can remember seeing that.

BE: That was the first technological—where technology adversely affected, I think, the paper. You know, because of the tape—from the point of view of just getting the thing done—the type set—anytime you altered any words—then the tape—

they had to go back and reset and whatnot. Any editing you'd do, you were just screwing up the process, essentially.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: I remember that.

GJ: Yes, that was well-intended, but misguided. I mean, it was obviously put together by someone who was thinking, "We can get all these words set it in type in this amount of time."

BE: Yes, it really was a precursor of where we got to. In a sense, a mechanical precursor.

GJ: Yes.

BE: I had the same sense when computers came to the *Pine Bluff Commercial*.

GJ: Yes.

BE: There was a young woman on the copy desk there who was very facile. She was sort of like the human equivalent of that AP tape.

GJ: Oh, that high speed wire?

BE: The high speed, yes. So she could do high-speed process—well, you know, quality just didn't have a thing to do with it. It was irrelevant.

GJ: [Laughs] But when you left there, did you ever think you would go back to Arkansas again?

BE: When I left the *Democrat*?

GJ: Yes.

BE: I don't guess I ever thought much about it. When I went back into—I started back in newspapers in Pine Bluff. I was back in Pine Bluff, and went back to work part-time at the *Commercial* . . .

GJ: Yes.

BE: . . . after—I was still doing carpentry work in Pine Bluff for a while.

GJ: Yes.

BE: Then I guess when I was smashing my fingers on that frozen January tin, I just talked to Foreman.

GJ: Oh, absolutely.

BE: He's my mentor.

GJ: [Laughs] So I guess you had to change your outlook. So did you do any of the work in the house here—any of the carpentry work?

BE: Oh, yes. I've butchered up a lot of things.

GJ: [Laughs]

BE: You know, thinking about that, my interest in—I had the idea to get into carpentry almost as a direct result of watching the guys from the so-called top shop put the newspaper's type in the frames—in the "turtles."

GJ: Yes.

BE: I'm trying to remember whether it was at the *Democrat* I learned to read type upside down and backwards, or whether it was somewhere else. It could have been in Pine Bluff. I did some in Conway, where I was in college as well.

GJ: Yes.

BE: I remember just being mesmerized watching those guys cleaning up type and slamming it into the form.

GJ: Oh, yes, and using those little thin things to smack it. [Laughs]

BE: Yes, yes. And the working with the hands thing. I was taken with that.

GJ: [Laughs] You mentioned a couple of things—the company Volkswagens. I wasn't aware that the *PBC* [*Pine Bluff Commercial*] was so progressive. That was definitely quite an innovation.

BE: Staff cars in 1965.

GJ: Yes. I think the *Democrat* had staff cars, didn't it?

BE: There you go, see, Gerald. You know, working on the copy desk—you're just like a mushroom. [Laughter]

GJ: I'm thinking that because he was state rover—Moe Moore—maybe he got a car and an allowance or something.

BE: It just wasn't a part of conversation.

GJ: When I had to go on assignments, I either had to take a cab or . . .

BE: Really?

GJ: Yes. Or get over there by bus.

BE: Was this to a sporting event?

GJ: Yes. Sometimes high school or recreational. I don't remember staff cars for the staff.

BE: Okay.

GJ: But it did seem to be kind of a laid-back place, you know, not necessarily high-energy or a big flurry of asses and elbows or anything like that. I guess, in that regard, it sort of took on Marcus George's personality.

BE: I have a totally opposite sense of the place.

GJ: Oh, really?

BE: Exactly. Getting all that copy up there and the headlines, rushing to try to make deadline. I don't remember. I don't have the memory of rewriting somebody's headline, but I know I did.

GJ: Yes.

BE: Remember the half-sheet?

GJ: Yes, the half-sheet.

BE: You know, getting that copy up there and then running up the stairs—the spiral staircase . . .

GJ: Yes.

BE: . . . beside that . . .

GJ: Conveyor belt.

BE: Conveyor belt. And you'd go up there and—I guess the way they used to do makeup, you know, what did they call it—running layout or something? Where the composing room guys would get the type and put it in the page—one column after another.

GJ: Oh, yes.

BE: And when they'd run out of space, it would stop.

GJ: Then they'd start filling in stuff.

BE: But if the story was too long, it would just whack it off.

GJ: Yes. [Laughs]

BE: So you'd go up there and I'd be trying to make reasonable trims or cuts—or here, if you turn this—if you take your little tool and make a comma into a period, then the printers would stop there—at least you'll end with a period at the end of a sentence.

GJ: Yes. [Laughs]

BE: And the tension between—here, you were trying—you would think you were being—making things literary or whatever, and the composing room guys, whose interest was in getting the type in there and getting that page moved on to the next desk . . .

GJ: Before they got screamed at about busting deadlines and making the trucks late.

BE: So a lot of that was very high-energy, I thought, tension and high energy. That's what I'm sure led to Nielsen throwing a fit.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning Tape 1, Side 2]

GJ: So after your carpentry stint and your chicken house building and getting back into the newspaper business—any sort of benedictory recollections you have about the craft that ought to be recorded?

BE: [Laughs]

GJ: What do you remember about the paper's coverage, say, of Vietnam or the Johnson Administration?

BE: Totally zero. Totally zero. It's amazing how unaware I not only continue to be, but was even more then, I think. You know, it's like—there must be something selfish about that, I think, really. But, you know, you were just focusing on whatever *you were* thinking about and whatever—I didn't—content—I don't think I had much—I didn't pay much attention to it.

GJ: Yes.

BE: Well, in your position now—what you've been for the last ten years—you would, by definition, need to think more about that sort of stuff, I suppose.

GJ: Yes. And, like you, much more so than I would have if I was sitting there proofing stories.

BE: Right.

GJ: One thing I *do* remember about the *Kansas City Star*—I thought that early on we really sat out Watergate, but it turned out [that] so did a lot of other newspapers.

BE: Oh, yes. You were at the *Kansas City Star*?

GJ: In the seventies [1970s], yes.

BE: Was Jeff Price around there at some point?

GJ: Yes.

BE: I remember he came from there.

GJ: Yes. In fact, Jeff was the first of—Jim Steele was actually *the* first, but he left maybe ten years before any of the latter-day kids got there. But Jeff came to the *Inquirer*, I think, [in] 1970, 1980—no, 1970 something. Before the [].

BE: It was 1970 something. Yes.

GJ: And, shortly after that, Connie, who was then [Slough], and Tim Weiner—and it just opened up a conga line of—there were about twenty folks who left Kansas City and came to the *Inquirer*.

BE: Yes.

GJ: So Jeff was the modern-day Pied Piper there.

BE: Yes.

GJ: But I do remember that we were all sort of talking about going to a bigger paper where you had more options. *Kansas City* was a good, fundamentally sound paper from what the *Star* did, but not terribly daring and didn't have a lot of national bureaus and foreign—so if you had that taste for excitement, in that regard, you know, you weren't going to get [it] in Kansas City. That was one of the reasons it was okay to leave.

BE: Well, I guess, in that regard, Nielsen's going to *Newsday*, and Foreman must have had some sway to get him a job up there—then *Newsday* became a place to advance to from the *Democrat* and that—anyway, I think some people did that or whatever. And I know I considered—I must have considered because I remember I had a trial. Let's see, Nielsen was—I was visiting Nielsen at his—he lived in New York on Houston Street in an apartment. He built a—he'd always had back problems, he built a bed in his apartment where he [slept?] for his back or something. Anyway, I ended up with a try-out there or something, and I remember they said, "No, we don't want to hire you, but if you're still interested, maybe later," or something like that. That was about the time I retired from the business. So by the time I got back, Foreman, of course, from *Newsday*, was at

the *Inquirer*—if he'd still been at *Newsday*, I'm sure I would have contacted him there.

GJ: Made another run at it?

BE: Yes.

GJ: [Laughs] Those were some *really* interesting times. Fascinating stuff. All those—the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and—you know, some newspapers just flat-out sat it out. Did you see the story about the *Lexington Herald* apologizing?

BE: Yes.

GJ: I thought that was fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. Just didn't cover it.

BE: Hank Klibanoff was writing a—he had paired up with Gene Roberts . . .

GJ: Right.

BE: . . . on some book about the coverage or *non-coverage* in the South of the Civil Rights Movement. I don't know what's come of that, if anything.

GJ: I think that—I know the deadline's passed, because it was . . .

BE: Yes. That was a few years ago.

GJ: . . . approaching when he was leaving here, so I think that they're being re-whatevered—in the publisher's hands.

BE: Oh, really? So it got that far?

GJ: Oh, yes. I think so. They were close. Well, Bill, I appreciate it. This was fun.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]