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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Cecelia Storey
Little Rock, Arkansas
20 October 2005

Interviewer: Alyson Hoge

Alyson Hoge: Okay, so when is that you started at the newspaper?

Cecelia Storey: Wait a minute, first of all, we have to tell them that this is an interview between Alyson Hoge, City editor of the *Democrat Gazette*, and Cecelia Storey, Active Style editor of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and today is October 20, 2005.

AH: Yes, and yes.

CS: You have my permission to send this to the UA [University of Arkansas Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] archives so that they can—archive it.

AH: Right, good, I'm glad that I have your permission to do that. [Laughs] And the person transcribing this tape is going to say, "What a couple of idiots," anyway.

CS: No, they're not going to say that.

AH: Anyway, okay, so, now, for the third time, when was it that you started at the newspaper?

CS: I started at the newspaper in July of 1978. I was twenty-two years old and fresh out of college.

AH: So this was your first newspaper job?

CS: Well—yes, it was my—well, you know, okay, technically . . .

AH: Not counting college jobs or . . .

CS: Not counting college or high school or when I was a kid I did a couple of little things for a paper in Bay City, Texas. Because my dad was a columnist, among many other things, he arranged stuff for his kids to get published.

AH: Were you originally from Arkansas?

CS: No. We moved here in 1971, but I was born in 1955 in Virginia. My dad was in the [United States] Navy and in the Pentagon. And when he got out of the navy—he got mad; he quit in a huff because they passed him over for promotion because he was too old. They passed him over for promotion to rear admiral, and it made him mad. Then he moved us to Dallas, Texas, where he sold light bulbs. He was saving the world by selling light bulbs, and then a year later, we moved to Crystal City, Texas, which is below San Antonio. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce there, and had a little Firestone store and a farm. And was a newspaper columnist there. Then we moved to—oh, then he went into the "war on poverty" [by joining] the Office of Economic of Opportunity and Model Cities [OEO], and we moved to Bay City, Texas, where I was in junior high school. Then, in 1971, when I was in ninth grade, we moved to Sherwood—again, it was the OEO that brought Dad up here. I've lived in Arkansas ever since, except for time in Texas for college education.

AH: What college did you go to?

CS: The University of Dallas in Irving.

AH: Okay. I think it's important to ask why you wanted to get in journalism. Because I think, considering how emotionally taxing the newspaper world is, it would be important to know why somebody would want to enter a profession that is notoriously low paying and low rewarding. So, why was it that you wanted to go into journalism?

CS: Well first of all, you have to understand that not everybody knows these things about newspapering before they become newspaper people. There are a lot of people who have very romantic ideas about newspapering. I was one of those. Because my dad—the column was kind of an avocation thing for him. And he was always involved in broadcasting in one way or another. He had public affairs programs on the radio, was a DJ and had a newspaper column. He was just one of these guys that does 18,000 things. So through him I grew up with an idealism about serving the public through journalism. Although we would never say journalism. That was too highfalutin a term. You would be serving the public by helping people know what was going on. So when I was a kid in college, I wanted to be a writer. Then I accidentally got involved in the newspaper. When I came back to Arkansas, I was—I had a B.A. [bachelor of arts] in Literature from UD, University of Dallas, although I was not really an extremely "verbal" person. With that kind of a degree, even in those, you know, less technical times it wasn't easy to make a living. But my dad was friends with Margaret Arnold, who became Mara Leveritt. At the time, Margaret Arnold had just left the *Democrat* and gone to work with Alan Leveritt at the *Arkansas Times* magazine, which he was just starting up. She was friends with Jerry McConnell, who was the big hiring

dude of the *Democrat*. So my dad said, "You know, my daughter is coming home from college and she's brilliant, absolutely brilliant. We should keep her in Arkansas. She's one of the young minds that we don't want to lose in the great brain drain." And Margaret called up Jerry and said, "Would you talk to this kid?" and so Jerry said, "Okay." Now before I came in to interview with Jerry, I did call the *Gazette* because I preferred the *Gazette*, because we grew up reading the *Gazette*. It looked like the sort of place, to be, to me. I called, and I think I talked to Bob Douglas, and told him that I had graduated with A's and had a good grasp of grammar, which was baloney. I look at my school papers now and realize [that] I didn't know grammar, and I couldn't spell. And he said, "Well, that's lovely. Why don't you make an appointment to come see us?" So I don't remember if I set up an appointment, because I didn't have a car, and I was dumb and young at twenty-two. I think I probably drove—or got someone to drop me off at the *Gazette* building, and I started to walk in and became intimidated by the entryway and left. They had this marble floor, and they had these glass picture windows, and there was all this historic stuff in it. I looked at it, and I thought, "Oh my God, I'm not good enough to be here." And I left. And then Dad pretty much made me go to the interview with Jerry McConnell. I remember shaking in my boots. I came out of this elevator, and the first person I saw was Robert Ike Thomas, who was a photographer at that time, and he was wearing floods, so his pants were too short, which calmed me just enough that I was able to go talk to Jerry McConnell. And we talked for—it must have been forty or forty-five minutes, and I remember that we talked about Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. I was probably just the biggest little intellectual show-off you've ever seen, you know, being a

little college kid you kind of look at everything the wrong way. One, it's all about you. And you're actually kind of surprised when the world doesn't just bow down on its knees and say, "You've arrived." So Jerry was very nice to me, and he set up an interview for me with Bill Husted, who was the city editor and Bill didn't like me one bit. Bill asked me a couple of very basic, pertinent questions that anybody you would hire as a reporter ought to be able to answer, and I couldn't answer them. You know, I didn't have favorite reporters that I'd been reading in the newspaper. I didn't have an opinion about how the newspaper had covered recent events or anything. I was a complete dodo bird, because I had spent four years not watching TV and reading Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. But Patsy McCown, the copy desk chief, was desperate for a warm body. She liked me a great deal.

AH: How did she—if Jerry McConnell sent you to go talk to Bill Husted, how did you end up talking to Patsy McCown?

CS: Jerry probably said, "First off I'll have you talk to Bill Husted, and then you can talk to Patsy McCown."

AH: Oh, okay. All right.

CS: I don't remember if I did both those interviews on the same day or not. I don't think I did. I think they probably brought me up again, and by that time I would have been pretty desperate.

AH: Yes.

CS: I remember filling out the application. And where it said "position desired," I wrote "job." [Laughter] I had really, really stepped off-the-street [with no experience], no credentials. Just walked in off the street and got trained here. Al-

though I had worked in my college newspaper my freshman year, my college did not have a journalism department because they considered it a trade, not a profession. And I'm kind of inclined to agree with that. I think it's a good thing to go through academic journalism training because you learn how not to sound like an idiot if you have to go on a talk show. But pretty much everything you need to know, you have to learn on the job, you have to learn by doing it. You have to learn largely by failing and being dragged through a wringer by people who know what you ought to have done and did not do. So I got hired on the copy desk. My dad got me an apartment downtown at Fowler Square, which was within walking distance, and that was important because I not only didn't have a car, but I was still drinking to excess at every opportunity. So that probably saved my life and other people's lives that I could walk to work. In those days the building was not locked; you could come in twenty-four hours a day. It didn't take very long before I discovered that there was something here I really wanted. It was the computers. I had never used a computer keyboard or composed on a computer before I got here. And I had a—I had a terrible writer's block while I was in college. I mean severe to the point that I got called in by my college president when I declared as an English major and he said, "Are you sure? You haven't finished a single theme paper since you got here, and in fact, you have an incomplete that you've been carrying since you were a freshman." I said, "Well, it's hard, and I like to do things that are hard." Which is true. You know, I like to do things that aren't easy for me.

AH: Right.

CS: So—but I found the—when I found the computers all of a sudden I could write.

And it really helped that the newspaper only cost fifteen cents a copy, because I'd be able to say to myself, "If people are paying fifteen cents for every story in this paper, how good does any one story have to be?" Now, I look at that now, and I think, "Oh my God, why would you hire somebody with that kind of an attitude?" But that's what happened in those days. This was not a prestigious newspaper. It had a revolving door, and yes, it was a sweatshop. People were hired in off the street with very little experience, so that the experienced tradesmen who had been here for decades were put through hell by training us. You know, they had to work with people who were idiots! And I was an idiot.

AH: Oh, you mean, like me too? [Laughs]

CS: Well now, you ought to know. I had the impression that you were one of the bright people who were the future and going to make us more professional. But when I was hired, I was hired as an idiot because they needed a warm body and I was available. I went to work for, I think it was $135 a week. So Patsy trained me on the copy desk and we were on an old U [-shaped desk] on the second floor. We had four little computer monitors, so there were maybe ten copy editors. Eight or ten. So we had the battle of the bladders. Once you got a computer terminal, you didn't let go of it. We counted the headlines, you know? One and one-half-a-half count. We had Teletype machines, so the wire editor would tear off the wire stories. There'd be strips of this kind of buff-colored Manila paper. A scanner for inputting a few reporters' locally-generated stories was a relatively novel invention, and we had one rickety scanner where you'd feed in type-written pages, and if you had something that—a correction you needed to make as you fed them in, you put ebony pencil marks on the page and that would stop the

scanner and you could type in what you actually wanted it to say. So, the copy that came through locally was really dirty. One of the copy desk jobs was simply to clean up local copy. Then the wire copy came off the Teletype, so it was all the old-fashioned coding, which you had to learn to do. There was a lot involved in learning just to read copy. But Patsy also taught us to read it intelligently and to think about the order the information was in—and to actually use your brain. Patsy was a good teacher. Just because she was passionate about language. And she was working with interesting people. I mean, everybody that I worked with on the copy desk was this really interesting person. Some of us should not have been working in a newspaper because we just were too interesting. But it was an exciting, intellectual atmosphere for somebody who came predisposed by an egg-head past to look at things in broad themes and to see significance, you know, everywhere. And who was also drinking a great deal. There were people here who, to this day, I think about them, I hear their names, and it just makes me happy to know that I got to work with that person.

AH: Can you remember some of their names?

CS: Yes. The first one that always jumps to mind is Leslie Newell (who later became Peacock), because she—she was a smartass and she said things just blatantly that she should *never* have said. She didn't ever hold back. But she was also very incisive. Very funny. One of my earliest memories is—we had this spiral staircase between the second floor where the copy was generated and the third floor where the compositors had their gang hideout. I remember Leslie coming down this spiral staircase brandishing this proof page, this galley proof, and the headline on it said, "Prisoner Complains of Unnecessary Beating." And she brandishes it, and

she said, "When is a beating necessary?" [Laughter] She was just full of stuff like that. It was always really thinking about what words mean and being funny. She was hilarious with Bill Husted, because Husted was a sort of brash character who would be difficult to work with if you didn't have a great sense of humor.

AH: Right.

CS: And she did have a real good sense of humor. She was somebody I really, really, liked. Amanda Husted. When I came in the door here, I didn't understand why some people are liked and other people are not liked. I mean, I was just to the point of emotional maturity that I was noticing that there were some people that you liked to be with and some people you didn't. As a child—and when I say child, I mean twenty-one, eighteen, nineteen, even twenty-two, twenty-three—in my mind, what mattered was how smart you were. Because my family had this romance about the intellect because what else do you have when you're poor? So, in my mind, what mattered was being smart, and I thought the way that you showed how smart you were was by being very judgmental. And very critical. And really, a horse's ass. Amanda had a different way of living in our very difficult society in the newspaper. She was just likeable. So I started studying her. She was the wire editor, and she was married to Bill Husted. So I started studying the way Amanda talked to people. Why did people like Amanda? And it wasn't just that she was a pretty woman; she was a pretty woman. It was also that she would use the word "like" a lot. "Don't you like him?" "Oh, I like that." "We went and saw a movie; I liked it so much." And as a little judgmental person, I would think, "That's kind of shallow; she was not very specific about what she was thinking." But then I started noticing, "Yes, but if you're positive, most of

the time people like to be around you." So I started consciously trying to be a more pleasant, positive person.

AH: Well, because you're observing that a lot of people that we work with over the years tend to be pretty critical. And all they can think of are negative things to say about their co-workers, the newspaper, the world, and all that. So she would stick out—I don't want to say like a sore thumb, because that's a negative connotation, but I mean, she would stick out like a, like a beautiful rose in the middle of our little meadow here, because you're right. I mean, she did have a very positive attitude about things.

CS: The day went better when she was on schedule. One of the first things I noticed was that we had a problem every day of how we were going to make the paper happen. I mean, it was—it was a struggle because we were—a newspaper is made by committee, it's made by a team. It's going to get made—how good of a product it's going to be depends upon how well the team works together. It can be made by people who hate each other and it can be good. But those people are going to burn up like cinders. If it's made by people who work well together and who take pleasure in their lives, then they're going to persist, the product can be good. Everything is better. That was one of the things I noticed was that Amanda's approach to other people, in a very difficult situation with very limited resources, helped the product happen. And helped it happen in a way that we could bear to come back and do it again the next day, and we weren't going out and getting drunk blotto, you know, constantly. At least all of us weren't. Just so that you could bear to come back in the next day. I know there was a whole lot of drinking in our newsroom.

AH: You mean actually during the working hours or was it . . .

CS: Well, people had little bottles stashed here and there, but mostly it was off premises.

AH: Yes.

CS: So, she was very important to me. There was another person it took me longer to find because you don't immediately go into the back shop, into the compositors' room when you first work on Patsy McCown's desk. That was a job done by the late man. Everybody else stayed out of there. Because they were mean. Man, they were mean guys. I now look at it, and I understand exactly why they were mean, they were working with one idiot after another. And very stressful jobs. But there was a guy back there named Junior Atwood who—there was a tendency when there were a bunch of compositors in the back shop and James Gruber was there, for them to turn into a wolf pack, and they would just go after anybody who walked in the door. I mean, tried deliberately to humiliate them and scare them. Most of the guys would not do that on their own. Most of them were very nice men. Johnny Watts was lovely. Virgil Griffin was sweet. But altogether, led by Gruber, they would deliberately try to reduce you to tears. Junior Atwood would stand up against them. And he would be deliberately kind to you. Knowing that you were an idiot, knowing that you were asking him to do something he was going to have to tear up. He would—he would be nice to you. Under very stressful circumstances. When he was tired he would be nice to you. So gradually, between Amanda and Junior, I started looking at the whole world in a different way, and I think that is the best thing that has happened to me here in this newspaper where I have spent all of my adult life, is that I was shown examples of good

lives.

AH: Let's stop the tape for just a second.

[Tape Stopped]

CS: Ask me one of your curiosity questions.

AH: Okay, well as you know, one of the things I'm always interested in is technology. What I remember when I came here in 1979 is that the wire came in through the computer system. Now you were mentioning earlier that the wire came into the Teletype. So how was it getting from the Teletype into the computer system to be typeset?

CS: All right. If I understand this—now, I can't remember when we switched from the Teletype to the high-speed wire, although I was the first high-speed wire editor. As I understand it, the teletypes came clattering in, and we had these print-out pages. But they were also simultaneously printing out on yellow strips, back in the back shop, that Pickle DeMoss would tear off, and they had like holes punched in them. And the holes were some sort of code, and Pickle could read it. He said it was backward and upside down.

AH: Yes, yes.

CS: And then he would feed those things into the Linotron, maybe?

AH: Yes, actually there was a machine that was attached to the scanner that I remember. And yes, you could feed that tape in there, because I remember that there would be times when perhaps the wire would be down, the computer system would be down, and we would use that, a few years after the system was in place, or the high-speed wire came into the computer system. And yes, the tape was like a ticker-tape, and about an inch wide maybe.

CS: Yellow.

AH: Yes, it was yellow and had holes punched in it. And Pickle was also one of the other gentlemen who worked back in the back shop.

CS: Pickle was fun.

AH: Well—yes. [Laughter] I also remember that Gruber died at an early age. So, anyway, now to get back onto what we were talking about with the back room. So, if there were only four computer terminals, then how did a copy—how many copy editors were there working on a shift? Nine . . .

CS: Oh man. Now, that's a good question. I'm not sure I know.

AH: But I mean, there were more copy editors than reporters.

CS: We were also an afternoon paper, so it wasn't a night shift, it was morning.

AH: Okay. That was another one of my questions, I mean, were you working daytime hours or night hours?

CS: We worked daytime hours; we'd get there real early. The wire editor would come early and then the late man would stay. And I think the late man may have had an overnight shift, but I don't think so.

AH: For those who have never worked on an afternoon newspaper, how early would you have to get here?

CS: Depended on your job. But a routine copy editor—I remember walking to work in daylight. So it must have been six or seven. But the wire editor would be getting here in the dark, in the early morning, like three or four, because Amanda would be here before we got here. And I remember—I can't remember if this was after we switched to the morning newspaper or still during the time when we were making an afternoon newspaper, but I remember that the wire editor, one of that

person's jobs—because I had to learn how to do it—was to go downstairs and re-boot the mainframe, which was this big metal box with wires that spilled out all over the floor like guts. And you had to know how to push—how to load the addresses to make the poor thing wake up again. It would completely forget where its brain was.

AH: Yes, also remember that the computer system back then had very limited capacity and that every terminal that we have here in the newsroom—which we called a VDT or video display terminal—was attached to a big box that would be about two feet wide, two feet deep, and about five or six feet high. And that was—it almost was like before transistors were invented. But anyway—and that was what was connected to the mainframe, so you had all these big boxes that we had to make room for in the newsroom.

CS: They were like the buffer memory. I can't remember if they were flush with the floor or if they were up off of it just enough for the mice to hide under.

AH: I think you're right.

CS: But there were also big wire cables, or big cables that came out of these things and ran under our feet. And there were mice. There were mice running around. And then we had a lot of noise from those machines.

AH: Right. Because each one of the VDTs had a fan on it, and each one of those big boxes had five fans on it.

CS: Then when the air conditioning, the what's-his-name memorial air conditioning would kick in. BOOM! [Laugh]

AH: Yes. I remember that . . .

CS: And the memorial air conditioner, too.

AH: I don't remember that.

CS: Bert Lance maybe? Michael Storey posted funny clippings and errors on the side of the air conditioner.

AH: Do you also remember that the—what was the floor like that was here?

CS: Black and white tiles. I remember black and white tiles, and I remember the women's restroom. Oh, and the women's restroom was so vile that—Betty Woods was our society editor and Dr. Joyce Brothers was going to come to town. And Betty became just consumed by fear that Dr. Joyce Brothers would have to use the restroom during her interview at the newsroom. So the ladies' room got renovated.

AH: Cleaned up? That once a decade cleaning. Do you remember the. . .?

CS: Yes. People would steal toilet paper out of there and take it home, too. [Laughter]

AH: Because they were so poor and all.

CS: Yes, well some were more poor than others. And people would steal all kinds of stuff out of the shop. I remember being kind of amazed. That was one of the moral things you learned other people are doing, and you have to ask yourself, "Should I do that?" "No."

AH: Well, from what—all I heard was—from what I heard, the men's restroom was even more vile than the women's restroom, so. Anyway, but the other thing I was going to ask you about the floor, do you remember the floor was not perfectly level but it had kind of a ridge in it at one point?

CS: Right.

AH: Also, because of the cables that—those huge cables that we had running every-

where—that when they needed—because the mainframe was on a lower level and they had to get all these cables to go down there, that they drilled holes in the floor? So you had these uneven, you know, four- or five-inch wide openings all over the newsroom. And that would be another place that you would look down and you would see a mouse peering up at you.

CS: [Laughs]

AH: Okay, so you had—before we go on, I was going to start talking about [John Robert] Bob Starr and how the culture changed in the newsroom.

CS: When he came.

AH: Is there anything else you want to talk to about prior to that point?

CS: Let me think. I had already started writing. I had been there about three months when I started doing movie reviews, play reviews, and I wrote an op-ed column briefly. It wasn't really a labeled column, but it was a frequent insertion on the op-ed page.

AH: What was your byline name at the time?

CS: Celia Loyall, L-O-Y-A-L-L. So, I was coming in after hours and in the middle of the night to write.

AH: Did you find yourself—that here was this place where you were paid barely above minimum wage, because I think minimum wage was about $3 an hour then, and you were paid barely above that. And this culture you were in. Did you find yourself when you were off work, instead of going and doing something else—besides drinking—you would come up to work and do things?

CS: Yes.

AH: I mean, obviously, you were coming up here to write. Did you find yourself

hanging around the newsroom?

CS: Hung around the newsroom all the time because this was where it was. It was a really exciting and interesting place. But I—okay—this is before Starr came. I remember when I would meet people out in the city and they said, "What do you do?" I would say, "I work downtown." They would say—it was a whole string of evasive answers I would give to the question of basically, "What do you do?" And it ended up with my only telling them, "I work in an office."

AH: Why were you evasive?

CS: Because it was embarrassing. Even though this was a consuming and fascinating place, and really exciting place to be, it was also embarrassing because the sense that you got from other people out in the street was that the *Democrat* was an inferior newspaper.

AH: Yes.

CS: And it probably was. It probably was, it probably was not a very good newspaper. It had some great people working here.

AH: But it also had some miserable people.

CS: You know. And idiots, like me, you know. Maybe it's the people. I think back on things that I edited as a copy editor, and oh my God, I would be rewriting the wire stories. What do I know? Nothing. You shouldn't be doing that.

AH: I know. If you're like me, you would be saying—well, I have said several times, "If I were hiring me when I came in the door at that age with high ambitions and so forth, I would have told me to go away." I would not hire me. [Laugh]

CS: I would not hire me. Not by a long shot. That's why I have so much respect for Bill Husted today. But then Starr came, and the first thing Starr did—well, we're

going to . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

CS: I remember sitting at the copy desk and one day this strange man just sat down next to me. He was just pleasant and friendly. He was lurking around and noticing what people were doing. Then I remember the next thing he asked, he asked everybody to turn in their resumes. I had never written a resume, I didn't have a resume, wasn't completely sure what a resume should have in it. So, I just scribbled up some stuff about, you know, writing for the newspaper when I was eight years old and high school editor and working on my college newspaper. I think I put it in a—tore it out of a notebook and handed it in to him. He called me into his office and he said, "This is not exactly a resume." And I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I didn't know how to do it." And he started—I'm not, I tend to say I am not sure what went on between me and Bob Starr, but I think that in my mind I confused him with my father, with whom I had a combative relationship. He was a very difficult man. A great leader of men, a terrible parent. You know.

AH: Wait a minute—are you talking about your dad or Starr?

CS: My dad, my dad. And that's why I'm thinking I confused Starr with him, because Starr was a good newspaperman, lousy manager, right? But he had this horrible ability to have faith in you. If Bob Starr had faith in you, your life became very difficult because you wanted to rise to the occasion. At least I did. I remember that he—he asked my opinion about all kinds of stuff in the early days, which I think is frightening when I realize how little I knew, how little I paid attention to—I believe we started the "Otus the Head Cat" column because Starr asked me,

"What can I do to keep Michael Storey happy?" And I said, "Well, you should let him write more, and let him write about the his cat. He has fun doing that?"

AH: What was Michael Storey doing at the time? Michael Storey, who is now your husband.

CS: Yes. Michael Storey at the time was . . .

AH: Was he in sports [at this point]?

CS: I don't think he had gone to sports yet. I think that Starr made him the graphics guy in sports. I mean, the editor of sports, to edit Wally Hall. I think he was still in copyediting. Then Starr made him the editor over in sports, the main copy editor dealt with the sports copy and laying out the pages and everything. Not long after that, [Starr] put him in charge of designing things. Designing for—we had a tabloid called *Arkansas* that Starr started, and I think—he put Michael in charge of that. Because Michael is just creative and—at the time, we had kind of a paucity of people like that. Now we've got them out the wazoo. So, we had this combative relationship that I confused, I think, with the relationship I had with my dad. I know that—I remember quitting in a huff twice. Starr would just say something that I just thought was so horrible, and I would march in, and I'd quit. The next day I'd wake up and I'd go, "Oh my God, what have I done?" And I'd come back to work and be relieved that I still had my job. I remember the first time it happened when the paper came out the next day, somebody had drawn a Hitler mustache on Starr's logo. I've always thought that it was somebody back in composing, and that's always made me feel kind of cool, that the guys liked me by that point. To work for Starr . . .

AH: Wait a minute, wait a minute. Did this appear in the newspaper?

CS: Yes.

AH: With this mustache?

CS: Yes.

AH: Oh great. Okay.

CS: Yes. So, I'm completely lost in time, I don't know what happened when. But I remember that, yes, the culture of the newsroom changed dramatically when Starr came. For one thing, we started having reporters. When I came here there were empty desks and a ton of copy editors. And the copy desk was where it was happening, where all the cool people were. The only people I remember seeing out in the news room were Bob Lancaster, and he had his head down on his typewriter because it was such torture for him to write, it was hard for him to write that column. I remember we had so few reporters that they didn't even think about them. All I remember is copy desk. But then Starr came and we started getting all these reporters. I mean all over the place. There was a whole batch of them from Columbia. One young, smart person after another.

AH: You mean Columbia, Missouri, right?

CS: Yes, Columbia, Missouri.

AH: Not Columbia, New York. Okay.

CS: Then he hired—the big scandal is he hired Chuck Jones—is it Chuck Jones?

AH: Is that the business editor?

CS: For $180 a week.

AH: Yes.

CS: And we were all scandalized. Chuck Jones was making $180 a week. So, I remember marching in and saying, "How can you pay that man that much money?

How can he possibly be worth that much money?" And he said, "Do you realize that you're working for sweatshop wages? Do you not understand that?" And he said, "I will not preside over a sweatshop. If I could, I would raise everybody right now. But I can't. So I'm going to, as I can, raise—bring you all up—but everybody I bring in, I'm going to start paying a decent, or more decent, wage." And that was one of the things I really kind of clung to and liked about him, was that he refused to preside over a sweatshop. On purpose. I mean, it was, in fact, sort of a sweatshop. But he didn't want it to—have it be his fault that it was. So, yes, we got all these new reporters. We got cool people. Joann Pryor over at business with us. She was a religious person and a business writer, and there was Audie Ayer, who was hilarious and kind and good. Garry Hoffmann, I guess was on city desk, and he was so sweet. You know, the days started getting better because you had a whole lot more normal people coming and going. We got a new crop of copy editors. I remember when Jan Cottingham and Karen Taylor, I think, came on the same day.

AH: Right.

CS: And Greg Adams, who was also one of the new people was real excited because they were both "classic beauties." And they were smart and bright. The newsroom just got much, much bigger. Si Dunn was brought back. We were divided into all these organizational layers. We got the high-speed wire.

AH: So he really brought things up. I mean, he obviously . . .

CS: Huge change.

AH: . . . and then Starr became the top guy in the newsroom. He obviously went to Walter Hussman [Jr.], and said, "You know, we need to be spending some money.

We need to be hiring more reporters. We need to make some technological advances here," and so forth.

CS: I never knew if that was Starr's doing or Hussman's doing.

AH: I think it was a combination of the two. I mean, I remember from Starr that his general philosophy about hiring reporters was, he learned to hire them young because he knew that they would come cheaper than—I mean, he wanted—one, he wanted to raise salaries, that's true. But still he was taking advantage of the fact that people were young and you could hire people—you know, guys who had one or two years of experience or was fresh out of college—you could hire them cheaper than what you could hire somebody with five or ten years of experience. And out of that bunch that you had—whereas we had very few reporters, now we had a lot of reporters—out of that bunch, you might have some that were real keepers. And out of that you might find something that would be worth having. So, yes, so that was his philosophy, he needed to energize the newsroom with a bunch of young, aggressive, go-get 'em kind of reporters.

CS: And it—everything was bigger.

AH: One thing I'm wondering about in your relationship with Starr is when you talk about—yes, I mean, you had a tumultuous relationship. But nonetheless, you felt free to go in and talk to him about things. Did that cause you any conflict? Because as Starr continued to stay in the newsroom, and engaged in this war with the *Gazette*, that set up some divisions in the newsroom, and there were people whose objective was to end up going to the *Gazette* someday, and if you allied yourself with Starr, then you tended to be ostracized by everybody else in the newsroom, or viewed warily by other people in the newsroom or seen as a brown-noser or

whatever. Did you run into any of that kind of a conflict?

CS: I think that I was so dimly aware that I probably wouldn't have noticed if people thought I was a brown-noser because I was still at that point struggling to become someone who would be acceptable to anybody. "Please don't hate me. Oh, please don't hate me." I do know that there were divisions. Some people felt it a lot more sharply than I did. But really, I liked the people that I worked with, whether they were anti-Starr or pro-Starr, I liked them as people and enjoyed them so much that it was probably just confusing for me. My poor little confused self was probably just overwhelmed, and so I didn't think about it. But I didn't really go in Starr's door all the time. I mean, I was pretty afraid of him, too. I would only go in there when I was just so overwhelmed by the need to express, "Oh my God, you can't do that! Don't do that, that's not right!" I think he thought it was funny. Maybe I was cute when I was younger; I'm not sure. But mostly I think I avoided him. And I'm probably two-faced. I was probably sympathetic with the people who were anti-Starr and sympathetic with the people who were pro-Starr.

AH: Maybe you were objective. [Laughs]

CS: Well, I felt like the important thing is to have the day go well and to try to find the part of the job that you love, and to make the product as good as you can make it. At the same time, which is what I love about working for a newspaper, when the product sucks, life has never been better. I mean, you lived for those moments when the picture's upside down or a real bad headline gets in. You know, it's just so funny. Like the "not one chinchilla of evidence" incident. Hilarious. Really, really funny. So although you're trying so hard to do a good job, and that's what

you're focusing on, and you just want everybody to get along—"Can't we all just get along?" When things go bad, that's cool.

AH: Do you think that we should clear up for the record that the "one chinchilla of evidence" was not in Wally Hall's column?

CS: I don't know where it was. It was a transcript, right? With somebody reading into the phone and then . . .

AH: It was a—well, yes. It was—RaeAnn Ritter was a capitol hill reporter covering a speech by Steve Clark. And oddly, the story ended up in the newspaper with Ed Phillips' byline.

CS: [Laughs]

AH: But he was talking about, I think it was the creation science case where the state had passed this law to say that you had to teach creation science along with evolution in the classroom. I think what he was saying was that there was not one scintilla of evidence to prove this case. Or whatever. Anyway, RaeAnn was dictating this to a clerk, and the clerk said, "chinchilla?" And RaeAnn said, "No, scintilla—I don't know how to spell it"—which just proves the advantage of being a good speller—and told her that she had to look it up. The clerk put in chinchilla, and it went through the city desk and the copy desk and the late man and all that. And ended up in the newspaper. So we had the one chinchilla of evidence.

CS: And life is good—for some reason, that is just one of the highlights of the time. [Laughs]

AH: Yes. It was a—but somehow, that story has been perverted into it was in Wally Hall's column.

CS: But it credibly could have been in Wally. I mean, Wally really had a very poor

grasp on grammar in those days, and he needed to be edited big-time. Wally and I—I had this food column, and Wally was one of my first interviews. I remember—well, yes, my first interview interview. Yes, I interviewed him about what he did not eat for breakfast, for this food column. (The food column did not last long. The food column was starting to bloat and was becoming enormously large, and it had to be killed.) Wally told me what he didn't eat for breakfast, and then the recipe was, you know, put the things back. So, good times.

AH: All right, so Starr was hired December of 1978, and when I came aboard in May of 1979, I think we still had one edition that was a city edition, I mean it was a morning newspaper, and then the rest of it went morning. The state edition must have gone morning as well. It seems like part of it was afternoon and part of it was morning or whatever. Then at some point shortly after I got here, as a clerk, which by the way was something that you called to my attention. Because I came here in May of 1979, and I remember—this is the reason I'm interviewing you here is because you were the first person I met my first day on the job. I think you were working as the Sunday wire editor. I started on a Sunday. I came in here, there was nobody else in the newsroom but you. I introduced myself; you introduced yourself. You were being very helpful to me. I told you that I was a city desk news assistant. You said you had no idea what that was . . .

CS: I didn't. [Laugh]

AH: . . . then we learned the hard way later that that meant I was an obit clerk. And all I was supposed to do was type up obits, and then be told by Mabel Berry the head clerk of all the mistakes that I made. But anyway, so how did life change after the newspaper went to a morning edition? I mean, did that change your hours?

Change your schedule?

CS: Yes. Everything changed. The schedules were hung on the bulletin board and you knew what you were going to do that week, and you found it out, I think, on Friday. Things were just more complicated. You had different supervisors. We also added a suburban division. There were just layers and layers of complexity. I was completely lost. I just came in and did what I thought I was supposed to be doing that day.

AH: Who was the head of the copy desk at that point . . .?

CS: We had two copy desk chiefs. We had a night chief and a day chief. And I think Patsy McCown was the day chief, and, I think, Si Dunn was the night chief. But it might be—I might have it reversed.

AH: No, I think you have it correct.

CS: Yes. And I remember being uncomfortable with Si.

AH: Why?

CS: Really kind of a chauvinist. I think it was just an—yes, he was kind of a chauvinist.

AH: I mean, did he not think that women were capable of doing things?

CS: Yes.

AH: Okay.

CS: In fact, he was very, very old-fashioned. He wanted us to put gas in quotes . . .

AH: Gas?

CS: For gasoline.

AH: Oh. Okay.

CS: Yes. He was old-fashioned. He had an unhappy situation at home, and it just

made me uncomfortable, because you just had the feeling that—you know, he would bring all this food, and feed everybody all this food. I would think in the back of my mind, "What if someday he just poisoned the food? He could kill us all at once. Wouldn't he be happier?" So I never ate the food.

AH: Right.

CS: And I find—we may have to take this off the transcript now. Because I don't know if he's still alive.

AH: No, he died at an early age.

CS: Oh.

AH: Anyway, a relatively early age.

CS: He wrote short stories. And he asked me to read one of his short stories. And it was pretty bad.

AH: [unintelligible]

CS: People were really unhappy. Meanwhile, I was getting happier because Michael and I were dating. I had stopped drinking too much. We had this office romance going on [laughs], where he would insert love notes in the wire, and I was the wire editor. I would come across his love notes amid stories about hijackings or Guyana or pork bellies. Oh, you know one thing that I don't think you would know is that we had—the copy editors had a big piece of fiction that we were all writing together in the computer system.

AH: Oh yes, I think I've heard about this.

CS: Yes, we all added little bits and pieces to it. Some of it was really funny, and some of it was really stupid. It went on after—it was after Jane—Jane Gordon Wood came and Karen Taylor. Because I remember Michael writing hilarious

stuff about Jane's blue tennis shoes and Karen Taylor being wrapped too tight for Clarksville. We had all that hidden away in the computer. Then also, we would sometimes let—who was the Campbell? Fred Campbell, right?

AH: Yes.

CS: Fred Campbell. We would sometimes slip personal fiction in among the typeset stuff, and send it back in the hopes that Fred wouldn't notice. And frequently, he didn't notice. And you could get things typeset that way. Terrible. I should not admit that. But we did do that. I also wrote poetry in the computer, too.

AH: I also think that we need to explain a little bit about our computer system, which of course, I think it was a little outdated by the time that we started using it, and *really* outdated by the time we quit using it. But what I remember about it was it was a text-only system that you could—that had no security in it anywhere in the sense that you could call up anything, anywhere, in the system. Anybody could call up anything. Anybody could change anything in that system. That you could put in a code to call up a story. Every story had a name—or every file had a name. And you could call things up by the name. And there was no way to find, you know, if I wanted to see all the stuff that Celia had created, there was no way of doing that. That it was all . . .

CS: You could hide stuff.

AH: Yeah, you could hide stuff, if you were creative in your naming of things. But if you were also creative, you could find stuff, too. And you could easily put stuff in there too, like you were talking about. But it wasn't like—there was no Internet at the time, right?

CS: Yes.

AH: And there was no cable—or there was cable, but I don't know that we had cable in the newsroom at the time.

CS: We didn't have cable in the newsroom.

AH: But there was no CNN [Cable News Network]. There was no Fox News. Nothing like that. So, I mean, what we knew, we learned from the wire at that time. It was only by then—and all we got at the time was the AP [Associated Press], right?

CS: No, I think we also had—didn't we also have *New York Times*?

AH: I don't know. I don't . . .

CS: See, I should know that. I should know that.

AH: You'd know better than I would.

CS: Well, I would, if I remembered things.

AH: Yes. Well, okay, so you were talking about people being unhappy. What were they unhappy about?

CS: They weren't happy about the politics of the paper. Of the editorial page.

AH: Oh, Okay. [unintelligible]

CS: Yes, David Hawkins's editorials annoyed a lot of people who worked here. I remember Bill Husted telling me, "Just don't read them." They were annoyed—they were disturbed by Starr's manner with people. I remember one time there was just a sort of crescendo of disgruntlement, and then he called us all back into the vending machine area. Do you remember the "peddle your virtue on the street" speech?

AH: The what?

CS: "Peddle your virtue on the street."

AH: No.

CS: "If you don't like what we're doing here, you can go peddle your virtue on the street." He told us all this. It was like, "We're going to work hard, we're going to do it fast, we're going to do it dirty, we're going to do more. And if you don't like that, if that's not good enough for you, you can go peddle your virtue on the street."

AH: I want to go back to something from your childhood. You talked about the *Gazette* was the newspaper that you read. At our house, we took both newspapers. Did y'all [you all] take both newspapers at your house?

CS: I don't believe we did; I think we just took the *Gazette*. But I only lived here from high school on.

AH: Right. And is what you knew of the *Gazette* your perception of it or is it what your parents' perception of it was?

CS: It would have been my perception. I remember reading the editorial page. I remember reading the cartoons all the time. I remember aspiring to write letters to the editor of the *Gazette*. That and entering the poetry contest in the *North Little Rock Times* was the height of it, for me.

AH: Yes, yes. What is it that you think that made people think the *Gazette* was better than the *Democrat* in those days?

CS: You know, since I have not held both of those old papers in my hand as an adult and read them and compared them, I suspect it would have been the prose on the editorial page. I mean, I suspect that the editorials were just better written in the *Gazette*. Hawkins was not a very good writer.

AH: I think that was a part of it. I think another part of it was the *Gazette* had veteran

reporters who had been covering their beats for a long time and we had such turn-over here among reporters. Nobody got—everybody was always getting beaten over here on stuff. The veteran reporters would always know about something before it happened. But anyway—so people were unhappy. Then what—you were the wire editor. How long were you the wire editor?

CS: That's a good question. Well, Greg Adams was news editor. We didn't really have a wire editor after Starr came. That was one of the things that annoyed people. When I was hired we had a wire editor position that was better paid than the copy desk position. Then when Amanda left, the wire editor was not replaced and there was an organizational restructure where we did not have a wire editor, we had the copy editor who worked the wire, which was a big step down in status. I remember that fried some people's grits. So I was a copy editor who worked the wire. And you know what—I was the copy editor who worked the wire, until I perceived that I was burning out on it, which would probably have been 1980. It was when Jan Cottingham was here, because I turned to whoever was my boss. There was the day when I had done a very bad job of allocating my wire stories for play on whatever page they were supposed to be competing for. And Jan Cottingham called up the economy story and she just said, "Should this really be back here inside the paper? This is the economy story." I looked at the budget and I thought, "Oh man, this is really not very good thinking on your part. You're not paying attention." And I turned to whoever my boss was and said, "You've got to take me off the wire; I'm not doing a good job anymore." They said, "What?" And I said, "Take me off this job. I'm not doing a good job anymore. Why don't you give it to Jan Cottingham. Give it to somebody—give it to fresh

horses, you need fresh horses." That was one of the things that would happen with all of our jobs in those days, is that people would be ridden into the ground. And it was before the National Labor Relations Board snit. But people would be working a lot more than forty hours a week. You were allowed to just work yourself sick. And people would do it. Then somebody brought NLRB down on us, and then we all had to punch a time clock. Then the big deal was trying to get around the time clock, because you had too much work in your job description to do it in the right timeframe.

AH: I remember one time—speaking of the time cards. I remember one time going in to talk to Starr about a raise for someone. He looked at their time card record and noticed that they had been working overtime, and he said, "They've already given themselves a pay raise." [Laughter] Anyway, so then okay, you quit doing the wire, what did you do next? Just become a regular copy editor?

CS: I think I became slot man and I did the bulldog editions for TMC [total market coverage]. And I was—we got married in 1981. By three months after I got married, I was pregnant. So by the end of 1981 and into 1982, I was a slot man with a great big belly. And doing bulldog edition. I remember Jerry Bokamper laughing himself sick because Ben would kick, my son Ben inside of me, would kick. We would be on deadline. The computer would be crashing constantly. So you had to work very fast while it was up. The computer would be crashing; I'd be sitting on a chair on coasters, rollers, caster rollers?

AH: Casters.

CS: Yes. And getting up as close as I could with my giant belly to the keyboard, and Ben would kick, hit the desk and I'd roll backwards. I mean, just roll [laughter],

and grab my way up to the desk and type again real fast because you had to send that blasted edition before the computer might die again.

AH: Now TMC stand for?

CS: Total Market Coverage, which we meant—a fun way of apparently interpreted it was throwing the papers everywhere, on the bridge and . . .

AH: Yes. Well, what that meant was, I think it was in Pulaski County.

CS: It was a throwaway paper.

AH: Right. What day of the week did it come out?

CS: Wednesday.

AH: It was Wednesday afternoon, right?

CS: Yes.

AH: Okay. And I think it was every home in Pulaski County . . .

CS: Whether they wanted it or not.

AH: Right. That was one issue. Of course, we got sued over that. There was the other—the other thing was, it went to every home that was a non-subscriber. It might have gone to the subscribers, too. That part I don't remember. I know that the whole idea was to get the paper out there to the people who didn't already take it. So what was the nickname that you gave the TMC?

CS: I don't know.

AH: Total Mass Confusion.

CS: Oh, that is a nickname I don't remember.

AH: Right. And didn't we have to do that on Tuesday for Wednesday's newspaper?

CS: I remember Wednesday; all I remember is Wednesday. It's possible that we made it Wednesday.

AH: Yes, that's what I mean. . .

CS: And then threw it in the afternoon.

AH: Right. Yes.

CS: I just remember it seemed like every month a new story came in about an atrocity of some carrier dumping the TMC . . .

AH: Right. Okay. So then you were working on, you were doing slot. A slot person does? A slot person does what?

CS: A slot person—copy editors read the stories, they write headlines, and then the slot person checked the headlines, reviewed the edited copy looking for obvious libel and other problems, and then sent it to the composing room where it's type-set.

AH: Right. Which of course is different now. I mean, they still send it to the—now the page designer, who puts it on the page. The process is similar, the technology has changed. What did you do after that?

CS: At some point I did the layout and design and editing for the suburban editions.

AH: What were the suburban editions?

CS: We had—we divvied up the cities into quadrants and had a little tiny reporting staff who was writing about neighborhood news in that particular area. I think they were little tabloids.

AH: They were, they were.

CS: And Meri [Meredith] Oakley was North Little Rock. There was a guy named D. Michael Finnegan, who wet behind the ears.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

CS: Okay, this is tape two of Alyson Hoge and Cecelia Storey. We were talking about the suburban edition.

AH: Right.

CS: Which were four editions for city coverage.

AH: And they gave neighborhood news.

CS: They gave neighborhood news. They were written by a small—each one had a little reporting coordinator who would collect the neighborhood news.

AH: Right. And probably wrote some stories, too.

CS: And probably wrote all the stories.

AH: So you were doing that—at some point you were doing that. You were doing the slot editing job.

CS: Yes, I believe that I—I now believe, having talked about this during the time when the tape recorder was not running and we thought it was—I believe that I did the suburban edition after the wire and then went to the slot job.

AH: Okay.

CS: Although it's possible that I did both of those things simultaneously, different days of the week. But I remember when I left the newspaper in February of 1982 to deliver my son—and I quit on Thursday and had him on Friday, because it was a scheduled C-section—I was the slot person at that point.

AH: So, when you came back. . .

CS: Well, I stayed out not quite a year; it was less than a year. And I was hired back part time by Lynn Hamilton to be the production liaison for the *Air Scoop*. The *Air Scoop* was the public relations' weekly organ of Little Rock Air Force Base. It was written by the public information office out there. It is what is now the

Drop Zone. We had a contract to print it. We supplied advertising sales people, two little cool ladies, who would sell ads like crazy in Jacksonville and Little Rock. I would help the public information reporters' copy be not full of typos and help them get it typeset and interfaced with the compositor, Cecil Atwood. Cecil Atwood was a real revelation to me at that time. When I was hired for that job, I was terrified of Cecil, because he could be pretty mean and angry back in the composing room, and that's what I remembered. But I soon learned that Cecil was that way because he was very smart and very good at what he did. He had been having to put up with being bossed around by people who did not know what to do, including me. That's why he was mean to us. Once you started working with Cecil, you started to love him. He was a wonderful compositor, a great problem-solver. He read the copy that he pasted up; he would notice things wrong. Stuff came out clean and good when Cecil did it. And he could make pages fit. So Cecil and I worked together really well. I did that as a part-time job for, I think, four years. Then I started just being—it wasn't enough to be working part-time, so I went to Starr and I said, "I want to make you a children's section, a children's page. We need something in this paper for kids. So that I can hand it to my son, and he'll leave me alone so I can read the big people newspaper." So, that's how we came up with "Kid Club", which was kind of my idea, and it was a really badly executed idea at first. That was saved by being crammed into an increasingly smaller space. The smaller the space became, the better the "Kid Club" became. Basically, all I did was just take stuff written by children in schools around the state and photocopy their artwork and wax it and paste it up. I had a broadsheet for a very brief period of time, and then I had on the comics

pages every day a little—I don't think it was even eleven inches deep—square that I filled up. And I would paste all that—I would pull an all-nighter and I would put a whole week's worth of the "Kid Club" stuff together. "Kid Club" Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Then Sunday was a color page on the back of something, I forget what. I don't remember what it was on the back of. But it was the big color page. I think I did paste that up as well. So I was working at that point on the *Air Scoop*, which required, the way I did it—because I was kind of not wanting to be a mother—I would do an all-nighter for the *Air Scoop* on Wednesday nights and Thursday morning, so I'd be here when the Air Force people would come to the *Democrat* building. Then I started doing another all-nighter for the "Kid Club". But my health started to go down-hill big time. I joined the Y[WCA, the Young Women's Christian Association] and took a stress test and my heart rate recovery was really horrifyingly bad, and it frightened me, so I went into Starr and I said, "Listen, the way I'm living now is going to really hurt me, and I don't want to be doing that. Can you hire me back full time? Then I can…" I think I had offered taking a part-time job with the paper helping Rhonda Owen do MidWeek, so I was working on Saturday morning. So it was a patchwork of these part-time jobs, and I was doing all-nighters, plus just the stress of being a young mother.

AH: I think that when we switched between tapes that was when we were talking about Rhonda, and who was Rhonda and what was MidWeek?

CS: Okay, Rhonda Owen, this would have been one of Rhonda's second or third jobs here, I think. But the MidWeek was sort of what the TMC was replaced by? It was a little bit classier TMC. And we built it on Saturday, Saturday mornings. It

had a big personality profile story, and it was folded so that it looked like a tabloid but was really a broadsheet. The cover would have the big color block picture of the movie star or whoever, and then the inside, on Page Two, would have a fifty-inch story about that person, taken off the wire usually. Although I wrote a couple of them, and one of the first ones I did was an interview with Griffin Smith.

AH: Who at the time was what?

CS: He was newly-hired as the Travel editor. This would have been toward the end of my tenure in MidWeek. Because then I went to Starr and wanted to be, asked him to make me full-time again. They did hire me back, and the first thing he assigned me to was to help Griffin with Travel. I very quickly—this has been a little secret that I—this is revealing a secret: why did Celia ask Starr to let her not work with Griffin anymore? Griffin was too smart, and I couldn't keep up with him. I did not have any geography in my head. None. And Griffin is meticulous, methodical, respectful. I could just see it coming at me, like the end of the railroad track. I was about to roll off the end of the railroad track and be exposed as a complete dodo bird. I mean, I'm a very friendly person, and people are always giving me much too much credit. I think I have an intelligent-looking face. [Laughs] But as this transcript will demonstrate, there's not a lot of "there" in there.

AH: That's not true.

CS: So I could see it coming, and I went in to Starr, and I said, "Listen, you need to find somebody who's better suited to work with this man." He was like, "Oh, kid, come on, don't run yourself down." So that didn't work. So then I went back to

him and I said, "Listen, don't make me work with this man, I can't stand him." [Laughter] That would work with Starr. He would understand that. He would not allow you to be an honest assessor of your lack of skill, but he would allow you to be a jerk who couldn't get along with somebody. So, then he took me off that, and I forget what I went to then full-time. Oh, oh, is that when I did the broadcasting column?

AH: I don't know, you mean the TV column?

CS: No. I did a broadcasting beat column, everything on TV and radio.

AH: Oh, okay. That I didn't remember.

CS: See, I don't remember—I think that may have been it. I think I may have gone to him and said, "I'm bored, either fire me or give me something to do." So there must have been—I must have been just working with Rhonda and then doing other copy editing full-time after I'd gotten myself excused from travel and Starr gave Travel to Kim Christ instead, because Kim had said something to me about a vacation trip that she had taken out of the country, and I thought, "Oh, she's a world traveler." [Laughter] "She'll be more suitable." It turned out she was; they worked together very well. But, yes, I must have been doing general copy-editing and then helping Rhonda on the MidWeek, and I became increasingly bored. I went to Starr and said, "Give me something interesting to do or fire me." So, unfortunately, he put me in the broadcasting beat column, which was a five-day-a-week column on the front of the entertainment section. I don't think he even cared that I didn't have a clue about television or radio, either one. I don't think it would have stopped him if he knew, truly, that I did not know which channel number was which network, or how many networks there were. He just

put me in this job where you were supposed to be a critic of local television personalities and radio personalities. And because I'm the sort of person who thinks, "Don't show weakness, don't show weakness," I just jumped right in, and three days later my first column appeared. Apparently he was perfectly pleased with it. I think he wasn't very interested in any of the lifestyle coverage that we did, and as long as there weren't people beating on his door saying, "This person's no good," he was happy, and he left us alone. Which actually in those days was not a mark of favor. If your life was hell it was because he was interested in you, and that was a better thing than if he was ignoring you because he just didn't respect you. That's basically what happened, is that he just didn't respect the television stuff, he thought of it as a training ground and a toybox. So I worked my butt off because I was given this column, and it was such an investment in me, and I—I mean, I worked sixty, seventy hours a week. I did enterprise stories. I learned how to check traps. I was going around—I went over to Fort Smith and stayed there, interviewed all those people up there, and tried to remember people's names, and took people to lunch, and really thought I was doing it up right. Then—it must have been 1991. Let's see, I was also teaching aerobics, so I was really overworking, which I have a tendency to do. And getting very burned out in the process, without realizing it. I mean, I lost three pounds just the first week of that job, just from worrying. I'd lie awake at night worrying because I knew I didn't know what I was doing. But it was interesting. I realized that I would rather be scared than be bored. It's really better to be scared than to be bored.

AH: That's the way I am.

CS: But then there was this—in 1991 there was this Fayetteville dorm incident, one of

those situations where a thirty-three or thirty-four year old—we had it both ways—woman was allegedly raped in a dormitory by athletic students. And word came back that we were going to publish the woman's name.

AH: Because the prosecutor dropped the charges because he found her not to be credible.

CS: That's right. It was just like, "Oh my God, we're going to publish a rape victim's name. Oh my God. Even if she's just, you know, an alleged rape victim, oh my God, we're going to publish her name." So I marched in there, and I said, "Why are we going to publish this woman's name?" Well, he had been pelted all day long by people disagreeing with his decision to do that. So, he just turned to me and he said, "The fact that you don't understand why we're going to publish this woman's name is why you will never be anything more than a television reporter." I remember just looking at him and thinking—realizing—a light just went off over my head, "I cannot work for somebody who doesn't respect me." So I walked out; I walked up to Bob Lutgen, I said, "This is my two weeks' notice. I'm leaving." Closed the door. Bob did not believe me. So I worked . . .

AH: Who was Bob Lutgen at the time?

CS: Bob Lutgen was the assistant managing editor who kind of did the operations. Kind of an operations editor. He just thought I was funny. So two weeks came and went, he had not replaced me, so I said, "I'm leaving. I mean it. I quit. Replace me." I think then he asked me to stay another week. He said, "We'll have Steve Kuy Kendall do this job." I showed Kuy Kendall the deadline, basically that's all I had to show him, and then I left. Then Hussman called me in to ask about why I was leaving. And I fibbed.

AH: What'd you tell him?

CS: I told him that I had just allowed myself to burn out.

AH: But that was partially true though.

CS: It was partially true.

AH: I mean, it might be that because you were burnt out, that that's what made the matter of the naming the rape victim, the alleged rape victim's name, made it all the worse.

CS: It probably was [that] I overreacted to that because I was tired. You know, I probably secretly had a death wish for the job, because I was really torn in all different directions, and running away from being a young mother. And at that time I had what would be a seven, eight-year-old kid walking around the house quoting that horrible father on *Married With Children*. You know, this is just not right. So, I was being torn in several different directions, but really ultimately it came down to I realized, "You have read this person wrong. This is not your father, this is someone who just wants you to do a job." And that sort of tore the sheets, and I was—I needed to leave at that point and figure out who I was. You can't have an adult job relationship with somebody that you think is your parent.

AH: Right.

CS: It's not healthy.

AH: Right. So that probably was about the spring of 1991.

CS: Yes.

AH: I did not realize until today that that was a factor in your leaving at that time. What did you think about the newspaper war at the point that you left? Did you feel like things were going great, it was going to go on forever, or did you feel

like things were just really out of control or what?

CS: At the time, because I had begun to be involved in the recreation community—I was writing a sports column when I left as well as the broadcasting column—and so I was making friends in the recreation community and we were all benefiting from being noticed. Zan Jarvis [Susan Jarvis] was working for our sports section doing a great job covering great stuff. Objectively, I knew that that was frivolous coverage, that we did not need to be doing that. I looked at the size of our paper and believed that the newspaper war was fantastic. Because either we got it or the *Gazette* got it. I mean a lot of stuff was covered that did not need to be covered. But the readers got such a deal. I mean, the papers were cheap and they were huge. Really—we were all over this market, just writing about everything that moved. I remember looking at the papers and thinking, "This is fantastic." I did not know enough about business to understand what it was costing, that it could not go on, that it was really—a freak.

AH: Do you know how much it was costing?

CS: I remember being told that there was a month where we lost more than a million dollars.

AH: In the last year of the newspaper war, Gannett was losing $20 million and we were losing $10 million, a year.

CS: It was something that couldn't continue, and being a fish in that water, I did not know enough to know that what it was was too big.

AH: I'm going to backtrack because it was in 1986 when Gannett bought the *Gazette*. The Patterson family had owned the *Gazette* for such a long time. We knew that the *Gazette* was up for sale because there had been an attempt to sell it to—either

another family or I can't remember who it was, but another news organization or another family, and that deal fell through. Then Gannett bought the *Gazette*. And do you remember the climate in the newsroom at the time when that happened?

CS: I remember people not having much respect for Gannett. That's all I basically remember. Gannett was that *USA Today* company, making everything shorter, shorter, shorter, shorter. I remember that we all noticed that the *Gazette* was going in a direction we didn't like. I remember they put cheerleaders on the front page, and the headline was—or there was a promo box or something—was "Geez, Those Knees." I remember thinking, "Man, the old *Gazette* would never have done it." But they also still had some very good writers. It was just—no, I don't remember specifically the newsroom climate in those days. I remember the glee with which—I guess it was under Patterson that we were able to place ads in the *Gazette* saying, "D Day is coming," before we became a morning newspaper, and "D Day is here." These ads actually appeared in the *Gazette* advertising our shift to an a.m. paper. I remember the glee of that. So that was definitely a newsroom mood when that happened. But I don't remember a newsroom mood about the sale of the paper.

AH: Do you remember any of the buttons that were handed out, like . . .

CS: I remember "Can Do."

AH: Yes, I was going to say, "Can Do" was one.

CS: "Can Do." And it should have said, "How High." [Laughter] I still have my "Can Do" button.

AH: I do, too. I also have one that says, "We're in the black." It was like one month we made a profit. [Laughter] One month we made a profit.

CS: Yes, we got a little check, didn't we? We got a little bit of money.

AH: Yes, I think you're right, I'd forgotten about that.

CS: I remember feeling guilty about some things in that line. At one point, Hussman called us over to this huge meeting over in the press building. Do you remember this? And we were all sitting in these folding chairs, and there were telephones under the chairs? And we were supposed to go door to door and ask our neighbors to buy the paper.

AH: I don't remember that.

CS: And the newspaper—the phone was like a compensation or something, a thank you present or something. I remember feeling really guilt about that. Michael and I were married at that point, and I remember we kept the phone briefly and then I think we brought the phone back. Because we just couldn't find time in the day to go door to door.

AH: I must have been out covering some other story when that happened, because frankly I don't remember that.

CS: I feel bad about that. I think I should have gone door to door. Why not? You know, help your employer.

AH: Well that's something that you talk to a lot of upper management managers in other departments here, and you will find that as they rose through the ranks, that was a typical thing that they did. I heard a story yesterday about Paul Smith and Eddie [Telford?] delivering newspapers when they worked in El Dorado because of—Eddie was thinking that some extra editions were going to be delivered by circulation. And no, it turned out that the ad salesmen were going to throw these additional newspapers. But anyway, yes, there certainly was that. I remember the

indignation in the newsroom here anytime somebody said, "Hey, we could sell the newspapers and get a bonus," or something like that.

CS: Yes, there was a whole lot of people that were offended by that, like it was beneath them.

AH: Right. Exactly. Never mind that everybody here was making whatever salary they earned because of circulation . . .

CS: Because of circulation.

AH: . . . and because of . . .

CS: . . . because of guys down in advertising knocking themselves out. They worked so hard. I had some friends down in the ad production area, Vicky Morgan and those people worked—you know, we ought to be interviewing those people. They worked their tails off.

AH: I know. All right, do you remember all the defections in late 1991 at the height of the war? I think—you mentioned Zan Jarvis . . .

CS: Yes, Zan and I had a screaming fight at the Metrocentre Mall. I am ashamed of this incident. We had a screaming fight about it. It was embarrassing. Because I just couldn't believe that she was going to go over there. I think—but they were going to pay her $30,000 a year. Come on. She would have been nuts not to take that job. And, in fact, at the time I was mostly upset that she hadn't warned me she would be leaving because she knew I would have liked her job a whole lot more than being a broadcasting columnist—about which I knew nothing much. I would have asked for her job.

AH: I was going to bring that up, because you talked about Chuck Jones making $180 a week and you started out here at $135, and its also got to be important to give

some perspective. Salaries in 1978 and 1979 versus what they were at the end of the newspaper war. I remember that there was—that people here were going over to the *Gazette* for $50 a week pay raises.

CS: Yes.

AH: The problem that we had here—when we would hire people and they would get paid more money to work here was the same problem over at the *Gazette*, because people over there would find out that, "Oh, I've been over here working for the *Gazette*, slaving away for the *Gazette*, now you hire this person from the *Democrat*, just to get them away from the *Democrat*, and you're giving them $50 more a week." That caused resentment over there too. In fact, there was one reporter that there was a battle going on between the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* to hire that person and the salary that was offered was $525 a week. So, that shows you that in the space of a little over—in about twelve years, salaries had potentially quadrupled. I mean, that was just for a reporter. Unfortunately though, editors were also—assistant city editors were making about that same salary, so that wasn't that much better. But that would have been in the range between $25,000 and $30,000 a year.

CS: I remember about that time we were all told that anybody who talked about what they made could be fired. Just don't talk about salary.

AH: Well, what's funny about that is, yes . . .

CS: [Laughs]

AH: . . . the person who instigated that rule was Starr. It was a meeting of editors when Starr blurted out that salary. That led one of those editors in the meeting to immediately go to the *Gazette* followed by one of the reporters he'd been friends

with, followed by another reporter. So boom, boom, boom, and that was all in March of 1991. So where were you in October of 1991 when you heard that the *Gazette* had been closed?

CS: In October of 1991, I was home.

AH: Had you been watching the news accounts of the *Gazette*?

CS: I was hearing it from Michael. You know, Michael was just elated. Michael took all of this a whole lot more personally. For me, working here was my life. Actually, and you come here and you try every day to be a better person. It's not this big, ideological war that apparently is in some people's heads. Michael was one of those people who took it all extremely personally. If you said something bad about the *Democrat*, he was personally offended. You know, there are people he won't forgive today because they "deserted" and went to the *Gazette*. Oh, come on. You know. I think that's making something that should be business much too personal.

AH: Well, it's like some people who used to work for the *Gazette* can't forgive the *Democrat*.

CS: Exactly. It's a kind of a silly confusion of categories. Confusion of moral categories. But Michael was elated, I remember that. He was so excited. I don't think he slept that night. What would I have been doing? I would have been just rattling around my house. Probably volunteering at PTA [Parent Teacher Association].

AH: When was it—what was the year that you came back?

CS: Nineteen ninety-eight. It was after Starr was gone. But I kept—Ed Gray, the perspective editor, kept my ego afloat. Because I felt like I had been—not just quit,

but been banished. And Ed Gray allowed me to publish book reviews, and that gave me something to think about and something to do. I don't think I did any freelance work for us. I did freelance work for another publication.

AH: Well, when you came back, it was as a day copy editor, right?

CS: Yes.

AH: And that has since evolved into being over the "Health and Fitness" section.

CS: And then for a while I had the television column. Michael was trying to do "Paper Trails."

AH: Right, yes.

CS: And that's where we are today.

AH: Is there anything else that you want to talk about involving the newspaper war?

CS: Yes, there is one thing that I want to say. I'm glad it's over.

AH: Yes. But, on the whole, would you say that it was a . . .

CS: Oh God, you know what I really want to say?

AH: What is it you really want to say?

[Tape Stopped]

CS: I don't want to run out of tape.

AH: Well check the tape and see—if it's about to end, then flip it over.

CS: I think it might have enough. I'm going to be standing here, I'm going to hold it and watch it. This really matters to me.

AH: Yes.

CS: Remember when I told you about these wonderful people that I worked with, and how important they were to me as a young woman finding my way in the world. A very confused young woman finding my way in the world. I lost those people

in the newspaper war. And I missed them. They are people that I missed dearly. I never got to know them the way I would like to get to know them. A lot of them are disaffected from me now because I stayed here at the *Democrat* building. You know? You had this terrible sense of loss. People who—when they went away, and when they lost their jobs. I mean, it's just loss, loss, loss. It's sad and terrible.

AH: Are you saying that they didn't want to be associated with you because you stayed here at the newspaper and then you became an enemy? Or are you just saying it's simply like as life happens, people move out of your life and . . .?

CS: Both. They are people that I think would consider me an enemy because I stayed here, which really makes me feel sick. Then I think mostly just the people that they left here through the *Gazette*, through the portal of the *Gazette*, and then became lost to me because they moved on to a different part of the world, a different life. Jerry Bokamper. I loved Jerry Bokamper. Gone.

AH: It sounds to me like—if I could sum up your career here, I mean it seems like I would characterize you as a very bright person and a creative person who, because of that, would get bored doing the same routine and was looking for new challenges but also was guilty of tending to overwork. Do you think that—but also that perhaps you were not as heavily involved in the politics of what was going on as perhaps some other people were. What I'm hearing is that sometimes you weren't aware—I mean, you were aware of some of the turmoil, but not a close observer of it.

CS: No.

AH: And you didn't let that affect your relationship with other people. But they might

have allowed it to affect their relationship with you or with other people. Like you had the pro-Starr [people] for example, and [anti-Starr people]. They wouldn't get along, and you couldn't understand why we can't just all get along.

CS: [Laughs] Let's all just get along. Yes. I'm not a person who is an administrative mind. I am a person who comes to work one day at a time.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

AH: Have you ever wrote consumer-information stories for Home Style?

CS: No, they were talking about making me do that. Then they had mercy on me and allowed me not to do it.

AH: That's what I was . . .

CS: Okay, it was just not a good writing subject for me. The other day I was trying to remember all the different functions that I've done for the *Arkansas Democrat* and the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. And there was beginning with copy editor and movie reviewer. Book reviewer. Op ed columnist. Food columnist. And these are logo columns. Sports columnist. Business writer. I remember at one point Aubry Shepherd teasing me that I was trying to get published in every section of the paper at once, and I realized I was. Production assistant for the *Air Scoop*. Wire editor, even though it was just a copy editor who works the wire. Entertainment columnist. Paste-up—I did the paste-up on the children's stuff, and I guess you could call that children's editor, because I went and talked to schools. Television writer. Health and Fitness section editor. That's a lot.

AH: It is a lot.

CS: You get to work in one place and do all this different stuff. You don't have to just

do your same job forever.

AH: And not be the least bit qualified to do any of it.

CS: [Laughter] You can learn it on the job. See, that's why I think newspapering is a trade.

AH: You're right. There's no school you can go to to learn to be, say, a Health and Fitness editor.

CS: We were talking the other day, the people who you meet in an office like this, a lot of them are wonderful, creative, smart people that you're very attracted to. You work with them day-in and day-out, but you don't really, really get to know them, although you center your life in the newsroom, and you feel like your best friends are here—these are people that you know through work, you don't really know them in the fullness of their personality because we don't do a whole lot of socializing outside work. That's a strange sort of way to live, where you spend your entire life caring about one place, walking up those same black worn-down stairs every day.

AH: Well, also I've noticed that during this conversation that you had the self-effacing sense of humor, but I've also heard you also talk about being competitive. Now, I don't know so much that you felt competitive with the *Gazette* were there . . .?

CS: There was a time I was very competitive with the *Gazette*.

AH: And that was doing what?

CS: When I was going head to head with Paul Johnson, and he was beating my butt.

AH: Oh, on running.

CS: No, on the broadcasting column.

AH: Oh, okay, but then . . .

CS: He was like thirteen years in the broadcasting beat there. He had the networks giving him the tapes, so that he was able to be intelligent—he wrote previews about the season, and we had none of that. I mean, you would call up the network and say, "How come the guy at the *Gazette* has in today's paper a preview of a show that's going to start tonight?" And they'd said, "Well, we sent him the season tape." "Well, why didn't you send me the season tape?" And they'd say, "Well, Little Rock is not a very large market, we're not going to be sending everybody in Little Rock, Arkansas, copies of our tape." I'd say, "Well, you realize this is a statewide newspaper. This state has *two* statewide newspapers, and I am the other statewide newspaper." And I think ABC was the one that I convinced to *send me* some tapes. But I would have to go over to Channel 7 and get their production guys to show me their feeds of things, and I would have to go over to Channel 4 and beg them for help. Going head-to-head with Paul was going head to head with someone—who not only was a creative and wonderful writer and a good decent guy—who had the resources of having been in his job for a quite a while and knew how to work it. The only thing I had going for me was just sheer energy.

AH: Right.

CS: So, I felt very competitive with him, and I usually failed when we were going head-to-head. [Laughs]

AH: But all the pieces together though, I mean, at some point though, all of the efforts that we made over here, even though they felt futile some of the time, most of the time, you know, we did ebb away at their lead in advertising and circulation . . .

CS: And circulation did pretty well, too. Some things we did do well.

AH: What do you think we did well?

CS: Well, the recreation coverage. I know that's a small area, but I think we did that well. And we did better—we improved in our city coverage in lots of ways. We really did. I mean; there was a point where I would start reading the *Democrat* first to see what we said had happened. State coverage I don't know because it was just never as real to me as the stuff that I could see going on around me because I lived in the central part of the state. I don't know how we stacked up in our statewide coverage. Compared to them.

AH: How did you feel when Starr died?

CS: Relieved.

AH: Why relieved? Obviously he was out of your life.

CS: Well not—it's one of those things where there's—there are relationships where you have bilateral communication, and there are relationships where one side of the relationship is a whole lot more invested and troubled by the person than the other. This is one of those situations where he was a big, confusing figure for me. So he mattered a great deal, even though I was no longer looking at him day-in and day-out, and the fact that he had not respected me was a big blow that I had to get over. You know? And it mattered to me. I ran into him—when I was living with Michael's mother while she died of cancer, I ran into him and Norma over at Baptist [Hospital] a couple of times, in the cafeteria over there, because he was going in for more work on his heart. And we would have real pleasant conversations. Afterwards I would realize that he didn't really have the kind of opinion of me that I thought he did. I was just somebody who used to work in his office. It was okay. He wasn't walking around thinking, "Oh that Cecelia Storey, boy, was

she a disappointment, I put time and energy into her, and she just didn't pan out. She quit because she wanted to be a mother." He didn't have that opinion at all. I was just somebody who worked for him. That was reassuring. Made me feel a whole lot better about myself. Then when he died, I was frankly relieved because that means that's where the story ends. I don't have to have someday a horrible discovery that he was disappointed in you, and yes, he was sorry that you were such a disappointment. You know? You know how the story ends after somebody dies.

AH: I think that was probably difficult for his relationship with a lot of people. I think that he would—if you did something that didn't fit into his agenda, that he would do that thing to cut you down. Like what happened with you and the day that you decided to quit. That was his attempt to control you. But, like you're saying, you were much more bothered by it than he was bothered by it.

CS: That's right.

AH: It would have been the kind of thing that he would have said and then just forgotten about and wouldn't have dwelled on it. But you did dwell on it. I think that that also affected the relationship he had with a lot of people here in the newsroom—never thought he'd generate so much animosity. I mean, you were either with him or against him, and a lot more people were against him than they were with him. You know. Garry Hoffmann was someone who quit in frustration over dealing with him.

CS: I was sure sorry when Garry left. I mean, there are some people who make it—like we were talking about Amanda Husted. There are some people who make the job easier. Just because they have a good nature and Garry was one of those

guys. I was sorry when he was gone.

AH: Well, can you think of anything else you want to talk about?

CS: I think we need to stop talking because frankly, we've already—the archives have already given me far more attention than I deserve.

AH: [Laughs] That's not true.

CS: Well, that's a good place to end.

AH: Okay. Thank you.

CS: Thank you.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Lu Ann Smith-Lacy]