Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
Special Collections Department
University of Arkansas Libraries
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-5330

Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Bill Taylor
Little Rock, Arkansas
26 April 2006

Interviewers: Meredith Oakley

Meredith Oakley: This is Meredith Oakley. Today is April 26, 2006. This interview is part of the [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History]'s project on the *Arkansas Democrat*. We will transcribe this interview and make it available for those interested in Arkansas history. We will give you the opportunity to review the transcript, Bill, at which point you will sign a release. All I need you to do now is tell me your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Center permission to use this tape and make the transcription available to others.

Bill Taylor: Well, I'm Bill Taylor and I'm willing to do that.

MO: And can I get you to go ahead and sign on that top line, which is the release form? And you will see the transcript before it's accepted. Thank you.

[Tape Stopped]

MO: All right. I am Meredith Oakley, and I am interviewing Bill Taylor. Bill, to start

out, just please give me some basic biographical information: your name, where you're from, who your folks were—that sort of thing.

BT: Well, my name, of course, is William Thomas Taylor. Everyone knows me as Bill. I was named after my two grandfathers. I was born in Bearden, Arkansas, on July 9, 1928. All of my Arkansas ancestors came to Arkansas in the early 1800s and all settled in Dallas County. My mother's family, which was the House family, settled at Holly Springs.

MO: House? H-O-U-S-E?

BT: Yes. And my daddy's people, the Taylors, settled at a little community called Jacinto, which is just outside of Princeton.

MO: Jacinto with a J?

BT: Yes.

MO: J-A-C-I-N-T-A?

BT: T-O.

MO: Oh?

BT: T-O. Yes. I've always speculated [laughs] where that name came from. But they had a Princeton mailing address, and at that time Princeton was the county seat, or Princeton was the first county seat of Dallas County. When the Cotton Belt Rail-road was built, it changed all that because they picked the route that came through Fordyce. And, of course, all the growth began around—shifted to the railroad area and the little town died. But it was quite prominent. Some of Arkansas's early leaders came from out of that area—Princeton, Tulip, and there was—in fact—oh, I forget his name now, but the writer for the *Arkansas Gazette* years ago that wrote kind of about—what do you call this?

MO: Arkansas Traveler-type of column?

BT: Yes. He did a story on that area one time, and the heading was something like, "It was the Athens of the South." There was that much intellectual activity.

MO: Was there someone before Charles Allbright?

BT: Yes. Yes. Oh, you said Charles Allbright? I'm sorry, it was Ernie Dean.

MO: It was someone before him.

BT: It was before Charles, and his name will come to me at another time. [Laughs] But, anyway, that's where my family all settled and sort of have my roots there. I started to school at Sparkman, Arkansas, in 1934, and then the family moved to Smackover in 1935. We lived there, actually, until 1940. But in 1938, which was, I think, the worst year of the [Great] Depression, my mother and I went to live on the farm with her parents at Holly Springs, and my two sisters went to live with Grandmother Taylor, which was about three miles from there in the same community. And my dad just stayed in Smackover and worked. We were there about a year and then we went back to Smackover. But then my mother and father separated and divorced in 1940, and my mother moved—came to Little Rock with me. My two sisters had married by that time. So that's how I arrived in Little Rock, which turned out to be a wonderful thing for me.

MO: So your forbearers were farmers in Dallas County?

BT: Yes.

MO: And the war sort of—the Depression years, anyway, sort of changed the makeup of your immediate family, and you and your mother came to Little Rock where you went to school. Where did you go to school here?

BT: I started at the—of course, it was in the summer—we moved here in the summer

before junior high school, and so I went to East Side Junior High School, which was down here at Fourteenth and Scott. It's now an apartment building for handicapped people, I think. But I went through junior high school there, and then that's where I met my wife. We started dating when we were in junior high school

MO: Really?

BT: Yes.

MO: And her name was . . .?

BT: Juanita.

MO: What was her maiden name?

BT: Johnson. Her name was Johnson. And we went to high school, then, in Little Rock High School in the fall of 1943, and later graduated from there. I started to work with this newspaper as a carrier boy in June of 1941, just before my thirteenth birthday.

MO: How about that? What was your route?

BT: Well, I go through my route every day going to and from work. The route number was F-21. We had districts. Back then, they were alphabetical, and I picked my papers up at Third and Cross. There was a service station there. It's now a parking lot. [Laughs] And I delivered the area from Cross Street to Bishop. That's where the viaduct is, and from Fourth Street down to Markham. I had that route for a year. Interesting enough, my district manager was Herbert Jones, who founded the Jones Toyota foreign car business here in Arkansas.

MO: How about that?

BT: But I carried the route for a year, and then he put me on the payroll as what the

title then was a coach. My job was to train carriers—new carrier boys when they took over their routes. I taught them their routes and taught them how to do solicitations and do the collecting, which we all did then. We didn't have people who paid through the office. We had to keep our own books. But for a year I also continued with my route. So for a year's time there I had my route which I delivered. Of course, we were an afternoon newspaper then. The reason I was able to do both jobs was that I got out of school an hour early. I went an hour early in the morning and I got out an hour early in the afternoon. So my papers were spotted or dropped there at Third and Cross Street, so I could deliver my route and get to the substation at Fourteenth and Marshal, where the other twenty carriers on that district got their papers, and be there in time to deliver another route and train carriers and that type of thing. So for a year I did both of those, and then I gave my route up, but continued working as coach.

MO: How much *was* the newspaper then?

BT: Well, a single copy on the streets was three cents daily and a nickel on Sunday—twenty cents a week for home delivery—eighty-five cents a month if you paid by the month. And sometime, probably within a year or so after we got into the [World] War [II], the single price went up to five cents daily and seven cents Sunday, and twenty-three cents a week or a dollar a month if you paid by the month.

MO: So were you in a . . .?

BT: I was on a route. I started in the summer, and I was on a route—like, I had a route just a little over six months when Pearl Harbor [Hawaii] was bombed. So—of course, that was on a Sunday. We put out an "extra," and I had the experience of

selling, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!"

MO: *That* must have been exciting.

BT: Well, in retrospect . . .

MO: You were fifteen?

BT: What?

MO: You were fifteen—something like that?

BT: Oh, let's see—oh, no, I wasn't—this was 1941. I was still thirteen.

MO: Okay.

BT: We had six districts in the city where carrier boys picked up for that neighborhood—you know, substation. And on each of our districts we had a football team and a basketball team. We had competition. We would play football on Sunday morning after we got through with our routes on up in the morning. And so the boys from over in District E, which was North Little Rock and the boys from my district were playing—we played on the deaf school grounds—their football field. And probably around noon or slightly after noon, I happened to look down on Markham Street, and I saw Mr. Jones—Herbert Jones's car drive up and stop. I thought, "Well, what's he doing here?" [Laughs] Well, he was coming to get all of us to take us to sell extra papers. And so every morning as I come to work I pass the deaf school [laughs]—I think about, "Well, this is where I was when Pearl Harbor—I learned [about] Pearl Harbor. Then I come on down Third Street and I turn through the Capitol and make that little turn, and I pass the corner where I saw Juanita for the first time; I had just finished my paper route on an afternoon and was walking home. I lived on Wright Avenue at the time, and I would walk right through there.

MO: So you walked your route? You didn't have a bicycle?

BT: Well, I could do either, but at first I started out on a bicycle and then I walked it more than I used a bike. It didn't make much difference. At that age you don't think anything about walking three or four or five miles. So I was walking from—I finished up at Third and High Street, where there was a service station—two service stations, in fact—and was walking through the Capitol grounds and right there on the corner by the old Capitol Hill apartments—why, there was this pretty little girl that I'd never seen before. I knew the boy she was with because we were in school together. That would've been in really late August of 1942, and just before school started. When school started, she was going to East Side. She had transferred from—they had moved to a different location, and so she was now in the East Side School District rather than West Side. That just so happened—they put her—I walked into a classroom, and there she was sitting there. There was a vacant seat next to her, and I took it.

[Skip in Recording]

BT: . . . sat here. It was another six months before I'd have a date with her. She was pretty popular. But once we started dating, which was on Monday, March 23, 1943, why, we never stopped.

MO: You remember the date?

BT: Oh, the second-most important day of my life.

MO: What was the first?

BT: We were married on Sunday, Christmas Eve, 1944. We completed our last two years of high school after we were married. That was sort of a—took a miracle to make it work out the way it did. It had nothing to do with the newspaper, but we

were—we thought we could get married in Benton. Of course, there were a lot of justices of the peace in Benton. That's where everybody from Little Rock under age went to get married. Of course, we had the consent of her parents as well as my mother. In fact, they went with us. When I told the justice of the peace—when he asked me my age and I told him, he said, "Well, I can't marry you. If you had told me you were twenty-one, I wouldn't have questioned you. But since you've told me your actual age, I can't marry you." So I thought that was the end of the world. My future stepfather, who was with us at that time, was from Searcy, and his father still lived at Searcy. So he called—this was on a Saturday—he called us early Sunday morning and said he had talked to his father in Searcy, who worked at the courthouse. So we went to Searcy on Sunday, Christmas Eve, and opened up the courthouse and he issued us a marriage license. And I guess it was his church that had just moved into a new—his congregation had just moved into a new church building downtown, and they were celebrating that day. They were still meeting at 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon. So after we got our license, he took us down to this church—walked up—interrupted what was going on. They stopped everything, and we had a church wedding. And that was the beginning of fifty-three years.

MO: Fifty-three years.

BT: Yes.

MO: Juanita was later the religion editor for the *Arkansas Democrat*.

BT: Yes. Yes, you knew her.

MO: Yes.

BT: She raised those four kids—those six kids . . .

MO: Four.

BT: I'm sorry, I can't count very well. When our youngest child, Suzette, was fourteen years old, Juanita entered college and majored in Journalism. Just at the time that she finished, Bob Sallee was doing the religion column [laughs] because he didn't have anybody. And she came in for an interview and she didn't even get to go home for lunch. [Laughs] He just brought her stacks of stuff and said, "Here!" [Laughter] So that started—she was, of course, here some twelve, almost thirteen years.

MO: So did you go to college?

BT: Yes. It was nine years after I graduated from high school and we had three children. Of course, I was working here all the time that I entered UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock], except it was Little Rock Junior College. And I only thought I'd get to do two years, but as it turned out in my second year there, they went to a four-year school. So I got to do four years and get my degree. I had three children when I entered, and there was five at my graduation exercises.

MO: What degree did you get?

BT: Well, it's in psychology.

MO: In psychology?

BT: Yes.

MO: That comes in handy in your line of work.

BT: Well, it put names on kind of what I had already learned, you know, about—I learned so much on my paper route about people. I had 150 subscribers that I delivered to—I was responsible to them. I went there once a week and collected from them. I ran into situations, you know, that I gained some experience and

some knowledge . . .

MO: What *were* some of them? Who were some of the characters on your route?

BT: Well, the one that really stands out in my mind I think that taught me the best lesson—a very good lesson—I had—there was quite a few young war brides that lived on my route. This was right there—well, near the train station, which didn't have anything to do with it, except I saw a lot of soldiers come through [laughs] on trains when I was delivering. There were several apartments on my route that were just regular apartment buildings and then a lot of houses that had been developed into three and four apartments. In this particular case—one that I remember—and this house is still standing, and I go past it every now and then—I was collecting as I delivered on Saturday afternoon, which was not unusual. And this young lady—her husband was stationed at Camp Robinson, and she was there in her apartment upstairs. I had gone up there to take the paper and also to collect. And I don't remember what was said, but she just jumped all over me. [Laughs] You know, I'm a thirteen-year-old kid—bewildered! But I left and I gave her her paper, and I left. On Monday, when I was delivering my route, she caught me when I came into the building and came up to leave her paper, and she apologized. She said—and I don't know where her home was, but she could've been 1,000 miles away from home for the first time in her life. She said, "I just got some bad news from home, and you were the first person I saw after that." So all my life, whenever someone has responded irrationally to something that has happened—what I've said or done—I realize that their anger is not directed at me, but what I said or did didn't justify their behavior—they're reacting to something else, and it's kept me from ever fighting back. As a result of that, always get

things worked out.

MO: Yes.

BT: But that's really the one. And then I remember the honesty of people. The paper was twenty cents a week and I collected each week. I can remember more than one customer who would get out of work and there would be maybe two or three weeks when they couldn't pay their paper bill, but I would keep delivering the paper. And then when they would go back to work, they would pay me. Each Saturday they would pay me twenty cents for that week and give me ten cents on their sixty-cent balance until they got it paid up. When we moved to Little Rock—my mother worked in a laundry. She made $6 a week. That was all the income she had. She was a good manager, and we had a—used to have a one-room apartment, and I never missed a meal.

MO: Is that why you went to work for the newspaper—because of the need to help out the family?

BT: No, I just wanted to work. [Laughter] As a kid in Smackover, I used to make extra money with scrap metal—you know, finding scrap metal. There was a big junk yard there that would buy it. Of course, I found out later they were sending it to Japan and they were later shooting it back at us [laughs], but I didn't know that *then*. But it did help. Once I had a paper route, then I could buy my own clothes and take care of school supplies and movie money. MO: Now, how were you paid as a carrier and just how were you paid as a coach?

BT: As a carrier, the same situation exists today—you really aren't paid—you buy your papers. We're independent contractors, so we'd get paper bills each week that had to be paid, and we would collect from our customers and pay our paper

bill. And the difference between what we collected and what we owed would be our profit. I think on my route at that time I made about eight cents a week per subscription. Of course, if I failed to collect from someone—someone would happen to move away or whatnot—it was just a loss that I took. But that route had a little better rate on it because it did have apartments than a route that had just a complete residential area where folks lived there and lived there and lived there. You know, they didn't move like that. It would not have been a paycheck because the employees got paid in cash then. Yes, up until—we were still paying in cash after Mr. [Stanley] Berry and Marcus [George] became owners of the newspaper. Jean Bradley can tell you all about that because she was part of that group—she was in payroll when they would count the money out.

MO: So were you paid like everyone else? You came down here and got your pay [ ]?

BT: Well, I didn't, actually. On Saturdays, Mr. Jones would just have a little voucher for me, and I would sign the voucher. And, of course, he had money that carriers had turned in to pay their paper bills. So he would just take $5.94 out of the cash bag and give it to me, but my signed voucher was for six dollars. Six cents was for Social Security. And I think we probably did that for more than a year and then it changed over to where on Saturday I had to come down here and go to the payroll department and pick up my money, but it was still cash.

MO: Who paid you when you had to come down here to payroll? I had heard that Mr. [K. August] Engel handed out the money.

BT: No, no. Not when I was here. Well, Roy Bragg was the business manager. He was in charge of that business office, which was up in the corner. Fannie Eat-

man—I don't know what Fannie's title would have been. There was an office, and that's where the payroll money was. So you went in there and they had little envelopes. And it had a tear-off slip on the outside which you signed, and they kept that as a receipt that you had gotten your money. And then you had the envelope with your cash in it and, of course, it had the breakdown on it for total amount and then Social Security, which was the only deduction.

MO: There was no insurance or anything like that?

BT: No, we didn't have anything. We had nothing then. I was told—and I'm sure this is a true story—I guess Ralph Casey told me this—that during the Depression that Mr. Engel had gone to business people around town—merchants—and encouraged them to continue advertising because, of course, the newspaper needed that, plus the merchants needed to do it. And he would take part of payment in cash or check or whatever—or a lot of times just cash—and part in vouchers, and as an employee you would get some of your money in cash and you would get vouchers which you could use to purchase shoes or clothing or whatnot.

MO: So you got part of your salary in cash and part of it in vouchers for other merchants?

BT: Yes, I was told that was during the Depression, and I thought that was really creative on his part. It enabled an advertiser to keep advertising. It enabled the newspaper to still have revenue. And these were things that every employee could use, you know? They were more or less coupons for clothing and other merchandise. But that didn't still exist when I went to work for him.

MO: When did you meet publisher K. A. Engel?

BT: You know, I never actually met the man.

MO: Really?

BT: I was never introduced to Mr. Engel. Probably starting about 1943, whenever we had to start coming down here to get our money, I would sometimes see him. Now, he lived in the Capitol Hill apartments, and the carrier boy, who was a friend of mine, had had that route. Capitol Hill was just off of my route. But he delivered the paper to Mr. Engel, but he'd have to come down here to collect. [Laughter] He was quite an impressive man—always neatly dressed—always carried himself very well—stately. He was a stocky fellow—wore double-breasted suits. I can remember him wearing gray-colored suits more than any other kind.

MO: Dark gray?

BT: What?

MO: Dark gray?

BT: No, they were a light gray is what I remember. You know, he was a very—I don't know if the man ever spoke to me, you know? Probably not. He was a very reserved person and a very formal—if he had known me for fifty years he would probably have still been referring to me as Mr. Taylor, as with some of his old-time employees, he would have. I was told a story by somebody which I think would be a true story. I don't think they could've made this up. Of course, you know, the competition the *Democrat* and the [*Arkansas*] *Gazette* always existed, but it was a friendly competition. Like, when they had a fire over at the *Gazette* in their pressroom, Mr. Engel offered them the use of our presses if they needed them to get the paper out.

MO: Really? When was that?

BT: Oh, I'd be afraid to go back to—it was a long time ago.

MO: This was a story you heard, though?

BT: Probably in the 1950s.

MO: Oh.

BT: Yes. Possibly in the 1950s.

MO: You working here at the time that happened?

BT: Yes. Yes. But they got their damage repaired to where they could put out the paper. But he and Mr. Heiskell would've been friendly competitors.

MO: That's publisher J. N. Heiskell . . .

BT: Yes.

MO: . . . at the *Arkansas Gazette*.

BT: And the story I was told was that they were at some social occasion and got into a conversation, and Mr. Engel said, "Mr. Heiskell, do you subscribe to my paper?" And he answered. Mr. Heiskell said, "Well, yes, Mr. Engel, I subscribe to it, but I don't read it." [Laughter] So Mr. Engel said, "Well, what do you do with it?" And he said, "Well, I feed it to my goat."

MO: [Laughs]

BT: So Mr. Engel said to him, "Mr. Heiskell, one of these mornings you're going to wake up—your goat's going to be smarter than *you* are." [Laughs]

MO: Good story.

BT: And probably quite true. But it kind of sounds like both of them. Of course, I never had any direct association with him whatsoever. He didn't deal with very many people. He *would* come into the business office every now and then, and I worked in the business office back when Jean was there. I had three different jobs

here at that time, and one of them was I worked out of the business office, but I spent some time working there in it rather than out in—we used to go out and collect for classified ads. People didn't have checking accounts, and we'd mail them a bill, but within a few days I was one of three of the young men who would be knocking on their door, which they considered a favor, really. They didn't have to make a trip to town to pay. And I just lost my train of thought.

MO: You were talking about having three different jobs. Was this one of them while you were the coach?

BT: Oh, yes. Yes, I did—no, this was after I did that—I was a coach all the way until after I got out of high school. I had the motor route I've talked about, and I worked in the mailing room on Saturday night stuffing papers and tying bundles. It was back when we tied the bundles with grass rope.

MO: Yes.

BT: And then in the mornings I would work in the business office.

MO: This was after high school?

BT: Yes. Yes. Gosh, I had something important I was going to tell you there and I sidetracked myself.

MO: Well, we were talking about your three jobs and working in the corner office.

BT: Yes. How did I get off on some of that? Oh, well.

MO: We can come back if you think of it.

BT: Yes.

MO: That's not a problem. That's not a problem.

BT: Oh.

MO: So tell me, then, about your transition from paperboy to, I guess, more secure

[laughter] or warmer work or something. Where did you—how did you evolve from paperboy to where you were?

BT: The most enjoyable thing I ever did, really, was my motor route. I loved that motor route and the people on it, and I made good money on it. In fact, when I became a salaried employee I took a cut. [Laughs] I was making more money delivering papers than—I had this motor route from 1947 to 1956. Really, it started—the route started at Scenic Hill. Originally, it started at Scenic Hill and I delivered a portion of Levy out to Camp Robinson and then all the way to Mayflower, and everything in between. Of course, we began having a lot of population growth out that way during that time, and the route grew to the point at one time I was delivering to 950 subscribers and collecting from all these people each month at their door . . .

MO: [Laughs]

BT: . . . which was a pretty full-time job.

MO: I can imagine. Did you use the little books with tabs on them . . .

BT: Yes.

MO: . . . that you tore off?

BT: Yes. Yes, we had gotten around to that. Originally, when I first started we had a book that you had to fill out with a pencil.

MO: Oh, my.

BT: But we did that. As the area—Levy and Lakewood and Park Hill and all began to develop, they wanted to take that portion of the route and turn it into, like, boy delivery where you deliver the papers to the porch and that type of thing. And they wanted me to take over the district as the district manager, and so that's what we

did. In 1956 I established this district with—I think I started it with seventeen routes, and I stayed on that district as district manager for five years until 1961. I think when I went off the district I had about forty-five routes. But we had taken in Sherwood, and, of course, Lakewood had grown, and Levy had grown, and the whole thing. And so . . .

MO: But you were *managing* carriers?

BT: Yes, I was the district manager for that area. And then they offered me a job as zone manager in the state covering south Arkansas. There would have been three district managers—three districts down there. That would have been my responsibility. I didn't accept the job initially. I guess they must have offered it to me—I can't really remember when—but we had a new baby at that time, and this would've required me to be out of town three or four days—nights—a week.

MO: Yes.

BT: But a year later—and a year later would've been in 1961—I felt like I could do that, and it was a promotion and it was—it turned out to be very interesting. I enjoyed it very much being out in the state in small towns and dealing with those people.

MO: Yes.

BT: And so I was a zone manager, then, for five years, until 1966.

MO: How many counties did you have to travel to and how often?

BT: Well, my zone—the south zone—the Arkansas River divided the north zone from the south zone. So everything [laughs] in there.

MO: I love it.

BT: Of course, in those days there were areas of the state that we really didn't circu-

late in. Like, in Fort Smith—we had papers going into Fort Smith, but not many, and they would've just gone into the racks around town. We didn't have any home delivery. Texarkana—we didn't have home delivery in Texarkana. We had a newsstand down there that we sent papers to. So there was a lot of area that we had no circulation in, but . . .

MO: So where did you primarily visit?

BT: What?

MO: Where was the primary circulation in the south district—south zone?

BT: Well, we were—you know, we had good circulation—like, down Highway 65 and McGehee and Crossett. I guess on the other end—El Dorado, of course, would've been a prominent area over to about Magnolia. That was really about as—that was as far as we—no, it wasn't—we went on to Lewisville. Those papers went by bus. I usually left town on Tuesday to go out—kind of—you would go where your trouble was when you had problems. But I tried to spend some time each week with each of my three managers—I'd spend—whether they had any problems or not—you know, and try to be in their district for a day and spend time with them about their district. So I would—where I didn't have problems, that kept me out there. I would come home usually late Thursday night. After I got through Thursday night I would come back to Little Rock. So I'd be gone usually Tuesday night, Wednesday night, and maybe until close to midnight Thursday night.

MO: Yes. That must've been hot weather travel in those days—freeways?

BT: What?

MO: Were there freeways?

BT: Oh, no, and there wasn't air-conditioning [laughs] either. Yes, it was a little different. I was zone manager there for five years until 1966. We'd had some personnel changes here. Our state circulation manager at that time became our—we didn't have a circulation director like we have now. You know, like with Larry Graham. He would've been called the circulation manager. We had a circulation manager and then we had a "city" circulation manager, and we had a "country" circulation manager. They dropped "country" somewhere, but I liked that title better than I do "state" circulation manager.

MO: Why?

BT: Oh, I like the "country. I was from the country. I—it just has a nice sound. "State" sounds like I'm in charge of everything, you know?

MO: And what *is* that title now?

BT: It's state circulation. I've been state circulation manager from—I don't know when they changed the title. But the state circulation manager became the circulation manager, and so then he told me I was the "country" circulation manager.

MO: That was in 1966?

BT: Yes.

MO: And you're still doing that?

BT: Yes. [Laughter] He didn't ask me if I wanted the job. You know, I've never interviewed for a job. It struck me years ago, if I had to go looking for a job, I wouldn't know—I wouldn't *interview* worth a darn. [Laughter] I wouldn't know what to do.

MO: But the opportunities found you?

BT: I'm just lucky—very fortunate in marriage and in work. You know, I thought to

just grow up in a business where I really like to come to work every day. I've never woke up in the morning and said, "God, I *hate* to go to work." I've gotten up in the morning wanting to go to work, and either do it reasonable well enough that they've kept me here, or nobody's ever noticed that I'm here and they just keep paying me and I just keep coming back, you know? [Laughs] Shortly before Mr. [Walter E.] Hussman [Jr.] bought the paper—I'm not sure what the economic situation was, but it was very difficult keeping carriers on all the routes. They really weren't making enough money, and so we had lots and lots of carrier turnover. I was very fortunate that I had a lot of men who were very loyal to me and to the company, and they kept working under circumstances that caused them to work every day.

MO: They had to take on other duties because there weren't people to do them?

BT: Well, they were always delivering a route. In fact, I had—at one time I kept a list on my desk of all the routes that we didn't have carriers for and who was delivering them, and I kept myself in reserve to, you know, "Okay, there's nobody to deliver *this* one." See, I have . . .

MO: So you have delivered papers since your promotion?

BT: Oh, Lord, yes. I delivered three motor routes one afternoon in Benton, only I went down there to deliver two. But after I finished those up and started back, I saw where a carrier hadn't picked up their papers, and so I delivered three. I have—this sounds like [ ] I've done this—I did what was necessary. I have left Little Rock—again, when we were an afternoon paper—I'd come to the office in the morning. I've left here at noon and driven to Harrison and picked up the papers for the motor route that went to Eureka Springs and delivered that route and

drive back into Little Rock and repeat the same thing the next morning. And, you know, similar things to that.

MO: Did you have a car allowance for that?

BT: What?

MO: Did you get a car allowance?

BT: Oh, yes, we got paid mileage. Yes. Yes. Of course, we still had the regular stuff—work here, you know, that needed to be done. When we changed from evening paper to morning paper, I was amazed at how little turnover in carriers we had. I thought that we had carriers who could do afternoon routes, but couldn't deliver morning routes, but we really didn't have that, so that wasn't a real problem. But with the bundle haulers, it—especially one or two—it was a real problem. Back then, at that same time, our presses were worn out. Sometimes we'd run two hours late, three hours late. You never knew.

MO: You're talking about during the time Walter E. Hussman, Jr., bought the paper in 1974?

BT: This . . .

MO: Oh, you're talking about going to morning.

BT: Yes. I think I kind of jumped over it there.

MO: That's okay.

BT: But when Walter—after he bought the paper, he recognized he was going to have to spent more money than what was being spent in the circulation department. So we began to raise the level to where the carriers could make more money. And that, plus the recession. We had a recession back in the 1970s, and that kind of stabilized people. If they had something that was making money, they stayed

with it. But that was probably the toughest time. The hardest time for us was prior to Walter buying the newspaper.

MO: Bill, I'd like to talk about that, but would you like to break for a while and take this up again later? I've kept you talking for quite a while.

BT: Oh, you have?

MO: Yes.

BT: Well, let's see.

MO: And you're beginning to cough, so I was thinking you may need a break.

[Recording Stopped]

MO: Okay, we're resuming now. You were talking about the times before the morning transition. I'd sort of like to go back to, I guess, the last years of K. A. Engel—going back to the [Little Rock Central High School] integration crisis of 1957, because I know that had an impact on the newspapers in Little Rock.

BT: Yes.

MO: I'm wondering what type of impact it had on the *Arkansas Democrat*.

BT: Well, we had a very large increase in circulation. I was district manager at that time. Of course, I knew—and I was over in a blue-collar area—my district was over in Levy, and I knew what kind of response was going on. I forget now just what the figures were, but I think the circulation—the *Gazette* lost something like 20,000 circulation within a very short time, and we picked up about 10,000 of that.

MO: Was this attributable to the editorial policy of the *Gazette* or . . .?

BT: Yes.

MO: . . . a combination of the editorial policy of the *Democrat*. What *was* the *Democ-*

rat's stance?

BT: Well, I'm not sure I'm an authority on that. As you know from your experience, the *Gazette* was very strong in their editorials for integration. My impression was the *Democrat* was not anti-integration. In fact, I understood that Mr. Engel's instructions to reporters and to that division that they just report, that they not put any opinions into their reporting. I think we got the reputation, maybe in some quarters, of being segregationists because we weren't—they were comparing us to the *Gazette*, which was considered to be an integrationist.

MO: Were we more neutral, editorially?

BT: I would say we were—I wasn't reading editorials back in those days. I think we were close to neutral. I'm sure we had some editorials asking that the law be respected and for law and order and that type of thing. And we didn't—from a circulation standpoint, we didn't try to take advantage of this or talk about it or promote it. I had at that time twenty-five or thirty carrier boys. And, of course, we did regular solicitations. I mean, we had two nights a week that we went out and did solicitations. And I had told my carriers in my meetings with them that I didn't want them talking about that. "You don't need to talk about that. Just go and knock on the doors and tell the people you're the *Democrat* carrier on their route," and that's basically what they did. Of course, a lot of these people had already stopped their *Gazette* subscription. But we picked up a lot of subscribers at that. The *Gazette* did a really—I forget who their circulation manager was, but he did a really smart thing. He knew something about human nature. They kept filling their racks—their boxes around town. They put lots and lots of papers in them, and he didn't care whether they were stolen or what. He knew that there

was people who had discontinued their paper, you know; they were mad, they were angry, but they were still *Gazette* readers—had been for twenty or thirty years, and he knew that they would not—they wouldn't go without the *Gazette* for long.

MO: [Laughs]

BT: So he made these papers available to them, and it wasn't too long . . .

MO: So their rack sales must have been a little healthier.

BT: Part of these were not paid for. I'm not sure. But he didn't really care because back then we had honor racks. These were honor racks/

MO: That's right.

BT: So you could get papers without paying for them. But he kept the people reading, and then it wasn't too long before they'd find any excuse to stop the *Democrat* and take the *Gazette*—any kind of little service problem. And so, gradually—it was probably several months that went by, but then they began to recover some of their circulation.

MO: So, really, it was only a few months in which the *Democrat* circulation benefited from the *Gazette*'s political problems?

BT: Yes, maybe a year.

MO: Yes.

BT: It would be hard to say. I understand there were business people in Little Rock that tried to get Mr. Engel to go to a morning paper at that time.

MO: Really?

BT: Yes. Again, I just heard that, and it would kind of make sense. I mean, they wanted a morning paper for advertising purposes, but they didn't want the *Ga-*

zette. But, of course, he didn't do that for whatever the reason.

MO: Well, what *was* the circulation differential between the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* in, say the 1950s and 1960s?

BT: Oh, I don't know. Really, I don't. I think we exceeded them in total circulation for a really short period of time. Where they dropped about 20,000, we picked up about 10,000, so I guess in there was your differential because that . . .

MO: Yes.

BT: I think I'm remembering correctly that just for a short time we had a slight edge in total circulation. But, of course, the *Gazette* delivered in a lot of areas out in the state that we didn't cover at that time. As a morning paper, going to press at maybe 10:00 at night, they could get to places in the state and have morning delivery . . .

MO: Yes.

BT: . . . whereas with our afternoon paper, by the time—if we tried to circulate in those areas, it would've been *dark* [laughs] when we got there with our papers.

MO: Do you think that had something to do with the fact that we were more a central Arkansas or a Little Rock newspaper than a statewide newspaper—with the afternoon schedule?

BT: Oh, I don't know. I never thought about it. It was probably just economics. You know, there's not any real revenue for a newspaper from an advertising standpoint. Any circulation we have in Jonesboro I'm sure cost us money. We don't get any—Jonesboro businesses aren't going to advertise in our paper. So when you're circulating way out there in the A-O area . . .

MO: A-O?

BT: "All Other." I'm sorry. In our circulation, you know, we have our city zone, retail trade zone, and then everything else is A-O or "All Other." Our retail trade zone goes out, oh, from seventy-five to 100 miles from Little Rock. McGehee is in the retail trade zone. Guidon is in the retail trade zone. Batesville is in the retail trade zone. But then when you get out of Independence County into Sharp County, you're getting into A-O.

MO: Yes.

BT And Russellville is in the retail trade zone, but Clarksville is in the "All Other."

MO: I see.

BT: So those are just—you don't—a newspaper doesn't get a lot of advertising revenue from A-O. The one area it does help in is with national advertising—you know, the national advertising. But Little Rock merchants aren't going to be interested in paying high advertising rates to deliver in Marmaduke [laughs], for instance.

MO: Yes. Makes sense.

BT: Yes, I think so.

MO: But, still, the *Democrat* must've had a fairly strong circulation base as an afternoon newspaper for a time.

BT: We did. We did. You know, I've forgotten these figures that I used to know, but most of the large newspapers in this country . . .

[Recording ends at 0:58:43 on CD 1]

[Beginning of CD 2]

MO: Okay, if I could get you to repeat that most were active . . .

BT: Yes. Most of the large newspapers in the country were afternoon papers. Here,

again, I'm not swearing by my figures now, but I kind of remember these—in Arkansas, there were—in the 1940s, maybe on into the 1950s—there were thirty-five daily newspapers, and twenty-nine of those were afternoon papers. So any town that we went into—we'll take Conway. We were an afternoon newspaper, but the *Log Cabin Democrat* was an afternoon newspaper. So when we went into Conway in the afternoon, we were competing with the local paper for readership . . .

MO: Yes.

BT: . . . whereas—because we were on the same time schedule. The *Gazette* going in there in the morning, you know, had many—several times the circulation that we had in Conway. The *Gazette* as a morning paper only had five other morning papers to compete with. One of those was in Texarkana, which is a *long* ways [laughs] from here. One was in El Dorado, which had a morning and evening, and Hot Springs had a morning and evening. Hot Springs was the only retail trade zone town that had a morning newspaper. The other morning newspapers were in A. O.—the ones I just named—and all. So that was the difference in competition, so out in the state in most towns the *Gazette* would've had more circulation than we had. Of course, they had less competition for the readership at the time. I don't know what those figures are today as far as morning, noon, and whatnot. But that's what they were then.

MO: What were the 1960s like? [Laughs[

BT: Let's see.

MO: During the late 1960s, Mr. Engel died, and his nephews [Marcus George and Stanley Berry] inherited the newspaper. That was around, what, 1968? Must've

been some dramatic changes then.

BT: Well, let me see. His nephews had the newspaper for five years. Walter bought it in, what . . .?

MO: 1974, I believe.

BT: 1973 or 1974. I think he was twenty-seven years old or had his twenty-seventh birthday after he bought it. He and my oldest son share a birthday. He was born in January 1947, so that would've been—if he was twenty-six or twenty-seven—about 1973 or 1974 when he bought the newspaper. [Note from Cheri: It was 1974, according to Hussman's own interview.] So Mr. Engel died about 1968—somewhere along there—1968, 1969.

MO: Now, I believe that Stanley Berry and Marcus George took over—it seems to me it was around 1968 and they had it for five or six years before selling.

BT: Yes, five, I think.

MO: But Mr. Engel had owned this newspaper for decades at that point.

BT: Since 1928, I think.

MO: So they're . . .

BT: They moved into this building in 1928.

MO: Where were they before? Do you know?

BT: Ralph Casey could tell you exactly. They were on Main Street. They were either in this block—the same block on Main Street or they were the next block down.

MO: I've heard this building was a Y.

BT: Yes, it was.

MO: YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]?

BT: Yes. So, evidently, the YMCA moved from here over to Broadway and Sixth

Street.

MO: Yes.

BT: See, where our old press used to sit would've been in the swimming pool.

MO: That's what I've heard, but I didn't know if that was the case.

BT: Yes.

MO: That's why the basement is so dank.

BT: Probably.

MO: [Laughs]

BT: Probably. And I think that's why the steps going out of here are small. They were—when the boys would come down here to swim, they would've been bare-footed.

MO: [Laughs] Right.

BT: And there would've been small steps compared to now.

MO: Yes.

BT: Yes.

MO: But you don't remember any immediate changes when Mr. Engel died and the nephews took over?

BT: No, there really wasn't any dramatic changes. Both nephews were already working here. Marcus was in the newsroom and Stanley had been here—Mr. Berry had been here several years—five or six years or so—in advertising, and sort of being trained—broken in to be a publisher, I think. I think Mr. Engle was trying [laughs] to teach him the business.

MO: Because Mr. Engel had not married and had no children.

BT: That's right. That's right. He did not. He had two sisters, because Marcus [and

Stanley]—you know, they were cousins, but they were from two different families.

MO: Yes.

BT: There were not any—I mean, nothing affected me. The operation just went on. But they were not, I guess, as good at managing as Mr. Engel was. But, you know, television each year became more and more a factor with an evening newspaper.

MO: Yes.

BT: And I think that's one thing that made it difficult.

MO: So circulation *did* decrease during that time?

BT: Yes, circulation did decrease. Advertising, of course, decreased along with it. But I suspect that decline had already started when Mr. Engel was still alive. But there were no dramatic changes made here.

MO: Was the newspaper still a fairly sizeable commodity? I remember in years after that it got very small.

BT: Oh, we were putting out some pretty small papers. Of course, during the World War II years, we put out really small papers—about eight pages. Saturday would be eight pages, almost too small to deliver. [Laughs] Of course, they had—I guess the one change they had made at some point—they—yes, they started publishing Saturday paper in the morning. We went to a morning Saturday paper before—even before Walter was here. Of course, that was an attempt to get advertising. Probably, automobile ads was what they were after. You know, people did most of their shopping on the weekends. And we *did* pick up some automobile dealers' advertising as a result.

MO: Well, when did the green sheets come about? Remember the final edition that was green?

BT: Hmm . . .

MO: For the purposes of the racks, I think.

BT: You know, I don't really—I remember the green sheets, or at least I hadn't thought about them. You know, we always had a final edition. In fact, as an afternoon newspaper, one time we printed six editions each afternoon.

MO: Six?

BT: The first two were called "home editions." We had a first and second home edition that, of course, hit the streets to be sold, but they weren't delivered in Little Rock. These went out into the state. The title "home" never did seem to fit, but I'm sure historically there was a reason for it. Then we had a "first city" and a "second city." The "first city," I think—our Pulaski County motor routes and the routes out on the fringe would've gotten that, and then the second city edition would've gone for most of Little Rock. Then they had the final, which went nowhere except to the newsstands and street sales. Then they had what was called a "night edition." There was only a few hundred on it, but it was used to—sent to mail subscribers that weren't going to get their paper for another day anyway. And I guess the reason for that was just to devote all the time earlier in the day to getting home deliveries and all that stuff taken care of it. Of course, it took a little longer to do mail subscriptions than what it would now. They just run through a computerized thing now, but back then they had to be labeled and all.

MO: Yes.

BT: And that's what they do. They had the night edition for that.

MO: I didn't realize that. How long did that continue? Or when did it stop?

BT: I don't know. [Laughs] A long time ago. [Laughter] I don't know when that stopped. Sorry.

MO: That's all right. Well, then, what do you remember—you don't remember anything remarkable about the nephews' time here. What about when Mr. Hussman took over? Surely, there were changes.

BT: Well, things began to change, but not dramatically. I mean, there wasn't any "housecleaning," as such. It was a little—I mean, there, again, I'm very, very fortunate, along with some other people—if most any chain had bought this newspaper, you know, I wouldn't have had a job here. They would've just come in and they would've cleaned out everything and brought their own people in. They wouldn't have bothered to find out whether I knew what I was doing or not. I mean, I understand that's the way they operate, you know? The first change, I guess, was made in advertising. Of course, Paul Smith came here with Walter. Let's see, Paul and Alan Berry. There was one other one who came from Texarkana, but then he—after a couple of years, he went back to Texarkana. So the advertising director that we had then—been around here a long time, and he lost interest and enthusiasm, and he really wasn't doing very much. So it wasn't long before Paul replaced him and took over the department. Then he had a pretty lethargic display advertising department. There were a couple of good ones. The rest of them just didn't do very much. In fact, a lot of times they left their morning meeting and, I understand, went to the *movies* [laughter] or whatnot. But, anyway . . .

MO: They must not have worked on commission.

BT: They did, they just weren't very ambitious. You know, they were willing to settle.

MO: Hmm.

BT: Paul's approach to that, and this is interesting—the reaction to it was—he announced to them that every Friday the two lowest producers for the week would be terminated, and they *were*, week after week, and he'd bring new people in. And some of these people [laughs] never got the message. They just kept hanging on until they fell in that category. And so, over a period of time, he build up a pretty livewire advertising group. The other change Mr. Hussmann made was in the circulation department after two or three months or so; he terminated the circulation manager, which was kind of traditional. You would think that's where the problem was—circulation. We still didn't have a title for the circulation director for our top person. He was a circulation manger. So we made a change there and brought in Gerald Doty from Dallas [Texas]. Gerald was a good circulation person. But doing these two things, it still wasn't revitalizing the newspaper, as I think it was originally thought it would do—perk up circulation and it would take care of itself. But it didn't turn out that way. So then the next thing to do was to go morning in a head-to-head competition with the *Arkansas Gazete* .

MO: How did you feel about that?

BT: Oh, I didn't think much about it. We were going to do it, so [ ] do it. I did expect quite a bit of carrier turnover, but that didn't happen.

MO: Yes.

BT: And so it was—we just had to readjust our schedules there, and we did. You know, I guess the really big, dramatic thing that happened—that has happened

since I've been here—the one that would have to be outstanding over all the others was putting the two newspapers together, you know, the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*.

MO: What do you remember about that?

BT: Well, you know, I knew it was coming, I guess, thirty days or more before . . .

MO: So you knew? You didn't just suspect, you *knew* it was coming.

BT: Well, at that—somewhere there, thirty or forty days or so ahead of time, we knew, but didn't know the dates. Of course, it couldn't be talked about because there was something like a $2 million "keep quiet" clause. I mean, if word had gotten out and it had been traced back to here—because this thing wasn't closed. The deal wasn't completely approved yet.

MO: Yes.

BT: The company could've had to pay a couple million dollars to the folks over at the *Gazette* because—the word did kind of get leaked out a little bit, but it turned out it was somebody over *there* that did it. [Laughs] But we didn't know until it happened *when* it was going to happen. I had left the office on Friday afternoon and had gone home, and had been home about thirty minutes or so, and Larry [Graham] called me and he said, "It's going down in the morning." So I came back to the office. I had to go through and assign route numbers—different route numbers. I don't remember just exactly what that was for, but we had to—because they turned over to us the tapes of all their subscribers, and we were . . .

MO: You had to deliver to their subscribers, *too,* starting . . .

BT: Starting Saturday morning.

MO: Saturday morning.

BT: As best we could. I mean, we didn't know how many of their carriers might just say, "Hey, I'm through," because we couldn't use *all* of them. But we got remarkable cooperation from them. I had one carrier out in the state way up north who refused to show up the next morning. And then within the next couple of weeks, I had two or three that dropped out.

MO: But you had almost unanimous cooperation for that first day?

BT: Yes, we did, and a number of them we were able to keep as carriers.

MO: Was that several dozen or several hundred or how many?

BT: That we were able to keep?

MO: How many did you suddenly have responsibility for on Saturday morning . . .

BT: Oh.

MO: . . . in addition to your people?

BT: Well, they would've had as many or more carriers than we had out in what would've been my area. They probably had 300 or more. We had the people that been in our sales department go to our telemarketing area that night and use those phones to call *Gazette* carriers and tell them, "Show up in the morning. Go ahead and show up in the morning." We immediately switched all the single-copy papers from the *Gazette* routes over to our carrier routes, Here in the city it was a pretty simple operation because it was all computerized and you could just run this stuff together by neighborhoods and start delivery. It took me about five months—at least five months out in the state—to really put things together. It was the most interesting time, you know? A wonderful experience. I would not want to do it again. You know, there is no plan for this. This is not a procedure that happens. I don't know how many—there have been very few newspapers

that's ever really had to do this like this.

MO: That's correct.

BT: So there was no guide book to go by, and so we were dependent on these carriers out there to deliver these papers. It got a little nervous at times. I had a wall—that stuff wasn't there—that wall just had routes written up there—route numbers written up there of things that needed to be taken care of. And as we got them done, we would scratch it off. The *Gazette*—of course, the last couple of three months that they were in business—they put on an awful lot of subscribers that really weren't subscribers. They never paid for the paper, so we ended up with carriers delivering to a lot of people that they weren't getting any money for. And that's when it really got tense—you never knew—"Are they going to trust us? [Laughs]

MO: Right. So these carriers were paying for these newspapers, right?

BT: Yes, they were being charged for them.

MO: And being stiffed by these people?

BT: But they weren't getting any PBM credit for them.

MO: PBM?

BT: And we didn't know who they were.

MO: What does PBM stand for?

BT: Oh, that was "pay by mail." Now, with our new circulation system, we don't have PBMs, we have OPs—"office pay."

MO: "Office pay."

BT: Some places have PIAs—"paid in advance." You know, these are—Gerald Doty had set up the PBMs . . .

MO: Yes.

BT: . . . the "pay by mails" to designate them. So my guys really just had to go door to door and audit and find out who were subscribers and who weren't. And that took a bit. In fact, it began to—without me being aware of it, it took a toll on me. I lost, like, fifteen pounds in about a three- or four-week period. It got where I'd go to bed and I would go to sleep, and about an hour or two later I'd wake up, and I couldn't get back to sleep.

MO: Was it the stress or the long hours or a combination of things?

BT: I guess it was the stress. I've never believed that there really was such a thing. I thought, "Folks just make that up." We *were* working long hours. I was coming in at 6:30 or so in the morning—always by 7:00. And, oh, it would usually be 7:30 or 8:00 at night before I'd leave. And then I'd do about ten hours on Saturday and eight or ten on Sunday. So it was kind of all of that. Like I say, it was an interesting experience I don't want to ever do again. [Laughter] And I don't think I'll get the opportunity to. But that was the most dramatic thing that has ever happened, and I think anybody connected with a newspaper through the years would agree, from a circulation standpoint, it was the most dramatic thing that ever happened. Of course, there's not—as I said, it's not done very often. There's no guidelines for it.

MO: That was also history with the *Arkansas Gazette*'s age and repute.

BT: Yes. But we got it handled and went on from there. Yes.

MO: So there were—did you encounter any hostility or acts of aggression from people who were . . .

BT: No.

MO: Or *Gazette* employees who were, you know, upset about this change?

BT: No, not really. I understand there was a couple in Magnolia that had a *Gazette* route down there that we didn't keep because we had somebody else down there from the *Gazette* that we *did* keep.

MO: Yes.

BT: Of course, we had a longtime distributor there. In fact, they're still with us. They've been with us thirty-five years or so, and these people, I understand, got pretty ugly with them—the district manager—because they didn't get to keep a route. I found out when, you know, everybody just kind of took it in stride when these happen.

MO: What are some of the most common complaints that you've dealt with over the years? Occasionally, for example, I hear of subversive literature being slipped into copies of the newspaper in various parts of the state—hate messages—that sort of thing. Do you encounter much of that here?

BT: Very, very little. Yes. I feel like one time in some area of the state there was some of the hate stuff, but it was very little, and it didn't last long.

MO: How do you handle something like that?

BT: Well, if you knew it was a distributor—one of your distributors doing it, why, you can terminate him.

MO: Did you know that?

BT: What?

MO: Have you ever known that? Have you ever been in that situation?

BT: Where—all the hate stuff?

MO: Well, as an example.

BT: Well, through the years, we've terminated a couple of carriers. Now, I couldn't tell you about the city. I guess I've only terminated one, and that was just a year and a half or so ago.

MO: Really?

BT: Yes. There's probably some of that that goes on that we never know about, but it's very localized.

MO: Yes.

BT: The merchants will know the carrier on that route—groceries stores and things like that.

MO: Right.

BT: "How about putting these circulars out for me? I'll pay you five cents apiece?" or whatnot. Politicians used to be bad about that in small towns, especially. In some cases, churches. It would be the carrier. The carrier would want to do this for his church, you know? But it's not a major—it never has been a major problem.

MO: What—I'm interest in the fact that you have not—you *did* say that you at one time had three jobs here. But for as many years as I've known you, you've worn at least a couple of hats. You also handle the credit union.

BT: Oh, yes. I don't ever think about that because that's not really—that's not a company-sponsored thing.

MO: But it's time invested in the employees here. You must work seven days a week. [Laughs]

BT: Well, I pretty much do.

MO: How long have you been doing credit union work?

BT: Since 1971.

MO: Now, how did that come about? Who did it before, or *was* there one before?

BT: Yes, there was a fellow who—in fact, he was our credit manager. Yes, the *Democrat* Credit Union was chartered in 1934. Of course, it was a very small thing for a long time, and our credit manager handled it for several years. I don't really know how long. When he left the company, they needed—the board needed somebody to handle it, and I was—well, I was on the board. I had been elected to the board sometime prior to that. And, you know, it took maybe five or six hours a week to handle. And, with my work, I could do that—just work it in.

MO: There weren't that many employees then, were there?

BT: No. No, there weren't. It was a—gosh, I think when I first took it we had assets of about $60,000. Now we're a little over $3 million in assets now. I don't know how that would compare to back then in real money.

MO: Yes.

BT: Because I was available and it was a simple operation. [Laughter] And it paid a little extra money.

MO: Thirty-five years later, you're still doing that, too.

BT: Yes. Yes. And both have grown, you know? [Laughs] So, yes, it does—you know, I can kind of interweave it during the day here, you know, mostly. And the members are all really understanding. They understand I don't do it on a full-time basis, and so—and most of them, if they want to withdraw some money, they'll let me know today. Usually, I get it done the same day, but they understand it may be the next day because I would sit down at night and write checks after the day was over.

MO: Yes.

BT: But I do on the weekends—I do quite a bit of paperwork and all on that. So, yes, I do pretty much . . .

MO: Are you in a position to tell me how many, roughly, employees we had, say, in 1971 and how many we have today—the physical growth?

BT: No, I really don't know that. Now, Jean Bradley could probably tell you. She could tell you what we have . . .

MO: Because not everyone's involved in the credit union.

BT: She could tell you what she has today because she does payroll. And since we took in that northwest [Arkansas] stuff up there, I don't know—we're probably 1,200 or 1,500. I suppose thirty years ago that we maybe had 300 or 350. Well, look at the newsroom—how many there are now. In circulation we had, like, six city district managers and had about four state circulation managers, and we did not have any zone managers or anything of that nature. Gosh, I have fifteen district managers and three zone managers. And, of course, I don't know how many they have in northwest.

MO: Are you involved with the northwest [ ]?

BT: No. That used to be part of my area, but when we started what we started, then they operate it from up there.

MO: Is that a relief to you?

BT: Well, yes. Well, with what has gone up there it couldn't have been handled from down here.

MO: Yes.

BT: You know, you have a minor newspaper war up there.

MO: Yes.

BT: So it would've been out of the question to run it from here.

MO: Are you going to retire, Bill?

BT: [Laughs] Well, I'm going to have to, one day.

MO: [Laughs]

BT: I don't like to think about it. I've never had plans for retirement. And, of course, after losing Juanita, if I'd had any plans, they probably would've changed.

MO: Yes. What year did she die?

BT: It's been nine years.

MO: It's been that long?

BT: Yes, it's almost nine years.

MO: That must be why you are said to be here seven days a week by the ghosts of the building who wander in and out.

BT: Yes. But Jean could probably be able to tell you something about what was on payroll somewhere back there because she's been involved with payroll for a long, long time.

MO: When people ask you what you do and what you've felt about what you've been doing all these years, what would you tell them?

BT: When people ask me what I do?

MO: Yes, what you do and why you've done it for so long?

BT: Well, I have two answers. One of them is a smart-aleck answer.

MO: Give me that one, too.

BT: Okay. When people ask me what I do—not much. My best answer is "I sell newspapers." That always embarrassed my youngest daughter, but that's what I do. I sell newspapers. I started off selling newspapers. That's what I do. Sell

newspapers.

MO: Is there a trick to doing it well?

BT: [Laughs] Well, I don't know that I do it well. My other answer with the two things that I do—I explain that I'm able to do that—the credit union and the state circulation manager's job—because I just do each one of them one-half—halfway!

MO: [Laughs]

BT: People don't ever ask me questions like that. What was your question again?

MO: [Laughs] What you do and why you've done it for son long.

BT: Well, because they pay me, obviously.

MO: [Laughs]

BT: If I'd had unlimited money, I would do it anyway—if they *didn't* pay me, I think. For some reason or other, I like it. It's—maybe I can do better than that. This job in circulation has never been boring. It can often—it can be frustrating because everything that I do has to be done through other people. I have a zone manager, I've got a district manager. I'm hoping that they will do it the way I would do it if I was out there. I'd like for him to be a projection of me. When I first—when I was transferred from the city circulation department to the state, I knew things would be different there—same business but done differently. Bob Sorrells was our circulation director.

MO: Sorrells?

BT: Sorrells—at that time. So I asked him. I said, "Mr. Sorrells, what is our policy?" And he said, "Bill, I just have one policy: be fair." I thought, "Well, that's not bad." So that's what I would like for my people to do. I'd like for them to under-

stand that they *are* the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* when they're in Jonesboro or Mountain View or wherever their area is, and I'd like them to be a good representative of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. And I would like for them to do it the way I would do it if I were there. Now, I know it doesn't get done [laughs] just like that, and sometimes they may get it done *better* than I would. But, to a degree, it's frustrating when you don't get done what you know could be done if you could just [ ] there. And back when I was not more or less required to stay here in the office, I would get in my car and drive 100 miles somewhere to get something settled because once I got into that town, I could *think* that town and I could solve whatever problem it was in that town. Here in the office, you know, I'm away from it. It's a different thing. So does that kind of answer it?

MO: Yes, it does. Would you still go out and deliver papers if you had to?

BT: Yes. I think I could still do that. I'd have to buy me a different car. I have a small car and our papers are so big now that I would need another vehicle and all. But in my younger years I thought that before now I would have retired from this, but I also had in my mind that I might move somewhere to kind of a small town—maybe Harrison or somewhere.

MO: Yes.

BT: And get me a motor route.

MO: [Laughs] Doesn't look like you're going to retire.

BT: It doesn't look like it. Oh, probably, they wouldn't hire me for [laughs] a motor route, either. But that was just one of the things I thought about. Things change as you go along.

MO: They do. Well, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to

add to this marvelous oral history?

BT: No, I can't even think of a thing that I was going to tell you. [Laughter]

MO: If you think about it, call me. I'll bring the tape recorder.

BT: [Laughs] I have been so fortunate to have had good people to work for and to work with through all these years. There's never been any interoffice rivalry—what do they call it? Back-biting? Is that the word?

MO: Back-stabbing or –biting.

BT: I've never seen any of that within the department or between department heads. I think it's just so unusual because I hear other people talking about where they work, and there's always this going on and that going on. I've just never encountered any of that. There, again, I've been very fortunate—still am. Glad to be here.

MO: Well, thank you for your time today. I appreciate it.

BT: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]