Gazette Project

Interview with

Eddie Best,
Searcy, Arkansas,
10 January 2001

Interviewer: Jerol Garrison

Jerol Garrison: I am interviewing Eddie Best, a former reporter and editor of the sports department at the *Arkansas Gazette*. We are doing this interview for historical purposes to shed light on the *Arkansas Gazette*. We want to find out what kind of newspaper the *Gazette* was and what made it that way. Eddie, this interview is part of the Oral History Project being conducted by the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. The center will transcribe the interview, and you will have an opportunity to review the transcript and make changes before the document goes into the archives at the university library. It will be available to persons interested in Arkansas history. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

Eddie Best: Yes, I am, Jerol. Let me say up front how immensely pleased I am that you and Roy Reed and the university are undertaking this project. I think it is absolutely wonderful because the *Arkansas Gazette* was a wonderful place.

JG: Eddie, I have a form, which you have reviewed and signed, in which you agree that this interview can be conducted and that the transcript will go into the archives. Is that correct? Have you reviewed that form and signed it?

EB: I have, yes.

JG: You are willing to have the interview?

EB: Of course.

JG: You will have a chance to review it, by the way.

EB: I am proud to be a part of it, Jerol.

JG: Eddie, please describe the time that you worked at the *Arkansas Gazette* and your duties.

EB: I started to work there in September of 1954. I was just a kid. I feel like I grew up at the *Arkansas Gazette*, as my wife did. We were both about the same age when we started there.

JG: How old were you when you started?

EB: I was sixteen. I started my senior year in high school. I had a friend, Willie Allen, that I had grown up with in North Little Rock. He became a successful photographer. Willie started me in my career, and I started him in his. Willie had heard about the *Gazette* hiring kids on Friday nights to come in for a few hours to write stories about football games that were phoned in from across the state. I think they got paid eight dollars for two or three hours of work. I came in September, and we started writing football games on Friday nights. There were others in the Friday night pools who were working then. Someone left in sports shortly after that. Orville Henry would look at the copy written on Friday night, and he felt like I was the best of the bunch. That is what I like to say, anyway. He gave me an opportunity to go to work during my senior year in high school. I would come in and go to work after school at four o'clock and work until about ten. It was about six hours a day. I would also work on weekends. I didn't really want to be a newspaperman. I wanted to be a doctor. We got started on this and, boy, I got bitten real quick. I got printer's ink in my veins. The next thing that I knew, I was hooked. I was at the *Gazette* for twelve years. While I was there, I had the opportunity to do a number of things. When I was eighteen or nineteen

years old, I was covering major events– the Little Rock Travelers, major football, baseball games, basketball games, girls' basketball games. All because we had a wonderful man who was in charge, Orville Henry. He was a great teacher. He would literally take the neophytes who were there and show us how to write and put words together in a forceful way and to save space. He would say, "Come watch me." We would stand and look over his shoulder. He would take a big, black pencil, and he would mark our copy all up and tell us why he was doing that. I think, slowly, those of us who were there, the young guys, we learned from that. He taught us how to cover sports events in a most efficient way. He taught us how to interview people, how to avoid the pitfalls, and how to keep yourself out of the ditch, so to speak. I cannot say enough good things about Orville Henry. He had an ability to recruit some talented people who went through his sports department before I was there and after I was gone. Someone, someday, really needs to do a paper on that alone. It is remarkable the people who did come and work for him as a sports writer. I worked on covering general sports. I then moved over to the copy desk, editing copy and handling special sections. The last few years that I was there, I was also the outdoor editor. Not really by title. But I was the outdoor editor. I took care of the outdoor page, and on Tuesdays I was in the field hunting, fishing, and interviewing people. We never got around to calling me the outdoor editor. I was just the outdoor guy, you might say. I was probably one of the first to promote hunting and fishing to the degree that it is now. On Sundays we acquired a full page for outdoors. I think we helped the newspaper at a very difficult time. When we were going through the integration crisis of 1957, I recall there were an awfully lot of people who were canceling the newspaper and wanting to drop the *Gazette*. I was told that sports helped stabilize a little bit. Orville told me one time that there was talk of,

maybe, at least on Sunday, wrapping the newspaper in the sports section. That would be interesting to find out if that was really true. It was a time when people were vehemently against the *Gazette*, but they still had to read about the Razorbacks and the Travelers and some of the other sports activities. I owe the *Arkansas Gazette* a great deal. It introduced me to my wife, and it helped me to get started on my career. It exposed me to a wonderful work ethic that I took with me when I left in 1965. Frankly, I think that our children have this today. It seemed like there were traditions there when I came that I felt we had to carry on. One of them was getting to work on time, not skipping assignments, getting to work, regardless if the weather was bad. We were real proud of the fact that when it snowed, we got to work. We figured out a way to get there. We had an old black 1963 Rambler, four doors, and it had lots of room in it. It was heavy and wonderful in the snow. We would plan beforehand when we would know the weather was going to be bad. We would get it out, park it at the curb, head it down hill, and we would have our snow crew ready to ride with us. Sometimes we would knock over garbage cans on the way out. Sometimes we would almost slide into the ditch. But we got to work. I just feel like it was something that probably existed before I came and that I was expected to perpetuate. Those who were with me, like Martha Douglas, Margaret Ross, my wife, Pat, they all felt the same way. I owe the *Gazette* a lot for that and for the wonderful, talented people that I saw. I tried to emulate them in some ways. We had some really great writers who went through in those days. We worked in the southeast corner of the building. It was a little corner next to the alley. I remember them talking about how, before I came, sometimes they would crawl out the windows, post scores, and do things for the general public. There were some remnants of that still around. I never really saw any of it, but I know there was an old

telegrapher's key over in the corner that was used for transmission from the baseball park and the office. I never really understood fully how that worked. There were remnants of the past that were there, that reminded everyone that this place did not just start yesterday. We had certain traditions that were there and we were respectful of.

JG: When you say the scores were posted, were they posted in the window or outside on the sidewalk?

EB: As I understood it, there was a big board outside of the window. The guys would crawl out the window and write the scores of the World Series and other major events on the sign beside the building. There were some rivets or bolts in the side of the building to indicate to me where they were. It is on the second floor. I thought the building was wonderful. It was sturdy. It was sort of synonymous with the institution we were working for. Every time that I go by, I feel this real soft spot in thinking about the way that it used to be. Today it has been remodeled and is totally unlike the way it was when I was there, internally, at least.

JG: You were sixteen when you went to work there. You were a senior at North Little Rock High School?

EB: At North Little Rock High School. I mentioned Willie Allen. Willie stopped writing on Friday nights. He had a girlfriend or something. He stopped writing shortly after I went to work down there. A little bit later I heard there was an opening in the photography department. They were going to hire or were creating a new position, I believe. I decided to help Willie. I went by to see the chief, Larry Obsitnik. I checked out a 4 x 5 camera, which I had learned to use by then, incidentally. I took lots of pictures. I took it out to Willie Allen's house. I said, "Willie, there is a job opening at the *Gazette*. They need a photographer. This is

how you cock the shutter, and this is how you pull the slide." This is really the lesson that he got in photography. I said, "Get over there, and see Larry Obsitnik quick because he is going to hire somebody." He did. He didn't come back and see me after he had his interview. I didn't know how it worked out. Later that evening I saw Larry Obsitnik walking down the hall. I said, "Chief, did you meet that fellow that I sent to talk to you?" He said, "Yes. We decided to hire him. He is a little bit green, but we think he will work out." [Laughter] I can't tell you how pleased I was. Willie became a very successful commercial photographer. He was in Dallas when President Kennedy was killed and shot a number of very important photographs. He is still making a living cocking the shutter and pulling the slide in Little Rock today. He is still a dear friend.

JG: When Willie went to work, was he also a high school senior?

EB: He was a year ahead of me. He was, let's see, he graduated in 1954. I graduated in 1955. Willie was trying to go to school and do some other things, as I did later. I started school at Little Rock Junior College. I went to school as we could afford it. I also attended the University at Little Rock when it was established at the junior college. I wasn't able to finish, but by the time I was into my career, I felt the experience that I had was enough to help me earn a living. It was expensive, and we had children that were coming along. I regret that I did not get my degree. I got a good start and a good foundation in the basics, I felt like. It helped me as I went into business later on after we left the newspaper.

JG: When you went to work at the *Gazette* sports department, who was in the sports department? That would have been 1954.

EB: It was September of 1954. To my recollection, I think there were five or six fellows in there. There was Orville, Chuck Miller, an old-timer who wore a green eyeshade to work, Wilbur (Bill) Bentley, from the old school. He was winding

down as I was winding up. There was a young fellow there named Don McNeil, who left shortly after I arrived. He became a successful real estate man in Little Rock. Dave Hacker and Huey Aynesworth were also there about that time. I think the sports department was growing, and they let me get my foot in the door part time. I was then invited to start to work full time with them, and I moved on in. We grew from there. Bill Simmons was hired shortly after that. He is now with the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. Robert Shaw, who is head of the bureau in Little Rock of the Associated Press, he was another one who came through shortly after me.

JG: Both Bill Simmons and Robert Shaw started to work as copy boys.

EB: That's true about Bill. Not sure about Robert. But they worked back in sports. They also were in on something that I like to remember fondly, and that was the night they suckered Bob Starr. Bob Starr worked for AP and was back in the corner–John Robert Starr, who was over at the *Democrat* during the newspaper war–Bob was the night guy over at the AP. He was back in the glassed-in corner where he could see the city room of the *Gazette*. I don't know, it seemed like folks were always trying to pull pranks on him. I know that Simmons and Shaw were in on this and some others. I was in on the edge of it. One of them came out with a funnel and had put a penny on his forehead. He tucked the funnel in his belt in the front of his pants. He reared his head back and put the penny on his forehead. He was trying to drop that penny and catch it in the funnel. He tried it two or three times, and he couldn't do it. Shaw or Simmons tried it two or three times and couldn't do it. They knew that Bob Starr could not sit there and not respond in some way. Sure enough, he jumped up from his chair and said, "You morons, let me show you how to catch that penny with that funnel." He stuck the funnel in his pants, put the penny on his forehead, and reared his head back to

drop it into the funnel. When he did, one of the guys came walking quietly up with a bottle of water, then poured it into the funnel and wet his pants for him. [Laughter] Well, we had a great laugh out of that. I don't think Bob Starr did. That was one of the lighter moments after we got the paper out. Everybody kept their head down and worked their tail off until the paper was out. It was really wonderful. Jerol, you were there. I used to see your back. You always wore a white shirt. We were all working on manual typewriters. The noise was deafening sometimes. Everyone was working together very hard to get the paper together by the deadline, to get it done and to do it in the best way that we could. I don't know. There was something universal about that. I think every person who left there carried it with them. It was just a great work ethic that I talk to our boys about today.

JG: When did Jim Bailey come to work in the sports department?

EB: Jim Bailey was a skinny country boy from Emerson. He came a year or so after I did. He had attended Southern State College in Magnolia. He apparently caught Orville's eye with several things that he had written. He was a very talented writer from the very beginning. He was a really nice man that I got to know very well. When the paper was out, frequently we would go out to the King Tut Cafe and have a hamburger steak or something and talk about the newspaper and other things. We try to stay in touch. I was impressed with his ability.

JG: Where was the King Tut Cafe? I have never heard of it.

ED: They called it the King Tut Drive-In, I believe. It was out on Asher Avenue. It was one of the few joints in Little Rock that was open all night. When a guy working nights got off, he could go down there and get himself something nice to eat. It was close to Troy's Roller Rink on Asher Avenue. After I graduated from high school, I worked later in the evenings. My job on the desk required I be

there until the paper was out, which was usually at least one o'clock in the morning and sometimes two or later than that. In working that assignment, I got to know some great guys in the back shop. I think they liked me because I was a hunting and fishing guy. They liked to talk about places to hunt and fish. Thinking back about the hot type and those Linotype machines and those guys who would set the headlines by hand, it makes me feel very old. Today everything is done by computer. Those were very talented fellows, who would finesse the type and the columns and the final product. They were all a union operation. We were not permitted, those of us from the news side, were not permitted to touch any of the type back there. We would tell them where we wanted the type placed, but we would keep our hands off it. I respected that from the very beginning. I think because of that, they respected me. They realized that we were working in harmony. Years later when we were in Pine Bluff, I got to work a little bit part time there, just a little bit for the heck of it. They were not a union operation, and the sports editor would invite me back in the type shop and ask me to help get the paper out a couple of times. He would pick type up with his hands and put it on the page. He asked me to help him do that. The first few times I did that, I felt guilty. I felt like I was doing something I shouldn't be doing. It was just an unusual time that will never happen again. That technology is outdated now.

JG: Were you on a desk in the sports department the whole time you were at the *Gazette*?

EB: No, I started as a general assignment writer. I was assigned to a variety of things. I think when Bill Bentley retired or moved away, Orville made the decision then to ask me to become the desk guy and to succeed him. I edited copy, wrote headlines, and laid out the section. Friday nights, incidentally, were a miracle.

From about nine o'clock until about eleven o'clock on Friday nights during the football season, we would get phone calls of all the football games that occurred that evening. It seems like there were roughly seventy-five of them that would be phoned in. We would take the basic news over the phone, write stories, write headlines, set it all in type, seventy-five different stories, from nine o'clock until roughly eleven o'clock in the evening. Most of them had to be done by ten-thirty. Think about that–seventy-five stories. Some of them weren't very good, but we got the job done. Jim Bailey and I developed such a technique that we could crank some of those long sheets of copy paper into those old manual typewriters, and we would pick up the phone. We knew the questions to ask and the right sequence. We would write the story as we went along. When we hung up the phone, we would crank the paper out, and we had a finished story. We would then hand it over to the headline guy, sometimes Orville, sometimes Chuck, sometimes me. Like I said, it probably wasn't very good, but it sure met our deadlines. It was a lot of fun to do that. It taught us to work fast. It taught us . . .

JG: It taught you to ask questions about what was the most important part of the game.

EB: Yes, you would get a phone call, and you would ask, "Where was this played?" They would say, "DeWitt." You would then type in a DeWitt dateline. "Who was it that played?" "Well, it was DeWitt and Arkadelphia." "Okay, was it a conference game? What was the score? What influenced the outcome? What was the big thing that settled the score?" They would say, "Well, Joe Brown ran ninety-eight yards for a touchdown with ten seconds left." We would type the lead and away we went. We would ask, "Well, how did the scoring go?" When we got through, it was all finished, and we met out deadlines. Today it is done a whole lot differently. They just write the score in the headline. There is not a

whole lot of creativity in the headline anymore. They just put the score up there, "DeWitt 16, Arkadelphia 2." It is a lot faster, but it is not near as interesting to the reader as the way we used to do it.

JG: You used to have a crew that would help you on Friday nights.

EB: Yes, and some of them weren't real slick on sports, but they got the job done. They would say things like, "They forward passed the ball." This sounds like something that you would have said a hundred years ago. We would edit that out of the copy, and it would work fine. I don't know if they made extra money doing that or not. They probably did. It was a lot of fun. Friday night football was sort of like election night. There was so much going on and work was so fast and furious, it was actually a lot of fun, and you felt there was a certain cohesiveness there, that it pulled people together. When it was all over and done with, you could look back and say, "Hey, we got it all done. The sports fan will read it in the paper in the morning."

JG: Eddie, recount some of the more interesting experiences you had in the sports department.

EB: I feel that I had a unique opportunity to do some things when I probably wasn't experienced enough to be doing them. I did it anyway and I benefited from it. I remember when Coach Broyles was hired at the university. He came to Little Rock for his first major news conference. I couldn't have been more than eighteen or nineteen years old. The news conference was on a Sunday afternoon, which was Orville Henry's day off. Orville asked me to cover it. I went out there. I loved sports and football, so I was knowledgeable enough about Coach Broyles. I wasn't real smart in the way that I handled it. Coach Broyles rolled in, and he had this real thick Georgia accent. I was just smitten with his accent, and I dwelled on that just a little bit more in my story than I should have. Actually,

some of his responses to the news conference, I wrote them up the way they sounded to me, with the Georgia drawl. I guess that I was trying to be Jimmy Cannon or Red Smith or somebody. Anyway, I turned my story in, and it was published. The next morning I received a phone call, and it woke me up. Because Pat was at work, she was on the switchboard. She said, "Eddie, what did you do?" I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "This phone is ringing off the hook, and people are mad at you about the story that you did on Frank Broyles." I said, "Why?" She said, "They thought you were making fun of his accent." I said, "Well, I didn't mean to." That day I was off. I didn't go to work until Tuesday. When I came in, I fully expected to get jumped about it. I never heard a word about that. The newspaper received a number of calls that were offended about the way that I wrote the story about Coach Broyles. I never heard from Coach Broyles one way or the other. You know, I felt like I grew in the position because of the way that we would be critiqued each day. A. R. Nelson, the managing editor, was absolutely wonderful at giving you instructions. He would tear the pages out of the sports section. He had this big grease pencil. If there was something on there that should have been done another way, he would circle it or write in with great big words about three inches high what should have been done. He would post that on the bulletin board in the sports department. Every day when I would come to work after I had worked the day before, I knew there might be something on that board over there that would be to my attention and would have the grease pencil marked all over it. I never would look when I walked into the sports department. I knew the guys in the city room–if Nelson had put something on that bulletin board, they would know it was there and they would be watching for my reaction. I would walk into the sports department and would just look out of the side of my eye to see if he had gotten me this time.

Well, yes, there was one hanging over there. I would take my seat and look around to see what he had said to me. He would write something like, "Didn't you read the blankety-blank story?" or whatever. He would correct my mistakes and point them out to me. Sometimes they were very blunt, and sometimes he said it very gracefully. It was really good. I felt like it was an advanced class in communication, and I was getting paid to be a part of it.

JG: Was the grease pencil on the page proof?

EB: Most of the time. He was doing the others the same way. I guess some of the guys in the city room got the same dose of medicine that I did. Because I did not come in until about four o'clock, his day was already underway by then. He had the opportunity to critique the newspaper and write things on the pages, and that was a good way to learn. Orville did the same thing. His was a little bit more personal than that. He would ask you to come over and sit with him, and he would talk to you about things or show you things. I owe a great deal to Orville Henry. He helped me to get started and raise my family and to get established in a career. I left in March of 1965. I was friends with George Purvis with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. He introduced me to Ben Pearson, who owned the big bow and arrow manufacturing plant in Pine Bluff. I would frequently go hunting with the two of them. I would write stories about them in the *Gazette*. It caught the eye of a young advertising man, Jim Faulkner in Pine Bluff. He had the advertising account of the Ben Pearson company. He called me one time and asked me if I had ever thought about going into public relations. He needed to do more for the Ben Pearson company because it was a big coveted advertising account. You know, you have been in the same boat, Jerol. In March of 1965, I resigned from the newspaper. It was a very hard thing to do. I moved my family to Pine Bluff, where we worked for–well, until the agency was moved

to Little Rock. I ultimately became executive vice president with Faulkner and Associates, the advertising and public relations company, until it was sold in 1985 to Deloss Walker in Memphis. I became EVP at Walker and Associates. I left there to go to work for a publishing company that was ultimately controlled by International Data Group of New Hampshire, who published *DOS for Dummies* and some other well known books. I was one of their publishers, and we had a public video publication with a monthly circulation of a million, four hundred thousand. I left there and thought I wanted to retire earlier than your normal retirement age. I did not like it at all. I think Pat told you about how I wound up over at Yarnell Ice Cream Company as the advertising director there. I only intended to be there for a year. They saw Blue Bell Ice Cream marching down the road to Arkansas, and they asked me to stick around for a while. I stayed there for five years at Yarnell Ice Cream. I retired a year ago as their advertising director. I am now enjoying life in Searcy. I have been president of the White County Historical Society for the last three years. I am enjoying very much preserving things for posterity just as we are doing for this particular project.

JG: When you left Walker and Associates, where did you go to work?

EB: Well, I went back to work basically for Jim Faulkner, the old friend who had started the advertising agency years before. This is a very astute businessman, who, just as a sideline, started a video store promotional publication called *Take One*. He was selling this to video stores across the country. After he sold the advertising agency, he retained *Take One* and was surprised by the fact that it was an overnight success. It was immediately successful. It grew so quickly that it was almost beyond his control. He didn't really want to be there every day. Before we knew it, the circulation was almost a million. He called me and asked me–he said that he had heard that I was leaving the Walker Agency. He was

wondering if I might be interested in going to work for *Take One*, helping him, because it was going so well. I came back and worked on it. Before we knew it, circulation had jumped up to one million, four hundred thousand. We had a big office of people, telemarketers and others in Little Rock, who were working for that. It was sold–let me see, I am trying to remember the exact date. It was sold a few years later when Mr. Faulkner decided to go into some other enterprises. He is a very successful, wealthy man, living in West Little Rock now. He is still a good friend. *Take One* became a branch of International Data Group (IDG), which is a big publishing conglomerate in Peterborough, New Hampshire. I never thought that I would work for a yankee, but I did wind up working for a bunch of yankees for a few years. I got along very well. I worked in Little Rock, but we were owned by this company in New Hampshire. They were opening up some projects in Nashville, Tennessee, and they wanted us to move our office to Nashville, or move some of us up to New Hampshire. I couldn't see myself living in New Hampshire, even though it is a beautiful place. I decided to leave there and thought at the time that I would just be a fishing bum the rest of my life. We have a cabin on Little Red River, and we spent time there. Surprisingly, I didn't like it as much as I thought. In a few months I realized that I needed to be working on something else.

JG: That was when you got the offer from Yarnell?

EB: Yes. I had heard the advertising director there was retiring, and he was a friend of mine. He had told Mr. Yarnell, "Eddie is adrift right now. He thinks he wants to fish, but he really needs to be working."

JG: What was his name?

EB: Don Burkhart was his name. Rogers Yarnell is the president of the company. He called me and talked to me and asked me if I would at least be a consultant. I

agreed to do that for a year. We mothballed our house in Little Rock and came to live over here in a little rent house. We were having a lot of fun, fishing on the weekends and working during the week. We suddenly discovered Searcy, and it is a really wonderful place.

JG: How do you spell Burkhart again?

EB: B-U-R-K-H-A-R-T. Don Burkhart. He had worked with me in the old agency days. He was a PR guy for John Paul Hammerschmidt before he went to work for Yarnell.

JG: Eddie, tell me a little bit more about some special things you covered in the sports department for the *Arkansas Gazette*.

EB: With talented people like Orville Henry and Jim Bailey in the department, it was not really proper for me to draw the major assignments. I was still just a kid. I was not in their league in terms of writing ability. I did a lot of odd things. I aspired to be creative and different. As I said earlier, we talked about some of the really talented sports writers like Jimmy Cannon and others. I remember I covered a boxing match one time. It was the Golden Glove boxing match, and the heavyweight champion was upset. When the decision was announced, he sat in the corner. I think I wrote in my story about how he sat in the corner with tears coming down his face. I don't know. It just seemed like something I ought to tell the reader about. Here was this big, burly guy, and he was sitting there in the corner weeping. Well, the next evening when I got to work, I got a phone call from this man who wanted to know if I could meet him in the alley. [Laughter] I said, "Well, no, I am busy right now. What do you need?" He said he wanted to talk to me about something. Well, he was so evasive I became suspicious. He finally revealed that he was the brother of the heavyweight champion. He was going to clean my clock in the alley if I would go down there. [Laughter] I

apologized, but I don't know–he didn't come up the stairs looking for me. I had some other situations like that, where people were not very happy with the way that things were written. Most of it was a very pleasant experience. Everything I wrote, just as Orville and Jim Bailey and others and yourself, is now on microfilm. You can go back and judge for yourself whether it was good or bad or whatever. It is there. The outdoor columns, I was really proud of those and how we grew in that area of coverage. In looking back, I see that I could have done a lot more. We did much more than was ever done before.

JG: Were you the first writer of an outdoor column at the *Gazette*?

EB: I think I was to the degree that we did it. We had some fellows who came after that and did that. There were people like Tom Mull, Hubert Thompson and Gus Albright who did occasional columns for us or contributed material. We did not really have an outdoor page like we have now. The fact that Orville made that commitment to put me in the field one day a week was evidence that it was important. The readers wanted more of that. It was a great job to get paid to go and hunt and fish one day a week.

JG: How long did you write for the outdoor columns?

EB: I think I started that in the early 1960s and continued it until I left in 1965. It was three or four years that I did that, maybe a little longer.

JG: Any especially interesting outdoor experience that you wrote about? Do you remember any one in particular?

EB: I covered a number of fishing tournaments and things. I know there was one tournament where there was an accident and a drowning. I don't know. One thing that sticks in my mind was the time that I spent all day on the lake taking pictures and had these great shots. I knew it was going to be a wonderful picture page, people catching fish. I came in late that evening, and the photography

department was closed. The transom was open to the photography department, but the door was locked. I wrote a note and put a rubber band around my roll of film. I put the note on it and pitched it over the transom, thinking that Gene Prescott or Larry Obsitnik would pick it up the next morning and develop my film for me as they always did. I came to work the next day and asked them how my shots turned out. They said, "What shots?" What happened was that the janitor came in the morning after and swept up the trash on the floor, which was my roll of film that I had shot all day. It was gone. Those are the things that I remember the most within the events.

JG: Completely gone?

EB: I lost it. I sure did. That was a lesson learned, too.

JG: Did you write a story anyway, without any photos?

EB: I am sure that we had something to fill the paper that day. You know, people were hungry. They never got enough of the hunting and fishing material. I felt then that there was an enormous demand for it. I was happy to see that they continued that after I left the newspaper.

JG: Did you write about different kinds of hunting experiences like ducks, deer, and squirrel?

EB: I never was especially skilled as a hunter or fisherman. I had the wisdom of going with people who were, like Ben Pearson, who was a fantastic shot. I remember one time while we were hunting, we walked upon a big water moccasin. We were bow hunting. I jumped back and drew an arrow and shot and missed, drew another arrow, shot and missed. Zip–this arrow came zinging right by me. Ben was about twenty feet behind me. He shot that thing right through the head with a bow and arrow. I knew then that there were fellows who knew how to do this a little bit better than I did.

JG: It is hard to sight in on a narrow water moccasin.

EB: He looked big though. He looked as big as my arm. [Laughter] There was another time–you know, Ben Pearson was a genius. I never knew when he was speaking allegorically. We were walking down a levee one time, and a rabbit jumped up and took off. I just watched it run. Zip, an arrow went by me. It was Ben. He shot at it, but didn't hit it. Ben said, "Eddie, why didn't you shoot at that rabbit?" I said, "Well, I didn't feel like I could hit it." He said, "Let me tell you something. You are never going to hit anything if you don't shoot at it." I think he was really talking about more than hunting. I began to listen to him when we would talk. He was a lot deeper than the average person. He was a mechanical genius, who invented most of the things they used to manufacture equipment down in Pine Bluff.

JG: He was the owner of what company?

EB: He was the owner of the Ben Pearson Archery Equipment Company in Pine Bluff. You would be interested in this because of your AP&L background. He started out as a lineman for AP&L. He was ahead of his time. He had all kinds of inventions. He had an electric garden. He had a bed of coils he buried in the ground that kept his garden warm in the winter. He would raise crops in the wintertime. That is a true story. He invented the equipment–he was the father of mass production in archery equipment.

JG: Is the company still in business?

EB: It is, but it has changed hands many times. It is not and does not resemble what it used to be.

JG: It was a major company back in the 1950s and 1960s?

EB: It was. The Fred Bear Company in Grayling, Michigan, and the Ben Pearson Company in Pine Bluff were the two names in archery equipment when archery

and bow hunting boomed in America. It was sold to the Brunswick Company, the bowling people, a while later. The company is not the same anymore.

JG: How many times did you go out with Ben Pearson?

EB: He was a busy, successful man, and I didn't–in terms of total numbers of hunts, I can't remember. I guess they all stick out in my mind. We hunted a whole week in Mexico one time. I remember that he built a lodge out in Prim, Arkansas, on up above Greers Ferry Lake. It was a Shangri-La. It is beautiful. It is still there. It is a church camp now. He invited me to come up and go hunting with him and his son Benjamin one weekend. We went up and he was just building it. We slept on bedrolls. I remember that he cooked my breakfast for me, and I thought how unusually nice that was. Here is a fellow that is a millionaire and a very successful man, but he was gracious enough to invite me up and fix breakfast for me. I would take pictures and write about things like that. I think it helped people to understand who he was. He was an older man then and didn't live a whole lot longer after the time period that I am talking about. He lived a full life and was a unique individual. As I get older, I'm turning into a crawdad–always looking back at where I've been. I"ll never forget those wonderful years at the *Arkansas Gazette*. Thanks again for asking me to be a part of this project.

[End of Tape One - Side One]

[End of Interview]