Gazette Project

Interview with

Harvey Cooper
New York, New York
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Interviewer: Jim Barden

Jim Barden: I'm talking to Harvey Cooper, and we're starting over because we didn't get it the first time. But Harvey, let me just start off, now you are a native of New York. Is that correct?

Harvey Cooper: That's correct.

JB: The Bronx.

HC: Right. I was born in the Bronx and lived in Long Island from the age of seven.

JB: And you went to school where, Harvey?

HC: I went to college at State University of New York at Binghamton. That's in upstate New York.

JB: All right. Then after college what did you do?

HC: I was a Vista volunteer for about a year in Baltimore.

JB: And then you came to work for *The New York Times* News Service. Is that correct?

HC: Right. That is correct.

JB: As a clerk.

HC: As a clerk.

JB: And what year was that?

HC: That was in 1968 during the Republican National Convention.

JB: And then we became acquainted, not long after that, when I went to work for the news service in January of 1969, and you were continuing as a clerk then, but you wanted to be an editor and things were not moving fast enough at the news service. Right?

HC: That's correct. That's exactly right.

JB: So you went . . .

HC: I went to work for the *Bond Buyer*, which was a financial publication in the Wall Street area, specializing in the municipal bond market. You know, I realized then at the same time I was – I realized at a certain point that I really wanted to work for a daily newspaper, so I started working as an extra at the *Jersey Journal* in Jersey City. And I liked that, but there didn't seem to be any full-time openings, and I realized that maybe I should go somewhere other than New York to learn the craft. One of the things that I did was I would come up to the news service sometimes, you know even after I'd left *The Times*, and you and I would practice some headline writing and things like that.

JB: And then I put you in touch with someone at the *Arkansas Gazette*, right?

HC: That is correct.

JB: And do you remember who that was?

HC: It was probably Bob Douglas.

JB: Yes, it must have been Bob. I forgot.

HC: Yes. Yes. Or it might have been Jim Bailey, also. I don't know whether he

would have been the one who would have put me in touch with him. But Jim Bailey, of course, was somebody you were close with or you knew in your days at the *Gazette*.

JB: Yes. Right, exactly.

HC: I remember him giving me a very warm welcome when I got there.

JB: Yes. Right. I had forgotten about Jim. Yes. He was one of the great sports writers.

HC: That's right. And, of course, Jerry Jones was there.

JB: Yes. Right. So you went down then for a tryout?

HC: That is correct, just to tell a short story. I think you actually had some contacts in Dayton also. Dayton, Ohio.

JB: Oh, that's right. That's right. Exactly. I had forgotten about that.

HC: And I was trying to debate whether I should take my first shot in Little Rock or in Dayton. And being like the old – like a famous *New Yorker* cover, you know, with a map of the United States. Basically three-quarters of it ends at the Hudson River, and the rest of the United States is a tiny portion of the whole map. I had a very limited sense of geography in those days. I was very young then. So I was debating whether to try out in Little Rock or Dayton first, and I figured, well, I would want to come back and visit New York some time, and I figured, well, Little Rock and Dayton were about the same distance [from New York] in my mind, which I found out later was not true at all, Little Rock being about twice as far away. Little Rock sounded more exotic, so, since it was about the same

distance as Dayton, I figured I would try there first. So I went to Little Rock. I had a tryout and was offered a job.

JB: And you went down, at that point, without – being one of the few people in America who didn't know how to drive a car.

HC: That is right. That is correct.

JB: Or one of the few men.

HC: That is correct. [Laughs]

JB: Probably the only one in the South.

HC: Probably. I would say that is probably true. [Laughs] That's most likely true.

JB: So you got a place close enough to the *Gazette* so you could walk to work.

HC: Right. As I say, I think it was around 17th and Louisiana. You know, I am not exactly positive, but I think around there. But it was fifteen or twenty minutes to walk to work.

JB: How long was it before you decided that you needed a car to get around?

HC: I think I more or less decided, it just – it was inertia. I think I more or less decided maybe shortly after my tryout. During the week of my tryout I was staying at the Sam Peck Hotel, which was maybe five, six blocks from the *Gazette*, and I would walk from the *Gazette* to the hotel. And downtown Little Rock in those days was absolutely dead at night. The fact that I was on the street at 10:30 at night prompted a cop to stop and ask whether everything was okay. So I guess I realized, you know, without a car there I was a little bit out of place. [Laughs]

JB: So you took a driver's test or I mean, I'm sorry, you learned to drive.

HC: Right. Right.

JB: You went to driving school.

HC: I went to driving school. This was – actually, this is another story I am just reminded of. [Laughs] When I was at driving school, I was taking driving lessons, obviously, and all of a sudden – you know, I really wanted to get that license. I got there in October 1974, and this was around late spring of 1975. All of a sudden the driving teacher disappears, you know, right in the middle of the lessons. So I didn't know what to do, you know.

JB: Where were you? I mean . . .

HC: No, no, no. Right in the middle of my series of lessons. Let's say I'd signed up for 10 lessons – I'm sorry I didn't express that well.

JB: Oh, I see. It wasn't in the middle of the road.

HC: No, not in the middle. [Laughs] Anyway, so she just disappeared. She didn't show up. I couldn't reach her. Well, there was one other driving school in town, so I called up the other driving school and, apparently, the owner of that driving school had divorced the woman from the other school, and it was not an amicable divorce. He absolutely hated her, but I didn't know this when I told him that I was at the other school. And he told me, "If you took lessons from her, I will never give you a lesson." [Laughter] So I was just – I didn't know what I was going to do. Those were the only two driving schools in Little Rock. But, finally, she just showed up again. You know, I never questioned where she was. She was

just out of commission for about a month. Gone for about a month and I thought I would never learn to drive and never get my license and never be able to go to a movie again in my life. [Laughs] But it finally worked out.

JB: So finally she showed up and finished your driving lessons.

HC: Right. Correct.

JB: And you went out and got a car.

HC: That's right.

JB: And tell me the story about that.

HC: Oh, well, my first weekend day off I get in the – a tremendous sense of freedom. I mean this was a big breakthrough. I was 29 years old and did not know how to drive until I became 29 down in Little Rock, where I was really forced to learn. Most of my work career before I got to Little Rock was in Manhattan, and I was living there, and you really can rely on public transportation. So, anyway, I finally get my license, and that first weekend I had it, I got in the car, and it was so exhilarating and so much fun. It was such a beautiful day. It was in the summer, July of 1975. I just started driving along – I think it was called Cantrell Road, which turned into Route 10, going west. And instead of just picking up my laundry, which is what I planned to do, I just kept on driving. And about three or four hours later I was 150 miles away in Oklahoma because I just didn't want to stop and it was so beautiful. It was such a great experience.

JB: So you go to Oklahoma and then – what turned you around that day?

HC: Well, it started getting dark, and I figured eventually I would have to go home.

JB: But you did get home that night?

HC: Yes, I did. Turns out for some peculiar reason I ended up having an incredible endurance. I am not saying I am a good driver. But, even though I didn't drive till 29, I have an incredible endurance driving. At least I did then because I was much, much younger. My closest – when I went down to Little Rock, as I said, I didn't realize the geography – it turned out the closest person I knew from my previous life, which was basically here [New York], was an aunt I had in Wisconsin. I clocked it from the parking lot of the *Gazette* to her door step. It was 715 miles and four or five times after I got my [license] during my stay in Little Rock, I made that round trip on my two-day weekend.

JB: Wow.

HC: And still managed – I drove so many hours straight that I managed to spend some time with her and my cousins in Madison, Wisconsin, and still have enough time to drive back and get to work the next day.

JB: Wow.

HC: I really, really had endurance in those days driving.

JB: And over a two-day weekend.

HC: Right. Just in a regular two-day weekend. I didn't take any extra days.

JB: Wow.

HC: I would just drive straight through the night. I think my days off were Monday and Tuesday at the *Gazette* – I think they were my days off the whole time there – and I'd get off maybe 10 o'clock Sunday night and be full of energy because,

basically, you know, most nights of the week I would socialize after work. That was a big thing at the *Arkansas Gazette*. These are like my peak hours, so I would just drive up and maybe stop for a nap for like 20 minutes somewhere in Missouri or someplace like that or southern Illinois and get there.

JB: So socializing at the *Gazette* was one of the big things?

HC: Yes. Yes.

JB: The staff members were very close. Is that right?

HC: Very close-knit group, especially the people on the copy desk, and some of the reporters with our particular group.

JB: Who were some of the people on the copy desk that you were socializing with?

HC: Well, Jonathan Portis, whose house we often went to. He's the brother of Charles Portis, the novelist, who I understand worked at the *Gazette* years before that.

JB: Yes.

HC: Jack Bradley, Ed Gray, Gerald Koontz, Brenda Spillman.

JB: So you guys would go from apartment to apartment or . . .

HC: Right.

JB: Rather than to bars. Is that right?

HC: Most of the time. Occasionally, very, very rarely, we went to a bar, but not too often. As I recall, maybe the bars in Little Rock in those days closed at midnight. Is that possible?

JB: Well, it's possible.

HC: Yes. Yes. Which wouldn't have left us much time anyway.

JB: That's right.

HC: Yes.

JB: Well, was there . . .?

HC: There were private clubs that we went to a couple of times, you know.

JB: The old Press Club was closed.

HC: That was it.

JB: Was that still there at that point?

HC: Yes. Yes. I went there a couple of times.

JB: That was a big deal when I was editor. Right across the street. We went over to all those social clubs. You are absolutely right. The bars did close at midnight.

HC: That was one of the reasons for the social clubs.

JB: Then these so-called private clubs would be the place where we would hang out.

HC: The Press Club was still there when I was there.

JB: The Press Club was still there.

HC: I went there a couple of times, but mostly we went to my house sometimes. A lot of times to Jonathan's. Sometimes to other people's.

JB: Were there a lot of parties?

HC: Yes.

JB: Somebody at the *Gazette* would give parties, and they would be for staff members.

HC: Yes. More parties than at any other place I have ever worked. I have worked in a couple of places.

JB: Okay. Right. Aside from all these social events, the work was pretty serious.

HC: Right. I think it was a paper that foisted a lot of respect for seriousness, for accuracy, for lack of flamboyance, which – you know, that approach had some detractors, but many people admired it also. You know, some people thought that the *Gazette* might be a little on the dull side. The *Gazette*, I think, in addition to its local roots, might have looked, to a certain extent, to be like a *New York Times* for its region or for its state. It definitely aspired to be a statewide newspaper, to cover the state.

JB: And the competition with the *Arkansas Democrat* – at that point, the *Democrat* was viewed as how?

HC: Well, the *Democrat* was perceived as much weaker, not much of a threat. As an extreme right-wing, kind of a partisan right-wing paper, and at the same time not having much principle. While the *Gazette* was viewed, in our minds, as being a highly principled publication. I think a lot of people felt a lot of pride working there. It took me a while to gain it, because I didn't have that much familiarity with it, but I think many of the staff members, many of the Arkansans, really had a deep feeling for the *Gazette*. You know, what it had stood for over the years.

JB: And how do you feel about the *Gazette* now that you've compared it with the – you have worked at other papers, *Newsday*, on Long Island, and the *Daily News*, in New York, for many years – how do you compare the *Gazette*?

HC: Well, I think it was really excellent for – you know, I know it had its faults, but I think overall it was really excellent compared to most newspapers in smaller

cities. I think, in some ways it was better than newspapers in bigger cities. It did have lively things. One great feature the *Gazette* had was the feature in the left-hand column, "In The News," which I think the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* has picked up. These little blurbs about people. It was done in an amazingly interesting and readable fashion.

JB: I think Bob Douglas was one of the originators, may have been the originator.

HC: I wouldn't be surprised. When I was there, it was Pat Carrithers[sp?] who did a great job with it.

JB: Yes.

HC: I mean, he was the guy who generally did it.

JB: You know, I may be mistaken about that. I think Bob did it, but it wasn't his idea. Anyway, that was – and now, you know, many papers have those. Even *The New York Times* has the start of the same type of the deal.

HC: That's right. But I don't think it has done as well. [Laughs] I have to tell you I just think, you know – well, the fact that it was positioned on the front page. It was that one narrow column. It was all – I even like the layout. The idea of where it was I just think it was just perfect. Especially as a counterweight to the seriousness of the rest of the page. You know, that was before – I don't know whether the *Gazette* – well, I am sure when Gannett took it over, it became more featurized. It had the lighter stories. But when I was there, basically, the front page was for hard news, serious stories.

JB: Yes.

HC: So the "In The News" was nice – it gave it a little balance. A very enjoyable feature.

JB: Who were some of the writers who were the stars of the paper that you recall?

HC: Let me tell you one story about "In The News" which I just thought of.

JB: Yes. Tell me.

HC: This was my very first day on any newspaper where I sat in the slot. It was one day at the *Gazette*, and one of the things I was slotting was the "In The News" column and it was as I just described, in the most prominent spot in the newspaper and, as you learn as years go on when you sit in the slot, even your best copy editor can let major bloopers get by. Which I learned the hard way that very first day. And this is one of the things that helped me be extremely careful. Again, I won't name the name, but – I don't think we assigned stories at the *Gazette*, the way I remember. I think we just picked them out of the electronic basket. Oh, by the way, one of the interesting things we should go back to – let me finish this story – but one of the things we should go back to was that during my tenure at the *Gazette*, they switched from paper and pencil to computer. That was, you know, during the time I was there. – Anyway, you know, he picked the story out of the computer basket, one of the really sharper guys there. He sends it to me, and I slot it. The next day there were two major embarrassing errors in the paper. One was a confusion of the words "prostrate" and "prostate." [Laughs] So it came out something like, "The guy lay prostate on the ground." And the other one was similar, just bad. I can't remember the other one for some reason.

Well, to add insult to injury, the guy who told it to me was the guy who was the rim editor on it, and he comes up to me the next day, "Boy, my friends really laughed at these two errors in the *Gazette*." It turned out – I was so furious. I mean, I should have been – I was furious at myself, too, but, of course, I was furious at him for missing it and furious at him for having the nerve to approach me with it. It was the day before my vacation, and actually I got so upset about it because I did have standards then, you know. I did know how important it was and how stupid a newspaper can look, so it ruined my vacation. It was right before a vacation that this guy told me that. And it took me – this was a guy I generally liked – but I couldn't speak to him for about a month or two after that. I was just livid, but overall the experience was very good. I mean, you really cannot – this is one thing I learned there. It's a major thing in copy editing: you can't assume anything is right.

JB: Well, was this on the "In The News?"

HC: It was the "In The News." Oh, if it was on page forty-two, I might have been a little more relaxed about it. But this is something that everybody in Arkansas – I am sure everybody who bought the *Gazette* read that. It was – as I say, it was just a great, great feature, and it was visible. It was almost as bad as if you would have had it in a headline, you know, on page one.

JB: "He was prostate on the ground."

HC: Yes. Right. And there was another error, which I forgot, which was just as bad.

JB: Well, *The Times*, *The New York Times*, I have got to tell you, Harvey, is still

confusing. We are still confused by "prostrate" and "prostate." [Laughs]

HC: Well, I guess it is a tough one, but I can tell you, I will never – I will never in fact make that error. There might be some others.

JB: We've all made those kinds of errors.

HC: Right. But this was my first day on the slot, you know. It just came back that this – the first time I had ever done any kind of slot work – before then I was just on the rim. So it just hit me on the face.

JB: And going on vacation.

HC: Right before a vacation. And the guy who let the error go by on the rim, supposedly, has time to read a little more carefully, you know. A very bright guy [unintelligible].

JB: Harvey, you said they switched over from . . .

HC: Right. When I got there, the *Gazette* was still in an old – the news room was probably the same one that you worked in. It was probably the same one as fifty years before. It was a very old-fashioned news room, wooden floors, you know, pencil and paper and those – I forgot what you call them – those . . . What do you call those things – were they conveyor belts that brought the copy back from the composing room?

JB: Yes.

HC: So during the time I was there, the *Gazette* switched to the new technology, which was editing on VDT screens. And they took off a large part of the old composing room-- because we moved out of that space – and they built what was essentially

a brand-new news room with the VDTs. I think the system was called [Hendricks?]. And that was a major, major change. Another great thing for me was – this turned out very lucky for me personally – it was great to learn my first computer system at the same time everybody else was learning it. I've often felt sorry for tryouts who come to the *Daily News*, who not only have to worry about the copy, but have to learn the peculiarities of the *Daily News* computer system, you know, the commands and the different formats, et cetera. But, you know, everybody was struggling, and we all learned it together.

JB: Well, now you had not worked electronically at all before you went down there?

HC: Not at all.

JB: You had – Certainly, the *Bond Buyer* was not that way.

HC: Right. Actually the *Bond Buyer*, the part of the *Bond Buyer* that I worked on, was very similar to the news service, and it's called Munifacts. I actually didn't work on the *Bond Buyer* paper. That's why I said I really wanted to enter a newspaper. Munifacts was a wire service for bond traders, so it was similar to what I was doing at the news service, in the sense that you'd edit copy and hand it to a teletype operator to punch in. That was the technology. I didn't really – what an ancient history.

JB: Yes.

HC: Teletype operator. I hope people 20 years from now understand that term.

JB: Yes. What a teletype operator is.

HC: Right. Right. Wow.

JB: And forget Linotype operator. That's history.

HC: Actually, when I got to the *Gazette*, it was all Linotype operators.

JB: Yes.

HC: There was one printer – I remember that some of the printers at the *Gazette* were really characters. There was one guy who always went around and barked. Woof, woof, woof. [Laughter] Anyway, one day I am walking through the news room, and I feel a tug at my ankle and I hear a bark. It's this guy on the floor going, woof, woof. [Laughter]

JB: The guy is on the floor?

HC: Barking. [Laughter]

JB: Barking and tugging at your ankle?

HC: Yes. True story.

JB: How old was this guy?

HC: He was probably in his 50s, I would guess. He was just a character. You know, this was his little routine.

JB: This was his thing?

HC: Yes.

JB: He was not nuts. He just enjoyed doing this.

HC: I guess. I didn't pursue it too much. [Laughter]

JB: Now, wait a minute. Were you sitting at your desk?

HC: No, I was walking.

JB: You were walking.

HC: I was walking, and, all of the sudden, I felt – woof, woof – and, you know, somebody grabbing at my . . .

JB: And he was lying on the floor?

HC: Woof, woof. [Laughter]

JB: And snapping at your ankle?

HC: That's right.

JB: Hmm.

HC: I can't remember his name. I probably could figure it out, but I can't remember his name.

JB: Well, does any one match that as far as being a character?

HC: Rutherford. Rutherford. I remember, there was one thing about Rutherford. He was a great boss. He was my direct boss most of the time I was there. But Rutherford, every day around deadline – when deadline would come, he would all of the sudden start saying – get very nervous and say, "We're going to make it tonight boys. We're going to make it tonight." It was almost like a preacher. Go back into the shop and say, "We're going to make it tonight boys. We're going to make it." I guess we always did make it, but we always wondered what would happen if we didn't. What would happen to poor Rutherford? Anyway, it was – Rutherford was a very, very serious guy, and people maybe made jokes about him because of that, but everybody respected him on a different level. He was very well liked. But somebody that serious, you know, sometimes opens himself up to a certain amount of ridicule, but, overall, Rutherford's a good guy.

JB: Is there anything besides the parties and the seriousness of the paper at the same time and the characters that you recall about the paper that stands out to you?

HC: You asked me a question before, and I couldn't think of an answer, but one – occasionally on a Sunday, I forget whether I filled in as news editor or on the wire desk, I started doing that after a while. I remember two decisions. One I am kind of proud of. The night that the – I was probably just lucky – I was on duty the day of the Jim Jones massacre in Guyana, and somebody said, "It doesn't sound like such a big story." And I said, "Well, let's put it on page one. It looks bigger." And it kept on getting bigger and bigger as the night went on.

JB: Yes, that was.

HC: That turned out to be a tremendous story.

JB: An incredible story.

HC: Yes, that was.

JB: What was the break that you had at that point?

HC: I just felt, well, all these people – I think it was before they knew . . .

JB: How many there were?

HC: How many, plus, I am not sure they knew right away what the involvement of the congressman was, Congressman Leo Ryan, right? Was he there, or was his daughter there, or what was it? Somehow there was a California congressman . . .

JB: He had been over there to visit them because, I think, he had had some relatives of his constituents over there.

HC: His constituents. I see. Was he killed?

JB: No, he was not. I think he had been over to visit them just recently, I think, because he had become concerned. The relatives in California were his constituents who had relatives who were in Guyana, and they were concerned.

HC: How right he was. Yes.

JB: And he became concerned enough to, I believe, fly over.

HC: Well, that connection was not known right at the beginning either. As I say, it just exploded as the night and then as the days went on.

JB: And what was the other thing?

HC: The other thing was – because of my personal background, I was there [at the Gazette] the day that the Nazis were marching through Skokie, Illinois, which was a big story at the time. At that time there were a lot of Holocaust survivors there and – I don't know what their reaction would be now, but at that time – I'm Jewish and I did not – I wanted to underplay the story just because I felt – and this you asked me what kind of [unintelligible] and, again, I was either the telegraph editor or the news editor that day. And we ended up making less of it than, I think, someone else would have made of it. But I just didn't want to give [publicity] to the Nazis. I think nowadays the thinking might be just the opposite. You know, the [unintelligible] blowing up, but back then at least I felt not – you know, that they didn't deserve that kind of play. So that was two of the things I remember.

JB: Yes. Well, from the *Gazette* then you decided that after four years in Arkansas – you decided you might want to get back home?

HC: Yes. That was my only motivation. I liked working on the *Gazette*. It was a great, great place. As I say, I learned a tremendous amount. I learned to respect the craft, learned to respect the news. More of the idea of balance. You know, not to be partisan. But I did want to get back home.

JB: And you – on a visit you applied at the *Newsday*?

HC: *Newsday*, on Long Island. Yes, basically, I left an application, and they called me up for a tryout. Had the tryout.

JB: So you came back then, after having spent a little over four years in Little Rock.

HC: Yes. That's correct.

JB: And you came back in February in 1979, is that correct?

HC: Yes. That's right.

JB: And what was the atmosphere like on *Newsday*?

HC: Well, *Newsday*, after the warmth and camaraderie at the *Gazette*, I found it very, very cold. It was a little bit too much of a shock for me. And I felt that the setup was that everybody worked separately. It was very atomized. It wasn't – maybe it was the physical structure of the desk. It was just – and I think for a copy editor to make it even lonely than it has to be. It was not that great a setup. So it wasn't anywhere near as happy there workwise as I was at the *Gazette*.

JB: Although it was not too far from your home, was it?

HC: It was very close. As far as commuting, it couldn't be better. It was one exit on the Long Island Expressway. And at the unfortunate hours that I worked there was nobody on the road.

JB: You lived in Plainview, within easy driving.

HC: Plainview. *Newsday* was in Melville, so it was right there. And I couldn't have had that job if I didn't learn to drive in Little Rock, I would like to point out. [Laughter]

JB: Yes. Right.

HC: No matter how close it was. You can't walk on Long Island, and there is no public transportation I am sure after 10 o'clock at night.

JB: Right. As bad as Little Rock at first.

HC: That's right.

JB: If not worse on Long Island.

HC: That is correct. That is correct.

JB: So from there you decided to give the city a shot.

HC: Well, I had heard about the *Daily News*. There was somebody at *Newsday* who had been approached by the *News*, and he wasn't interested, and he passed my name on. And, you know, it seemed interesting.

JB: So you had another tryout there.

HC: Yes. I had a tryout there.

JB: This time they were working electronically, is that right?

HC: Yes. Well, *Newsday*, also. Yes. As I said after the *Gazette* I don't think I ever worked on pencil and paper again.

JB: Yes.

HC: Right, so the copy chief offered a provisional job because he didn't have

authorization for a regular full-time hire at the *Daily News*. I wasn't about to do that.

JB: At this point the *Daily News* was owned by the . . .

HC: The Tribune Company.

JB: Yes. And it was kind of shaky at that point?

HC: It was shaky even then. I had a lot of hesitation about leaving *Newsday* even though I wasn't that happy there. At that point I was getting a little older. I was getting a little more interested in security, but I was really – I really felt stifled at *Newsday* at that point. So when the copy chief at the *News* came up with the full-time job, I took it. You know, I had a lot of going back and forth. In fact, the copy chief at the *News* at that time was Len Valenti. First I told him, "No," actually. [unintelligible] So he called up. He actually called me at home and said, "I want a better explanation. I won't take 'no' for an answer." [Laughter]

JB: After you turned him down?

HC: After I rejected the job.

JB: Not the provisional job. The real job.

HC: No, no. The regular full-time job. I had real hesitation about making that move.

JB: Full-time job. So you . . .

HC: Because the *News* did have – from the day I walked into the *News*, there were rumors about its future, you know. Actually, I think the rumors were not off base. It's just by some various flukes of luck that – various flukes – that we are still in business and I am still there.

JB: Well, so you were not able to give a good enough explanation of why you rejected the job?

HC: That's right. I couldn't answer him. This guy was extremely persuasive. That's right. He won.

JB: So he wound up hiring you.

HC: That's right.

JB: Okay.

HC: I ended up accepting.

JB: As soon as you went to work there, you said there was crisis after crisis. What was the first thing?

HC: Well, the first one that I remember, you know they – a few months after I got there, they were going to try something called the "Tonight Edition," which was supposed to be an upscale *Daily News* that would sell in the afternoon. But it didn't work at all. They just kept on losing more money, and when they folded it, they were laying off a lot of people, and the Tribune company threatened to sell the paper to Joseph Allbritten. Joseph Allbritten had already drawn up a hit list in an early attempt to bust the newspaper guild, but that never materialized, and the Tribune kept the paper at that point.

JB: And then who purchased it from the Tribune?

HC: Well, that was years later.

JB: What was the series of those . . .

HC: In 1991, after the strike. There was a strike – a major strike at the *Daily News* in

October – it began in October 1990.

JB: Was this a Guild strike?

HC: Actually, no. The Guild wasn't the first – the Guild respected the picket lines, but . . .

JB: Who began the strike?

HC: Basically, the truck drivers, I think. Truck drivers were the major force behind the strike, although many Guild members crossed the picket lines, which ultimately turned out to hurt the Guild.

JB: You did not cross the picket lines?

HC: No, no. I was on strike for – well, whatever – it was four and half months. Anyway, toward the end of the strike, Robert Maxwell bought the paper form the Tribune Company. Or assumed the paper. Actually, I think they might have paid him to take it. And he ran it for a while, and then he fell off a boat, so the stories go, but he did . . .

JB: He drowned.

HC: He disappeared. That is all I am going to say is that he disappeared. I remember the day – I will never forget the *Daily News* headline the next day, "Maxwell Dead At Sea." I don't know. Just it was one of those incredible . . . And then a few months after that the paper went into bankruptcy, and then Kevin Maxwell, one of Maxwell's sons, came into the newsroom, you know, to rally the troops. I'll never forget he said, "This is all bullshit. This is bullshit." The next day, he goes back to England, and he is in jail. [Laughs] It is just amazing.

JB: What was he jailed for?

HC: Well, he was part of the whole fraud.

JB: Oh, I see.

HC: They were stealing, you know. They were stealing pension funds from Maxwell's papers in Britain, you know. But he said, "This is bullshit." [Laughs] And then a couple of days after that – a couple of days after that his wife is applying for the British equivalent of welfare, you know. They call it the dole over there. And she said, "Well, you know we have to eat, too." [Laughter] It is just a staggering, a staggering series of events. And then in 1993, Zuckerman took over, essentially. Mortimer Zuckerman took over the paper.

JB: So you have been the slot – the assistant slot person.

HC: Right. The official title is assistant copy chief – for about four or five years now.

JB: Assistant copy chief.

HC: Right. Basically, I do slotting and, you know, the second slot, as backup slot. And I run the desk once a week, and I run the desk in the absence of the copy chief.

JB: So you are doing mostly slotting now because of the pressure of all the stories.

HC: Right. Right. I mean, you have to have more than one slot.

JB: Used to, we (*The New York Times* national desk) were just doing one slot, but now it is just too, too much for one person.

HC: No, you need at least two. Yes. It's tremendous.

JB: It was really too much for two people a lot of times, well, sometimes, anyway.

Well, you are pretty happy in this newspaper career, and I guess you got a pretty sound basis at the *Gazette*.

HC: Absolutely. Absolutely. That was the beginning of it. That was where I really learned.

JB: I know I look back on my time at the *Gazette* as really as, you know, one of the highlights – although it was just a year.

HC: You were only there a year?

JB: Yes. I was only there a year, but it was like I didn't appreciate it. Even though I had a great time and thought that it was great – and they won the two Pulitzers while I was down there – it was only years later that I really appreciated what the paper was, what it had done, what it had achieved, what it was for so many years. And the people that I have talked to, you know, who have been there, they feel the same way. It just made a big impression.

HC: Yes. Tremendous disappointment when [the Pattersons?] Heiskell sold it.

JB: Yes, it was. None – none of us who there at the time would have ever envisioned such a thing.

HC: No, no. When I left in 1979, that was – that would be when I left in . . .

JB: 1978.

HC: I left in 1979, that's right.

JB: Oh, it was 1979.

HC: I was there from like October, 1974, to February, 1979.

JB: I see.

HC: That's correct. I never would have dreamed that *Gazette* would fold. Of course, Gannett wasn't there yet.

JB: Yes.

HC: What year did you work there?

JB: I worked there in 1957 and 1958. The year of the Little Rock Crisis and the next year.

HC: The Little Rock Crisis. Central High School.

JB: Well, Harvey, it has been really interesting talking to you and hope this is good for the project.

[End of Interview]