Gazette Project

Interview with

Jerol Garrison,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
9 February 2000

Interviewer: Roy Reed

Roy Reed: . . . This is Jerol Garrison and Roy Reed on February 9, 2000, in Jerol's home in Sherwood. First of all, Jerol, I just want to be sure we have your permission to tape record this interview and turn it over to the Center for Oral and Visual History.

Jerol Garrison: Yes, that's fine.

RR: Okay. Why don't you start by filling in a little background on yourself personally before you came to the *Gazette*? Where and when you were born, and to whom and just kind of sketch your life before you joined the *Gazette*.

JG: I was born in Columbia, Missouri, in the heart of Missouri, and at age seventeen my parents moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas. Of course, I came with them.

RR: You were born when?

JG: I was born in 1931.

RR: '31.

JG: And . . .

RR: Just getting the complete [information].

JG: October 4, 1931, is my birthday in Columbia, Missouri. We actually lived four years in California, the four years that I went to high school. I graduated from

Sequoyah — S-E-Q-U-O-Y-A-H. I got that wrong; it's S-E-Q-U-O-I-A.

RR: S-E-Q . . .

JG: U-O-I-A Union High School in Redwood City, California. And right after I graduated, my father took a job at the University of Arkansas, so in September that year, we moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, and I tell a story that I was the only student in Fayetteville who came to college and brought his parents with him!

RR: [Laughs.]

JG: So, I attended the University of Arkansas, and then later I spent two years in the Army. And I attended Northwestern University. I had a bachelor's in journalism from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville and a master's degree in journalism from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Before I came to the *Gazette* in 1958, I was a reporter for the Neosho — N-E-O-S-H-O — Missouri *Daily News* in southwest Missouri, where I covered everything there was to cover, all the way from the county court house and city hall to high school sports and farm feature stories. Anyway, at the *Gazette*, after being there a few months and covering some night meetings and being on general assignment during the day, I was placed on the federal beat which was, at that time, a half-time beat. I would cover the federal beat in the afternoon when I came to work, and in the evenings I would cover night meetings like the Little Rock City Council or the North Little Rock City Council or the North Little Rock Hospital Commission, something like that. In 1960, after I'd been there two years, the *Gazette* made the federal beat a full time beat, and so, I covered that on a regular basis.

RR: I think it might be interesting to people who don't know anything about how newspapers work to tell something about the hours that you worked. When would you come in to work and when were you off? We were a morning newspaper.

JG: When I first went to work at the *Gazette*, I came to work at 2:30 in the afternoon. That was the first two years, and I would cover the federal beat, try to get in a little supper, and then cover a night meeting and get off after the night meeting, along about 11:00 p.m. After two years, my hours began whenever I felt I needed to come on. Usually, I would report in about 10:00 in the morning and leave about 8 or 9 at night. The hours varied depending on the news load. I would be going to work on a schedule that kept me away from morning traffic and coming home on a schedule that kept me away from the evening traffic. So, that part I thought was great.

RR: Were you paid overtime if you had to work late?

JG: I didn't turn in overtime. During the legislative session, I would ask for some extra time off in return for working long hours. And that would give me a three-week vacation rather than a two-week vacation and enabled us to take some trips out west.

RR: As I recollect, all of us worked kind of uncertain hours. You mentioned you went in when you felt the story demanded it. I think most of us there — that might seem strange to people who are required to go in at 8 or 9 and maybe punch a clock. Newspapers were different.

JG: Well, my starting time would vary according to if there was a federal court

hearing, say starting at 9 in the morning, I would have to go in and be present for that hearing. If there wasn't a hearing, I had a little more flexibility on what time I went in, but I was usually there making the rounds of federal agencies and federal courts by 10:00.

RR: You mentioned going in after rush hour traffic. I just remembered that one time Charlie Allbright, who at that time was writing the "Our Town" column, wrote a column about you and a Plymouth automobile. Can you tell that story?

JG: Well, it was a 1953 Plymouth that I'd bought in 1954 when Sally and I were married. Sally is my wife, of course.

RR: S-A-L-L-Y?

JG: Right. I was rather proud of the car and rolled up a lot of miles on it. Well, one day I was looking at the odometer, and I noticed that sometime the next morning on the way to work it would turn over 100,000 miles. So I said, "Well, that'll be fun to watch that thing turn over." Well, by the time I got to my parking place near the *Gazette* building, I looked down at the odometer — I'd forgotten to look! — the odometer had already turned over and it said 100,000. So, so much for that. I didn't get to watch it. But Charlie wrote a column on it and it was funny. It was interesting.

RR: Charlie is funny. He's always been able to wring all the humor out of a thing like that. Do you have that column?

JG: Somewhere I'm sure I do.

RR: Would you remember the date?

JG: Well, I don't remember the date, but I think I can find it.

RR: We like to keep paper like that, documentary stuff, to go with the interviews, and it just occurs to me that would be a nice thing to add.

JG: Well, he wrote another column about a Volkswagen that I had. Of course, the Volkswagen engine was in the rear. I had stopped at our church in that Volkswagen and I was picking up some limbs, and I loaded them in what was the trunk of the Volkswagen; they were sticking out a lot. But then I tried to close the lid down over these limbs, and I thought I had it fixed okay, but driving out on the highway, when I would get up to about 20 miles an hour, the lid would fly up and I couldn't see. So I had to stop and try to fasten it down again and then continue on. Well, there was a line of traffic that had formed behind me. Finally, when I came to a yard, I pulled off and decided I was going to dump the limbs in a man's yard. He was out there and he said, "No, you can't do that!" And I said, "Well, just long enough for me to go home and get something else to load these limbs in." So, I did that and it was kind of funny with Charlie writing his column about the Volkswagen chomping up and down on these limbs as I drove down the highway with the line of cars behind me.

RR: Yes, that'd be an interesting column, too. If you come across those, I'd appreciate a Xerox copy. I never saw the one about the Volkswagen. I guess I was gone by then. You mentioned the federal beat. You covered that how many years?

JG: I was at the *Gazette* fourteen years, and thirteen of those were involved in covering the federal beat.

RR: What year did you leave the paper by the way?

JG: I left the paper in 1972.

RR: Okay. What sort of stories did you get on the federal beat?

JG: Well, the most important element of the federal beat and the one which took about half of my time was covering the federal courts. This involved writing articles when cases were filed and covering hearings and trials when they took place in the courtroom and then writing up the decisions. School desegregation hearings got to be my specialty, and I covered Little Rock school case hearings, as well as those from other school districts. In the beginning, Arkansas had a pupil placement law for desegregation; then that was changed to Freedom of Choice plans and most of the coverage involved that. After I left the *Gazette*, busing got involved.

RR: If you could give just a little description of what those laws were – pupil placement and Freedom of Choice. What were these laws designed to do? These were state laws, right?

JG: Right. Well, the pupil placement law was designed to, more or less, hand pick the black students who would be admitted to the formerly all-white schools. Blacks who wanted to go to a formerly all-white school had to actually apply and be approved by the school board before they were admitted. Sometime in the late '50s, that was thrown out, and so the schools . . .

RR: By the federal court?

JG: It was thrown out by the federal court, and schools began using the Arkansas

Freedom of Choice law which was enacted by the Legislature, and it allowed students to choose the school they wanted to attend. Many black students chose to go to the formerly all-white schools, and I am not aware of any white students who chose to go to the formerly all-black schools. That all lasted a long time until the U.S. Supreme Court said that that wasn't very good, and what the U.S. Supreme Court wanted was unitary schools, just one set of schools for all students which, in essence, meant that the small school districts closed their black schools and all pupils went to the formerly all-white school. That worked well in some cases, but in school districts with a heavily black population, it caused a lot of white flight in which white students left the formerly all-white schools and either went to a private school or to another school district.

RR: Pupil placement and Freedom of Choice, am I right that both of those were enacted during the Faubus years, the administration of Governor Orval Faubus . . .

JG: Correct.

RR: . . . and were efforts to slow down the process of desegregation?

JG: That's right.

RR: It sounds as if you covered this rather important running story for a great many years since Little Rock had become one of the well known centers of the racial conflict as regards to schools.

JG: Yes, and some of the hearings were rather interesting. Others got rather tedious and you felt like the four walls of the courtroom were closing in on you because they went on for days. In the beginning, we had lawyers like Thurgood Marshall

and Wiley Branton, and Thurgood Marshall went on to higher things in Washington, and Wiley Branton continued as a lawyer. Branton was joined, I remember, one day in 1962 by this very young lawyer just out of Yale Law School named John Walker, a very skinny guy, and John Walker later went on to be the chief lawyer for the black plaintiffs.

RR: On the other side, do you remember some of the lawyers representing the school district?

JG: Herschel Friday — H-E-R-S-C-H-E-L — Friday, F-R-I-D-A-Y.

RR: Friday, that's a law firm?

JG: No, back then, it was Mehaffy, Smith and Williams, and then later went on to be the Friday law firm. Robert V. Light. V as in victor. Light, L-I-G-H-T, was the other principal lawyer; he later took over for Herschel Friday. Those were the two principal school board lawyers used by all the school districts. So they would be in the court, representing the school, and then you would have the school superintendent talking about integration or what might happen under integration and how they would implement their plan. You sometimes would have expert witnesses telling about the sociological impact of integration. And I remember one witness in particular who was very interesting was a sociologist. The gist of her testimony was that blacks talk differently and she used a lot of different phrases that black children used. And she was from a school district that had a sizable black population and there was a lot of black dialect, and she illustrated on the witness stand what one aspect of integration was going to be, that is simply

learning how to understand black pupils.

RR: You dealt with some of the best known names in the country in legal circles. I'm thinking of Thurgood Marshall, who President Johnson appointed to the Supreme Court later on. You dealt with these people first hand. What kind of memories do you have of people like that? Say, Thurgood Marshall?

JG: Well, I don't have any memories of Thurgood Marshall except that he was very efficient and very straightforward and the same with Wiley Branton. I got to know Wiley a little more. He was a very business-like lawyer. You sort of felt that a person like Wiley could hardly believe some of the things that were coming from the witnesses for the school districts, but he handled himself with a lot of dignity. John Walker was a little more fiery. You could tell he was getting worked up over some of the testimony that he was hearing.

RR: You seem to be suggesting that Wiley Branton and some of the others used some body language now and then. To express themselves.

JG: I don't remember any particular body language from Wiley Branton, but John Walker would move backward and forward and sometimes sideways in talking to his witnesses. John Walker was indignant over some of the things he heard the school officials talking about.

RR: Did you ever interview Thurgood Marshall?

JG: No.

RR: Did you ever have any conversation with him that you can recollect?

JG: No. My coverage of Thurgood Marshall was very brief and I don't have any

recollection.

RR: During this same period — you worked at the *Gazette* from ‘58 through ‘72 —

JG: Right.

RR: What were some of the other big stories that the *Gazette* was covering during those years?

JG: Well, of course, Orval Faubus himself was a big story. And all the politics in Arkansas seemed to revolve around Faubus. The Democratic Party every two years would try out these candidates who claimed they were going to unseat Faubus, but it never happened. In fact, by the time that 1966 rolled around when Jim Johnson was the Democratic nominee, Faubus was not running. I suppose if Faubus had run that year, he would’ve been nominated again. But Jim Johnson captured the segregationist vote in ‘66. He overpowered Frank Holt in the primary, but he faced a formidable foe in the general election, Winthrop Rockefeller. Winthrop Rockefeller had already run in ‘64 and was defeated by Faubus, but up against Jim Johnson — some people were afraid of Jim Johnson, that he might be just a little too much of a firebrand, so they voted for Winthrop Rockefeller in the general election. Rockefeller was a man who appealed to reason, and he won.

RR: Have you ever noticed how often you see the mistake in print that Rockefeller defeated Faubus?

JG: Yes, that never happened.

RR: Never happened, but have you seen it in print? I see it all the time.

JG: I think I have seen that. Now, Faubus did run again, but he ran against somebody else. I think Rockfeller had vanished from the scene.

RR: In fact, he was finally vanquished, Faubus was, by Dale Bumpers in 1970. But there are all kinds of other stories that the *Gazette* concerned itself with during those years, and, as you say, one of the big ones was the Faubus years. Outside of politics, do you think of other big stories that occurred during those years?

JG: Well, the big one for me was the Arkansas River Navigation Project which fell to me. Because of the federal beat, I covered the Army Corps of Engineers which was in charge of that construction project. So I covered the construction of the twelve locks and dams on the Arkansas River and the revetments and dikes to stabilize the banks. I remember one time in the early 60s, I stood on the bed of the Arkansas River at Dardanelle. The Army Engineers had rolled the river back with a cofferdam and . . .

RR: Cofferdam?

JG: Cofferdam. C-O-F-F-E-R-D-A-M. And that left the river bed, at least half of it, sitting dry, and the river had scoured these potholes and ridges on the bed of the river out of the sandstone. So the lead of my story was that if kids wanted to play a game of hide and seek on the bed of the Arkansas River, that they could easily hide by these three-foot ridges and potholes that had been worn there over the years by the action of the river.

RR: That's amazing.

JG: I also rode on the first barge tow into Little Rock in 1969. On that historic

occasion several of us, several people got on the towboat at the David D. Terry Lock and Dam downstream from Little Rock in January of 1969 when the river had been made navigable to Little Rock. And we rode that towboat and the two barges carrying loads of steel up to the port of Little Rock in twenty degree weather. It was a very cold day, but it was a very historic occasion. One of those loads of steel was for the Ward school bus manufacturing plant in Conway; they were going to make school buses out of the steel from Pittsburgh. The other barge carried steel for the Arkansas Foundry Company. I also remember when I drove my car down to David D. Terry Lock and Dam downstream from Little Rock for the dedication of this dam, the car stalled in a line of traffic and, wow, what was I going to do? So I got out and started to push. I was going to push it off to the side of the road; it was on the access road leading to the dam, and right behind me was a fancy car, limousine-type car, driven by John Riggs, one of the Arkansas River supporters and backers. And these two men jumped out of the car and began helping me push, and I looked up and there was John Paul Hammerschmidt and David Pryor! Both were Congressmen.

RR: [Laughs.]

JG: I thought, boy, that was great service to get my car off the road, and I was able to ride in their limousine the rest of the way to the dedication. Afterward, I arranged for a different ride back home. I also went to Tulsa in 1971 when President Nixon dedicated the 400-mile navigation project, the Arkansas River Navigation Project. That was a historic occasion with a lot of festivities at the port of Catoosa, which

is the port for Tulsa.

RR: I was there that day for the *New York Times*. I'd forgotten all about that story. C-A-T-O-O-S-A.

JG: Right. Another major aspect of the river work were the six bridges at Little Rock, all of which had uneven spans, that is, spans of different lengths. And they all had to be altered before we could have barge traffic on the river. They all had to have new navigation spans which would line them up for the forthcoming barge traffic. That was a major navigation project: three highway bridges and three railroad bridges had to be changed. The construction of the Titan missile silos — there were eighteen missile silos built in a ring around Little Rock, actually, a half circle north of Little Rock, as a defensive measure. I remember how eery it was going down in one of those silos when it was under construction, and you saw this massive amount of concrete that had been poured into the ground, possibly 20 stories down into the ground, I can't remember the exact depth, but you wondered, "What are we doing? Why are we having to do this? Isn't this a tremendous waste of our resources?" On the other hand, we needed the defenses, so we had to be doing something. And then later, of course, when I saw a missile in a silo, that was also an awesome thing.

RR: I gather the reason for all those missiles around Little Rock was to protect the Little Rock Air Force Base, which is a SAC base, a Strategic Air Command base, which meant the bombers that would attack Russia if they attacked us had to be protected.

JG: Right. That's correct.

RR: Did you cover the story when one of the Titan missiles, one of the silos exploded?

JG: No, I was ill at that time. Ernie Dumas covered that story. I remember he did a great job.

RR: That's right. I ran into Ernie on that story. I came back to the state for that story. It was a terrible tragedy. I don't even remember the year, but a lot of people were killed. Several dozen people died in that accident.

JG: Right. But in connection with my work with the Army Engineers, I also wrote about the Greers Ferry Dam on the Little Red River, and I remember standing on the high bank there, looking down at the construction in a deep valley and watching the men and machines carving a place for the foundation for the dam on those steep hillsides. I remember that I sort of reverted briefly to my childhood and I started to use the word "steam shovel." And then I thought, "No, that's not right. These are modern machines, not steam shovels!" So I had to quickly correct myself. It's funny how a person lapses back to his or her childhood. President Kennedy came to Greers Ferry Dam and dedicated the structure in 1963 on October 3, 1963, just six weeks before he was assassinated. I didn't go up to Greers Ferry, but I covered his speech that same day at the Little Rock fairgrounds. Kennedy gave two talks that day; one was at Greers Ferry for the dedication; the other was in Little Rock. And I remember how hot it was. It was a sweltering hot day and beads of sweat were falling off my forehead onto my notebook as I was trying to take notes. Fortunately, I noticed a White House

stenographer taking down the speech, and I asked him if I could get a copy of it. And he said, "Well, if you'll go out to Little Rock Air Force Base, why, in about two hours, we'll have this transcribed and you can get copies." So, after the ceremony and the festivities, I got in my car and drove out to Little Rock Air Force Base and didn't have to wait long, and got a copy of the speech. It really saved the day for me because I had crummy notes and I didn't have a tape recorder and I was grateful for that copy.

RR: One of those little problems that reporters run into, you have to figure out how to solve instantaneously. That was quick thinking.

JG: Well, I remember it was the insignia of a pin that the man wore on his lapel that told me he was associated with the White House. I also covered Hubert Humphrey when he came to speak in Little Rock in 1968 when he was campaigning or running for President. I believe that was the Democratic state convention where he spoke, although I can't say for sure. And I covered George Wallace when he came for a rally in the late '60s. It was a political rally, but it turned out to be more of a segregation rally. And I can remember George Wallace saying one thing to reporters who talked to him — well, he covered a lot of ground, but I remember one thing he said was that the white steelworkers in Birmingham couldn't understand why they had to take showers with the black steelworkers. He made that comment which stayed with me. Later, he was paralyzed with a bullet and he reconstructed his whole outlook on the segregation question.

RR: He certainly did. One of the last articles I did for the *New York Times Magazine* was about George Wallace after he had converted to, after he admitted he had been wrong about segregation. An amazing turnaround.

JG: And I covered Wilbur Mills, representative Wilbur Mills, when he went to Boston in 1971 to kind of feel the waters for a presidential candidacy.

RR: He went up to Boston?

JG: Yes. We were up there, probably, about three days. I remember one Sunday morning we went to see the Cardinal of Boston. I waited in the car; I didn't, of course, get to visit with the Cardinal, but Mills had a private audience with the Cardinal one Sunday morning. Or maybe it was the Archbishop. I can't remember if it was the Cardinal or the Archbishop. It seems like it was the Cardinal. Anyway, a high ranking Catholic official for that area met with Mills. I also can remember a news conference that Mills had, and I got there early, and I took a seat on what I figured would be the first row. And I thought, "Well, this is going to be nice. I'm going to be able to see Wilbur and hear what he has to say." I thought I'd have an inside edge on it maybe, but I didn't. I was amazed at how the press corps came with their tv cameras and notepads and recorders, and I felt smashed. I mean, I had been originally sitting by myself and, all of a sudden, I was sort of surrounded by all these other reporters and they actually found places in front of me. So I didn't have an advantageous position anymore. And I thought the whole group was rather boorish.

RR: Were these national reporters and tv people?

JG: Yes.

RR: Yes, they sometimes feel they can just take over. Television, that reminds me. We used to complain about the behavior of television cameramen who would park themselves right in front of the print reporters.

JG: I didn't have that kind of problem in Little Rock because television wasn't doing a lot of coverage back then in the '60s when I was doing my reporting. I think the tv cameras got in the way more later on, except for this instance I remember with Wilbur Mills in Boston.

RR: Yes, the press and broadcast people have different jobs to do. They sometimes rub each other wrong.

JG: Right. People later asked me, after Mills' drinking problem was exposed, if I noticed any drinking problem when I was with him up in Massachusetts, and I didn't. I remember on the plane coming back that he had maybe two drinks on the plane, a small private plane, but I didn't notice any drinking problem.

RR: Well . . .

JG: The prison system was in the news a lot during the sixties. I can remember hearings held in federal court on whether the leather strap that was used to punish prisoners was lawful or not. Little Rock federal district judges allowed the leather strap to continue with safeguards but on appeal the United States Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals declared the strap to be unconstitutional under any circumstances. The Tucker telephone, a device for giving prisoners an electrical shock as punishment, was declared illegal in federal court at Little Rock.

RR: Was that thing attached to their genitals?

JG: Yes. One wire went to the genitals and another wire to another part of the body was the way I remember it, so that a stream of current went through the prisoner. You would crank the telephone, an old timey telephone, to make it work.

RR: Was this attacked on legal grounds for being cruel and unusual punishment?

JG: Yes. I can remember Jim Bruton, the superintendent at the time, testifying; I don't remember any of the details. This was also the period when prisoners began filing *habeas corpus* petitions, petitions for a writ of *habeas corpus*, claiming that they were being held under inhumane conditions in the state prison system. Judge Henley held several hearings in which these inmates were bused to the federal building in Little Rock and came in one after another and testified about conditions. Some of them you felt like were telling the correct story; others you felt like were lying to try to get out of prison. It was very hard to figure out who was telling the truth and who wasn't. But they talked about the food, the gruel as it was called, the bunks, the mattresses, the toilet facilities, how they were treated by guards and other inmates, and in the end, the federal court said that prison conditions need to be improved if the state was going to continue to house inmates.

RR: You covered that whole series on prison conditions during the late sixties?

JG: I remember one day I came in about six o'clock on a Friday after the hearing had gone on all day and the *Gazette* had a tight paper and Bill Shelton and Bob Douglas — Bill Shelton, the city editor, and Bob Douglas, the managing editor,

said they didn't have room for much. So I remember I wrote about a six-paragraph story about the day's activities, and then I came back on Saturday and wrote it in more detail for Sunday.

RR: Space was always a problem for newspapers everywhere. Did you — how did you feel about the space restrictions as a reporter?

JG: Well, I can remember that phrase that Shelton used a lot — "Keep it short." Looking back now, I can see where it was necessary, but we actually had a lot of space for articles. The main thing was to try to get it in early because it seemed like that as the evening went on, the space got tighter and tighter.

RR: Compared to *USA Today*, how would you say the length of stories in the old *Arkansas Gazette* compared?

JG: Well, a lot of the stories in the *Gazette* were longer than in *USA Today*. In fact, *USA Today* has the philosophy of keeping their stories short, at least for the main ones on page one, and if there is extra information, well, they sometimes carry stories inside to provide more details, but the *Gazette* would let the major stories run.

RR: You mentioned Bill Shelton. What do you remember about Shelton? What kind of a guy was Shelton?

JG: Well, Shelton was really closemouthed. He didn't say much, and he wrote out instructions for reporters on a little short bit of paper. When the reporter came to work, he would find that in his typewriter; those were his assignments for the day. If you were on a beat, he might tell you over the phone if your first contact with

him was over the phone, but for the general assignment reporters, when they came to work each day, why, that little slip of paper was — usually with three or four assignments — was right in your typewriter along with the clippings that might be helpful. And my last year at the *Gazette*, I was on general assignment and I had really had trouble adjusting to general assignment. I liked to delve into stories in some depth, and I could do that over on the federal beat, but on general assignment it seemed like I was always concerned over whether I was getting something done fast enough in order to be able to move over to the next assignment and then some days there wasn't a whole lot to do and I felt at loose ends.

RR: Bill Lewis, was he still on general assignment?

JG: Bill Lewis was a news factory and Bill Shelton used him as his mainstay for covering general assignment events, by that I mean news that didn't fit under a particular beat. Bill Lewis would cover events at the Arkansas Arts Center, maybe fundraising over there, or a luncheon speech at the old Marion Hotel or maybe a follow-up story in which comment was needed from people. Bill was excellent about using the telephone to reach people quickly and get their comments and get off the phone and get the story turned in.

RR: A very fast writer as I recall.

JG: Sometimes his stories were too long; the copy desk usually took care of that.

RR: He worked for United Press where he learned to turn out copy very fast and accurately.

JG: And I can remember between his assignments he would go back to the library and come up with newspapers from other cities, and his hobby was cooking and he took out recipes from other papers to take home.

RR: Do you remember he used to get review copies of records, music? Because he reviewed music for the paper as well as books. How did you feel about accuracy in the paper?

JG: In general, accuracy was very good. I wouldn't say though that a special premium was placed on accuracy. I think the premium was placed more on getting the story done, and the reporter was expected to get the facts correct. I came to be a perfectionist, so I would work to make sure that what I wrote was accurate, even to the point of belaboring phrases. That meant that my copy tended to be turned in later in the day. It was really a problem rather than an asset. I think to be a good journalist, you have to be accurate but don't belabor a point.

RR: Did your writing habits cause any problems?

JG: Sometimes I would turn a story in, and 30 minutes or an hour later, I would realize that something I had written was incorrect and I would try to get the story back. And so that caused the news desk problems.

RR: I understand. Do you remember ever making a mistake that got in the paper?

JG: Yes. That's the worst thing that can happen to a reporter . . .

RR: I agree with that.

JG: . . . is trying to write the correct news. I mean, you feel like you're dripping blood on the floor when you are writing a correction. I can remember one evening —

this wasn't working on a correction — but I can remember one evening at the *Gazette* that I was on general assignment and the people from Casa Bonita restaurant came in and they talked to the city desk and the city desk referred them to me. They were trying to scotch the rumor that they served dog food in their Mexican entrees. Of course, it was an incorrect rumor that was being circulated and it was hurting their business. So we talked it over at some length, and I kind of spelled out what I might write in a short article. Finally, they decided it would make the matter worse or at least wouldn't improve it to have an article. So they left without an article. That is a problem when you are trying to scotch a rumor. You almost have to repeat the rumor to correct it and then you call attention to it.

RR: Yes. You've talked about the people who worked there. You've talked about Shelton a little bit and Bill Lewis. How do you remember Bob Douglas?

JG: Well, my first memory of Bob Douglas was in 1958, '59, '60, along in there, when he was standing up all day at a big table editing the wire copy that came in, and as the day wore on, he would have a big stack of wire copy that was spiked over to the sides of his table, maybe two spikes.

RR: A literal spike, we're talking about.

JG: Yes, a real steel spike probably six inches tall that you slammed the copy down on and it stayed there.

RR: And to be spiked meant that was not being used. If it was spiked.

JG: Well, it probably wasn't being used. I guess he kept the copy he was using on his big table in front of him. It was a big table, probably 4'X6' in size.

RR: More copy would be thrown away than would be put in the paper in any one day.

JG: Yes, that's true. Probably 3/4 of the wire copy that came in got thrown away because it wouldn't fit or they had duplication — the *Gazette* had both the AP and the UPI wire service, and sometimes they would use just one story instead of trying to put the two together.

RR: I guess later on he became news editor?

JG: Later on, he became news editor and then night managing editor --- that was about the time I left in 1972. Even though he was night managing editor, he sat in the slot and manned the news desk. Later, he became managing editor and had an office.

RR: As a reporter, do you remember having dealings with him when he was day managing editor?

JG: He was night managing editor. Shelton had the title of day managing editor.

RR: Oh, I misunderstood. Douglas was night managing editor and Shelton was day managing editor. Oh, okay.

JG: That's the way it worked. And Shelton was still, to everyone, the city editor, but he did have the title day managing editor. Well, I remember in the evening if I turned in some stories too late, Douglas just said, "We don't have room for that."

RR: Did you know Mr. Heiskell? I mean, did you have any impressions of J.N. Heiskell, the chief owner of the paper?

JG: In the mornings when I would be sitting at the *Gazette* working on a story, Mr. Heiskell would come in up the side stairs, along about, somewhere between nine

and ten o'clock. And he would usually have an armload of books and papers with him, and he would frequently stop at the city desk and talk in low tones with Bill Shelton about some stories that he'd like to have covered. And then he would walk on to his office. Occasionally, you would see him during the day coming and going from the *Gazette*. I was told he wrote some of the small editorials, the ones that were about historic items or special topics that especially interested Mr. Heiskell like historic preservation.

RR: He was getting up in years, wasn't he?

JG: Yes, he was. When I came there, he must have been in his late eighties. When his ninetieth birthday came and went, I said something to someone once about "Wonder what's going to happen to this paper when Mr. Heiskell dies?" And the reply was "Mr. Heiskell isn't ever going to die." It seemed to be a standard phrase. Well, I left the *Gazette* in '72 and later that year I was able to attend Mr. Heiskell's 100th birthday party at the Little Rock Country Club. It was a momentous occasion. I also was fortunate to know Joe Wirges, the longtime police reporter who was there. I remember when I first joined the *Gazette*, usually one night a week I had to fill in on the police beat when Joe Wirges was not working. That was always a dreaded assignment for me. Not so much what I might be having to cover, but what I might miss. I mean, when you're on a police beat, you feel like, obviously, the police are working on one case after another, but you never know what they are doing, and you keep wondering whether something might be going on that you should be working on. And so, I was always glad

when the evening came to a close and it wasn't some major thing that had broken, at least not that I was aware of. I can remember Joe Wirges, though, even in his old age, he had tremendous energy. One night a little plane was trying to land and . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

RR: You were talking about Joe Wirges, one night and a plane.

JG: This particular night I was actually on the city desk. It was probably about 1959, and I was sitting on the city desk. Shelton was probably on vacation or Jones was on vacation or both. So Joe was calling in this information about this plane having trouble and trying to figure out where to land. Well, the plane circled around over, mostly over North Little Rock, and Joe was in his car trying to keep up with the plane, and about every 20 minutes, Joe would call in, telling what the plane was doing and then, bingo, all of a sudden, the plane landed on Highway 70, as I remember, out on the outskirts of North Little Rock, and Joe was very soon on the scene and phoning in more information about who was in the plane and what happened to it in this landing, how the pilot managed to avoid hitting cars and power lines and somehow made this emergency landing. And I was taking it all down and wrote an article about it for the *Gazette*. But I can remember Joe calling in breathless from each of these stops, giving me a blow-by-blow account of the whole deal. And then about 11:30, he walked in himself. He covered his story and he was back in at the *Gazette,* and I was just finishing up writing up his

notes.

RR: What did Joe sound like on the telephone?

JG: Well, he sounded like someone who had lost part of his voice, a little bit on the hoarse side.

RR: I remember a gravelly voice.

JG: Yes, very hoarse.

RR: I remember how he would start a conversation when he'd get you on the phone. He had a particular way of beginning. I can't call it up; do you remember?

JF: I don't remember the words. . . .

RR: It was gruff, but you knew instantly who it was.

JG: Yes. When I was covering over at the police station, sometimes I learned that he'd actually helped the police officers write up some of their reports.

RR: Yes, he was — made it very difficult for the rest of us to cover the police when we had to fill in over there because he knew them all and we didn't know any of them. They were not too free with their information with us fill-ins. I agree with you; it was a difficult assignment. The others of us had occasionally to go over there and stay all evening at the police station; we were never quite sure what was going on. They weren't being very helpful, the cops.

JG: Well, I had all the great respect for Joe Wirges, and I also developed a great respect for you, Roy Reed, and Ernie Dumas for political coverage. You guys were experts. You knew your way around the State Capitol.

RR: We thought we did, but, eventually, I would learn how little we really knew about

what was going on out there during the Faubus years!

JG: Well, you were able to figure Faubus out, you and Ernie Dumas. You knew what he had up his sleeve.

RR: Speaking of Joe Wirges, I've heard somebody say — you might be able to confirm this — but all the rest of us referred to Mr. Heiskell as "Mr. Heiskell." To his face, certainly, but maybe we, behind his back, called him "Mr. J.N." I've heard that Joe Wirges called him "Boy" to his face.

JG: I hadn't heard that one. [Laughs]

RR: He was the only person on staff who could get away with that. Is it true that Joe died the same day that Mr. Heiskell did? That his obituary also appeared on page one? Do you remember that?

JG: Well, I don't know. I should remember something like that, but I don't.

RR: I could check on that, but that's my recollection. Of course, I was gone from the paper by then.

JG: I do remember that Joe Wirges was able to come to Mr. Heiskell's 100th birthday party. Mr. Heiskell died something like six months later.

RR: Anybody else on the staff that you particularly remember?

JG: Well, Jerry Jones was assistant city editor and he had big shoes to fill when Shelton was not there. He had to convince reporters, you know, that his assignments needed to be respected. With Shelton it was just kind of an automatic thing, but Jones had to make it clear. He was very friendly, but he had a tough job trying to fill the shoes of Bill Shelton and make assignments that

needed to be followed.

RR: Do you remember Pat Owens? Patrick J. Owens?

JG: I just vaguely remember him. I know he was a great reporter. He could sort of read things. He could look into people's minds and know what their motives were. And so his stories were very thoughtful.

RR: Do you recall any particular problems that the paper was having during your time there?

JG: Well, I came in '58, which was the year after the desegregation crisis of '57, and the paper was still losing circulation. And people were telling me about towns in east Arkansas that wouldn't allow the *Gazette* into the city. The circulation continued to drop for a few years, but then in the '60s, it started to rise again. And I can remember the big day sometime in the late '60s, I can't remember what year, when Mr. Nelson announced that the *Gazette* had once again passed the *Democrat* in circulation, which was a great event for the *Gazette*, considering the way it had suffered as a result of its stand on the school desegregation crisis.

RR: Mr. Nelson. That would be A.R. Nelson. What do you remember about him?

JG: Well, he was kind of hard boiled and he also was quiet. I can remember him standing over to the side of the newsroom and gazing out at the reporters as they were at work. You sort of felt like that he wanted you to do a good job and keep the copy moving and get the paper out. When he talked to you, he was very pleasant to deal with. He didn't say very much. He would disappear in the evening along about six o'clock for dinner; he had dinner somewhere. And he

would come back again later in the evening and check on things before he went home.

RR: Dinner and a beer. He loved beer, as I recall. He drank Budweiser in a stand-up bottle. Bought it by the case.

JG: Well, I can remember some evenings I would give him a ride home since I lived out in Sherwood and he lived in the Lakewood area of North Little Rock. Occasionally, he would bum a ride home with me after I'd finished work. He'd just ask me what time I'd be going home and I would try to estimate and then would let him know when I was ready. At that time, I had an old 1940 Packard that I'd drive to and from work. And I would navigate that car up "Snake Hill" in Lakewood and drop Mr. Nelson off at his home and then chug on home in that old car.

RR: Do you remember anything that happened in the newsroom? Anything that stands out as funny or angry or anything like that?

JG: Well, I remember one time, Tom Swint, the news editor, punched Ray Moseley. I can't remember what it was over; it was over some story, I guess. Moseley, probably the *Gazette*'s top reporter, was sitting at the city desk that night.

RR: He worked at the . . .

JG: I was sitting at the crap desk.

RR: Okay. Which was next to the city desk.

JG: Right. Right at the city desk. And Tom Swint came out of the men's room and I don't remember if Moseley said something or what prompted this, but Swint went

over and punched Moseley and knocked him to the floor. And we called, somebody called an ambulance, and Ray was carried away to the hospital. I don't think he was seriously hurt. He was choking temporarily.

RR: Was he bloodied up a little bit?

JG: I don't remember seeing blood. I just remember he was on his back on the floor choking on some blood, as somebody said. Orville Henry was the one who came over and knew what the problem was. Moseley was choking on blood, and so Orville turned him over on his stomach so he could catch his breath.

RR: What'd they do with Swint?

JG: I don't remember that they did anything to him. It seems like he left a few months later and went out to Seattle. He's the one, yes. Tom Swint. He moved to Seattle, but I don't remember whether it was right away or six months or a year later.

RR: Did anything like that ever happen again? It was mostly a pretty friendly bunch.

JG: Yes, it was a group that got along well.

RR: What did the newsroom look like? Start with Nelson. You mentioned Nelson a while ago. My recollection, which may be wrong, was that his office was in the corner of the newsroom and was behind glass walls, but I'm not sure.

JG: You are exactly right. He was behind glass walls.

RR: If you ever got called in there, you were always a little nervous, wondering what Nelson had on his mind. Do you remember being called in to talk to Nelson?

JG: Well, his room was in the glass enclosure behind the city desk, but it wasn't long

until he was able to take over a private corner office on that floor, down from the newsroom. So I can remember being called into his private corner office, but usually it was to tell me I was getting a raise or something like that. I don't ever remember being called into his office to be called on the carpet, although I can remember that shortly after I came to the *Gazette*, I got a name wrong. He came over to my desk where I was working and told me that there was a man named Jack Pickens, a major building contractor who had an office in the *Gazette* Building and I somehow got his name in the paper as Jim Pickens. And Mr. Nelson came over and said, you know, his name is Jack Pickens.

RR: Not exactly a chewing-out.

JG: Well, I was very embarrassed by it. I probably hadn't been there but about two months.

RR: Oh, yes. Getting a name wrong was one of the worst things we could do as reporters.

JG: I can't remember what happened to that glass enclosure. That's really weird, isn't it. I can remember seeing it and then it wasn't there.

RR: What were the desks like?

JG: Well, they were plain desks with kind of a rubber, kind of a . . .

RR: A steel desk.

JG: A steel desk with a . . .

RR: Composition top.

JG: Kind of a composition top. A gray composition top.

RR: Were reporters still sharing telephones when you worked there?

JG: Yes, for a long time they did.

RR: Two reporters on one phone.

JG: There would be two desks and one phone. And sometimes you just would have to wait, maybe, thirty minutes while a neighboring reporter was finishing up the use of the phone. Usually, beat reporters — who weren't there during the day — shared a phone with a general assignment reporter.

RR: What kind of typewriters did you have?

JG: Well, they were Underwoods and Royals, the way I remember it. And they sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. And they were not always in the best of repair. I remember on the city desk — it may have occurred after I left there, but Jerry Jones accidentally knocked Bill Shelton's typewriter to the floor. It broke, but was still functioning. Shelton was still using it. The *Gazette* went to computers a year after I left there, in 1973. And I remember the reporters telling me about this wonderful machine, that when you were writing, you could go back in and insert a phrase or a sentence somewhere in the paragraph you had already written and you didn't have to tear out the copy and cross it out in pencil. It was just right there — you'd make the change right there on the machine.

RR: Did you ex out words on the typewriter? As you were writing, if you misspelled, wrote something wrong, a row of x's across . . .

JG: Yes, I would x out. If I was just starting a story and I had a bunch of x's like that, I would immediately start over. I was notorious for having trouble getting the first

three paragraphs written and I would rip it out and start again with a fresh sheet of paper. And then I would go on from there and then frequently, if I made some more mistakes, more than I thought was acceptable, I would tear out that much of the story and then start over and then I would paste the two pieces together when I got through.

RR: There were paste pots around just for that purpose.

JG: Along with your phone, there was a paste pot.

RR: Writing a lead was always troublesome for a lot of us reporters. I had the same problem you did, would frequently start over two, three, four times before I got that first paragraph or two the way I wanted it. Some people, like Bill Lewis, would write a lead and never look back.

JG: Never look back. That is the way you are supposed to do it. I learned in journalism school when you start writing, you are supposed to write and don't look back. But that didn't always work.

RR: Did all of us have spikes on our desks or was that just on the city desk? I remember Bill Shelton's spike. I was always a little bit afraid of it, fearing that I would stick my hands out on it or sit down on it.

JG: Yes, it was very prominent on the side of his desk. And, fortunately, there was usually a waste basket there. Most people didn't walk right next to the desk where the spike was, they walked around the waste basket. Sometimes I would worry that the copy that was spiked and ready for the copy desk would somehow wind up in the waste basket or something like that.

RR: Do you remember what brand typewriter you used?

JG: Underwood.

RR: I forget what mine was, but they were not new!

JG: No.

RR: Then there was the row of Teletype machines [teletypewriters] over against one wall.

JG: In the beginning, they were over against the interior wall. And they clacked away all day long and all night long. And they were later moved into a separate little room down at one end of the newsroom, between the newsroom and sports. And they were behind glass in there and I know Pat Carithers would be going in there, ripping off the articles as they came in over the Teletype machine.

RR: Telegraph editor at that time. Do you remember, does Pat spell Carithers with one "r" or two?

JG: One "r," as I remember. C-A-R-I-T-H-E-R-S. And I hope someone's going to interview him.

RR: Yes. He's on [the list]. Can you describe the sound of the Teletype machines? You used the word "clack."

JG: It was like someone typing into a magnifying amplifier that made it louder and the typing never stopped. It was constant, clackety-clack-clack with a bell ringing at the end of each line.

RR: Very regular typing.

JG: Yes, just very constant, very even pace. If there's one person who could type like

that, it was probably Orville Henry. He was known for being very fast on the typewriter, but most of us couldn't approach the teletype in speed.

RR: Was there much conversation in the newsroom?

JG: No.

RR: Sound of voices?

JG: A little bit, but basically not too much because everybody had work to do. There was a wooden parquet floor in the newsroom, and later the *Gazette* got a rug on the floor, as I recall. The rug came after I left there. It seems the parquet floor did amplify the sound.

RR: I have a theory that the decline of American newspapers began when they first started to put carpet on the floor of the newsrooms. It's been downhill ever since then. A lot of people smoked tobacco in those years. Do you remember the smell?

JG: Yes, people smoked wherever they were sitting and wherever they were doing their work.

RR: Mostly cigarettes.

JG: It didn't really bother me at first. I had little problem with it. I didn't like to have smoke blown in my face, however

RR: You and I must have been in a minority as non-smokers.

JG: I don't think Bill Lewis smoked.

RR: No, Bill didn't.

JG: Ernie Dumas didn't.

RR: I bet it would be easier to name those who didn't than those who did. Did anybody smoke a pipe or cigars, do you remember?

JG: I can't recall that anybody did. There might have been somebody on the copy desk that smoked a pipe.

RR: Were they still chewing tobacco or dipping snuff?

JG: I didn't see any of that.

RR: Spittoons once were a regular feature of the newsroom. I remember spittoons. Unless they were just there for decoration.

JG: I don't remember any spittoons.

RR: Do you remember any particular changes that took place at the paper while you were there? You mentioned, for example, the computers came in right after you left. Is there anything else you can think of as a change at the paper?

JG: Well, when I came, the Linotype was still in use where the operator would sit at the Linotype machine and the reporter's copy would be right there in front of him. Later, Teletypesetter, or something like that, came into use. Someone would sit at the Teletypesetter keyboard and convert the reporter's copy into tape. The machine would punch holes in the tape. The tape was about an inch wide, it was yellow, and it fed out of this machine. The printer would take the tape and feed it into the Linotype machine. One printer could operate two or three Linotype machines that way. He or she would feed these tapes into the Linotype machines, and the Linotype would function just like someone was sitting there at the keyboard. Well, that, supposedly, reduced the amount of skilled labor that was

needed to operate the Linotype machine. And I think that was the way it was when I left there. Of course, when computers came in, it was a totally different ball game; it cut out so many different steps. The reporter was responsible for getting the copy written and getting it correct. Of course, the copy editors would have a look at the copy on their computers at the copy desk, and then it went to the printers. But the printers didn't have proofreaders anymore. They simply printed the material off the computer receiving end and it was converted into proofs, --- galley proofs and then page proofs.

RR: Those Linotype machines that you mentioned, we probably ought to mention that they set type in hot lead slugs, we called them. One line of type was a slug, individual slugs. They were put in galleys, and then at some point, they were converted into pages of the newspaper.

JG: The Linotype machine had the most moving parts of any machine. And when you saw one in operation, you knew that for a fact. They were an engineering marvel, but they broke down a lot. So you almost had to have a repairman on hand at all times to get them going again.

RR: Talking about sounds in the newsroom, when you walked back to the composing room, there was still another set of sounds, from the Linotype machines.

JG: Yes, the matrix – each letter was a matrix on the machine, and you could hear the matrix dropping into the mold where the hot metal was pressed to make the slug.

RR: Talk about working in that newsroom. Do you recall any particular, any peculiar work habits of any folks who worked there?

JG: No. It was just the general assignment reporters who were there all day long. The reporters on beats would cover their beat during the day, and then they would drift in in the late afternoon to make final telephone calls and write up their articles.

RR: I remember, for example, that Bill Shelton, city editor, had the habit of leaving the newspaper for a coffee break every afternoon almost precisely at the same time, around 2 or 2:30. Did you ever have coffee with Bill?

JG: Just one or two times, not on a regular basis. I did go with him once over to the Miller Coffee House.

RR: Yes, that's where he liked to go. I recall Charlie Allbright, who was a columnist, walking over to the windows facing Third Street, am I right, there was a kind of a ledge there? You could prop a foot up on that ledge. He was standing there smoking a cigarette with one foot propped up on the ledge and his hand, his chin in his hand and gazing out onto Third Street for inspiration.

JG: Right. I can see that. I don't know whether he had his foot on the ledge or on the radiator, but . . .

RR: Might have been that. We had hot water radiators, which, I guess, pinged some in the winter.

JG: We also had air conditioning. I can remember coming to work there in '58, and it was nice to have air conditioning. We didn't have it in our house until 1965.

RR: Do you remember the screens on the big windows on the Third Street side, to keep out the glare of the sun? They were very peculiar-looking screens.

JG: They went up the window halfway, as I recall. I'm not sure. I just remember they

were kind of green and they created a kind of a shade as well as a screen.

RR: Yes. I want to make sure that — early on, you mentioned your wife Sally. What is Sally's maiden name?

JG: Ingels.

RR: E-N-G-E-L-S?

JG: I-N-G-E-L-S.

RR: I-N-G-E-L-S. And you have three children, right?

JG: Right. Three daughters.

RR: Three daughters.

JG: All daughters.

RR: And their names . . .

JG: Linda Richmond, of Tulsa.

RR: Rich . . .

JG: R-I-C-H-M-O-N-D. Margaret Holaway. H-O-L-A-W-A-Y, of Sherwood.

RR: H-O . . .

JG: H-O-L-A-W-A-Y.

RR: One "L"?

JG: Right.

RR: Okay.

JG: And Cathy, C-A-T-H-Y, Stark, S-T-A-R-K, of Annandale, Virginia.

RR: One more question about the *Gazette* before we wind up. Do you have a favorite memory?

JG: Oh, I guess my favorite memory would be that it was an institution, and it was really a treat to work for the *Gazette*, something that had been there for so many years and had such a good reputation. That was — when you were there, you just felt like you were working on one of America's finest newspapers. You felt like it was a very intelligent newspaper that knew what it was doing, was on the side of right, R-I-G-H-T, when the public might be wrong.

RR: Do you remember when the paper died?

JG: Yes. I can remember going to a rally a day or two before that. Some of the *Gazette* employees had a rally outside the building to try to conjure up support for saving it and T-shirts were handed out. I remember Max Brantley spoke, and then, the next thing I knew, the newspaper had closed. Now, actually, on the day it closed, we were in Kansas City, and I know I picked up the *Kansas City Star* and there was a picture, one of the last pictures made in the *Gazette* newsroom. The *Kansas City Star* carried the picture along with an article about the closing. I saved several copies of the *Gazette*'s last issue. In fact, I've got several months of the *Gazette*'s last issues. I thought it was a shame the *Gazette* never had a chance to print a final issue, but actually the last issue that was published had a picture of a grave on the front, as I recall, with a black ribbon. An editorial inside indicated the end was coming and wished everyone good-bye. Jerry Dhonau said he wrote that editorial on the spur of the moment. Jerry Dhonau is the better one to tell that story than me. I remember Max Brantley was very active in trying to head off the paper closing.

RR: How'd you take it?

JG: Well, it was a very sad thing. It was a great loss that the *Gazette* wasn't around anymore. The hardest thing to adjust to was missing the editorial page. The *Gazette* was a liberal voice. It was a voice for liberalism and reason and for understanding of other people.

RR: You had gone to work for Arkansas Power and Light Company in 1972. I guess you were still . . .

JG: I went to work for the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 1972, and was the UALR information director. And then I went to work for Arkansas Power and Light Company in 1980.

RR: I guess that's where you were when the *Gazette* closed in 1991.

JG: Yes. A few months after the *Gazette* closed, Arkansas Power and Light hosted a dinner for all the *Gazette* news employees. It was in the lobby of the First Federal Building on West Capitol Avenue, and it was a joyous evening which gave the *Gazette* people a chance to come together and have a drink and chat about things.

RR: You must have been involved in the arrangement of that.

JG: Kay Kelley Arnold and I arranged that.

RR: Does she spell Kelley with an "E"?

JG: Yes.

RR: What was the office called, the Office of Information?

JG: It was called Corporate Communications.

RR: Yes.

JG: We were looking around for something that we might do for the *Gazette*, and I hit upon this idea of a dinner for the news employees and it happened. And everybody had a good time as far as I know.

RR: Yes.

JG: I spoke briefly in praise of the *Gazette* and several *Gazette* people spoke about their memories of the paper.

RR: Can you think of anything else that we haven't covered that you need to mention or would like to mention?

JG: No.

RR: All right.

End of Interview