*Gazette* Project

Interview with

Martin Holmes,
Fayetteville, Arkansas,
27 September 2002

Interviewer: Scott Morris

Scott Morris: This is Scott Morris. Today is September 27, 2002, and I'm here in the journalism department at the University of Arkansas with Martin Holmes. I'd just like to ask you to agree on tape to what you've already signed, and that is that your interview will be available for research purposes after you've approved it.

Martin Holmes: I agree.

SM: Okay. Great. If you will, let's just start with your early life–where you were born and when–that sort of thing.

MH: All right. I was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Jefferson County, in 1925, during the Coolidge administration. [Laughs] We lived at Pine Bluff. I have two large families. My mother's family was the Culpeppers, and my daddy's was the Holmeses, and they all lived in this area–these counties–near south Pine Bluff.

SM: Right.

MH: From Rison to Star City.

SM: Right.

MH: Okay. That pretty well [laughs] tells you my background there.

SM: What did your father and mother do?

MH: My father was a traffic man for Southwestern Bell [Telephone Company]. In other words, he did stuff like line work and installing equipment and keeping it running, and that sort of thing.

SM: Right.

MH: And my mother had been a telephone operator. [She] also [worked] for Southwestern Bell, and I'm sure that's how they met. After they married, she quit work and so forth, but my father–a very tragic story. Before many years had passed, he became the victim of a brain tumor.

SM: Oh, goodness!

MH: He lived [ ] for a while, but there wasn't much they could do in those days for that, so, despite a trip to the Mayo Clinic and some other places, he died in 1934. And, at that point, my mother and the families rallied around. My mother was working, and my aunt was working, and we were struggling.

SM: Yes.

MH: We didn't know it. My sister and I were little kids. [My mother] was offered a job managing a telephone exchange for Southwestern Bell in Cotter, Arkansas, which is in the northern tier of counties over east of Harrison about forty miles. She accepted that for two reasons: she needed a job, and this was a job where it would be in the home. The switchboard and the office was in one room of this house, which was provided, rented by, the telephone company. So we moved over there when I was maybe ten or eleven years old, something like that. We lived there until I graduated from Cotter High School, where I was valedictorian

of my class in 1943. I attended Arkansas Tech briefly before I–and while I was there, I took an examination and qualified for the Navy V-12 program, which was an officer's training program. I went to SMU [Southern Methodist University] in 1943 and was moving along there. Then they offered us a chance to switch to the Naval ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] program and transfer to the University of Texas at Austin. I did that because, at this point, I was taking mainly engineering courses, which I could pass, but which bored me pretty heavily.

SM: Yes.

MH: So I went down to the University of Texas and completed the ROTC training and was commissioned as an ensign in the Navy in 1945. I was at a training program for people like me in Hollywood, Florida. The Navy had a big hotel there–the old Resort Hotel. The had a heavy-duty training program going on, trying to get some people ready for the big invasion.

SM: I'm sorry. The invasion of Japan?

MH: Yes. The war in Europe had ended by that time.

SM: What sort of training were you taking, specifically?

MH: Well, specifically, I was taking radar training and operations of radar. They're called CIC officers. That's what they were training us for.

SM: CIC stands for . . .?

MH: Combat Information Center. The Navy's vessels that were information centers had just everything in there in the way of radar and sonar equipment. For

example, the different kinds of radar were–they had stuff that detected airplanes, of course.

SM: Right.

MH: And then they also had surface radar for detecting vehicles. Those were also a great aid in navigation.

SM: Sure.

MH: And so that's where I was when the war ended.

SM: In Hollywood, Florida?

MH: Hollywood, Florida. Yes. And so I was already booked for a training session up at St. Simon's Island, Georgia, another tough-duty place [laughs], especially with the war over. I was up there for four months and then came west to San Francisco and on to Hawaii, where I was to join a ship. The ship was the *USS Appalachian*. I was on that for about a year.

SM: Okay, from when to when were you on board this ship?

MH: The summer of 1945 until the summer of 1946.

SM: Okay.

MH: That's when my points–that's how we got out of the Navy. They had–Anyway, this ship is an interesting little sidebar. The ship I was on was to be one of the ships that carried high-ranking officers and the press and so forth down to the Bikini [Islands] Atom Bomb tests in the South Pacific.

SM: Yes.

MH: I thought I was going there, but I managed to talk my way out of it on the plea

that I needed to get out in time to start school at the University of Arkansas in 1946. To my surprise, the executive officer said, "Okay." [Laughter]

SM: Let me stop you for just a second. Did you get a degree at either SMU or Texas?

MH: No.

SM: You did not.

MH: Did not.

SM: When you transferred to the University of Texas, did you continue to study engineering there?

MH: Well, I took some of that, but the course was softened a lot because we got a lot of seamanship–you know, Navy stuff–that we weren't getting in the Naval V-12 program.

SM: I see.

MH: This was an adjunct to the V-12 program by this point–the ROTC was–but their course was somewhat different. There was seamanship and navigation, things like that.

SM: And during this time, you knew there was a very real possibility that we would invade Japan, right?

MH: You damned betcha! [Laughs]

SM: What was your–I mean, it may sound like a silly question, but what were your feelings or thoughts about that? Did you . . .?

MH: Well, my feeling was that it had to be done, and I figured I was sure going to it, so what other feelings could you have?

SM: Well, I guess I–I interviewed Bob Douglas once. He was on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific.

MH: Yes.

SM: He said he had a real feeling of dread about the invasion because he had been lucky up until then.

MH: Oh, you bet! But, see, I never was in any of this action like Bob was. He was in a lot of it, and the worst kind–everything from kamikazes to just out-and-out guns shooting at you from ships. No, no, no! I wasn't really looking forward [laughs] to it!

SM: Sure. Well, I guess what I'm wondering is if–now, in retrospect, there are all these estimates of how many casualties there would have been, et cetera. Did you all know at the time that it would have been extremely difficult for . . .?

MH: Oh, yes! We had experienced these terrible battles with the Japanese. They were very determined warriors in defending their homeland. I know they would've died to a man before they would've given up. That's the way I've looked at it, and I think most other people did, too.

SM: When you were on the *Appalachian*, what was your duty there? What was your job?

MH: Well, my job mainly was serving as a watch officer. I was a CIC officer, but we didn't do much of that except when we were at sea. We did monitor things on our radar and so forth.

SM: Yes.

MH: It was just mainly a–that's how the ship was set up when I came to it. They just hadn't changed anything much.

SM: Right.

MH: We had the full complement of radar men and every other thing. We were ready to go if war had started.

SM: Right.

MH: And I'd been on that ship–they wouldn't have had to do much to be ready to go, But who knows how that would've all come down, you know?

SM: Well, you said you were on your way to Bikini. What did you know about the A-Bomb [Atom Bomb] tests? Did you have any apprehension about being present for it?

MH: No, I really didn't. At that point, the radioactivity factor hadn't been much–we were to be a good distance away, but the visibility thing–it's not really very far.

SM: Right.

MH: Seven to ten miles, maybe–something like that.

SM: Right.

MH: Of course, we would have been down there quite a while, too, because they were going to monitor all this stuff and so forth. And so I wasn't exactly apprehensive, but I didn't want to go.

SM: Right.

MH: And I've since wondered–maybe that would've been something–But I've never heard of any survey of the guys who were down there and whether anything

happened in the way of radioactivity.

SM: Right.

MH: I don't really think they did, or I believe it would've been publicized, one way or the other.

SM: Right. I apologize. My history is bad. The Bikini test would've been when?

MH: In the later months of 1946.

SM: Let's drop back to your childhood for just a moment–boyhood, young adulthood, before you went into the military. Did you have any aspiration early on to work for newspapers?

MH: Well, you know, I have to say that I sure thought about it. From the earliest days of my life, I loved to read newspapers. I was a sports fan. In those days, that's all we got. You could get a little bit on the radio, but you had to read the papers and magazines to get at it.

SM: Right.

MH: I always had a liking for reading. For example, when I was, I think, eleven or twelve years old, I asked my mother to get me a subscription to the *Saturday Evening Post* as a Christmas present or something like that.

SM: Yes.

MH: I read a lot of other things. I was fortunate to have some good teachers in that small town who had books of their own and who also let me read them. I always liked to read, so it was kind of lurking around. That was one of the fun things, too, about being in places like San Francisco or Miami or wherever: there were a

lot more papers then.

SM: Yes.

MH: And you could buy these damned papers for a nickel apiece, you know, and look at them–look at this one and that one. I did that, even then! [Laughs]

SM: Right.

MH: I compared what this one had and what that one had. And there were a lot of interesting characters–columnists.

SM: Did you ever have a newspaper route?

MH: For a little while I sold *Grit*.

SM: *Grit*?

MH: [Laughs] Do you know what *Grit* was?

SM: Oh, I remember it. Sure.

MH: A good news weekly [laughs]. I was not a very successful salesman, though. Let's put it that way!

SM: Was that in Pine Bluff?

MH: No, that was in Cotter. Pine Bluff had a pretty good daily paper, the *Pine Bluff Commercial*.

SM: Right.

MH: It was a small-town paper, but it was good. The Freeman family had that paper at that point, and I think one of my uncles worked for them for a while.

SM: As a newspaper reporter or . . .?

MH: No, as a salesman.

SM: A salesman. Do you recall when you were growing up, either in Cotter or in Pine Bluff, were the *Gazette* and/or the *Democrat* in your house?

MH: Well, yes. The way it worked was this, Scott. When we lived in Cotter, my next-door neighbor took the *Arkansas Gazette*. We had to go–I was downtown every day, and I had to pick up the paper. They didn't deliver it then. In the drug store they had this rack of papers. The drug store guy would write the names of people who were to get the paper. So I got our next-door neighbor's paper, and before I delivered it to her, I would skim through it myself [laughs]!

SM: Yes.

MH: Which was okay.

SM: And what did you read mostly then?

MH: Sports.

SM: Sports. Were there any particular columnists or writers . . .?

MH: Well, at that time, Ben Epstein was the columnist for the *Gazette*. Ben came before Orville [Henry], if you can believe there was such a thing. [Laughs]

SM: I didn't know the paper existed before Orville!

MH: Well, Ben Epstein was a very good newspaperman. He left in the middle of the war, or early in the war, and went, I think, to the *New York Mirror*, and Orville got the job. It was kind of funny. They had another guy working at that paper, Bill Shirley, who was a senior–second to Epstein. He went off to the war. When he came back, Orville had the job and Bill Shirley was out on his [hmm!].

SM: I guess we should say . . .

MH: [Laughs] Bill went to the Oklahoma City paper.

SM: We should say, for the record, Orville is Orville Henry, of course.

MH: Yes. Orville Henry was a longtime friend of mine, an acquaintance from the very earliest days. My first time–I was at the *Gazette* for a little while, earlier, but later I got on at the *Democrat* in the sports department, where I belonged at that time in my life because that was my main interest. Orville, at that time, was a one-man gang. He always was, but at that point even more so because he covered high school. He covered the Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference. He covered golf. He covered–you name it! I never could see quite how he got it all done. But he worked! He was a workaholic. That's a good way to describe Orville.

SM: Right. So you read the *Gazette* as a child. Did you read the *Democrat* as a child?

MH: No. It was an afternoon paper, and it didn't circulate much out. You know, you get up past Conway and Russellville and Arkadelphia, and they didn't even bother trying. Even in our time the paper didn't come up here except on the following day.

SM: Right.

MH: We had what we called the–we put out several editions when I was in Little Rock in the–when it was an afternoon paper. And you'd shoot for Hot Springs and Arkadelphia and Conway and Russellville, not too much farther than that.

SM: Was that mostly because of the roads, or . . .?

MH: No, it was just the time element. It takes you a couple of hours to get anywhere. We were getting that first edition out at around noon, and then there'd be a second

state edition about thirty or forty minutes later, where you'd just kind of catch up on things.

SM: Right.

MH: And then the city edition came out at one-something. You're talking, right there, that's two hours, and beyond that, you're just not going to get it there and get it delivered right. At least that was the feeling. It wasn't worth the expense. It might have been if you could've flown things, but that was not yet in the cards.

SM: So going back to your time, when you were getting out of the Navy, you said you had already enrolled or were already planning to come to the University of Arkansas.

MH: Oh, definitely. And, by this time, I had decided I was going to get into the journalism department, which it was at that time and is now, in the [college of ] arts and sciences. Mr. [Walter] Lemke was the head of it, and Mr. [Joe?] Thalheimer was his assistant.

SM: Could you spell his last name?

MH: Yes. T-H-A-L-H-E-I-M-E-R.

SM: And he was the assistant to Walter Lemke, the chairman of the department?

MH: Yes. I had a cousin from Pine Bluff who was coming up here to do the same thing. His name was Noah Holmes. We came together. Pretty soon we ran into–did you ever know Jerry Neil? He was dead before you came to the paper–or worked in Little Rock. He was an editorial writer.

SM: I think I knew him, actually–briefly, but . . .

MH: He was a great guy! [Laughs]

SM: I've heard good things about him.

MH: He was a great guy! [Laughs] Smart as a gun. Phi Beta Kappa.

SM: I'm sorry. If I can flip back for just a minute.

MH: Okay, I'm . . .

SM: No, it's my fault. You said you went to Arkansas Tech briefly once you got out of high school.

MH: Yes.

SM: And you knew then that you were going to be drafted, right? It was just kind of temporary . . .

MH: Yes. If I didn't do something, then I was definitely going to be drafted and within the year.

SM: So you were just sort of killing time, or . . .?

MH: No, I was taking something. I thought at that time I was going to take engineering.

SM: I see.

MH: I was taking this pre-engineering stuff like, you know, math and the like, the basic stuff.

SM: And did you meet anybody there who you'd run into later, or . . .?

MH: You mean as students?

SM: Right.

MH: Well, once in a while, yes.

SM: I thought you mentioned meeting Bob Douglas there.

MH: Well, Douglas was the main one that I had anything to do with in a major way as my life went along.

SM: Right.

MH: But, you know, you'd run into guys just like you do . . .

SM: Did you meet anybody else there besides Mr. Douglas that you worked with later?

MH: No.

SM: Okay. Anyway, now I'm going to get back on track.

MH: All right.

SM: After you left the Navy, you came up to Fayetteville to go to the university and majored in journalism?

MH: Yes. The first thing we ran into was a major snafu. Of course, it was true everywhere. We thought we had a room assigned to us. Pop Gregson had somehow been put in charge of the housing here, and, man, when we got here, it was a hopeless snafu. I forget the man that they finally got who had to do the hard stuff that was necessary [laughs], infuriating everybody. It took a while, but you just sort of catch as catch can.

SM: And the reason there were no rooms was . . .?

MH: Well, it was just here–they finally put a few–they had some housing-for-married quarters — pretty simple, like trailers almost.

SM: Right.

MH: Maybe not even as nice as a modern trailer at that. And we had some of these old

military things and, you know, the existing dorms, and that was it. The rest of it you just fanned out here in the countryside and town and got rooms.

SM: Well, what I was wondering, was it because of the G.I. Bill that there were a bunch of veterans coming back and it filled up?

MH: Oh, yes! You wouldn't believe what these guys did–most of them were quite a bit older. I was young. I mean, I was only about a year behind where I would've been, but most of these guys had been in it for a long time. They were married, and they had kids, and I mean it was hard for them. They hadn't been in school, but they were very determined. I've always thought that the G.I. Bill, especially as it pertained to education, was one of the best investments the United States government ever made.

SM: Right.

MH: There were millions of guys!

SM: Right.

MH: It was a great opportunity. Had I chosen, I could've gone to Stanford or anywhere!

SM: So why did you pick Arkansas?

MH: Because I wanted to come home! [Laughs] My family was here.

SM: Yes.

MH: I wasn't looking that far ahead.

SM: Right.

MH: I wanted to come home and be with my people and my home state, and so forth.

SM: Where did you end up getting a room?

MH: Well, my first–let's see, now, how did that work? We got a place out in town. It took a while before we finally wormed our way in down here to this dorm thing.

SM: What kind of dorm was it?

MH: It was just a G.I.–They had just rooms, just like barracks, except you had compartments for two apiece. Two men to a room.

SM: Right. And you . . .

MH: It was like a G.I. bathroom setup down there. It wasn't bad.

SM: Where was it located?

MH: Right up here above where the football stadium is now.

SM: Just north of the Razorback Stadium?

MH: Yes, just north. Just right up the hill there. And there were some other places around, but that was the one I happened to land in, or we did–my cousin and I, and a lot of other people.

SM: So you weren't married at this time? You were rooming . . .

MH: Heavens, no! [Laughter] I wasn't but nineteen years old, I think. Yes, nineteen.

SM: Tell me some of the students you met here that you might've had dealings with later on.

MH: Oh! Well, there were a lot of them. For example, Bob McCord. His picture is sitting over there. Bob came along–he wasn't there when I first came here. And, of course, Jerry Neil, later a *Gazette* editorial writer.

SM: Would you spell Jerry's last name?

MH: N-E-I-L. Wonderful guy. [I used to have better luck] on senior walk [ ]. Anyway, N-I-E-L–I forget what it was. Anyhow, Jerry and McCord and–let me think if there's–you know, you knew so many of those people. A lot of them went out and worked in these other small dailies around. Red Courtney was over at Wynne, I think. Ben Hicks went to England, Arkansas. Some of these guys just stayed on, and they finally got to own some of those papers. Courtney died young. I don't know. It's hard to remember too far because we could–the guys I'm talking about, we played cards together and drank beer together and, you know, you'd kind of slip off the table unless you were really working with them later.

SM: Right.

MH: Pendleton Woods and–God, I don't know! I can't–[Wanda Wassner?]. I saw a bunch of them at a reunion of the journalism grads a few years ago here.

SM: Any funny or good stories about Bob McCord or Jerry Neil or any of those people who might have been here then?

MH: Well, you know [laughs], there were some stories. I didn't work with McCord. I knew a lot more about him at the *Democrat* because he had worked there when he was a kid in high school, doing just anything. It was in those days, and he'll tell you the same thing if you ask him. He was a wonderful photographer, to begin with.

SM: Right.

MH: I think he's just as good as they come! [Laughs] But they'd had him working as

sports editor for a while there. I think he used to spread the copy out on the floor of the–[laughs] and just check it that way instead of . . . [laughs].

SM: You're talking about here at the *Traveler*, or . . .?

MH: No, no! I'm talking about in Little Rock! [Laughs]

SM: Oh, in Little Rock.

MH: Yes! [Laughs]

SM: Did you work for the *Traveler* while you were here?

MH: Minimally! [Laughs]

SM: What did you cover? What did you do?

MH: Very little.

SM: Were you a writer or an editor or . . .?

MH: I might've done a little editing. I don't think I–it was strictly sort of something that I felt like I'd better do a little of. Let me tell you something. I didn't prepare myself here for journalism [laughs] as much I could have! [Laughs] Where I learned journalism was when I hit the sports department at the *Arkansas Democrat*. Jack Keady hired me in. He was sports editor there. He recently died just this year, by the way.

SM: I'm sorry. Could you spell his last name?

MH: K-E-A-D-Y. Jack Keady. Great guy. Anyway, he hired me. The first thing he did, more or less, besides sending me out to some football games, was that he had me checking the wires. And then, one day, he said, "Well, go on upstairs and make up." He said, "Just ask for [Ham Bowen?]. He's the foreman up there.

He'll tell you what to do." [Laughs] And so that's how I learned. I learned from the printers and Jack.

SM: Right.

MH: The mechanics of . . .

SM: Putting the paper together.

MH: Yes, putting the paper together. You get the feel for deadlines. You get the feel for what printers can do, or will do, you know, a lot of things like that.

SM: Let me stop just for–you were at the University of Arkansas from when until when?

MH: 1946 to 1948.

SM: 1946 to 1948. Graduated with a B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] in journalism?

MH: Yes.

SM: And what did you do right after you graduated?

MH: I went to Little Rock right away. My cousin, Noah, and maybe Jerry, had graduated a semester ahead of me. Jerry was working at the *Gazette*. He was a reporter at that point, and my cousin was working for the extension service as a PR guy. So I went down there and Carol McGaughey was the acting city editor at that time. He was the city editor. He was Mr. Heiskell's nephew, I think. He was from Charlotte or somewhere, and he had come over and–I think, as I understand it, that Carol was going to stay on and be the guy who would sit in Mr. Heiskell's seat when it all came down. But, at that point, Carol was city editor, and so I got a job, along with a bunch of others. There were several others. Bob

was one who was starting in to work here. But I have to confess, my heart was more into the social [laughs] side of living around Little Rock and having some good times. I worked–I didn't really do much of anything, to tell you the truth.

SM: Well, what was the job? Was it a reporting job?

MH: Yes.

SM: Do you remember what you were assigned to?

MH: No. It was just stuff that they send you . . .

SM: General assignments.

MH: Yes, just general assignments, stuff they send the rookies out to do, service clubs and all that kind of stuff.

SM: When was that? Do you remember exactly?

MH: It was 1948.

SM: The fall of 1948?

MH: Yes, or the summer. I'm not sure. It was pretty soon after we graduated.

SM: I'm sorry. Before I forget, the city editor, Carroll . . .

MH: McGaughey.

SM: Last name is spelled . . .

MH: M-C-G-A-U-G-H-E-Y.

SM: Do you remember what your starting salary was?

MH: Forty dollars a week. That was pretty standard. Anyway, I also worked partly as a copy editor for a while. Finally, I think–old Nelson was the news editor at that time–he decided that . . .

SM: A. R. Nelson?

MH: Yes. He decided that–and I can't argue with him–that I needed a little more seasoning. Absolutely true. So I went back home for a little while and then came back to Little Rock. I had a couple of other jobs, but I got back in the newspaper business thanks to a reporter at the *Arkansas Democrat* named Effa Laura Wooten. Just a great gal. She covered this beat over there where the extension service was, and she knew that Noah was my cousin. So she said, "Tell him to go down and talk to Jack Keady." I went down there, and Jack said, "Yes, come on. Forty dollars a week." [Laughs]

SM: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to ask you, how do you spell her name?

MH: Effa. E-F-F-A L-A-U-R-A W-O-O-T-E-N. Effa Laura Wooten. Wonderful person.

SM: She was a *Democrat* reporter?

MH: Yes. Boy, there were a lot of good reporters around Little Rock in those days. I mean every one of them.

SM: How long were you at the *Gazette*?

MH: Not long. Six months, maybe.

SM: Six months or so. And then you went home for a while?

MH: Just went home for a while and did some fishing and some crap! [Laughs]

SM: And when did you come to work at the *Democrat*?

MH: You know, I guess it must've been 1949, somewhere in there. So I went to work for sports, and that was what I needed to do at that time because I knew about

sports and I liked it. It wasn't hard to write sports stories.

SM: What sports did you cover?

MH: Everything. Well, mainly, it was high schools–football, basketball and the like.

SM: How long did you cover sports at the *Democrat*, then?

MH: I'm trying to remember. Well, about five years or so, I guess. I got married there about the end of that time. Then I had–well, in fact, for a while there, I kept on working sports, but after that first baby came, I got to thinking a little bit more seriously about my future [laughs]!

SM: I'm sorry. So around maybe 1948 to 1953, something like that?

MH: 1954, along in there. Well, I can't even remember now. Yes, that's about right.

SM: So were there any particularly good sports stories that stand out?

MH: Once in a while I'd get–guys like Jack and Orville covered the Razorbacks, and it wasn't that big of a story then like it is now, but it was pretty big. And then the other big thing that we had around then was the Travelers, so the sports editors took those jobs because they got paid to be official scorers.

SM: Right.

MH: I think that, ethically, has become passe, but that's the way it was then. They got something like $5 or $10 a game. So, just by coincidence, they thought they would take on that assignment.

SM: Seems like a good idea.

MH: Yes, it was a good idea! [Laughs] Anyhow, I was the number-three guy in the sports department. I could see that there wasn't anything much going to happen

for me around there in that department. I quit the paper. I had been moonlighting. You know, you have to learn to moonlight.

SM: Doing what?

MH: Well, just doing a little writing for the ad agencies, or whatever you could scrape up. I wrote a lot of stuff for the magazine. McCord was the editor. You got paid extra for the Sunday magazine.

SM: Oh, okay. I didn't realize . . .

MH: McCord–I think he had taken over at that point over there.

SM: As editor, you mean, or . . .?

MH: Yes.

SM: What was the name of the magazine?

MH: I think it was just the Sunday magazine. It was a separate segment.

SM: But the copy was generated by the staff? It wasn't wire service . . .?

MH: No, it was strictly a staff thing. Bob wrote for it, but he mainly was just editing, and he was very good at recruiting and getting good stories. He did, as you might expect, a very good job. He had a good magazine. Well, you know, I'll tell you somebody who worked with Bob. Bill Whitworth.

SM: Who went on to be . . .

MH: The *Atlantic* . . .

SM: Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, right?

MH: Yes. Right.

SM: I guess he has recently retired to Little Rock, I think.

MH: Well, he's retired, anyway. But Bill was–he wrote the TV review when TV came in. [Laughs] He was writing the reviews, and it was pretty funny stuff! [Laughs]

SM: Do you remember what he said?

MH: Oh, no. I don't remember, but he had an attitude [laughs] which you're supposed to have.

SM: Before I move on, in terms of sports–I mean, I guess, at that time Central High would've been pretty powerful and . . .

MH: Central High wasn't Central High. It was Little Rock High. Understand that! [Laughs]

SM: Right.

MH: Yes, they were the dominant football team. Of course, they had a great coach. Wilson Matthews was the coach there at that time. They just blasted all the teams around Arkansas, mostly.

SM: Right.

MH: Once in while, somebody would rise up and smite them, but that didn't happen very often. They played, you know, like a Notre Dame schedule. They played teams in Oklahoma City and Texarkana, Texas–that was an annual game. And Texarkana would always give Little Rock a hell of a struggle. It was Texarkana, Texas, over on that side.

SM: Right.

MH: They played in Louisville [Kentucky]. They played in Baton Rouge [Louisiana]. And these teams would come to Little Rock, as well.

SM: Were there any particularly memorable games or athletes that you covered?

MH: You betcha! Well, Henry Moore was a great player for the Tigers in my time. He was also a great player for the Razorbacks.

SM: Here at the university?

MH: Yes. Ronnie Underwood–same thing. He was a wing back or something out here, and he later–I don't know if he played professionally or not, but he was–I'm sure he's still an official unless he has retired, you know, a big-time official. I believe he was a college official. Oh, many others–I couldn't tell. It goes on and on.

SM: From either paper, the *Gazette* or the *Democrat*–are there any particular characters that you remember?

MH: Well, I guess quite a few! I'll tell you two who were at the *Gazette* when I first went there. It goes back to the olden times, really. Joe Wirges was a police reporter, and they had another guy named John Fletcher–he was in that family–the Terrys and so forth. John mostly wrote about politics and the regular news, but Joe's strictly was crime. He was the sort of guy–now, you think about this. He was famous for this–he'd come in his old tattered pants that looked about like these khakis I've got on right now, and a shirt, and a couple of packs of cigarettes and write, without looking at a single note, very long stories! [Laughs]

SM: Yes.

MH: Very long stories about these chases and this gory stuff. Joe was beloved by the police around the state of Arkansas and anybody who worked with him who was

a lawman. And I think they had a cabin reserved for him down there at Tucker or Cummins [two Arkansas state prisons]. He'd go down there and fish, and they'd provide him with somebody to clean fish and cook for him at that cabin.

SM: I think I've heard that's where he took his vacations, right? At the state prisons?

MH: If there was such a thing as a vacation for Joe. Well, his son, Gene, was working at the paper at that time. He was a photographer. He was always over in the pool hall across the street. The boss would send a copy boy over there to get him. [Laughs] That's where he became [laughs] a real snooker player.

SM: And just to make sure–Wirges is spelled W-I-R-G-E-S?

MH: Correct.

SM: Why did the cops like him so well?

MH: Well, he just did a good job. And, of course, I think usually the cops came out looking like good guys in most of Joe's stories. I can't remember any other kind. But he was just thorough! And he knew them <u>all by name</u>!

SM: Didn't he used to go on those searches . . .?

MH: Absolutely!

SM: . . . when somebody would escape from the prison or whatever.

MH: Absolutely! He would be out there. He'd be there before <u>they</u> were if he got word and found out about it. And I guess he probably had a radio that he–Anyway, he was a fabulous guy! [Laughs]

SM: What about John Fletcher? What was memorable about him?

MH: John actually, as far as I'm concerned, was a big-time guy. He could've done

what he did anywhere. Smart, very smart guy, and a wonderful writer. He had his sources, and, you know, that's what . . .

SM: You said he covered politics and . . .?

MH: Well, things like that. And, you know, big-time stuff. He was always near politics because that was the big story. It always has been around Little Rock.

SM: Right.

MH: Naturally so.

SM: What about at the *Democrat*? Any other characters over there?

MH: Had a lot of characters at the *Democrat*. Well, I went back after–let me just briefly summarize this thing. After I'd worked for this PR outfit for a while, I went to Gene Harrington, who, at that time, was the city editor of the *Democrat* and a good friend of mine. You know, I'd known him before. I asked him if he'd give me a job. He said, "Sure."

SM: This was at the *Democrat*?

MH: Yes–as a reporter. So I went back to work for the *Democrat*.

SM: To the sports section?

MH: No, no. This was the news section.

SM: I'm sorry. So you . . .

MH: I'd gotten out of sports, you see.

SM: Okay. You left the *Democrat*. When was that? I'm sorry.

MH: When did I leave? You know, you kind of . . .

SM: About 1954? Is that what you were saying?

MH: Yes, and I was gone a couple of years, and I came back.

SM: Okay.

MH: And this was just shortly before this big story began happening, the integration story at Central High School.

SM: Right. Okay. I'm sorry. I'd lost you. You left in about 1954 and worked for an ad agency in Little Rock?

MH: Yes. Tom [Hockersmith?]. Yes. Tom [Hockersmith?], whose brutalized body was found on an island in the Caribbean some years later.

SM: Oh, my goodness!

MH: Himself, quite an interesting character! [Laughs] Anyhow, Tom, at that time his agency was based–Cranford Johnson is the successor for all this.

SM: Oh–to this Hockersmith?

MH: Yes. Wayne just took over all the accounts because he'd been there and worked for Tom for a while. Then when Tom just sort of collapsed–he had two or three monkeys he was carrying around on his back, and it just went to pot. And so Wayne just took over the accounts, and deservedly so. He was wonderful, a good person at his profession. Anyway . . .

SM: So you went back to the *Democrat* in what year?

MH: It was about 1956 or 1957, along in there. Anyway, Herrington brought me back. At that time–let's see, Herrington was a graduate of the university, by the way. Deane Allen, who's been around Little Rock and other places off and on for years, was the state editor. Joe Crossley–a Harvard grad, by the way–was the

news editor. Eddie Liske was the managing editor. Keady was the sports editor. McCord was the magazine editor then. No, wait a minute. They had a guy named Chet Allard, who was the magazine editor, and he wrote most of the magazine himself. He would appear under different bylines. His name was Chester Allard, so it was Dak Dralla, you know, Allard backwards, and other things like that.

SM: Oh!

MH: I think Chet finally died, and that's when McCord took over, and it changed pretty radically. There were some great reporters around then. Roy Bosson, who later went to work for the Brewers Foundation. He came from Hot Springs. Of course, old George Douthit was one of the old-school guys. He covered the politics at the state capitol until he died.

SM: Right.

MH: John Scudder was a reporter then and a terrible drinking man. He was pretty good until he got too far gone on the sauce. He was a great friend of Sid McMath. He was writing in the days when Sid came to power.

SM: Right.

MH: Bobbie Forster came later. She had been a radio reporter. She was a cracker jack. Maurice Moore came over from Hot Springs. [He was] one of these guys you'd send out on one story, and he'd come back with <u>five</u>. And on and on. There were a lot of good people around. We had some fun in those days. You know, when you work in a town where you've got two papers going at it, you

pick up that paper and look and see where you've screwed up, or [laughs] maybe you didn't screw up, but it's always there. You'd better do your job, or else you're going to be unmasked. [Laughs]

SM: Right.

MH: It was very competitive. The *Gazette* had a little bit of an edge on us in a lot of ways. For one thing, it was a night paper, and they had a little more time on things than we often did, but that's neither here nor there. It was fun time.

SM: When you went back to the *Democrat*, what job did you have then?

MH: I went back as a general assignment reporter.

SM: Okay.

MH: But I'll tell you how I always worked, Scott. Some time down the road, if you've had a background in editing, you're going to get called back into the editing game. That happened to me. Let's see, how did it exactly–at what point–? Oh, I know when it was! I filled in on the city desk, and I was just kind of working over there for a while as an assistant to the city editor. Allen went up to Washington with Dale Alford when he was elected to Congress, and so they were looking for–well, this time he was the news editor, Allen was, and he went to Washington, and so I got the job somehow or other as news editor.

SM: As news editor.

MH: Yes.

SM: And this would've been about when, do you think?

MH: You're a bad guy, Scott! [Laughs] But it was . . .

SM: Was it before Central High, do you think?

MH: Oh, no! No, it wasn't. See, that started when I was out of the newspaper business. I wasn't heavily involved in this, but I did cover the graduation ceremony, and that was about the only story of any magnitude.

SM: In 1958?

MH: I went to that.

SM: Which was when Ernest Green, I guess, graduated, right?

MH: Yes. They all graduated but one that night. Minnie Jean Brown was the one who was expelled. In fact, I got that story thanks to Virgil Blossom, who I'd known–you know, it was a final edition story one day.

SM: Virgil Blossom was the superintendent of Little Rock schools.

MH: Yes. He'd been the superintendent in Fayetteville, and I'd known him through the athletic association when I covered high school sports.

SM: Right.

MH: Anyway, that's neither here nor there. It wasn't much of a story, really.

SM: So you became news editor in about 1958 or . . .?

MH: In there somewhere. I left in 1968. It was a little after–probably 1960.

SM: Okay.

MH: I think I had that job for that long.

SM: So during the second time you were at the *Democrat*, you were a general assignment reporter up until you became news editor?

MH: Yes. And I did some desk stuff, but I think they probably thought of me still as a

general assignment. I'd done a lot of editing.

SM: Any particularly memorable stories that you've covered, in addition to the expulsion story?

MH: Not really. I guess just the stuff that comes up.

SM: Talk a little bit about the competition. I mean, you had worked briefly at the *Gazette* and then you worked at the *Democrat*.

MH: Yes.

SM: What was the competition like then?

MH: Well, you'd go out on a story of a magnitude, like a storm story or something, and you'd see guys out there, like Bill Lewis. Roy came a little later, I think.

SM: Roy Reed?

MH: Yes. By that time, TV guys were starting to show up, too. So you just had to be as thorough as you could, but your eye was always on the clock–how long it takes to get the story written and when the deadline is for the paper. So you just get used to working that way.

SM: Was the competition between the reporters on the job–was it friendly or was it . . .?

MH: Mostly, it was. I always felt like it was. I was friends with the *Gazette* people, and I liked them. I can't think of anybody over there I didn't like.

SM: Some of the people I've read these oral histories from have described the *Gazette* folks as being sort of arrogant.

MH: Well, I think they were, a little bit, but that didn't bother me.

SM: You didn't feel like they looked down on you for working at the *Democrat*?

MH: I never cared about that. But most of them I knew pretty well, and I think they liked me, too. There was some respect there.

SM: Right. How did your bosses–I mean, did they put a lot of pressure on you to get a better story than the *Gazette*, or was it your own . . .?

MH: No. You're supposed to get the damn story and come back with it. No, we didn't think about the *Gazette* when we wrote stories. I didn't, and I don't think the other people did much.

SM: Right.

MH: Maybe some of the political beat guys had an ongoing relationship, well, they might, but not me. And I think mainly we were trying to bust our buns and do it. And sometimes you just did it really good, you know? [Laughs] Sometimes not so good.

SM: I remember when I worked at the *Gazette*, the first thing I'd do in the morning, usually, was not read the *Gazette*, but read the *Democrat* to see what they had .

MH: Yes, sort of an update on what was happening. That's right.

SM: And to make sure they didn't have what we didn't have.

MH: Yes.

SM: Did you read the *Gazette* religiously when you were at the *Democrat*?

MH: Of course! I read it every single day from front to back.

SM: I worked at the *Gazette* in the 1980s. It was a much different time, but I always had sort of an acid stomach until I knew we hadn't gotten beat. Did you have that

kind of tension?

MH: I never felt that kind of tension.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

MH: . . . if you fell short, you might get your ass chewed a little bit, but it wasn't like [ ] hit the door, you know? None of that stuff.

SM: Right. What was the atmosphere in the two newsrooms. Was it the same, or was it different? Did it have a different feel being at the *Gazette* as opposed to the *Democrat*?

MH: Actually, I don't know how it was at the *Gazette* so much. Bill Shelton was sort of a demanding guy, but . . .

SM: Bill Shelton was the . . .?

MH: He was the city editor. After you got to know him–well, that was not really true, except he could . . .

SM: He was intimidating.

MH: Yes, he was intimidating. Yes, he was. That was his style, but he really wasn't a bad person at all. At least I didn't feel like that. I liked him. I used to go to the newsroom some over there when I was working in public relations, PR. And so I really knew those guys pretty well. In fact, sometimes I would go up and visit somebody. Bill was a friend of mine and others as well. After I left Little Rock, I'd come back, and the first thing I'd do when I hit town was call Jerry Neil, and we'd go down to the Little Rock Club and have a few snorts. Then I'd go on back down to the paper with him and visit [laughs] my friends.

SM: Right.

MH: Interfere with their work habits. Well, let's see. Who was–? Charlie Davis was working in the editorial department then. Gosh! I don't know. Those [Rush?] boys were back and forth, some of them–Jerry and Van. Anyway, I knew a lot of them.

SM: Well, I guess what I'm wondering is–did the feeling when you were in the *Gazette* newsroom as an employee and when you were in the *Democrat* newsroom as an employee, did they seem about the same, or was there a different atmosphere?

MH: You know, my time at the *Gazette* was so long ago that I can't really remember.

SM: Right.

MH: I really can't. It wasn't until I got to working at the *Democrat* that I really got a feel that I was doing my newspaper job and had an idea of what needed to be done.

SM: Well, let me ask that then. What was the atmosphere or the morale like in the *Democrat* newsroom?

MH: It was usually not so good. [Laughs]

SM: Why was that?

MH: Well, because they felt like they were outnumbered, the pay wasn't as good, and that's the way reporters are quite a bit, as you may remember. [Laughs] They're mistreated–quite a bit of mistreatment! [Laughs] And they were always looking for another job and that kind of stuff! [Laughs] It's true. That's just the way it

was.

SM: When you went back to the *Democrat* the second time, do you remember what you got paid then?

MH: I really don't know. It wasn't too much, $75 or something like that.

SM: Right.

MH: But that wasn't bad for that day and time–in Little Rock, anyway.

SM: Right. But, generally, the newsroom folks at the *Democrat* were looking to move on. Is that . . .?

MH: Well, a lot of them–and they did! Many a one came and . . .

SM: Of course, there were more newspapers then, so it was easier to move around.

MH: That's right. Exactly. You could always get a job if you wanted to move. And, you know, there were guys who came and went to the papers, too. I don't know if you've ever heard of a man named Deacon Parker. [Laughs] Deacon's real name was Morgan Parker, but he'd been a church editor somewhere, and that's when he picked up the name, "Deacon."

SM: I see.

MH: Deacon was funny-looking guy. He looked sort of like a [haint?], if you get what I'm saying. He was just gaunt and had this long, stringy hair, and he was a terrible boozer.

SM: Oh.

MH: But if you could catch Deacon in his sober moments between his drinking bouts, he was a pretty damned good copy editor. The *Gazette* hired him. He was a

friend of Nelson's, and he came and went over there two or three times, and he came to the *Democrat*.

SM: He worked for you when you were news editor, is that right?

MH: I don't know. I think, by that time, Deacon had passed on, but I knew him quite well. He did his job when he was there.

SM: Tell me a little bit more about–you said you were sent upstairs to sort of learn the paste up?

MH: Yes. We didn't have paste up then. That was hot type! [Laughs]

SM: How did it work? Tell me how it worked.

MH: Well, the stories would be sent to the composing room, you know, the copy with the headline slip attached to it.

SM: On paper, right?

MH: Yes, this was all on paper. Then the Linotype operators would set it, and it would come back over to the proof desk. They'd run the proof and send them to the proofreaders, which no longer exist, as you know. Then the corrections are made, and they bring it over then, so the makeup men could start putting it in the paper. We didn't even dummy anything with page one in those days, so you just had to kind of help these guys get that stuff in where it best could be seen.

SM: Right.

MH: We dummied the front page and the local page. That's the way it worked. Then you always had to kind of keep after the foreman to make sure he was running the copy out.

SM: When you say running the copy out, what do you mean?

MH: Putting it on the hook, where the–see, the printers would just come up and take the top thing on these damned hooks. They didn't care what it was. The Linotype operators just picked up what was on top. And so you had to kind of watch the foreman and make sure he was getting the priority stuff where it belonged, out and on the machines. After a while, they got to where they'd work with you pretty well if you didn't try to snoot them! [Laughs]

SM: Was the back shop unionized at the *Democrat*?

MH: Oh, yes! At both papers.

SM: So what could you do and not do? Since you weren't a . . .

MH: You were not supposed to touch type at all, not even put your fingers on it. You just looked at it. You could tell them what to do and all that. And then you'd tell them when to turn the paper and so forth and so on. Usually, you didn't have to tell them. Good makeup men, you don't tell them stuff. They know what to do.

SM: Right.

MH: You just stand there and make sure. After a while, you get to where you can read that type as well as you can read this–looking at that paper, you can read that mirror–I can read it as quick as I can read this.

SM: Even though it would be . . .

MH: Just in lead. You were looking at lead, [laughs], but after while you get to where you can do that. Sometimes you can catch errors. A lot of times you could catch a head [headline] error, which is the worst damned thing you can let get by.

SM: Right.

MH: But you could find those things. And after a while–you know, there was a certain amount of flex between you and these makeup guys. You could get away with a little touchy-feely there if you needed to, [laughs], and they wouldn't blow the whistle on you.

SM: What was the relationship with the union like when you were at the *Democrat*?

MH: Do you mean me and the union guys?

SM: Well, you and the union, and then, I guess, the paper and the union.

MH: Oh, it was all right. They had their contract. There wasn't any difficulty. I don't think there was ever a threat of a strike around there. Let me tell you a little story about that. Mr. Heiskell and Mr. Engel–you know, this was in the days when people owned papers, not corporations.

SM: And Mr. Engel was who?

MH: He was the owner of the *Democrat*.

SM: First name?

MH: K. August Engel, an old German guy from Texas. When the time came to negotiate these contracts with the unions, which were all the type guys, the pressman, and so forth, Mr. Heiskell deferred to Mr. Engel because Mr. Engel was a much more firm negotiator. [Laughs] So, in this case, Mr. Heiskell deferred to August. [Laughs]

SM: Let him set the . . .

MH: Yes. He was the guy who negotiated the contracts with the union guys.

SM: So the contracts were identical, then?

MH: Oh, yes. Besides, there was a differential for night [duty], you know? That kind of stuff.

SM: Right.

MH: No, it was the same deal. And you'd go down to the *Gazette*–I've done it many a time–and seen the same guys that you've seen in our [stereotyping?] department or the pressmen sitting around on the curb down there waiting to go to work for them, too. They worked back and forth. Everyone was a big family, mostly happy.

SM: And so you never really had any conflicts or . . .?

MH: Oh, no. I knew the work. We knew the game. We just didn't cross certain things. I don't know whether you've ever heard the story about when the *Gazette* people in the newsroom organized and tried to negotiate a contract [ _____ the guild].

SM: Right. Where were you then?

MH: I was at the *Gazette*. No, excuse me, the *Democrat*.

SM: You were at the *Democrat*?

MH: Yes. So I stayed in touch with Bob and different ones over there. And, of course, they were sweating bullets, and it was a very emotional thing, Scott. I mean, <u>big time</u>!

SM: I guess Bob Douglas sort of led that.

MH: He was one of the principal leaders of that and maybe <u>the</u> principal leader. But he

certainly was involved in a big way. So they did finally strike. Of course, newsroom guys are not really made up–they're not Teamsters. Do you know what I'm saying?

SM: Right.

MH: It wasn't like a big party for them [laughs] like if they were [hard?] stuff.

SM: Right.

MH: [Hard?] traveling. And, of course, pretty soon some of the guys were going back. Others went to work with the Associated Press [AP], like Adren [Cooper?], who was in sports over at the *Gazette*. And I don't know whether Tom Dygard was over there at that time or not. Do you know who he was–who he is? Was. He's dead.

SM: The name is familiar. Right.

MH: Well, Tom was a sportswriter at the *Gazette*. He came up here and was a–no, he went directly from here after he got out of school to the Associated Press. He was later head of the bureau in Chicago and later the head of the bureau in Tokyo. He wrote books besides, children's books.

SM: Spell his late name.

MH: D-Y-G-A-R-D. Wonderful guy. Really a talented person.

SM: So the strike–I'm trying to remember when the paper . . .

MH: It just finally–Finally, the guys went back.

SM: That was the early 1950s, right?

MH: Yes. Bob and the rest of them, [they gave everyone back?].

SM: Did any of them come to work at the *Democrat*?

MH: No, I don't think so.

SM: Just for the record, you didn't have a guild at the *Democrat*, either, did you?

MH: No.

SM: Was there any–you know, during what was going on at the *Gazette*, could you tell that the management at the *Democrat* was nervous that there might be an effort to unionize?

MH: I don't think Mr. Engel was one damned bit nervous. [Laughs] That's just the kind of guy he was. Hell, I think he'd have closed the paper or sold and done something. I don't know. But I don't think there was ever even any serious thought of organizing at the *Democrat*.

SM: So you were news editor from the late 1950s until . . .?

MH: 1968. Well, I would say early 1960s, maybe. You know, I can't–I'm just not sure. I should've checked this stuff. It's not important.

SM: How did you come to leave the *Democrat* and why?

MH: Well, at that point it seemed apparent to me that–first of all, it was an afternoon paper. The *Gazette* was more dominant at that time than they ever had been before in my life, and I just thought the paper was going down.

SM: Who owned it. Had the Palmers . . .?

MH: No, no, no.

SM: Still Mr. Engel?

MH: Mr. Engel and there were two nephews, Marcus George and Stanley Berry.

Stanley was the business manager, and Marcus, by this point in time, was city editor. They were the heirs who were going to take over, and they did when Mr. Engel died. But, you know, the situation was just deteriorating and that's when I bailed out.

SM: Can you be more specific about what you meant when you said it was deteriorating?

MH: Well, the circulation was declining, and advertising was declining. Had somebody over there been able to take over, they would be where Hussman is right today.

SM: Who was running the *Gazette* at that time?

MH: You know, I honestly don't know. Hugh, I guess, was the publisher. Mr. Heiskell had died by this time, I think. I'm sure he had. And, you know, the big thing was that they had a deal with Carrick Patterson and some of the rest of them. This put Bob on the spot and it put other people on the spot. And I'm sure morale was not too good around the *Arkansas Gazette* at that time.

SM: Carrick Patterson was Hugh Patterson's son?

MH: Right.

SM: Looking back on it, what could the *Gazette* have done then to put the *Democrat* out of business?

MH: Well, I don't think they could've done <u>anything</u> right then. The *Gazette* people–they must've been thinking about it. I don't think Mr. Engel would've sold that paper if he'd been alive. And there are some heirs involved there

besides Marcus and Stanley. God, they all lived to be one hundred. But they had this complicated deal that came up–this was after I left. It had to do with the Shreveport people down there in some way. But Marcus and Stanley got a share, or maybe they got the whole ball of wax there–the CBS station in Little Rock–they had a television station.

SM: Oh.

MH: And so they just left it to the management of the people who were there, and so they stayed . . .

SM: You mean left the paper?

MH: Left the management of the television station. I mean, once they'd sold out, then the paper was just–I don't know how–I think, by this time–see, that's when Hussman got it.

SM: Right.

MH: Somehow this complicated deal came up. It was about a three-way deal there, and so Walter Hussman emerged as the owner of the *Democrat*. And he hired [John Robert] Starr, and they started this war.

SM: War that ultimately lead to the . . .

MH: Yes. It was a sad day to me. I hated to think about the *Gazette* being sold to Gannett. I knew in my mind that that wasn't going to be a happy ending in the long run.

SM: Why did you know that?

MH: Well, because it was a chain and–I saw the *Stockton Record* every day at

Modesto, what kind of a paper they were operating, and it just wasn't what I thought of as up to what the *Gazette*'s or even the *Democrat*'s standards were.

SM: Let me drop back for just a moment.

MH: Okay, I know I'm rattling on here.

SM: No, that's fine. At the time, you were thinking of leaving the *Democrat*. You said circulation was declining.

MH: Yes.

SM: Ad revenue was declining. This was the early 1960s. What I was wondering is do you think there was anything the *Gazette* could've done–if the *Democrat* was that weak at that time, was there anything the *Gazette* could've done to take over the . . .?

MH: Well, I think there's a possibility that–I don't know. It would depend on some things–Hugh Patterson–I think it would've taken a more aggressive man than Hugh Patterson to do it. I mean, just somebody who was a more determined individual. Perhaps like the Stephens family. I'm a little surprised they didn't take a hand in that. They could have. They had the finances to do it.

SM: Right.

MH: But they didn't. No, I don't–I think eventually the *Democrat* might have just survived.

SM: On its own.

MH: On its own, and they might have, but it didn't work out that way.

SM: Well, what was going on in your personal situation? In addition to the troubles at

the paper, I guess you said you had gotten married, right?

MH: Oh, yes. I had two children, and I just felt like I wasn't going to make anymore headway around there for a while. Harrington was the managing editor, which was the next step up for me, and he wasn't going anywhere. There's nothing wrong with Harrington. He's a great friend of mine. So that wasn't going to change, I didn't think, so I just started casting about. And, like I said, I finally landed at the *Modesto* [California] *Bee*.

SM: Tell me again how that happened.

MH: Okay. I had scanned the ads in *Editor and Publisher*, looking for a job that met a certain pay scale, and I'm not going to disclose that! [Laughs] It wasn't too damn big. And also the weather couldn't be any colder than Little Rock, Arkansas. I don't like cold weather. This paper I landed with was part of the McClatchy chain, which, at that time, included the *Sacramento Bee*, the *Fresno Bee*, and number three, the little kid on the block, was the *Modesto Bee*. Much smaller town, smaller paper. And they also had a TV station.

SM: And you went to Modesto?

MH: Yes.

SM: How big of a paper was it, would you say, at that time?

MH: I've forgotten what the circulation was. It wasn't just great big, but it was a local paper, really. It included most of the town. It was a good, strong paper, financially and otherwise. There wasn't any competition.

SM: But it was smaller than the *Democrat*, I guess.

MH: Yes, I think so. And it certainly wasn't the same atmosphere, say, as–Little Rock is a great news town. It always was, and I'm sure it always will [be]. I mean, when you think of politics and the legislature and all that, that's just for openers. I can't remember a time that was dull around Little Rock. [Laughs]

SM: Right.

MH: And it was just lively. That's the only way you could put it. So I went out there, and it was a great change for me because this was a no-competition place. If a story came up and you didn't have room for it, you just held it over until the next day. And I couldn't get used to that [laughs] for a long time!

SM: What job did you take at Modesto?

MH: Well, I was working on the copy desk, and I held various jobs, like the slot man and makeup editor and things like that.

SM: The slot man does what?

MH: Well, you sit behind sort of a horseshoe desk, and you've got some copy editors out there, and you get all the stories, and you look at them and decide what you're going to do with them. You put a headline order on there and flip it on somebody's desk, and you just hope that you're getting the right story to the right editor. You know, these editors are like reporters. They have different skills and a different level of interest in what's happening [laughs], and so there's an art to that, I'll tell you for sure [laughs], just getting the right stuff to the right guy. And also, many editors can work twice as fast as others and still do a better job, and you have to bear that in mind.

SM: Right.

MH: It's one of those managerial things that you have to know about.

SM: So did you start as a slot man and . . .?

MH: No, I first just worked as copy editor. Pretty soon this job changed and I took more responsibility. And from then on that's about what I did around there, that sort of thing. It was editing all, doing make up, and working in the composing room.

SM: You said it was different going there to Modesto, where there was no competition. Was it as much fun? Did you enjoy it? You've got to speak up!

MH: [Laughs] I enjoyed it, but it was not the same sort of fun I was having in Little Rock as far as newspaper work was concerned.

SM: Why not?

MH: Well, because it was stuff that you might even not put in your paper here.

SM: Yes.

MH: It was more of a small-town atmosphere, and there was a lot of interesting things–well, like irrigation districts, that kind of stuff. Do you know what I'm saying? [Laughs] And the Tri-Valley Cannery gets a good deal, you know.

SM: Yes.

MH: Of course, that's the big industry there, farming.

SM: When you went to Modesto, was McClatchy still a family chain?

MH: Yes. And it was an interesting outfit, too. The McClatchys, for example, were very liberal Democrats, and their outfit, their place, was in the most conservative

areas of California. And so it's kind of like it used to be at the *Gazette*, maybe. A lot of people hated you! [Laughs]

SM: What were they like to work for, just as an employer?

MH: Well, I'll tell you something. They were a great place when I went there in the sense of pay. Our contract in Modesto–now, mind you, this is a town of about 65,000 people–Our scale was the same as the *Chronicle* in San Francisco because that's what the McClatchys paid. Their Sacramento guys got it, we got it, Fresno got it.

SM: Was it a guild paper?

MH: Not at that time, but it later became one. Sacramento and Fresno were, but we didn't have the guild.

SM: But you got the benefit of their higher contract.

MH: Yes, yes. [Laughs]

SM: Did you have local control on the news content?

MH: There was considerable control by Sacramento. We would get a must-go list down from Sacramento every morning from the editor up there.

SM: Stories?

MH: About six items to make sure we got them in the paper.

SM: What kind of things would those be?

MH: Whatever Elvis Presley was doing was one of the things. Elvis was on it all the time! [Laughs]

SM: Somebody was an Elvis fan!

MH: [Laughs] Well, smart guy! But it was sort of bizarre.

SM: Was there a political agenda driving that must-go list, or was it just things that they . . .?

MH: No. Well, that would be, I think, more in their–they would manage the editorial page, as well, from up there.

SM: Right.

MH: It was the editorial page more than anything else. Some critics thought more than that.

SM: Right.

MH: Which is not usually the case.

SM: Did you ever feel that from McClatchy?

MH: Not too much. I never was bothered by–I thought they were good people. I liked the McClatchys. Sometimes I thought they were a little bit–well, I don't know how to put it–non-competitive in the sense that they didn't have competition in Sacramento. There was another paper there, but it was a very weak second. No, they were good people, and the people came down all the time. Miss Eleanor McClatchy was the oldest one, and she was the publisher of all this empire. She'd come down and preside over Christmas dinner for us, you know, and be serving turkey in the cafeteria.

SM: Yes.

MH: And, you know, it's really funny, Scott. I would come back here and, inevitably, I would run into Hugh Patterson up at the Little Rock Club. Hugh knew me

pretty well and, you know, we would exchange greetings.

SM: Right.

MH: And the first thing he'd do was to ask me about Miss Eleanor. He seemed to think that I had daily contact with her [laughter]. It was once a year, but I didn't disillusion him. I remember the time when [George] McGovern was the Democratic candidate. Who defeated McGovern? Was it [Richard M.]Nixon? It was Nixon, yes. Hugh said, "I want you to tell Miss Eleanor, Martin–remind her that we stood by McGovern in this election and she didn't ." [Laughs]

SM: Get that message right to her!

MH: Yes! But they'd go to these publishers meetings and he knew Miss Eleanor quite well. And, of course, they were in pretty much the same political camp: strong Adlai [Stevenson] people. I'll tell you some of the–I don't know if his name ever comes up anymore, but a great editorialist who's as good as any I've ever read, maybe the best, was Ashmore.

SM: Sure. Harry Ashmore.

MH: I mean, he was absolutely a brilliant editorial writer. He just absolutely was wonderful! I'll never forget. I've never seen–you know, mostly they're boring.

SM: Right.

MH: Even if you're supporting or . . .

SM: If you agree with it.

MH: But he could write, and he could do it so well!

SM: And he went to California, didn't he? Somewhere out there . . .

MH: Yes, he's out there. After he left Little Rock, he went up to World Books or some damned thing. Then he went out there. Somebody gave millions to create this think tank in Santa Barbara. Harry Ashmore and Rexford Tugwell and, I don't know, some more of those guys just went out there and thought!

SM: [Laughs] That's a great job!

MH: They were probably drinking a lot of scotch while they were doing this. I'm just sure Harry is still alive because we would know if he had died.

SM: I think he passed away.

MH: Did he really?

SM: I couldn't tell you what year, but it was several years . . .

MH: Well, it just stands to reason. I wasn't aware. I missed it somehow.

SM: When did McClatchy go public?

MH: After Miss McClatchy–well, let's see–I'll take it back. When Miss Eleanor McClatchy died, her nephew, C. K. McClatchy, took over as publisher. He held that job until he died. It wasn't too much later, you know, a few years, but not too long. Corporate operators took over management, but the McClatchy family is still involved. New people were coming in there and doing the corporate switcheroos. It was nothing underhanded, but they just changed it.

SM: Right. Roughly, when do you think they went public?

MH: I'd say fifteen years ago, anyway.

SM: So about . . .

MH: It was before I left, and I've been retired–I'm seventy-six, and I retired

sixteen–I'd say fifteen or twenty years ago.

SM: So around 1980 or something? Somewhere in there?

MH: Yes. That would be a fair . . .

SM: I didn't realize it was that late. I was thinking it was sooner than–What position were you in when it went public? Do you remember?

MH: Just doing that stuff . . .

SM: Were you news editor or . . .?

MH: No, they didn't have a news editor at that point. Actually, I was fulfilling that task, but they didn't have a name for it.

SM: Okay.

MH: I was just a makeup editor or something like that.

SM: But you were in management rather than an editor?

MH: Yes.

SM: Did you see any change when it went public?

MH: Not much. The first thing they did that really had an impact on us was they bought the *Anchorage Times*, I think it was. It was a weak second up in Anchorage, and they bought it. They took a bunch of people up there, both mechanical and editorial people and including some of our people. They went up there and just created a new newspaper. And that was really the first of their major acquisitions. Of course, it was peanuts compared to these recent ones.

SM: Did they take any people from your paper?

MH: Yes, but not to stay. They just took them up there . . .

SM: Temporarily.

MH: . . . and just got things going in a good direction. They had some people there, and I guess they hired some others.

SM: Well, when the company went public, did you get any additional resources? Did you get more money or better equipment or anything at all?

MH: No. I mean, it was already–we weren't short of anything. We had everything. When it started going to computers, we were right up there early on. Of course, we didn't get enough equipment to begin with, and so we had to do it again. I thought I'd be out of the business before computers arrived, but I didn't get out in time. But we went from an afternoon paper to a morning paper. That was one of the things that happened.

SM: After it went corporate.

MH: Yes, I think that was after. Yes, I'm sure it was. It was hard.

SM: What was–just the switch to morning?

MH: Yes. That changes your life. You know how that is.

SM: Sure.

MH: Suddenly you're working nights and off days. That's not much fun when you've got a family.

SM: Why did they make that switch?

MH: Well, I guess because everybody else was doing it. Television rules the world, and it was ruling the world then, or it was starting to. The advertising and the interest was away from an afternoon paper.

SM: Right.

MH: People turn on a television set instead of picking up a paper.

SM: Right. Did you see a greater emphasis on the bottom line–I mean, on making money or generating a certain level of profit?

MH: No, not really. They always make money, I think. They might've cut a few corners in there, but it wasn't noticeable. I don't think it damaged the manpower situation or anything like that. No, I really don't think so. Somebody else might disagree who worked at Sacramento because they always had–just like *The New York Times*, they always had about twice as many people as they needed up there. Well, they might have thinned out [laughs] some of the dead wood.

SM: Right. In your case, it sounds like your experience with corporate ownership was pretty good, then.

MH: It was okay, but this was different than Gannetts and people like that.

SM: Right. So you think the McClatchys were an exception?

MH: Oh, yes, definitely, and they still are.

SM: What do you think about corporate ownership in general?

MH: Well, there's not much you can do about it, and that's terrible! The reason I say that is you can go places, and the papers look pretty much the same. Well, [in the past], you'd go to Memphis, and you knew when you were looking at the *Commercial Appeal* and how they felt about things, and that was a corporate paper itself. And the Hearst papers, you knew where you were with them. I don't call them good newspapers, but at least they were . . .

SM: Right.

MH: You knew who it was and how they felt about things. Guys like Hearst and Colonel McCormick and all those guys. They were potent guys in themselves. Hell, they called the shots. If you didn't like it, you could buy another newspaper. They weren't trying to cater to [laughs] anybody!

SM: Right.

MH: So I think that's better.

SM: Why is it better?

MH: Well, you've got different viewpoints, different ideas, and they challenged things.

SM: Right.

MH: They were always combing over the Democrats–guys like McCormick. Well, maybe it made better citizens out of them. I don't know. I kind of like those old days of the smoke-filled rooms myself! [Laughs]

SM: Do you think journalism has gotten too . . .?

MH: To me, I think it's gotten–it's too much that you open to page two and here's a page shot with just crap about entertainment people, pictures, and then they run an index that tells you the same thing. And I just look at the damn paper–my way of looking at it. And things like that. It's more of an entertainment. And I think that the papers are owned now by some of them, a lot of them. The newspaper is owned by the television channels.

SM: Yes.

MH: And they run this soap-opera stuff like it's news! Hell, I don't agree [laughs]

with that! And I think that they've just lost a lot of their clout. The only papers that have clout now mostly are the *Times* and the . . .

SM: *The New York Times*.

MH: Yes, and the *Washington Post* and the Boston paper. There are a few others . . .

SM: How does that relate to corporate ownership? Why do corporations . . .?

MH: Well, you can run a paper a lot cheaper if you'd follow the line of–you know, you're using the standard wire services–you don't have such a big staff out at places getting your version of the story. You can do it cheaper that way.

SM: Do you think there's a tendency to soft-pedal rather than risk offending readers?

MH: I don't know about that. I'm not sure about that. I don't really feel like they're really softening it too much, but I think sometimes you miss getting at a point or attacking a certain position that you used to have because there's nobody over there to do it. They're gone.

SM: Right. You knew it would be trouble when Gannett bought the *Gazette*. Could you elaborate a little bit?

MH: Well, by that I mean the old guys who were used to doing it their way weren't going to be able to operate that way. That's what I mean. Guys like Bob [Douglas], for example, and Bill Shelton, if he'd still been around. They would've had to alter the way they were used to doing things.

SM: Right.

MH: And that changes–of course, right away, you've lost quite a bit.

SM: I know when I was there that the popular notion was that Gannett sort of took a

serious newspaper and fluffed it up.

MH: Well, yes. That's an entertainment paper more than a newspaper, in my opinion.

SM: And you think that's directly tied to corporate ownership?

MH: Well, not necessarily. I think, for example, the McClatchys' corporate ownership hasn't been a bad thing. I mean, they've acquired some papers that might have gone down.

SM: Yes.

MH: And they were once great newspapers. They were headed for trouble, or they wouldn't have been sold. I don't know. They seem to be doing all right. They're making money, I think, quite a bit of money. But also I've read the *Minneapolis Tribune*, which I don't think is all that great a paper, but it's sure not the same as the *Sacramento Bee* by a long way.

SM: Right.

MH: And the same people are still there who were there before.

SM: Right.

MH: So my brother-in-law, who lives there and is ultra-conservative, thinks they're all dotty, but he thought that before! [Laughs]

SM: Yes.

MH: And he thinks they're <u>all</u> dotty! [Laughs] You know how that goes. If you've got a thin skin, you don't belong in the newspaper business! [Laughs]

SM: Do you think all newspapers are going to basically end up being owned by corporations or is there any way . . .?

MH: I don't know. It's hard for me to visualize much of a future for anything besides these ultra-powerful newspapers, and who knows how long that will last?

SM: What do you see happening?

MH: For example–I don't know. I don't read and keep up with things, but the *Washington Post* has certainly changed since Miss . . .

SM: Graham died.

MH: . . . Graham died, and Bradley and those guys are all gone. Well, you've got a different attitude now at that paper, I would think. After reading her biography carefully–I mean, I knew there was a lot of co-mingling with newspaper people and powers in Washington, but I didn't realize it was quite that much. When there's nothing but parties and dinners and Miss Graham going off on some excursion with somebody–of course, she was a wealthy woman, and that's what they do.

SM: Right.

MH: Anyway, it was interesting.

SM: Do you have much hope for newspapers in America?

MH: I hope, but I'm not too sure. [Laughs] Well, I just think it all changes, Scott. Everything changes. I'm kind of old. Some of it's sad and some of it is for the better. But I like to have an open press and plenty of it. I think that's much healthier.

SM: What do you think has changed? You said things changed . . .

MH: In the electronic world that we live in now. Think about it. Television–God, it's

changed just in–the Turner Network's revolutionizing the business.

SM: Twenty-four-hour news?

MH: Yes. People like Dan Rather and [Tom] Brokaw and those guys–when they're gone, there won't be anybody like them, I don't think.

SM: Right.

MH: Lord, you can turn on CNN channel, and they're all doing this kind of stuff now. You just watch that stuff and you can get a pretty quick wrap-up of what is really happening. Then, if you want to, you can watch those guys yell at each other and they don't discuss anything! [Laughs] I don't waste much time there.

SM: Yes.

MH: But I'm at the point now that I don't really pursue all this like I once did..

SM: I'm coming to the end of most of the things I wanted to ask. Just for the record, tell me–you're married to . . . ?

MH: My wife is Rebecca Walker Holmes. She was a Little Rock girl, and her family has lived here forever–you know, since back in the 1800s. We have a couple of kids.

SM: Who are . . .?

MH: They're forty-some-odd now. Walter, our oldest child, is a special ed teacher in the Modesto [California] school system, and our daughter, Rebecca, is married to a man who's a commercial real estate developer and may well become a tycoon one of these days. She lives in Davis, California. A branch of the university is there [University of California, Davis]. It's just west of Sacramento, of course.

SM: Right.

MH: We have five grandchildren. They're highly intelligent, beautiful kids.

SM: Beautiful and smart.

MH: Absolutely! [Laughs]

SM: Before I forget–I'm sorry–when . . .

MH: Well, they take after their mother that way! [Laughs]

SM: When did you retire from the *Modesto Bee*?

MH: When I was sixty-two years old–the very day–that week, that is. I had made up my mind that when the time came I was . . .

SM: What year was that?

MH: Well, let's see. I'm seventy-six, so that would be fourteen years ago.

SM: My math–1986? Is that–no, that's not right.

MH: That would be 19 . . .

SM: 1988, I guess.

MH: Yes.

SM: Okay. What have you been doing since?

MH: Reading, playing golf [laughs], fishing, trying to help raise my grandchildren and make sure they get the right stuff instilled in them, and that sort of thing. You have to keep after those things. I have many wonderful friends in California. It's a different place, but my newspaper friends–a guy I worked for there–Ray Nish, my managing editor for most of that time, was a great guy and a great newspaper man. He feels just like I do on this stuff! [Laughs] And some of the old-timers

around California, they're just great people, just like everywhere else.

SM: Is there anything I've left out about your experience in Arkansas either at the *Democrat* or the *Gazette*?

MH: Well, I'm trying to think. I know I've skimmed over some of the other guys who came to the paper later, like John Ward and Bob Sallee–when he was a reporter, I think he was wonderful.

SM: At the *Democrat*?

MH: Yes. He was a wonderful guy for storms and crime and breaking news. He absolutely had a great knack for it. He could just sit down with people, and they'd tell him anything.

SM: That's a great . . .

MH: He had it! The only thing with him–and it was kind of like with Ward–when they'd come back to the newsroom, it was tough getting them to sit down at a typewriter and start putting it on [laughs] paper.

SM: Did you have to remind them it's a daily paper?

MH: Yes.

SM: His last name is S-A-L-L . . .

MH: Double E.

SM: Double E. Right. He's still with the *Democrat*, I think.

MH: Well, if he hasn't retired, he's still there.

SM: Well, that's true.

MH: But Bob–for many years when I was working the night shift on Saturday night,

we used to have a penny-ante poker game in the newsroom between my jaunts up to the composing room. Some of the printers played with us. Gin rummy–Bob and I played a lot of gin.

SM: Yes.

MH: So that was a good way to while away your Saturday nights. I'll tell you one more little yarn about where I really learned to hate the Russians. One Saturday night I was working, getting the paper out. I decided to leave about thirty minutes early. There wasn't a damned thing happening anywhere. I told Floyd Stennit, the makeup guy, "Floyd, I'm going to cut out of here. Just go on, and when you get all these corrections done on it, turn it loose." Ewin West was the Linotype operator–he had been a reporter at the *Gazette* way back.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

MH: I got about halfway home–I lived out in the Pulaski Heights area–It came over the radio that the Russians had fired Sputnik into space. I thought, "Oh, my God! That was the first space shot." I just did a U-turn and floor-boarded the car and ran back to the paper. The door was still open, and I ran up to the composing room and told the Linotype operator and the makeup man to sit tight just a few minutes. So I got enough of a story where I could get it in up at the top of the page that night. Then I went home. I got to wondering later, "I just wonder if the *Gazette* will have that story." Sure enough, they did. I went back and asked Floyd, the makeup man, I said, "Floyd, let me ask you something. Did anybody

from the *Gazette* call over here that night and check to see if we were using that story?" He just smiled. I said, "Okay, that's as far as it goes [laughs]. I just wanted to know."

SM: Just in case.

MH: So they finally–the printer over there just called and asked, and they checked. Sure enough, they had to do it, too.

SM: The printers from the *Gazette* called the printers at the *Democrat*?

MH: Yes, exactly!

SM: Now, just to be–the *Democrat* was an afternoon paper, but you published on Sunday morning.

MH: Sunday morning. Right.

SM: So you were there on Saturday night.

MH: That's right. I worked a double-header on Saturday and on Saturday night.

SM: Right.

MH: Oh, yes. Well, anyway . . .

SM: Any other good stories you want to relate?

MH: Well, I'm sure there are, but I think you've probably got about enough! [Laughs] I love to think about it and recall the days. We did have a lot of fun. I don't care what anybody says about newspapers or anything. I enjoyed every damned day of it, I guess, except some of that stuff would get a little old. And I liked the people I worked with. I liked the guys I worked against and with at the same time at the other paper. It was just a fun crew, mostly.

SM: What made it fun?

MH: Well, just what I'm saying. I mean, I just liked doing it and . . .

SM: Yes.

MH: I liked going out and getting stories and writing them and editing, and the mechanics of–I just can't think of anything else I, personally, could ever have done that would've been half as much fun. Somehow we've survived on the pay and the little extra we got here. [Laughs]

SM: For me, it was always fun because it was always something new.

MH: You bet! Every day was a new day.

SM: It wasn't the kind of thing . . .

MH: You'd go down there–there wasn't stuff carrying over from the next–you had to start–something else was going.

SM: Well, Mr. Holmes, I've enjoyed it. I appreciate your time.

MH: Well, thank you, Scott. It's been fun meeting you and thank you for your interest and so forth.

SM: Thank you.

[End of Interview]