

Gazette Project

Interview with

Patrick Owens
23 February 2001
Montana Veterans Home
Columbia Falls, Montana

Interviewer: Ben Long

[Note from Interviewer: Patrick Owens was suffering both mentally and physically from a severe stroke and was difficult to understand, even in the same room. I cannot offer much improvement to this transcript.]

Ben Long: All right. I'm here today. It's the twenty-third of February, the year 2001.

My name is Ben Long, and I'm here with Patrick Owens at the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls, Montana. We are here for an oral history project by the Arkansas Center for Oral History. And I guess the first thing we are supposed to do is to say on tape that we give permission for the Center for Oral History to use this tape recording.

Patrick Owens: Surely. Okay. You can use it.

BL: Okay. If they can use it, they can use it. I guess we can start off with just a few things about yourself, Patrick.

PO: Let me give you [].

BL: Okay, the notes.

PO: [] there's a series of notes that you could read through and when we meet again, when you come back and if you have any questions about them you can raise, them with me.

BL: Okay, that sounds great.

PO: Then you can [] player.

BL: Paginate?

PO: Yes, and make a copy for me.

BL: Okay. And we'll be sending you a copy of the transcript as well. So I'll just start off with some basics. For instance, where were you born and when were you born?

PO: Libby, Montana, February–no, no, 5 August 1929.

BL: In Libby?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your family?

PO: Well, my father was a [] worker and came west [] the farm in North Dakota [] looking for work, and he met my mother who was the daughter of an absolutely hopeless homesteader on the Fisher River, thirty-five miles east of Libby. He killed himself. Her father killed himself trying to make a living on the land. He owned a piece of land where the Fisher River, east Fisher River [] with the –I'll get it in a minute. And, anyway . . .

BL: The Fisher River comes together–is this the main Fisher River?

PO: No. The east Fisher River. []

BL: Pretty tough country to homestead. That's kind of timbered country in there.

PO: Oh, yes. Hopeless. Hopeless. Hopeless. Anybody who–he came in 1914, which was really the end of the homesteader business.

BL: Yes.

PO: And so it was hopeless. It was a hopeless situation, and he killed himself working on this farm.

BL: When you say he killed himself, do you mean he committed suicide or just worked himself to death?

PO: No, no. He had small [arms?] [] and he just worked himself to death.

BL: Sure.

PO: And when my grandma, who was of eastern heritage, she married another fellow who didn't make a living off the farm. He worked for the forest service and made enough money that would—which was very little [] Bismarck [] look out for the []

BL: Did the fire look after the forest service, things like that?

PO: No. Sometimes—sometimes [] but the point is, he worked—I don't know—a maximum four-month year and made enough money to get by. Anyway, they married [] and when I was five and he was thirty-four, he drowned.

BL: Who drowned?

PO: My father.

BL: Your father drowned when you were five and he was thirty-four?

PO: He drowned when he was in a very serious accident when he was [], but it's on the western [] of the Lost Prairie, which is between here and Libby.

BL: Yes. A little [lake?] alongside Highway 2 there?

PO: No.

BL: Not that one?

PO: No.

BL: Different []?

PO: It's on—it's where the [] are at, and [] the eastern side of the Lost Prairie, which is a very rugged and flat area. That's where. And I'll []. But, anyway, he was working at [], and he drowned when [] water [].

BL: Okay.

PO: So anyway, at that point, my mother, who was more or less the age of my father . . .

BL: Yes.

PO: And [] had five kids [] was six.

BL: So you had four siblings. You were the second oldest?

PO: Yes. My sister, [Dot?], was the oldest, then my sister, [Mary?], and my sister, Shirley, and then my brothers, Stan and Gaylon.

BL: Gaylon?

PO: Gaylon. His real name was [] Gaylon [], but he didn't like that name. [] Gaylon, and he's known around here as Lum.

BL: Lum. Oh. Okay, I know Lum. That's your brother.

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. I know of him, anyway. I don't know him very well, but I know the name. So you had two brothers and two sisters?

PO: Yes. And, my mother, who [] immediately packed up and moved to Kalispell.

BL: Okay, so after your father died, you left Libby for Kalispell?

PO: []

BL: And that would have been in the 1930s.

PO: Yes. Rough time. Rough time. And she would—she would rent a house, a shack, and she got it for a month [free?] for renting it, and she paid for a month, and then two or three months to get her out, and that way [] three months like that.

BL: So you were there three months just to stay ahead of the landlord?

PO: Well—well, what do you mean staying ahead of him? []

BL: [Laughter] Okay.

PO: But she got by and, in fact, always [] pretty much. We were the only people with money every month [] because he had worked for the forest service and had got a little pension. In 1940—I'm guessing now—I think 1944—she remarried, and [years before that?] financially [] the pension was improved.

BL: The pension was improved, is that what you're saying?

PO: Yes.

BL: So you were getting a little bit more money from the government?

PO: Well, she got more for us children. She got enough for us children than she got before for us four children and her. She married a man named Orville [Hoover?], who was []. He was a bad, bad man. But, anyway, he was free []. He was driving a truck.

BL: Yes.

PO: []

BL: []

PO: [] And he was driving a truck and a boulder as big as a truck landed on him [], and he was disabled ever since [].

BL: One of the boulders fell off the [] and then landed on his truck, and he was hurt?

PO: Yes. I don't know what happened with the boulder or what was in the air []. Anyway, [] nobody really figured out what was wrong with him. []. But anyway, he took Orville and my mother to [] four or five times for a final settlement. [].

BL: But, anyway, he got a little bit of disability from . . .

PO: Well, he got a regular check. This lawyer got him a lot more money, and everybody would []. Every spring at this [school?]. [] the Diamond Key [Truck?] [] put on everything on there including a name [] and we went camping.

BL: For a month?

PO: [] Two weeks.

BL: Two weeks?

PO: And for four weeks. [] half the summer was spent.

BL: Great.

PO: []

BL: Half the summer you'd be camping. Where would you go?

PO: The favorite place we went was Felix Creek up the South Fork.

BL: Felix Creek up the South Fork?

PO: Yes. Now that place is covered with water.

BL: Right, because it's under the South Fork Reservoir now.

PO: Yes. And he was a good fisherman. I went fishing with him a lot with my mother, and he and []. But he was a bad person. He . . .

BL: Did he not treat your mother very well?

PO: No. He didn't treat Mother very well. He didn't treat us very well, but he was good in the summer.

BL: He took you fishing, anyway.

PO: Yes, fishing

BL: Did you catch some trout up there?

PO: Oh, lots of trout. Lots of trout.

BL: Cut throats and bull trout, I suppose?

PO: Sure. All sorts. [] It was this curious thing [], but we never went to Glacier Park.

BL: Huh? Never went to Glacier Park?

PO: [] as a kid you . . .

BL: Preferred the South Fork?

PO: Well, [] the North Fork the fish were running just everywhere.

BL: Yes.

PO: But []

BL: Okay.

PO: [] He was the second Irishman because my father was, of course, a descendent of Irish immigrants who came in [], and they were Catholic. Very, very Irish,

and his brother—his older brother stole all the money, which is how they [].

BL: Oh.

PO: And it made a certain amount of sense because otherwise he'd [] my money for anybody before his.

BL: Yes.

PO: But anyway, he [] settled west [Nigol?] Valley which is near the Canadian line.

BL: Yes.

PO: He [] a homestead which was a very different thing []

BL: Yes. So did you go to school in Kalispell, then?

PO: Yes.

BL: To elementary school?

PO: And high school.

BL: Did you go to Central School there, downtown?

PO: Yes. Yes. [] museum.

BL: Yes, it's a museum now.

PO: I went to school [] took college courses in photography.

BL: You took college courses in photography?

PO: Yes, in that building.

BL: In that building?

PO: Yes. [] lab in the [] basement of that building.

BL: Oh.

PO: []

BL: And so was that where you went through high school, then?

PO: Well, in Kalispell, I went to Flathead County High School.

BL: Yes. Flathead County High School.

PO: And []

BL: Yes.

PO: Well, let's see. [] took me to go to Kalispell []. At that time I had the highest IQ of anybody who had ever been at Flathead County High School.

BL: Is that right? [Laughs] From test scores they could tell?

PO: In general [] was the reason for giving the test.

BL: Yes.

PO: So I went through, just barely got through, with [] just to get me out of school.

BL: Now, wait a minute. I'm not sure I'm understanding. I hear you were very bright, but did you finish your classes?

PO: Yes.

BL: Because of your economic situation?

PO: No, no. Just because it was a dumb school.

BL: [Laughter] Oh, okay.

PO: Well, that's not true. [] very, very, very good in English and drama. [] Anyway, the point I started was that my brothers and sisters, who were happy in school, [] they accepted [] of all these three younger children. No, that's not right. [] Lum and Dorothy both [] school with the two others [] and [] that's all right. That's fine.

BL: Yes.

PO: []

BL: Yes. But you say you graduated, though.

PO: Yes.

BL: What year did you graduate from high school?

PO: 1947.

BL: 1947. Okay.

PO: [] It's there at the theater.

BL: The theater? Downtown at the movie theater?

PO: No, no. The theater at Flathead High School.

BL: Oh, like drama. You were in drama?

PO: Yes. It's a beautiful theater. It's beautiful. And I ran it. [] wanted lights or whatever. I was light man. []

BL: So you were in charge of the theater during high school or after high school?

PO: During high school.

BL: During high school.

PO: It was [] last year. I got mad and quit. He turned me in [], complained, because I got mad at him because the journalism teacher was treating me bad.

BL: So you were taking journalism classes in high school?

PO: Yes.

BL: But you didn't always get along with your journalism teacher?

PO: Not ever.

BL: [Laughs] Okay.

PO: [] He never had a course in journalism []

BL: So you . . .

PO: [] interested in.

BL: Okay. So what happened after high school?

PO: Well, I attended [] University of Montana.

BL: How could you afford that, given how—wasn't that pretty expensive?

PO: No.

BL: No.

PO: It wasn't. I couldn't afford it. I was there a little less than a year.

BL: About a year?

PO: Less than a year. And I went in the Army.

BL: Okay. Were you drafted, or was it just . . .

PO: Oh, I enlisted.

BL: You enlisted.

PO: And I went to [] to Panama to east of the Pacific side . . .

BL: The Panama Canal Zone?

PO: Yes. It was an interesting time.

BL: Yes?

PO: I was editor of the *Caribbean News*.

BL: Editor of the *Caribbean News*?

PO: The *Caribbean Army News*. It was a mess because I was a corporal and I had this

big job and [] which included Puerto Rico.

BL: So the paper was distributed to troops throughout the Caribbean area?

PO: Yes. And I'd get in a fight every once in a while with []. I ran with some readers who disagreed with the Army.

BL: Some of the readers disagreed with the Army?

PO: Yes.

BL: Did you have to pretty much toe the Army line?

PO: Oh, yes. Sure. But working on [] Army you waited a long time [].

BL: Yes.

PO: And [] and then I got out of that for some—well, I got out of the job because of [] my colonel, and he had at one point ordered me up for courtmartial [] and eventually got a punishment [] felony misdemeanor, sort of.

BL: Now, who got in trouble?

PO: I did.

BL: You did? From this lieutenant colonel?

PO: Yes. We were charged with everything including desertion, and it was reduced to a conviction of [] table. We refused to have removed from the books from the typing table and failing to report to do so.

BL: Oh. So it was kind of a silly charge.

PO: Yes. And it was not true.

BL: It wasn't true, but you got in a lot of trouble, anyway.

PO: Yes. Well, he got in trouble, too.

BL: Yes.

PO: [] Then I went to [] hospital. [] worked at [] Naval Hospital across the bay in Oakland.

BL: You worked for the military while you were still in the Army?

PO: Yes. And I [] I wound up at [] Naval base. And also I did stories on all—many of these guys. Must have been around three hundred, two hundred, three hundred guys. [] all of them and [] all of them, too [].

BL: Oh, really. So were they war vets?

PO: No. This was during the Korean War.

BL: During the Korean War.

PO: Yes. And then I got out, and I went to Hawaii University.

BL: So when did you get out of the Army? It would have been after Korea? After the Korean War?

PO: No.

BL: In the 1950s?

PO: Yes. [] The Army messed with me [] . . .

BL: Yes.

PO: . . . and [] got a criminal discharge [], and Senator Mansfield intervened on my behalf.

BL: Oh, really? Senator Mike Mansfield intervened on your behalf?

PO: Yes. [] personnel at his office, and they [] before the war was over, but not long before. And I was in for about three years and three months, or something like

that.

BL: And you were in the military for a total of three years and three months?

PO: Yes.

BL: So that would have been somewhere around 1950 or 1951?

PO: Yes.

BL: Somewhere around there, you went back to civilian life.

PO: Yes.

BL: And then you attended some more university, you had said.

PO: Yes. I attended eight or nine of them.

BL: Eight or nine different schools?

PO: And [] University of Chicago, University of California at Berkeley, and so forth.

BL: So did you get a G.I. Bill or something to help you pay for school?

PO: No, I just did it when I could, but normally I didn't go full time.

BL: Yes.

PO: But, finally, I got to go to Harvard as a Nieman Fellow.

BL: You were a Nieman Fellow at Harvard?

PO: Yes. 1966, right in there somewhere.

BL: In the 1960s? In the mid-1960s?

PO: Yes. It was [] a lot of great Harvard teachers were [] to Washington by—to work for Senator—President—[].

BL: President Kennedy, probably.

PO: Yes.

BL: So it would have been the early 1960s.

PO: Yes.

BL: Because . . .

PO: Yes, right.

BL: Yes. President Kennedy took a lot of the—what he called the brightest and best and took them to Washington.

PO: Yes. One thing that happened, though—it was quite interesting when the [] Cuban Missile Crisis occurred. It had just happened [] roughly the same time—summer of [], I don't know. [] then served by the Russian guy and they were in warfare at that time at Harvard.

BL: So you had a Russian student at Harvard that you knew during the . . .?

PO: No, no.

BL: No, no. I'm sorry. I'm misunderstanding.

PO: They were—I don't know who paid for it, but it was like a fellowship for them and it's Russian. In Russia. But they came here and were here when the Missile Crisis occurred, and [] when this was going on, and it was [] weapon [] I can't [].

BL: That must have been pretty interesting to have—during that very tense time.

PO: Yes. But, anyway, [] Truman was the president at that time and [].

BL: Blue Lines?

PO: [] he was a classic [] courier, and he [] the library [] strictly a government operation []

BL: Let me have you finish what you said there. You went to work for a polling agency?

PO: No, I went down there as a student

BL: As a student.

PO: As a student [] selection and a [] or whatever, and I was there for two weeks, and then I went back to Harvard.

BL: Okay.

PO: And [] had a son named Jim.

BL: He had a son. Hey, you know, we're about to run out of tape here. Let me stop this for a second, okay?

[End of Tape One, Side One]

Beginning of Tape One, Side Two]

BL: Okay, we are starting here again. Owens—Patrick Owens and Ben Long. We were just talking about Patrick's days at Harvard in the early 1960s when he was a Nieman Fellow there. And you were just saying that you had a son named Jim. So I don't know if you got married in there someplace, or . . .

PO: Yes, I got married in 1957. I was at the University of Iowa, and [] she gave up modeling. [] who was a reporter who worked for me on the *Columbia Basin News*.

BL: Okay, so you worked for the *Columbia Basin News*?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. Well, we . . .

PO: [] but he was a little fellow, you know. We looked for a school for him, and he met the first [] he was a little puzzled by that. He was a— he was a []

BL: Okay, so were you working at newspapers in between the time you were at schools? You said you went to several universities.

PO: Well, I was working at them during this time.

BL: So you would go to school while you were working at the newspaper?

PO: Yes. Right.

BL: Okay.

PO: Evening classes []

BL: How did you decide to get into journalism? Was that from your experience in high school? That didn't sound like a very positive experience.

PO: Oh, I don't know. [] I'll tell you what happened. [] worked in New York and Chicago [], and I listened to late-night radio . . .

BL: You listened to late-night radio in Chicago and New York?

PO: [] the idea was that he couldn't [] recorded and wrote down telephone [] clients. [] they would supply [], and he contacted them, I think [] for every—every mention of him [] so at that time he was fired, [] he was lacking about five bucks two months earlier [].

BL: Yes.

PO: [] And [] because every time he [] spend any money [] eventually [] more things [] he made a lot of money for the company. []

BL: Ok, so you were doing some radio reporting?

PO: No, no. I just listened to the radio.

BL: Oh, you just listened. Okay.

PO: [] Anyway, []

BL: Was it the 1950s? After the Army?

PO: Yes. And [] looking for some way to earn [], and I met [] desperate [] that I was kind of serious about applying for the chamber job []

BL: The Chamber of Commerce job?

PO: Which wouldn't have suited me at all.

BL: Wouldn't have suited you at all? [Laughs]

PO: No.

BL: But you were pretty broke and pretty desperate?

PO: Yes. [] trailer [] parked beside the [], and we didn't have a [] big staff. [] was his name, and he was a nut.

BL: They were in the radio station?

PO: He was a nut.

BL: He was a nut? How do you mean, a nut? [Laughs]

PO: Well, he did hours and hours of tape on the people from the forest service, and he did this because they [].

BL: Okay. Yes, I know. He really hasn't changed, has he? [laughs] So . . .

PO: But, anyway, . . .

BL: So you started to work for this radio station, did you?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. []

PO: And I ran it. Yes.

BL: You ran the radio station?

PO: For a while. I also reported the news and put some tape together, [] taking on Congress, of all things. Texas [] place where we would market as many as [] could handle [] Friday night [] six []

BL: [Laughs] So he'd—he'd hold the news for a day.

PO: So, anyway, he is now a congressman from Texas.

BL: He's now a congressman from Texas. Amazing. And so that's the guy who got you into the news business?

PO: Well, got me—well, [].

BL: Yes.

PO: []

BL: So did you go from that radio station to some newspapers, then?

PO: Yes. I went to the *Daily Inter Lake*.

BL: To the *Inter Lake*? In Kalispell?

PO: Yes. And [] went over to [].

BL: Okay.

PO: [] that's when mother died, but he was full of cancer and needed [] there for a while. [] *Columbia Basin News*, which is no longer in existence.

BL: Was that in central Washington?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. *Columbia Basin News*, is that what it's called?

PO: Yes. I—before I [] briefly as managing editor, I [] covered both Columbia Basin Projects, which was [].

BL: The Columbia Basin Project, when they were building the big dams?

PO: No, no—after they built the dams.

BL: Oh.

PO: They built the irrigation project.

BL: Oh, the irrigation project there in the Columbia Basin. Sure.

PO: And also I covered [Bristol?] and Hanford, which is the . . .

BL: The nuclear laboratory there at Hanford?

PO: Well, it wasn't a nuclear laboratory. [] very, very big []. As a matter of fact, [].

BL: Didn't they—isn't that where they made bombs, at Hanford?

PO: No, no. They made the . . .

BL: Plutonium?

PO: Plutonium . . .

BL: Okay.

PO: . . . for the bomb. And then I got on at the *Arkansas Gazette*.

BL: *Arkansas Gazette*, after the *Columbia Herald*—or the *Columbia News*—the *Columbia Basin News*?

PO: Yes.

BL: The *Arkansas Gazette*. And what town is the *Arkansas Gazette* in?

PO: Little Rock.

BL: Oh, in Little Rock. That's right. Now, how did you find out about the *Arkansas Gazette* all the way in central Washington?

PO: Tourists. I worked [] at the desk [] paper and this was the best, by far.

BL: The best by—the best paper that you knew about?

PO: The best paper, period.

BL: In the whole country? And that's how come you wanted—you went there.

PO: Yes. And they wanted me—that's a whole different subject, but—[].

BL: So you think your reporting at the *Columbia Basin News* caught their attention?

PO: No, I think I sent them a stack of clippings []

BL: Sure—sent them a bunch of clippings.

PO: And then they attracted attention [].

BL: Yes.

PO: But, anyway, I worked there.

BL: Do you remember what year you started?

PO: Oh, I do, very well. [] January of 1959.

BL: January of 1959.

PO: And at that point the schools were [] . . .

BL: Oh, sure!

PO: . . . by Governor Faubus and the [] the students he knew, who protested and wouldn't go.

BL: That was during the school integration crisis.

PO: That's when I went there, yes.

BL: That was President Eisenhower?

PO: Well . . .

BL: 1959?

PO: . . . maybe it was 1959 or not. Well, [] because Roy Reed was at that time reporting.

BL: Roy Reed was the star reporter in those days?

PO: [] and then . . .

BL: Do you remember who hired you?

PO: [] hired me.

BL: Roy hired you?

PO: No, no. He was a reporter.

BL: Okay.

PO: The [Ashmore?] paper was put forth by a man that was at that time named [Bob?] Douglas. [] man who hired nearly all the reporters at that point was Harry Ashmore.

BL: Harry Ashmore?

PO: Yes. []

BL: He was a good newspaper man?

PO: Oh, the best.

BL: And was he one of the main reasons the paper was as good as it was?

PO: Yes, and Mr. Heiskell.

BL: Heiskell?

PO: Heiskell. []

BL: Oh, you've got it in the notes here.

PO: [] really was a star reporter. Douglas was the news editor who became the managing editor.

BL: Douglas? Do you remember his first name?

PO: Bob. Sure.

BL: Bob Douglas?

PO: And his wife's name was Martha.

BL: Okay. Bob and Martha Douglas.

PO: [] were also [].

BL: Okay.

PO: And [] and the columnists—one of the two columnists was Charles Portis.

BL: Charles Portis?

PO: We named him Buddy.

BL: Buddy was his nickname?

PO: Yes.

BL: And he was a columnist?

PO: Yes. He was [] about a [] he went to Oklahoma from Arkansas to John Manning to [] novel []. It was a big movie.

BL: A western?

PO: Yes. It was a—it was a classic. [] [Reference is to *True Grit*?]

BL: And he wrote it? Well, did he write it when he was on staff, or did he write it after?

PO: No, he—well, he went off staff to write.

BL: Okay.

PO: And he never did return. He then moved to New York.

BL: Okay.

PO: And he worked for about [], and this was back in Little Rock now. []

BL: So what was your job when you first started at the *Gazette*?

PO: I was a reporter.

BL: You were a reporter?

PO: Yes. Just a general assignment reporter.

BL: Just a general assignment reporter. Whatever the editors wanted you to do, you did?

PO: Yes.

BL: Do you remember some of your early assignments?

PO: Oh, sure. One of the most interesting was I went to Pine Bluff.

BL: Pine Bluff, Arkansas?

PO: [] to cover around—just outside of Pine Bluff. Just north of Pine Bluff. And I [] and they went to far away jobs and got scared for me [] got through [] *New York Times* head lady reporter named [], and she was covered with rocks and bottles and things.

BL: Oh, one of the reporters who was down from *The New York Times* magazine got

through with rocks and bottles?

PO: Yes. It was a she.

BL: A woman. Yes.

PO: And I tried to help her out.

BL: You were there?

PO: Oh, yes!

BL: When she got hit?

PO: Yes. I was—I got hit with her because I was helping her out.

BL: You got hit, too?

PO: Yes. She—

BL: So was it—it was like a rally or a protest?

PO: Oh, it was a big rally and a big protest.

BL: And they were protesting . . .?

PO: Integration.

BL: Integration. Okay.

PO: And—I got up [], and the first thing that happened was I got stopped by the [] fellows from the [].

BL: So you were trying to find a—to use a pay phone or something to call in your story?

PO: Well, [].

BL: Okay.

PO: But [] phone in a colored house.

BL: There was a phone in a colored person's house?

PO: Yes. And he didn't open his door. [Laughs]

BL: He didn't open the door?

PO: No. But before that happened . . .

BL: Okay.

PO: . . . I got stopped by these guys.

BL: By these fellows.

PO: Yes.

BL: They were part of the Citizens' Council?

PO: Right. And they were joined by the State Police, which is really scary.

BL: So the State Police joined the Citizens' Council in the protest?

PO: No.

BL: No.

PO: The Citizens' Council was stopping me.

BL: Oh, they joined—they joined the Citizens' Council in stopping you from getting to the phone?

PO: No. Just questioned me, I think.

BL: Oh, okay. So let me see—let me try to understand here. The Citizens' Council basically came up and started—stopped you from doing your job.

PO: I left the place . . .

BL: You left the protest

PO: . . . to find a phone and it was a big fellow . . .

BL: Yes.

PO: . . . he stopped me

BL: He stopped you?

PO: And then they were joined by the State Police.

BL: The police came over, too.

PO: And joined in, and it was a serious incident.

BL: They were sort of—what, they were harassing you or asking you questions? Or what were they doing?

PO: Yes.

BL: Harassing you.

PO: And asking me questions.

BL: And asking you questions. Basically, keeping you from doing your job?

PO: Yes, more than that. They were scaring the hell out of me, too.

BL: They were trying to intimidate you?

PO: Yes. And so, anyway, I got in my car, and it cooled down []. In just a little while [], I got in the phone booth alongside the highway and [wired?] in my story, and it got through to the newsroom.

BL: You got into a phone booth finally and called up the newsroom?

PO: Right.

BL: And passed your story on?

PO: No.

BL: No?

PO: [] one of the things about was [] guy I know that I dictated to was []—he was against integration. Not [] along came a car, and I was sitting in the phone booth sitting outside some—and she turned on the light and somebody reached out a hand from his car and just took my notebook.

BL: You were sitting outside the phone booth and somebody . . .

PO: I was sitting in and out of it.

BL: And he drove past and he reached out and grabbed your notebook?

PO: No, they stopped.

BL: They stopped?

PO: And they weren't anything—they weren't secret about it. They were very intentional.

BL: So he just walked right over and took it.

PO: No, he was in a car. [].

BL: Oh, he just drove.

PO: And knocked it out of my hand. [] before that [].

BL: So, did you think it was one of the people from the group earlier who came in . . .

PO: I'm not sure.

BL: . . . came in and took your notes?

PO: [] when I reported it to the newsroom, the decision made was to scrap my []

BL: So was the part about—that you and this woman from *The New York Times* magazine being assaulted by this crowd—was that part of the news story?

PO: Sure.

BL: Yes.

PO: I don't think I mentioned many, but I mentioned . . .

BL: Mentioned her.

PO: The AP [Associated Press] version was much more mild.

BL: Much more mild than your version?

PO: Yes.

BL: So what was that like, covering that integration? Was it pretty controversial inside the newsroom? I know it was very controversial in the community.

PO: Well, it was very [].

BL: Was the *Gazette* in favor of integration?

PO: Sure!

BL: Yes.

PO: Well, that's another story. [Laughs]

BL: Okay. [Laughs] It must have been a pretty gutsy stand for them to take, though. It wasn't very popular.

PO: Well, actually, what happened was we didn't take that thing [].

BL: Yes.

PO: The thing blew up in 1957. [] law and the judge [].

BL: Yes.

PO: And in the 1970s by the time []. A lot had happened [] the year that the *Pine Bluff Commercial* [] investigated, and I'm sure that [] loss for the paper. And that was a really [] I mean [] what it was about [] preacher [], and

then he started on about that the [] dirty things—movies, books, everything.

BL: So the preachers were going on a crusade basically against pop culture?

PO: Yes. It wasn't a new crusade. They had one every year.

BL: They did it every year?

PO: Yes. And [Dan?] and I listened to all this stuff and I said, "Just a minute." "Just a minute?! What do you mean, just a minute?" Well, I said, "I'm the executive editor of the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, and I don't happen to agree with you. This is a big problem—more bigger problem—damned fools like you messing with the likes of politics—read what they like." [Laughs]

BL: So you stood up to them—to this bunch of preachers?

PO: Yes. [Laughs] I [].

BL: [Laughs] They were pretty shocked?

PO: Oh, they were very shocked!

BL: They expected you to go along with them, huh?

PO: I had before, and [] and were just stopping by to tell me what my orders were.

BL: They were just stopping by to tell you what your orders were?

PO: Yes. [] But, anyway . . .

BL: So do you remember when that was?

PO: Yes. Right after I got there.

BL: So I'm sorry. This other paper—the *Commercial*? Was the paper in . . .

PO: The *Pine Bluff Commercial*.

BL: The *Pine Bluff Commercial*. And so after the *Gazette*, you went to the

Commercial?

PO: Yes.

BL: Were they owned by the same company?

PO: No, no.

BL: They were competitors?

PO: Yes, they were fierce competitors. The *Pine Bluff Commercial* was smaller.

About fifty-five . . .

BL: It was a much smaller paper than the *Gazette*?

PO: Yes.

BL: So how long were you at the *Gazette*?

PO: Well, I went back to the *Gazette* after I did my thing at the *Commercial*.

BL: Okay, so you were a reporter at the *Gazette* for a while, and then you went to the *Commercial* and became editor?

PO: I became, first, the editorial page editor.

BL: The editorial page editor.

PO: And then the executive editor.

BL: Okay. And then the executive editor after that.

PO: Yes. And when I went back to the *Gazette*, I was hired as one of two associate editors, and that meant that I contributed editorials and now and then a column.

BL: With the other associate editor?

PO: Yes.

BL: So you were . . .

PO: I got the paper [].

BL: Yes. So do you remember, roughly, how long you were at the *Commercial*? Was it just a few years, or longer than that?

PO: No. The whole [] Arkansas [] both [] was seven years.

BL: Seven years? You spent seven years in Arkansas all together?

PO: [] and I [].

BL: Yes.

PO: [] very well [] original [] good enough, so I was selected, illogically enough, to write an editorial, bring her paper up to date [] integration. That was a big thing.

BL: That was a big step for the paper to take.

PO: Yes. Well, I guess [] editorial and [] but I don't know where [] because [] so bad []. So I get this editorial. Too long.

BL: It was too long?

PO: [] the second one. [] the company was [] and I was sitting there and he was reading the editorial page off the proof and I had a proof, too. And what mattered was because there was no estimation []. And, well, at that point, Mr. Heiskell is offended that all these people . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

BL: Okay. Pat, you were talking about how you were writing a very important editorial for the *Gazette* and . . .

PO: Yes. It was the most important editorial of that period.

BL: Of that period. A really important one.

PO: Yes. And what happened to me there was very similar to what happened numerous times.

BL: Numerous times to you and to other reporters or other editors?

PO: No, just to me.

BL: Just to you.

PO: Because I wrote long editorials.

BL: You wrote long editorials. How long do you think it was, this editorial? Do you know how many column inches it would have been?

PO: No, because I figured out [] but the editorials in the *Gazette* [] first wide column on the editorial page in the same space every day.

BL: Okay.

PO: And the [] in this one was within written to fill that space.

BL: Okay. So it was within the space that it was supposed to be?

PO: Well, it was supposed to be— it fit there if he'd have said to put it there.

BL: Oh, it would have fit there if he had wanted to put it there.

PO: And, obviously, I did and [].

BL: Okay. So he said it was too long and cut it into two editorials . . .

PO: Right.

BL: . . . without any explanation, you say?

PO: Yes. Well, that's right. He put the—slapped the headline on the second editorial

and didn't—wasn't there a word of what had gone before or anything. And then Mr. Heiskell turned to me. He was waiting for a proof and I also had a proof, as I remember. But he said to me, "How can you do such a thing—just not explain to any of these people? What's going on here?" And that is the precise point I had against him, you see? I am being called to account for his action.

BL: Because the way he edited it, the way he chopped the editorial into two, the second half didn't have the explanation of who the people were?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. So you explained it all, and then when he cut it in half, you lost the explanation of who the people were.

PO: Well, the explanation still was in the first editorial.

BL: Right.

PO: But it made no sense whatsoever of the first—of the beginning of the second.

BL: Right, because . . .

PO: Anyway, after he did this—and then he attacked me for doing it.

BL: Oh. So that's . . .

PO: Yes. And I went a little bit nutty, probably. But anyway . . .

BL: You gave quite an argument over it then?

PO: Argument is the wrong word [].

BL: Okay.

PO: [] have an argument with Buddha . . .

BL: [] Okay. [Laughs]

PO: . . . or Moses, or some—he was a very, very strong figure, although he wasn't very big.

BL: He wasn't a very big man, but you held him in high regard?

PO: Yes. And he looked like an editor.

BL: He looked like an editor should: Big, tough? Was he pretty tough?

PO: No, he was gentle.

BL: Gentle.

PO: His brother, who was the managing editor—and I don't know much about this—but he was alleged to have murdered somebody . . .

BL: Huh!

PO: . . . who was—oh, God, he had been dead for years—twenty—a long time before I had ever seen him.

BL: But this editor who you were working with—why did you hold him in such high regard?

PO: Because he ran the best paper in the country.

BL: Because he ran the best paper in the country?

PO: Yes.

BL: But he still made some bad decisions when it came to that editorial.

PO: Yes. Well, personally—when I—the key decision Mr. Heiskell made was to hire Harry Ashmore . . .

BL: He hired Harry Ashmore?

PO: . . . from [South] Carolina.

BL: And he ran the paper—Mr. Ashmore?

PO: He was the executive editor.

BL: Okay. So he was in charge of the newsroom, probably.

PO: And [Harry edited the editorial?], too, but he'd consult with Mr. Heiskell, you know? They'd do it together, the editorial. Well, everything. But he was running the place with . . .

BL: With Mr. Heiskell?

PO: Yes. With Mr. Heiskell's guidance now and then, his blessing.

BL: Okay.

PO: And I don't have this straight, but when Ashmore left and was leaving because it was a smart thing to do [], he was hated by the people in Arkansas and the people in Little Rock, especially.

BL: The people in Little Rock and the people in Arkansas didn't like him?

PO: They hated him . . .

BL: They hated him?

PO: . . . because of the race [].

BL: Because of the way they covered the desegregation?

PO: Yes, and they covered it and [] was []. But, anyway, when he left, I think he was hired as editorial page editor— that guy from Tampa, and he was a [mysterious appointment?] unless you assumed that the *Gazette* was going to crawl out a long way and then the editorial stand on integration.

BL: Hang on a second. So you say that the person they hired to replace him didn't

have . . .

PO: Yes. And, well, he and Mr.— [] and Mr. Heiskell hired him, but it was—Harris called finally [] the *Tampa Tribune*.

BL: *Tampa Tribune*? That's where this other fellow came from?

PO: Yes. And it was much, much quieter than—more [].

BL: It was as impressive a newspaper?

PO: It wasn't in the same league.

BL: It wasn't in the same league?

PO: Yes. And the *Gazette* was one of the really good newspapers at this time. The year I got there—no, the year before—they were the first newspaper to win two Pulitzer Prizes at the same time.

BL: They won two in the same year? Wow! Was that for the coverage of the integration?

PO: One for the coverage and the other one for the editorials.

BL: Wow! So did the people who worked there take a lot of pride, I imagine?

PO: [Laughs] Oh, yes! And they should have!

BL: Yes.

PO: But anyway, [] lost his name, but I'm []. But anyway, this guy performed a neutral function with me [and the old man?] because when he was there, he would get—he would [] I'm talking about, which was every so often and []. But anyway, he would straighten it out.

BL: He'd kind of go between you and Mr. H[eiskell]?

PO: Yes, and [I'd?] put in the missing words or whatever.

BL: Yes.

PO: And there's [for the thought the problem?], but he was around at this time for some reason. And [] it was awful [] just to [] master [] from a school this volatile. But, anyway, that's all about that.

BL: Okay. Let me make sure I understand. Remember you told me yesterday that when you went to another newspaper in Arkansas—which one was it, the *Courier*?

PO: No, the *Pine Bluff Commercial*.

BL: That's it. The *Pine Bluff Commercial*. Was that after this fight we were just talking about?

PO: No, no.

BL: This was later—after you had come back to the *Gazette* and when you finally left for good—it was because of this argument?

PO: Well, the thing about it is the argument was representative of . . .

BL: Of a pattern.

PO: . . . of a pattern that was just awful. See, by the end of this argument, Mr. Heiskell—he didn't say it in so many words, but anything that he could do to have me stay, he would do. But, by then, it []. And in this time I had a good job at the *Detroit Free Press*.

BL: Oh, the *Detroit Free Press*? That's where you went afterwards? Which is a good paper, too.

PO: Well, it isn't anymore.

BL: It isn't anymore? Well, yes, they had the strike and everything, didn't they?

PO: Yes. And I was the last real labor writer there.

BL: The last real labor writer?

PO: The *Gazette* was an anti-union paper.

BL: Yes.

PO: So, anyway, I left.

BL: One thing you talked about yesterday was the competition between the *Gazette* and other papers . . .

PO: Yes.

BL: . . .it was very cut-throat, you said.

PO: Oh, yes. Well, originally, it wasn't exactly cut-throat. The old man who owned the other paper—he did lots of strange and wonderful things. He took a picture of a bunch of groceries being hauled around by a dog, or whatever. And he changed the picture. This was a real picture taken by a real photographer of the scene. He changed them and retook the picture with a different loaf of bread.

BL: Oh, really? [Laughs]

PO: But, anyway, he was Sears' editorial editor, but he didn't—in fact, he was downstairs in the editorial—the guy who ran the paper was a nut. A real nut. The year before—well, this guy worked for the AP [Associated Press] for a year—I think Starr was his name.

BL: Starr?

PO: Starr. And all the people [from the town?] with Senator Thurman from South

Carolina.

BL: Senator Thurman from South Carolina?

PO: Yes. And I don't remember why the senator was there, but they had a press conference, and before it was over, Starr was answering questions. [Laughter]. It was really weird.

BL: Starr turned the news conference around, huh?

PO: Yes. He just didn't know anything. [] But they could take on the *Gazette* head to head, and the readers and advertisers and so forth were a little over [], but I can't remember his name either []. But, anyway, then the paper was bought by the chain of newspapers, and it was the biggest chain in Arkansas, probably the chain of small papers that [] somewhere near the *Gazette* and *Democrat*. And after the sale, all that money from the small paper was devoted to getting rid of the *Arkansas Gazette*.

BL: So the *Democrat* was the chief competitor newspaper?

PO: Oh, yes, it was the only one.

BL: The only one?

PO: Yes.

BL: And it was based in Little Rock?

PO: Yes, sure.

BL: Okay, it was based in Little Rock. So the *Democrat* was purchased by this chain, and they were able to funnel money into the *Democrat* to try to help complete the ... ?

PO: No. Into the *Democrat*.

BL: The *Democrat*.

PO: And so in this period, it starts off when we look at the way the *Gazette* was and then when it was looked at by the people of Arkansas and the people in Little Rock. On the period [] to this massive money, not one time [] was the *Gazette* behind on any measure of subscribers or advertisers.

BL: So the *Gazette* was able to maintain its ads and its readers?

PO: Yes.

BL: They still got . . .

PO: Yes. Well, it just lost out. And in the meantime, [Hugh] Patterson, whom I was talking about before, made the mistake of selling the *Gazette* . . .

BL: Okay.

PO: . . . to the Gannett chain.

BL: To the Gannett–Patterson sold the *Gazette* to the Gannett chain.

PO: And the Gannett chain had done an awful lot to improve papers, but they had [] fools economically, and they didn't put any money into a situation where there were competitors, and so [].

BL: Yes.

PO: But what they did for the *Gazette* was to get out [], and that was—I don't remember the detail. I don't remember [] Gannett selling the *Gazette* to the *Democrat* or selling it back to Patterson. But, anyway, the result was that they wanted [].

BL: Yes.

PO: And that was interesting, too, because a young man from Shreveport named Paul [Greenberg?] who was hired by me in the [Freeman?] at Pine Bluff to be, in effect, my assistant, and since I wrote all the editorials and everything else, pretty much, there was nothing for him to do. But he was a very, very different person in ways that [] the ones that []. But, anyway, he was the right one [].

BL: Oh.

PO: And, [what's] interesting about that because the Jews in the South who—racial battle—they were the one of the two groups of people who could be counted on to do [downline?] for desegregation.

BL: The Jewish people stood up for desegregation?

PO: Yes. And the other was the Northerners in the South.

BL: And the Northerners?

PO: It was [] including the editor of the paper in Memphis, who was from Wisconsin, as I remember.

BL: Yes.

PO: He was a Northerner, and, boy, he was a [right winger?]. And the assumption was in [] because of [] on television about the Jews in Mississippi.

BL: Yes.

PO: And their point was they had enough trouble getting along with the white senator . . .

BL: Yes.

PO: . . . and they didn't want to get involved in this thing about putting kids in school

with blacks.

BL: They weren't going to stick their necks out for that.

PO: Yes. And that's probably as good an [] come by.

BL: Yes.

PO: Paul had a really distinguished education [] Columbia []. Anyway . . .

BL: This was your assistant?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. Paul.

PO: Yes. But when they changed him in Little Rock, he took over the editorial policy of the *Democrat*.

BL: He took over the *Democrat's* editorial policy?

PO: Yes.

BL: And then it went pretty far to the right?

PO: Well, it was already pretty far to the right . . .

BL: Okay.

PO: . . . but it was more consistent with better quality people, and so forth—including people that are around today. The new fellow at CNN who's [].

BL: He was part of the *Democrat*?

PO: Yes. He was a news columnist for the company.

BL: Okay.

PO: I think he was a columnist, but he was []. But anyway . . .

BL: So it sounds like it was pretty hard sometimes for the *Gazette* to be so

aggressively pro-desegregation. Was it hard?

PO: Well, hard is not the right word. It took a lot of courage and a certain amount of backbone and heart. That implied that there was some other way to be.

BL: It was the only—it was the right thing to do.

PO: The right thing to do. It never for a moment backed down from—but anyway, while I'm talking about this editorial—when the thing started in 1957—is that right?

BL: I think 1957 was when they first ordered desegregation.

PO: At that time, the *Gazette* did not []. It came out [] judges [] but something must be done about the race problem and a lot less informed.

BL: They were kind of more—a little more wishy-washy?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay.

PO: Well, not wishy-washy exactly. But their position wasn't [any set?] position, but it was not flat out integration's position.

BL: Right. You kind of talked about the details some more without being really bold about it?

PO: Well, they were bold, but they were bold in a very kind of [] problem and that didn't make any sense because they were not for integration at that time . . .

BL: Okay.

PO: . . . but they were against segregation.

BL: So they were against segregation, but not necessarily for integration?

PO: Yes. They were—yes, right. That's true. They had all sorts of reasons for

opposing [] . . .

BL: Okay.

PO: But anyway . . .

BL: But they didn't really come out in favor of integration strongly.

PO: No. And then by the time this fight happened [] in the 1960s or later.

BL: In the mid-1960s?

PO: No. The mid-1970s.

BL: Mid-1970s?

PO: Well, I'm talking about the fight with [] I don't know to this day whether there [] what Mr. Heiskell believed [], but he did believe that these guys at the editorial page that put on the back in the scene, and he did that by ordering an editorial that was for the integration.

BL: He wanted to take that step . . .

PO: Yes.

BL: . . . and say that the paper was for integration.

PO: Big step.

BL: That was a big step. And that was the one that you were to write.

PO: Yes. Right. And, of course, because of the politics and the personality involved, it was inevitable that I should write it because [] the other associate editor of the *Gazette* on the editorial page was a guy named Jerry Neal.

BL: Jerry Neal.

PO: He was a big writer. They said that [] Harry Ashmore can tell just by looking at

them whether the two of them had written any particular chunk of copy []. But anyway, it would have made more sense by far to have put in Jerry as the editorial page editor instead of this guy from Tampa, but . . .

BL: But they didn't.

PO: Well, I assumed they didn't because they wanted some [background?] from the—if the [] town, but this same editorial policy was [there?]. It wasn't any problem. But anyway, so whatever reason []. But that was it. It turned out that Jerry [died?], so if he had been [] at that time, it wouldn't have been good.

BL: Because he didn't live very long?

PO: Well, he didn't live any time at all. He just died.

BL: Hmm. Were there any blacks working in the newsroom?

PO: No.

BL: No blacks. You said there were a few women.

PO: Damn few.

BL: But only a few.

PO: It was a damn few. I can't remember her name [], but one society reporter and a pretty good one—a woman who was—society kind of stuff . . .

BL: Society reporter.

PO: Well, she wasn't called that, but . . .

BL: Yes, but some other similar word.

PO: Yes. I guess that's all.

BL: We talked about this yesterday, and I don't think I got this on tape, so I'm going to

ask again about a woman who was one of the leaders in the integration movement that you said—I remember you said, "She was brave and a half."

PO: Yes. She's dead. She was the wife of the editor of the local black weekly.

BL: The wife of the editor of the local black weekly.

PO: Her name was—gosh, what is her name. I can't remember it right now. [Reference to Daisy Bates?]

BL: Well, we might come back to it.

PO: Yes.

BL: I remember you said you had a world of respect for her.

PO: Yes. She is []. She—but, anyway, she opened her home for twelve black high school students and she [].

BL: So they could go to the other school?

PO: When it finally came around two years later, in 1959, to integrate Central High School, the same nine kids were still there—still going ahead.

BL: Going ahead with the desegregation?

PO: They were a pretty remarkable group of [].

BL: The students were remarkable?

PO: Yes. One of them is now the bureau chief in South Africa for CNN.

BL: Oh!

PO: One of them was a big shot in the AFL-CIO . . .

BL: The AFL-CIO?

PO: . . . in the education department.

BL: Okay.

PO: [] That's enough about [].

BL: What was the day-to-day work like at the newspaper? Were you expected to turn out stories every day, or did you have to do more than one every day, or did you have some time to work on them?

PO: All of the above.

BL: All of the above.

PO: First of all, you've got to differentiate between working as a columnist and as an editorial writer, that kind of work.

BL: Yes, right. So you worked as a reporter, a columnist, and the editorial page editor. Or writer.

PO: Well, no. But at the *Gazette* I worked as a reporter, and I had a tough beat. I had—after I had settled into it . . .

BL: Yes, because you were a general assignment reporter at first.

PO: I found that [] and the blacks.

BL: Was that because of your beat?

PO: Yes, that was my beat.

BL: To cover racial issues?

PO: Yes, and to cover the organization.

BL: The organization? What organization is that?

PO: The Citizens' Council and . . .

BL: Oh, the Citizens' Council.

PO: . . . and the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People].

BL: The NAACP? Those were kind of the two sides?

PO: Well, there were a number of other . . .

BL: Of other organizations? Those were the main ones?

PO: The big ones. And I don't know [] the diary I kept or not, but the son of the chaplain of the Citizens' Council is now the editor of the *Washington Times*.

BL: Oh, is that right?

PO: Yes. He—I'm having trouble with names right now. But, anyway, I don't know whether you got this on tape or not, but I went to a meeting of the press conference called by this preacher and the executive secretary or whatever of the Citizens' Council, where they said the junior high school student had been beaten and very badly treated by the police. [] Well, didn't this boy weigh three hundred and twenty pounds or something? [Laughs] And didn't he [] tire iron.

BL: He had a tire iron, and he weighed two hundred and forty pounds, and they were trying to portray him as some poor kid who was getting picked on by the police?

PO: Well, he was a poor kid, and he was in the seventh or eighth grade, I don't know when.

BL: Yes.

PO: But he was also other things.

BL: He was also big and armed with a lead or steel . . .

PO: But anyway, we should talk more about the people in the newsroom

BL: Okay.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

[Note: There is a good deal of blank tape at the beginning of Side 2 before the interview resumes.]

BL: Okay, let's talk some more about some of the people in the newsroom.

PO: Okay.

BL: We talked about Mr. Douglas.

PO: He was the [] director. No, he was the original managing editor, but he was the [].

BL: And then you talked about Charles [Buddy?] [Portis].

PO: The guy who wrote [*True Grit?*] and the guy who became managing editor with Bob Douglas.

BL: Bob Douglas.

PO: He is now in Fayetteville and a retired professor.

BL: And then Harry Ashmore.

PO: Well, yes, he was the guy who [], but Roy Reed was the star reporter.

BL: Roy Reed was the star reporter? What do you think he did to earn that reputation?

PO: He covered the desegregation.

BL: During the desegregation?

PO: Yes.

BL: Did he win the Pulitzer?

PO: No.

BL: No.

PO: I think [Ashmore?] won the Pulitzer. Well, I have the sense that he won the Pulitzer with other people at the *Gazette*.

BL: The paper won it?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. Sure.

PO: But the individual who won it was Paul [Greenberg?] from Shreveport.

BL: Okay.

PO: And that's another story. But, anyway, I could almost name most of the people in that newsroom.

BL: It was a pretty big newsroom, you say—forty or fifty people?

PO: Yes. That was a wild guess, but it's pretty close.

BL: Pretty close?

PO: Ernie [Dumas] was a young fellow, and he was a [] . . .

BL: Ernie?

PO: Ernie. He was a []. He would [] everything [] really did a good job. Bill—but he was the segregationist sort.

BL: Bill? There was a fellow named Bill?

PO: Yes.

BL: He was a segregationist?

PO: Well, sort of.

BL: Sort of?

PO: He was the one who took the . . .

BL: Took your call? When you called in from that riot?

PO: [Laughs] Yes. And Tuohey . . .

BL: Tuohey?

PO: . . . was the woman.

BL: Okay.

PO: She was all right. She worked more of document stuff.

BL: You mean news clerking, kind of?

PO: No. She was a reporter.

BL: She was a reporter?

PO: A very good one, but she sat around and read documents.

BL: Okay, did a lot of the work with documents and things like that.

PO: The state editor was a joke. Well, he was the second state editor. The first one was all right, sort of, but the second was a joke. [] sort of played at the job.

BL: He wasn't a really serious reporter?

PO: No, he was the state editor.

BL: Oh, he was an editor. Okay.

PO: If anything happened out in the state, that would be what he's in charge—the city desk just took it over.

BL: Okay.

PO: See, the state desk was really a branch of the city desk, anyway.

BL: Branch of what?

PO: The city desk.

BL: The city desk. Okay.

PO: [Shelton?] Anyway, back to the reporters. And I'm doing a bad job because Jerol was the [defender? of the quorum?].

BL: Jerol?

PO: Jerol. And I can't remember his last name. [Garrison].

BL: That's okay.

PO: But he was a good reporter. He got a number of stories over there, you know. But he was [] hung up on the weirdest things. Like, the typewriter—a two-hundred-year-old typewriter—I don't know.

BL: He had an old typewriter?

PO: No, no.

BL: No?

PO: But there was—someplace around—in the basement or the attic or something of the Fayetteville building, there was this old, old typewriter. The oldest typewriter in the world. [Laughs] I don't know. And he really worked that story!

BL: He could get a story and really work on it?

PO: Well, the point is to get that story of this old typewriter and work it, and work it, and work it. And there's way to talk to him about it. I mean, it was just weird.

BL: He would just get kind of focused on a story like that?

PO: Yes, well, that was the most weird of them.

BL: Okay. [Laughs]

PO: But he also got [] real story, and the desk was really a more interesting place.

BL: The desk was an interesting place?

PO: Yes.

BL: Yesterday you mentioned that there was a pretty strong sense of camaraderie . . .

PO: Yes.

BL: . . . in the paper and that you guys would often have supper together because you were working late evenings.

PO: Yes.

BL: And you'd socialize—go and maybe drink beer or something on your free time sometimes.

PO: Yes. We went to the—it was [] He was partner at Breier's which was an old, old place.

BL: Breier's Restaurant?

PO: Yes.

BL: Was that a place you guys would often go?

PO: Yes. Often me and [].

BL: Who? I'm sorry.

PO: He was the first managing editor that I was talking about, and the second one was Darryl []. Anyway, he went and ate there. [] didn't get far [] drunk or anything.

BL: He didn't get drunk or anything, but he drank a little bit?

PO: A fair amount.

BL: A fair amount. [Laughs] Not falling down drunk, but a fair amount of drinking.

PO: Right. Well—then he was standing up drunk. [Laughter] And we hung out together a lot.

BL: You hung out together a lot?

PO: Roy and I lived very near each other, and we got together a lot. He credited me with starting the Faubus book. We would talk about writing it together, but I bowed out at about the right time. I got him going on it, and then I left.

BL: This was a book about . . .

PO: About Faubus, the governor . . .

BL: About the governor.

PO: . . . and the great [volume?]. It's a great history that really gives [], and the reason I say that I was [] was that meant that all the people involved in [] people from Arkansas.

BL: Okay, so they didn't have an outsider coming in.

PO: Yes. It was a much more interesting [] than I would have been.

BL: Because he was from Arkansas?

PO: Yes. Sure. He teased out these weird things about it.

BL: Yes. Found out interesting stories?

PO: Very, very interesting stories.

BL: So did he cover the governor's office, then? Roy? Was that his beat?

PO: No.

BL: No.

PO: That beat was [Ernest Valachovic] or something like that. He was a good hand. He was a champion reporter, and he was put to work in whatever was hot.

BL: Ah, he'd kind of go from . . .

PO: Yes.

BL: . . . special assignments, maybe?

PO: Yes. But he was mostly put on integration [and the colored?], probably.

BL: Because that was what was hot.

PO: Yes. Herman was a good fellow. []. [Around?] the desk was interesting because one of the people there was a fellow at that time—was bigger than I became eventually, and he weighed two hundred-fifty pounds.

BL: One of the desk editors?

PO: Yes. At that time, I drove a Karmann Ghia . . .

BL: You drove a Karmann Ghia?

PO: . . . and we both got in it [laughter], but I wasn't as big then as I became, but I was not small.

BL: So you both pretty much crammed into that car, I'll bet.

PO: Yes. We went down in Arkansas some. We got in the car and [] in and out of towns just to [].

BL: Yes.

PO: Then [] black people [] dozen or half dozen, but we'd roll into town, buy a

couple of beers or—I don't remember what we bought, but we were the hit of the day. [Laughter]

BL: You were hit of the day? Was it because of the car?

PO: Yes.

BL: Because of the car.

PO: Well, and because of []. But he became employed [] eventually as a music critic.

BL: As a what?

PO: As a music critic for the . . .

BL: Oh, he became a music critic?

PO: . . . for the *Post Dispatch* in St. Louis.

BL: Okay.

PO: In St. Louis.

BL: *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

PO: There was one guy who always looked and sounded as though he were dead [].

BL: I'm sorry. I missed it. Is this another editor?

PO: Yes.

BL: And you said he looked and sounded like he was dead?

PO: Yes. But he did okay on the copy.

BL: He did okay on the copy. He wasn't really—he was just kind of—pretty quiet there?

PO: Not exactly quiet, but rather freakish looking. [] But the reporter []. That's all I can think of right now.

BL: Okay. How about—did you have much to do with the—you said there was a black paper? Was that considered competition, or was it just . . .

PO: No, no, no. It was free, but it was not free. It was the paper for the Negroes.

BL: So there were two different papers, one for the blacks and one for the whites?

PO: No. There were lots of papers for the whites.

BL: Okay.

PO: And there were also for the blacks.

BL: Okay. So there were several papers around.

PO: [] But, anyway, it was an adequate paper. It was really distinguished by the wire [] editor.

BL: Yes.

PO: I can't remember, but I think he was a publisher, too.

BL: Okay.

PO: We'd hang around together a lot, different people and different times, and just stand around together and [] situations, and so forth.

BL: Talk about shop talk?

PO: Yes.

BL: And how to cover certain stories—things like that?

PO: Well, some, but not . . .

BL: Did you have more philosophical discussions?

PO: Yes. Right.

BL: Okay.

PO: The situation in the town was a mistake, and so forth.

BL: You said that a lot of the people in the town were angry at the paper.

PO: Yes. Very angry!

BL: So did you guys have to kind of stick together against that because I imagine that would be hard sometimes?

PO: It was complicated.

BL: It was complicated?

PO: When I went and wrote my wife and newborn child—in fact, he was born after I got to Little Rock—in July—he was lucky to be born because he was the only child that lived out of five pregnancies.

BL: There were five pregnancies?

PO: Of my wife.

BL: Of your wife.

PO: And he was the only one to survive.

BL: That was Jim?

PO: Yes. But he was— it happened that there was a doctor there who was a specialist in this kind of problem that hardened my wife, and therefore, he put my wife through and before long after that—well, six years after that—I married into it—and the big part of the end of the marriage was that sex was out of the question. We'd have sex—you're sentencing [] probably.

BL: Because of these complications?

PO: Yes. Because she—I suppose she would have been better off if we had simply had

sex-California solution. I would have looked for [].

BL: Yes.

PO: But we didn't know enough—smart enough to discuss facts. [Laughs].

BL: Yes. Back in those days that wasn't really an option in eastern Arkansas.

PO: Well, I don't know. But, anyway, Jim—I was giving him his first bath, and he was too precious for words []. And I lived at that time in an old house that was next to another old house, and that second old house—just south of mine—was an old lady. A white, old lady. In a shanty kind of place behind the house, she had a negro—somebody, I don't know whether—but she was okay. They would eat together, but they didn't live in the same house.

BL: The black person lived out back?

PO: Yes. In a comfortable place.

BL: Yes.

PO: But, anyway, that house [north of us?] came over with a casserole [].

BL: They brought you a casserole?

PO: They were new neighbors . . .

BL: Yes.

PO: . . . new to town, so they brought us food and best wishes, but then they found out I worked for the *Democrat* and the *Gazette*, and they freaked out! [Laughs].

BL: Is that right? I'm sorry, was this when you moved into the neighborhood, or when they moved into the neighborhood?

PO: When I moved into the neighborhood.

BL: Okay, so they kind of came and tried to welcome you with some . . .

PO: Yes.

BL: . . . and then they found out you worked for the *Gazette*, and they freaked out?

PO: Yes. They took back their casserole and beat it home!

BL: They took the casserole and left? [Laughs] They didn't want to be any part—oh, man! So was that the kind of typical—you didn't always feel really welcome because you worked for the *Gazette*?

PO: Oh, yes. A lot. But the other story—the point is that it was not at all, but just went away.

BL: Some people were like that, but not everybody? Is that what you mean?

PO: Yes. Some people had weird, weird, weird secrets about race.

BL: About race?

PO: Yes. And it's a more interesting place than this place.

BL: Than this place? Because of that?

PO: Yes.

BL: [Laughs]. Because . . .

PO: Well, I mean the scene down there is different.

BL: Yes, all that history.

PO: And the whole—the weird things—but, anyway, when I was in Pine Bluff, I went a number of times to the “Separate But Equal Saloon.”

BL: “Separate But Equal Saloon”?

PO: That wasn't its proper name, but that's what I called it. What it was [] it was run

by blacks, and I remember the business was pretty brisk, but some difference on the negro side. None at all except me, usually, on the white side.

BL: Is that right? You were the only white guy there?

PO: Yes. I broke the code a couple of times because the jukebox was on the negro side.

BL: So you walked across negro side to play the . . .

PO: Yes. [] bar [] was a [] and behind it was [] and you walk through there, you'd better be careful. One thing [] wind up in jail.

BL: You could wind up in jail for being in the wrong side of the bar?

PO: Yes. That's where they're not fooling around. This was segregated Arkansas.

BL: Would the black people be angry, or would white people be angry if you went and drank in their side of the bar?

PO: Angry was not the word at all. I never drank over there. I was over there . . .

BL: Just for the jukebox?

PO: Yes. Right. It's right here—somebody [].

BL: Yes. They'd be offended.

PO: Yes.

BL: It would just be something that's looked down on?

PO: Yes. The management—there was a bartender. He was [] because he didn't carry his license.

BL: You could lose your license. Yes. So what kinds of things were segregated? I mean, I know the schools were segregated. The bars were segregated. Did they

have different drinking fountains?

PO: Yes.

BL: Or restrooms?

PO: Oh, yes. Sure!

BL: Public toilets? Those things weren't separate?

PO: Everything was separate.

BL: Everything was separate.

PO: But [unequal?], of course. Everything.

BL: How was that? Because you moved from the West—from Washington and from Montana—to that culture, which was different than what you grew up with—what was it like when you first arrived? Do you remember that? Trying to get used to these rules?

PO: Yes. Well, first of all . . .

[Tape Stopped]

PO: . . . black thing was not the first encounter in Arkansas by me.

BL: You mean you had seen it before?

PO: Well, I have seen it and seen it and seen it. I was working in Panama in the army.

BL: Right. I forgot about the military. And then you said you traveled in New York and Chicago.

PO: Yes. Sure, but I didn't see much of the colored people in those towns, but I saw a lot of them in Pasco, Washington.

BL: In Pasco.

PO: And spent some—I had a doozy of a time with a woman over there who got very upset because of all the South African strange people who [] local [] thing. Africans.

BL: Oh. You called them Africans because they were coming from South Africa?

PO: Yes.

BL: But they were white?

PO: Yes. But the story said that they were "white South Africans," and the headline was "Africans."

BL: Oh! [Laughs].

PO: And that was fine with them.

BL: With the people from South Africa? They didn't mind!

PO: But this woman—she just—I'll never forget one of the marvelous pictures of [] was a [] [Laughs]. But this woman, [she got out of her mind over it?].

BL: She was angry that he had this picture of this black kid in the paper?

PO: Yes.

BL: Just because the kid was black?

PO: Yes. She said, "You couldn't find a white kid to get in the picture?" [Laughs].

BL: So you had to deal with racism before you ever got to . . .

PO: Oh, yes. Lots of it. But, anyway, at the same time, it was not the same thing . . .

BL: Right. It's not the same.

PO: . . . because the police [] on their side [].

BL: But—I forgot what I was going to ask now.

[Tape Stopped]

BL: Do you remember any of the other big stories of the day that you and the other reporters covered there at the *Gazette*? What were some of the other . . .

PO: The big stories were all about race.

BL: Race. [This we established?].

PO: Well, you know, you have the usual stories about [tax breaks?] and that stuff, but it was very, very secondary to this story.

BL: That was a choice by the editors to make it a big deal? Or it just was a big deal?

PO: It wasn't the choice by the editors. Well, I mean, there are many, many papers down there that ignored it.

BL: Many papers did ignore it?

PO: Yes, and they were foolish doing it! [Laughter]. [] rule. I, but only I would share confidences with the—in the [] freemen [] and the community and the Negro community, but anytime they [] about anything, it wound up in the paper. And you [] very, very proud and distinguished way to do it because I don't know of any paper that did it that way but us. In other words, in most towns, what got into the paper was sort of an edited version of what the town management [].

BL: They sanitized the news to their liking?

PO: Yes. A lot. A lot. A lot.

BL: A lot. Not just [a leak?] to the newspaper, but [a leak?] to the town?

PO: Yes. They were working together.

BL: Working together to sanitize the information that got out to the people.

PO: []

BL: But that wasn't your way?

PO: No.

BL: Did you know—there's a saying with the newspapers that "A good newspaper comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable?" Do you think the *Gazette* did that?

PO: Oh, sure!

BL: Yes. That was pretty much . . .

PO: Yes. That's sort of true, but [it was] hard to find anybody comfortable there.

BL: [Laughter]. Hard to find anyone comfortable there! [Laughs].

PO: But we were on the right side.

BL: You were on the right side.

PO: One thing that happened in Pine Bluff that was very funny was a young reporter—he just [] which is why [] chosen for this job. He was to cover the hamburger scene.

BL: The hamburger scene?

PO: It wasn't McDonald's, but it . . .

BL: Something like that?

PO: Yes. He asked me at the end of the second day, "I can't eat any more of that food!" And I said, "You're covering the Goddamned hamburgers!"

BL: [Laughs]. You mean he was working so hard he didn't have time to eat?

PO: Well, he was giving himself away.

BL: Giving . . .

PO: Giving himself away as a reporter.

BL: Oh. Was it just a new hamburger stand, or was there a controversy there?

PO: Oh, yes!

BL: Was it over segregation?

PO: Yes. Sure.

BL: So it was like a lunch counter situation?

PO: No.

BL: No?

PO: It was a--well, sort of, in the sense that if you're black, you can't eat these hamburgers.

BL: Okay.

PO: Weird, because I don't think they sat down [] I think the gentleman []. I don't know.

BL: I was thinking about some of these notes you took. Would you like it if I just read the notes into the recorder?

PO: Well, it's up to you.

BL: I guess we might as well, since you went to the [trouble of] writing them down. It says: "*The Arkansas Gazette* was started some time around 1819 . . ."

PO: Yes.

BL: ". . . in the *Arkansas Post*."

PO: That's the name of a town.

BL: That's the name of a town—"in the Arkansas Post and was later at the mouth of the Arkansas River."

PO: Near the mouth of the . . .

BL: "Near the mouth of the Arkansas River, and later moved to Little Rock later that century." You say, "It was a poor runner-up in the tussle for readers and advertising when the Heiskell family of Tennessee bought it around the turn of the century. John Netherland Heiskell, a young man with a solid record in Tennessee journalism, was named the editor and a brother of his was named the managing editor." That, obviously, was well before your time. "John was editor still when [I] joined up in January of 1968.

PO: Yes.

BL: "When I was associate editor, I lunched every Saturday with Mr. Heiskell at the Little Rock Club because [I] was the only editorial page hand who worked on Saturdays. And when [I] asked him one time, 'Wasn't it intimidating to compete against the rich newspapers who ruled the market?' Mr. Heiskell laughed, which was not very common for him, and said that the Heiskells were able to afford the *Gazette*."

PO: Yes.

BL: You remembered that, just thinking back?

PO: Yes.

BL: "In the 1920s, a Tennessee court case showed young editor Heiskell already set in

his ways." Was that the Scopes trial, or was that a different . . . ?

PO: Yes. It was the Scopes trial.

BL: Scopes trial. "That was the Scopes trial of a biology teacher. When that was read, the *Gazette* reacted with a spate of editorials, including page-one zingers. One called on [Arkansans] to pledge their word, their person, and their fortitude in keeping Arkansas . . ."

PO: Their fortune.

BL: ". . . their fortune." Okay. I'm sorry, I misread that. ". . . to pledge their word, their person, and their fortune to keep Arkansas free of creationism as government policy." So he was on the progressive side of that even back then.

PO: Yes, but he went to extremes for it.

BL: He went to extremes, yes, and put himself on the line for it. "In the 1970s, a different drill, and one which engages me, the last [part] of the Little Rock crisis. The *Gazette* didn't endorse integration, which was whites and blacks going to school together." This is the case that we were just talking about. "As near as can be learned, this was because Mr. Heiskell, an elderly Southern gentleman, did not." In the 1970s, you were the obvious choice to make that huge step of writing that editorial, right? I've got to find a new tape here.

[End of Tape 2, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 3, Side 1]

BL: Okay, we are continuing here. "[My] work with Mr. Heiskell shows the typical problems: the editorial was too long and Mr. Heiskell solved that problem by

turning it into two editorials. As happens, the second editorial emerged without language explaining who the characters were, and so on. And, reading from the proof, your God-like hero asked rhetorical questions about the missing information. And soon [my] cordial, personal and working relationship vanished.” So that was kind of a recap of what we were talking about earlier.

PO: Yes.

BL: "And now, take up Mr. Heiskell's personal decisions. The largest mistake he made was placing his son-in-law, Hugh Patterson, as publisher in charge of all non-editorial []. Editorial [misuse?] means the contents of news, the editorial, and so on. Patterson was an adequate publisher, making day-to-day decisions, but as a trustee of the *Gazette*, he was hopeless. He was something [like?] the Pine Bluff printing executive with an imagination that halted what the *Gazette* would sell for." I don't understand that. Was he behind the sale of the *Gazette*?

PO: Yes, but the point is [] preferred to be referred to as the publisher of a newspaper, but as the publisher of the *Gazette* and the question was whether it should survive. It was hopeless.

BL: In other words, he wasn't dedicated to the *Gazette*.

PO: Well, he was dedicated to the *Gazette*, but his notion of the *Gazette*—he [] indicated that he [] the *Gazette* as an institution . . .

BL: Yes.

PO: . . . failed to impress them.

BL: He failed to impress them—the institution of the *Gazette* as opposed to just—

PO: Yes.

BL: And probably for you who worked there, it was more than just a business, it was an important institution for Little Rock. For Arkansas.

PO: For the nation.

BL: Yes. For the whole nation. "When the *Arkansas Democrat* was purchased by the family that owned a chain of newspapers in Arkansas, revenue was not aborted to driving the *Gazette* out of business." Do you think that that was strictly economic, or do you think it was driven by politics?

PO: Both.

BL: Both economic and politics?

PO: Yes.

BL: They had a grudge against the *Gazette* for its [].

PO: Besides that, economically, it's a big thing to be in the town.

BL: Right. To be the sole—basically, to be the monopoly newspaper in the town.

PO: And it's interesting, and I don't suppose I mentioned it, but there were several papers when the *Gazette* turned down our offer to buy the *Democrat*.

BL: Is that right? Earlier they could have bought the *Democrat*, and they never did?

PO: Yes. Because they believed in two.

BL: They wanted two newspapers. They believed in that—having that. That it was good for the community. So Patterson's response was the sale to the Gannett chain. Then they said what we talked about earlier. They think that the Gannett has a record of improving some of its acquisitions, but that was not true at the

Gazette.

PO: Yes.

BL: I guess that pretty much covers what we talked about earlier, right?

PO: Yes.

BL: That, basically, you consider that pretty much naked commercial aggression on the part of the *Democrat*?

PO: Yes.

BL: Okay. Good. On to []. All right. Anything else you want to talk about?

PO: No.

[End of Interview]