Gazette Project

Interview with

Jason Rouby,
Little Rock, Arkansas
[2003]
Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: My name is Jerry McConnell. I'm here to interview Jason Rouby for an oral history of the *Arkansas Gazette*. First, I have to ask you to state your name and whether or not you approve of this interview and the use of this information.

Jason Rouby: My name is Jason Rouby. I do approve of this interview and use of the information.

JM: Okay. Jason, how long did you work at the *Arkansas Gazette*?

JR: From November 1, 1951, until March 31, 1962.

JM: What did you do at the *Gazette* during that time? What were your various roles?

JR: Well, I started out on the copy desk just to learn the routine, and then three months later I was assigned to cover Little Rock City Hall. In ensuing years, I covered North Little Rock City Hall, Pulaski County Courthouse, Little Rock Housing Authority, Metroplan—the formation of Metroplan in its early years, filled in covering the state capitol. I also did extra work—I put out special editions, and went back to the copy desk.

JM: What do you remember about your period at the *Gazette*? Does anything stand out to you as highlights and what kind of operation it was?

JR: Well, the standout event, of course, was the Central High [integration] crisis, and I remember that very clearly.

JM: Let me back up a little. How did you get to the *Arkansas Gazette*? What was your preparation?

JR: I was working at the *Jonesboro Evening Sun.* I had been there about three years, having come from Cleveland, Ohio. I had written sports, news columns, and taken photographs. I was told one day by Harry McDonald, the advertising manager, that Harry Ashmore would like to talk to me. So I came down to Little Rock, and Harry offered me a job. Apparently, he had been reading some of the stuff I had written.

JM: Did you study journalism in college?

JR: No. I went to a college. I didn't go to a trade school.

JM: Western Reserve University did not have a journalism course?

JR: No.

JM: Did you graduate from Western Reserve?

JR: Yes.

JM: Okay. What was your major?

JR: English.

JM: English major. Okay. And then you came to the *Gazette*. After the *Gazette*, did you go directly to Metroplan?

JR: No. I left the *Gazette* to take the position of assistant to the president of the Urban Progress Association, which was a new, self-appointed power structure.

My title as assistant to the president was to enhance the prestige of Raymond Rebsamen, who was the president. In effect, I was, with the secretary, the only staff person on the payroll. I worked there from—no, in 1959, not until 1962. I made a mistake. I worked there [at the *Gazette*] until April 1, 1959. And I worked at Urban Progress until May 1, 1962, three years, when I was invited by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce to move to that city and initiate and manage a program of downtown renewal, metropolitan planning, and other activities. The Chamber was interested in urban renewal and so forth. I came back, then, to Metroplan July 1, 1966.

JM: You did go to Omaha, then?

JR: Yes, for four years.

JM: Four years in Omaha.

JR: Yes.

JM: And then in 1966 you went to work with Metroplan.

JR: Right. As executive director.

JM: And you held that—you retired when?

JR: July 1, 1988. Twenty-two years.

JM: Okay. Back to the *Gazette*. What was your recollection on the operation of the *Gazette*? You might compare it a little—well, you don't necessarily have to compare it to the *Jonesboro* [*Evening*] *Sun.* What kind of newspaper was the *Gazette* in your time there?

JR: The coincidence is that in Cleveland I had worked as a copy boy, and eventually

as a police reporter for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. And the thing about the *Plain Dealer* and the *Gazette* was that they both had reputations for journalism excellence, accuracy, impartiality, complete reporting—that made you proud that you were on the staff. And, coming to the *Gazette*, with Mr. J.N. Heiskell's reputation and standards, I felt very comfortable. It wasn't the job, it was an obligation and an honor.

JM: Yes. And you felt that way, perhaps . . .

JR: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JM: . . . and were proud to work at the *Gazette*.

JR: Absolutely. You boasted about it.

JM: And you felt that they did uphold journalism standards.

JR: Oh, you were afraid not to. Mr. Heiskell would note it and tell you. [Laughter] Absolutely.

JM: Yes. Who were your bosses at the *Gazette*?

JR: Well, A.R. Nelson was the managing editor. Of course, Harry Ashmore was the editor. Bill Shelton and Sam Harris were the city editors. Tom Davis filled in.

JM: As a city editor?

JR: Yes.

JM: Okay. Was Sam the city editor before Shelton?

JR: Before Shelton. Right. Yes. But I think Shelton sort of filled in — was some assistance.

JM: So Sam went to the state capitol. Is that correct?

JR: That's correct.

JM: As a reporter. And then Shelton took over as city editor.

JR: Yes.

JM: Okay. Who was the news editor at that time? Do you remember?

JR: In the slot?

JM: Yes.

JR: Well, the one I remember I worked well with was Tom Swint.

JM: Yes.

JR: And I can't think of the other one who worked during the daytime. If somebody would mention his name, I would know it, but I can't think of it.

JM: Okay.

JR: But I know he had a brother who worked at the *Detroit Free Press*.

JM: Stroud?

JR: Yes. George Stroud. That's who it was. George Stroud.

JM: Yes. [Bob] Douglas was not the news editor at that time.

JR: No. Douglas was still not at the *Gazette* when I came down there.

JM: Okay. He had been out on strike, right?

JR: That's right.

JM: But he did come back while you were there?

JR: Yes. That's how I met him.

JM: What about the other *Gazette* staffers and reporters? I can't remember, but . . .

JR: Ken Parker was state editor, and Matilda Touhey was assistant state editor. Gene

Fritz was on the wire. I'm trying to think of who else was — Bill Rutherford and Pat . . .

JM: Carrithers?

JR: Carrithers.

JM: Yes.

JR: And then the reporters were Dean Duncan, Ernie Valochovich, Bill Lewis, and John Fleming, for a while. And, of course, Tom Davis. Who else was there?

JM: Mort Stern—was he gone?

JR: Mort was already gone. He was a legend by the time I got there.

JM: Yes.

JR: I'd heard about Mort Stern.

JM: Yes. And some of the others came later, like Roy Reed.

JR: Roy came. I was still there when Roy came. And Ray Moseley also came when I was there.

JM: Yes.

JR: Both went on to fame.

JM: Right.

JR: I didn't. [Laughs]

JM: They were—did you think that was a pretty competent staff?

JR: Oh, yes! Absolutely. Never had any doubts about anybody's efforts. It just wasn't an issue at all.

JM: Joe Wirges came back at some point in time while you were there.

JR: Joe was up at — what was it? Russellville or Morrilton when I was there? He was sort of my mentor at the *Gazette*.

JM: Was he?

JR: Yes. He was a police reporter. He was an institution.

JM: Yes.

JR: We were so close, he was my younger daughter's godfather.

JM: Is that right?

JR: Yes.

JM: Okay.

JR: See, I was at city hall, and Joe was at the police department downstairs.

JM: Yes.

JR: In the same building.

JM: Yes.

JR: Joe sort of guided me and introduced me around.

JM: I went to work at the *Democrat* in 1951, and I was on the police beat pretty quick. Joe was not there then. I think he was still out on strike, but he came back really quick. I remember they had some guy there who filled in for Joe when he went on strike. And I think the police felt like he was a strike-breaker, and they used to make up phoney reports for him and put them on the blotter.

JR: Joe was there when I came. I'll tell you who else was around—I can't think of his name—he covered the county courthouse. He was an older—George or something?

JM: I can't think of who that would be.

JR: An older man, portly, covered the county [ ] . . .

JM: Yes, I'll think of it eventually. I'll probably think of it at 2:00 tonight. So you spent more time on the city hall beat than anywhere else, didn't you?

JR: Yes.

JM: Anything that stands out in your recollection of coverage at city hall?

JR: Well, Pratt Remmel was mayor. He had just been elected. Pratt was a Republican, and I guess the city council was Democrat, as was everybody else there. Pratt was not an ordinary politician. Pratt had ideals.

JM: Yes.

JR: He was not a practical man. No questions about his honesty or ethics, of course. But he was fun to cover because he was so different.

JM: Yes.

JR: I think the city budget then was about $2 million. But Pratt did one thing — he hired the first traffic engineer, Mark Garver.

JM: I remember that.

JR: Mark was a civil engineer at Garver and Garver. What I remember about Mark Garver is that he recommended—this was in the early 1950s—that parking be banned on West Third Street from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. so traffic could move. And in his presentation to the city council, he pointed out that many other cities did such a thing, which had not been in Little Rock. He mentioned that in Boston they had that kind of traffic control. And I remember

Alderman Lee Evans from the 3rd Ward, who had been a streetcar conductor, saying, "Just because they do it in Boston doesn't mean we have to do it here!" [Laughter] I'll never forget that!

JM: Well, didn't they go ahead and put that in?

JR: Of course.

JM: They did follow a stress route.

JR: Because it made so much common sense! [Laughs]

JM: Yes, you ran into a lot of that stuff.

JR: Yes.

JM: People didn't want to see it change. As long as you were with the *Gazette*, you were pretty proud of its work.

JR: Yes. I took one year off. In 1956 I was awarded a Congressional Fellowship from the American Political Science Association. I spent a year in Washington working for the Adlai Stevenson's second [presidential] campaign, and for Representative Brooks Hays and Senator [J. William] Fulbright. And the idea was that you went up there and spent a year to learn how Washington operated, and came back to the paper, which I did. I didn't do any reporting after that. I worked in the city room under A.R. Nelson on special projects.

JM: Nelson was a managing editor until you left.

JR: Yes.

JM: Yes, he was the managing editor when I came over.

JR: Yes.

JM: But I didn't come until 1955. Did Nelson hire you or was it Harry Ashmore?

JR: It was Harry.

JM: Yes, Harry.

JR: I think—and [this statement is] personal—I never got along well with Nelson.

JM: Yes.

JR: I think that's because he thought I was Harry Ashmore's boy.

JM: Yes.

JR: And I wasn't. I didn't <u>think</u> I was.

JM: Yes. Nelson did have a reputation at the time—he had one that if you ever left the *Gazette*, he didn't ever want you back.

JR: Yes. I've heard that.

JM: Yes. I know that happened to some of the other people—maybe a little later on, but if they left and went to work somewhere else, he wouldn't even consider hiring them back.

JR: Yes.

JM: What kind of input did Ashmore have in the operation? Were you aware of any of his input into the news operation?

JR: Not so much directly. Of course, Nelson and maybe the city editor and the state editor would go in and have conferences with him and talk to him, which we never did as peons. The only time—and this is my clearest memory of the whole time at the *Gazette*, except for the Central High crisis, and that is an expanded story, which I'd like to go into, but . . .

JM: Go ahead.

JR: It was Labor Day eve, 1957.

JM: Yes.

JR: George Stroud was in the "slot." We all sat around the "rim." Unlike today's city room, if in this age of computers and fax machines, there are still city rooms, the city rooms I worked in at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *Arkansas Gazette* were noisy, smoke-filled, and uncarpeted. Reporters sat in rows of desks, writing their stories on manual typewriters, preferably Underwoods, while the departmental desks—city, state, national, and copy—were situated around the room to ease the flow of paper. The sports departments in both newspapers were located away from the city room. Reporters' stories went to the city editor, who, with the editors of the other news desks, discussed all their stories with the managing editor, who decided the importance of each story and its place in the news section and laid out each page, to fit the advertisement layout that had been laid out by the advertising department. From the managing editor, the stories and page layouts went to the copy desk, where the copy editor assigned a headline size to it. The copy desk was U-shaped, with the copy editor sitting in the middle, the "slot," and the copy readers, five or six, sitting around the outer edge, the "rim." The copy editor would distribute the stories to the copy readers, trying to keep the work load even. The copy readers would read each story carefully, checking for typographical errors, grammar, accuracy, and coherence, then trim the story, if necessary, to fit its allotted space and then write a headline. From the copyreader,

the story would go back to the copy editor for final approval and then to the composing room.

JM: Right.

JR: Well this particular night, I had written the headline and the subhead for the main story about—I'm paraphrasing—"City Quiet on Eve of Integration." George Stroud went home for dinner, like he always did, and called back to the *Gazette*—this must have been at 8:00 at night. He said, "I don't know what's going on"—again, I'm paraphrasing—"but there are troops around Central High. You'd better find out." I'm pretty sure Ken Parker was there. I don't remember who else, particularly. Maybe Gene Fretz. I don't remember who was on the city desk—maybe Tom Davis or Bill Shelton. I just don't remember. Anyway, somebody called and found out that Governor [Orval] Faubus had called out the Arkansas National Guard to preserve peace and protect the community on the eve of integration because all these people were coming in to create havoc. Someone asked, "Shall we tell Harry Ashmore?" George Stroud came right back down to the city room. George really did not know what to do. Finally, I think it was Ken Parker and I who said, "We've simply <u>got</u> to call Harry Ashmore! This is big! We've got to call him." And Harry Ashmore by phone immediately said, "Stop the press!" Just like in the movies. I had never heard that before in thirteen years of newspaper work: "Stop the press!" And in the first edition, probably the central Arkansas first edition, there was a bold-face lead paragraph saying that troops had been called to Central High. And that's all there was. That's the story

that ran. Harry Ashmore came down and heard what had happened. He made a few phone calls. He sat out in the city room, and he sat at the typewriter and wrote the front-page editorial, that said this is no longer a case of integration, this is a case of constitutional rights—states' rights versus the federal government, and that's the editorial that won the Pulitzer Prize for him. And he sat down there—it was just like watching history boil down to a microcosm. I'll never forget that. That's what impressed me more about Harry Ashmore than anything I ever knew about him before or after. And it was remarkable to be there that night to see history being made.

JM: He was a smart man, too.

JR: Oh, brilliant!

JM: Yes.

JR: But he instantly understood what had happened.

JM: Yes.

JR: And the rest of us were sort of worrying about the troops. He didn't think about the troops. He thought about the issues.

JM: Yes.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, Jason. The Central High crisis—you were there through just about all of it, or a good part of it. Do you have any other recollections of how it developed?

JR: Well, two, I guess. I was on the copy desk at the time. I wasn't covering it. But the point was that the *Gazette* city room was the headquarters for all the out-of-

town reporters from radio, television, and newspapers, and big names were there from all over. *The New York Times* was there. The *Washington Post*. The television networks. And the nice thing about it was that the Press Club was then operating right across the street from the *Gazette*, and was a pretty nice place to go. They were astonished to find a Press Club in Little Rock, Arkansas, that they could hang around in, and it was great being there. But the thing about it that affected the rest of us working at the *Gazette* was the animosity of the community against the *Gazette* because the *Gazette* said, "We've got to uphold the law." Not that "we've got to uphold integration," "we've got to uphold the law." I remember driving home one night from the *Gazette* at about 1:00 in the morning after the final edition—I lived in the Cammack Village at the time—driving up Kavanaugh in front of about where the Heights Theater used to be—I was pulled over at 1:00 by a police car. And the police were well known to be hostile to the *Gazette*, hostile to the idea of integration and the whole thing. I was scared stiff. This policeman stopped me, and I got out of the car and stood by the door. He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going home." "Where do you live?" "Cammack Village." "What are you doing out so late?" And, here, my heart was in my mouth. I was scared stiff. I said, "Well, I work at the *Gazette*." He said, "You work at the *Gazette*? Let me congratulate you! You guys are doing a <u>wonderful</u> job!" [Laughter] And I talked to him and I asked him, "Why do you feel this way?" And he said, "I'm the only one at the police department who feels this way. These guys get on me all the time! I'm so glad to meet you! Keep it

up!" And he said, "Go on home." [Laughter]

JM: Can you remember his name?

JR: No, I never got his name. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

JR: And that's sort of my personal recollection. Because when you went out of town, you were from Little Rock, and people—oh, how badly they would treat you. They were pretty bad. I remember in 1962 I went to Chicago with Raymond Rebsamen and his wife. We stayed at the Drake Hotel. When we registered, I signed in and wrote said "Little Rock." The desk clerk said something like, "Oh, Little Rock! Nice to have you here." And I rode home, called my wife, and said, "For the first time, somebody didn't jump on us for Central High School." When—who was it? Carol Channing sang, "I'm just a little girl from Little Rock" in [the motion picture] *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and she got booed in New York. That's how bad it was.

JM: Oh.

JR: We did not have an industrial plant come into Little Rock from 1957 until the Jacuzzis came here in the early 1960s because of the reputation of Little Rock, which had been imposed on this community.

JM: Yes.

JR: It was bad.

JM: Yes, it was.

JR: But that's what made you proud for having worked at the *Gazette*. It was

wonderful.

JM: Ashmore was involved in writing editorials all through that stretch.

JR: Absolutely.

JM: Was he much involved in the news coverage, too?

JR: I don't think he was. No, I don't think he ever did that. And I don't know that any reporter or anybody on the copy desk was ever told, "Say this," or "Don't say this," or "Slant it this way," or "Slant it that way."

JM: Yes.

JR: I just don't . . .

JM: The last time, I guess, if my recollection is correct, Ray Moseley was one of the main people covering the conflict.

JR: Yes. I think Ray Moseley was the lead reporter. I think Bill Lewis did a lot of reporting there, too.

JM: I always thought very highly of Ray Moseley.

JR: He was a very competent reporter.

JM: Yes.

JR: Very good.

JM: Very good writer. He has just retired.

JR: He went to Rome, didn't he?

JM: Yes. Well, he was with UPI [United Press International]. And he wound up in Moscow for quite a while. Then he went to Rome, I think, and then he wound up covering stuff in Greece and the Mideast and everywhere. But then he came back

after UPI sort of got—he went to work with the *Chicago Tribune*. He just retired from the *Chicago Tribune* and is living in London. Roy Reed said—he and Norma [Reed] went to see him—they were over there a month or two ago.

JR: Oh, okay.

JM: They went over there for their anniversary. They went to see Ray Moseley.

JR: Well!

JM: Now, Jerol Garrison—I don't know whether he was—I can't remember if he was there exactly when the integration crisis started.

JR: I don't remember.

JM: But I do remember him being there a little later on.

JR: Yes.

JM: Because they used to laugh and tell a story that the *Gazette* would go out and cover these meetings of the Ku Klux Klan and the Citizens Councils and all this, and they would claim that there were 5,000 people there, and the *Gazette* would say, "They claimed there were 5,000 people there. There were more like 2,000," or something like that. And they would challenge them. And Jerol Garrison would <u>count</u> them. He would walk through — they said they've seen him — I think it was some stands at Pine Bluff — they said he walking through the stands counting how many people were there. He was going to tell them <u>exactly</u> how many people there were! [Laughs]

JR: Jerol was an intense reporter.

JM: Yes. Now, who took your place at city hall? It wasn't Charles Rixse, was it?

JR: Rixse was at the *Democrat*. He was my opposition.

JM: Yes, I know he was for a while.

JR: I don't—oh, Jerry Dhonau.

JM: Was it Dhonau?

JR: Jerry Dhonau. I forgot about Jerry.

JM: Of course, you know, then Rixse came over to the *Gazette* later.

JR: Yes.

JM: But I couldn't remember whether he covered city hall or whether he was there. Of course, I had covered the police beat for the *Democrat*, and then city hall.

JR: Well, when I went to the city hall in 1952, R.B. Mayfield was covering for the *Democrat*.

JM: Yes.

JR: And then R.B. left or was reassigned to something. I don't remember.

JM: He went to the [Arkansas State] Capitol.

JR: Is that what it was?

JM: Yes.

JR: And they sent over a new reporter — a tall, blonde, gangly, rough-looking guy. He was there one day, and I showed him to get how to get the building permits, and how to do this, and he wasn't doing it. I think that's when Rixse came, the next day.

JM: Yes.

JR: And I said, "Where's the guy who was there yesterday?" Rixse said, "Well, he

didn't like working with people. He wanted to be in the city room." He turned out to be Wayne Cranford.

JM: Oh, is that right?

JR: Absolutely.

JM: Is that right?

JR: Yes. Worked one day. He didn't like meeting people. [Laughs]

JM: I'll be damned.

JR: He changed. [Laughs]

JM: That's strange, isn't it? I've seen people like that. But I was there—I was on the police beat for a long time, then I—whoever was doing the city [beat]—oh, maybe it was when R.B. got switched to the capitol. Then I had to cover both city hall and the police beat for a while. So I wound up kind of . . .

JR: Upstairs. That's where the city council chamber was. Remember that little room?

JM: Oh, yes.

JR: Yes.

JM: That's how I learned to concentrate. One summer they ran that jackhammer out there on that sidewalk for the whole summer, and you couldn't put the windows down because it was miserable, and there was no air conditioning, and you had to sit there and type your story with that jackhammer just going ninety to none.

JR: Yes.

JM: Any other thing that you particularly remember about the Central story or any

other coverage?

JR: Well, it was a time of stress. It wasn't comfortable for the whole community. There was a lot of hostility.

JM: Yes.

JR: I remember the efforts that the Citizens' Council made to fire the teachers who were supportive or at least not hostile to integration, and then the creation of the Women's Committee and the STOP [Stop This Outrageous Purge] effort. It was successful in recalling the anti-integration school board members and the election of new ones. And Virgil Blossom's professional martyrdom. When I was in Washington the year before, 1956 and early 1957, and this integration plan was in effect—it was well known—it was going to be a model because Virgil had worked it out carefully—start at the twelfth grade and work your way down, so on and so forth. And in his 1956 [presidential] campaign, Adlai Stevenson came to Little Rock at the invitation of Harry Ashmore, I believe. I think Harry was pretty well involved in that campaign. Stevenson spoke at Douglas MacArthur's birthplace in MacArthur Park and made a strong speech in favor of integration, that "it's the right way to do." And the editorials in Washington and other papers around the country, which came to us because I was working for Brooks Hays at the time, praised his courage in going into what they said was the Deep South and speaking up for integration. And those of us who were from Arkansas and from Little Rock knew it wasn't the Deep South. And it was courageous, but not as courageous as they made it out [to be]. It wasn't like going into Alabama or

Georgia or someplace. And this was the one place he could do it, because it was Mid-South. And it was fully expected that the integration would be peaceful, and I think it would have been without outside interference. That's already a matter of history. Roy can comment on that better than I can. [Laughs]

[Tape Stopped]

JM: What else about the *Gazette* do you remember that other people—that you can recall in particular about the way it operated?

JR: Well, I was just thinking about the people that we've talked about went on to do greater things, if that's the right word—what could be greater than working than the *Gazette*? What the heck! We talked about Ray Moseley. We talked about Roy Reed. Dean Duncan became chairman of the Department of Journalism at UCA. Bob Douglas at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Who else? Gene Foreman and Wes Pruden were editors of major newspapers, and there are others, Mort Stern in Denver.

JM: Denver. Yes.

JR: They were not just reporters. They've made reputations for themselves and moved up the editorial ladder. So, you know, there's a lot of that. And all of that because of Mr. Heiskell's standards. I don't think we can ignore that.

JM: No.

JR: That would be the prime reason. I remember once I misspelled the word "genealogical," and, by gosh, it came out circled. He tore it out and circled it and sent it back to me. Bill Shelton had great glee in giving it to me.

JM: Yes. Well, that would have been one word that Mr. Heiskell wouldn't miss.

JR: Yes, exactly.

JR: To this day, if I'm typing a letter, I do not split the name "Pine Bluff" on two lines, or Iowa City, or anything like that. And every time I hear on television that fire had gutted a building, I think, "No, it didn't gut a building! Only animals and people are gutted!" [Laughs] And it's not a gas station, it's a gasoline station. Just things like that!

JM: Yes, they were—the *Gazette* was careful about the language.

JR: Since Bill Rutherford died, the *Forum* at UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock] has deteriorated in its quality.

JM: Has it?

JR: Yes. And I circle it all the time, but they don't do anything about it. It just irritates me. When I was in Cleveland, I worked for Paul Bellamy, who was the son of Edward Bellamy, who wrote *Erehwon Revisited,* and had standards like Mr. Heiskell. When I was promoted from copy boy to police reporter—there were a couple of us, I think—they called us together, and he told us what he expected from us as reporters. What I remember—and this is kind of what goes on today—he said, "You are not detectives, you are reporters. If you find something that needs to be reported about a criminal, you go to a detective. You are not a detective." Of course, we didn't go through garbage cans. We weren't the Geraldo Rivera kind of reporter. But that was his standard.

JM: I tend to sympathize with that standard.

JR: That was his way—with you impartial. And if you wanted to write editorials, you'd get on the editorial page.

JM: Yes. I think the business has gone too much in the direction, personally, of being—what's the word? Since Watergate, that they used—that you're supposed to be . . .

JR: Investigative?

JM: Well, no. I can't think of the word now. Opponents of all the [group] in power.

JR: Yes.

JM: You're not up there to report what you find, you're up there to hold them to your standards.

JR: I don't watch television news because they're either biased or they're hostile.

JM: So hostile. They're hostile to anybody. You're not there to report what happens, you're only to report [what the mouth pieces said].

JR: And goad them into saying it.

JM: And that's what you're supposed to look for.

JR: That's right. That's why I don't watch television news anymore.

JM: Well, I watch it, but I get so mad that I—so what I do now, I use my computer to go on the Internet, and I read *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. At least I go on every morning and look at their headlines, and then if there's something about it that strikes me [as interesting I read it].

JR: Would you move in with us for a week and teach me how to use it that thing? [Laughs]

JM: Yes. But that's one of the joys that I do get out of the computer, is being able to do that. But, now, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*—see, I can't even do that with the *Democrat-Gazette* because they charge you to access them online.

JR: Yes.

JM: But not *The New York Times*, the *Post* or the *Los Angeles Times.* I think that's kind of crazy.

JR: How about the [*Southwest Record*]?

JM: I take the *Times-Record*.

JR: Oh, it's the *Times-Record.*

JM: Yes, it's the *Times-Record.* It used to be the *Southwest American* and the *Times-Record*.

JR: Yes.

JM: But I take it so I don't have to go online to access them. But they probably wouldn't be worth the effort.

JR: Well, you're aware of how much northwest Arkansas news is in our edition?

JM: Oh, yes.

JR: That's one thing that gripes me. The other thing that gripes me is the length of the stories, especially the wire stories. They're filling up columns with irrelevancy.

JM: Yes.

JR: We had a half a page a couple of weeks ago of tax problems in China. A full half page! It goes on and on.

JM: Yes. I'm aware.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Do you remember what your salary was at the *Gazette* when you went to work?

JR: Yes. I had gone to work—well, I left the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* as a police reporter. I was making $20.00 a week. I got the job in Jonesboro by long-distance telephone. I didn't know a soul in town. Gene Smith hired me at $35.00 a week, which was almost a one hundred percent increase.

JM: Yes.

JR: I didn't get any raises while I was there, but every once in a while, Fred Troutt, one of the two owners, would walk by and hand me a $10.00 bill or a $20.00 bill "for my cleaning," he'd say. And I appreciated that. So when I got offered a job at the *Gazette* for $50.00 a week, that was another good raise. I worked there a year, and was told that I'd get a raise at the end of a year. I did. It was $2.50. So I went up to $52.50. Hugh Patterson, who was the publisher—his assistant was a nice, easy-going guy. I can't think of his name. He was the one handing out the paychecks. I went down and told him that $2.50 wasn't much, but I was married, was buying a house, and had a child, and I couldn't afford to give him back his $2.50.

JM: [Laughs] Did he say anything?

JR: No. I think he was embarrassed. I mean, he may have said something, but, you know . . . [Laughs]

JM: I can't remember who . . .

JR: A guy on the first floor . . .

JM: It wasn't Frank Duff, but . . .

JR: Yes, Frank Duff!

JM: Okay.

JR: It was an easy-going paper in those days. You could walk in, and if Hugh was in, you could talk to him. If Frank was there, you could talk to him. The back stairway going to the second floor was never locked. The front door was never locked. Things were really open. It was easy. And it was a typical city room—typewriters clacking, no carpet on the floor, of course, probably a tile floor—and the AP [Associated Press], UP [United Press] and INS [International News Service] teletype machines were in a glass-enclosed anteroom, and you could hear them clacking. It was sort of out of the movies. Maybe that was typical.

JM: Yes. That was a great old sound. That's one thing that computers did—they got rid of all the sounds of all the machines clacking and everything.

JR: The first time I went up to the remodeled *Gazette*—when Bob Douglas was managing editor, I went up to see him—everybody had a computer and the floor was carpeted. It was quiet!

JM: Yes. It made a big difference, didn't it? Do you remember anything about the fringe benefits at the paper?

JR: Certainly didn't have any pension.

JM: Yes, probably didn't.

JR: I guess we had Social Security. There were no health benefits.

JM: Oh? There weren't any health benefits?

JR: No.

JM: And no pension. That came later on, before I left.

JR: Did they?

JM: Yes. They did put in a retirement program.

JR: Do you think I could get Walter Hussman to be retroactive?

JM: I doubt it. [Laughs] He had one, too, which, I think, was tied in with what they were doing with their other little papers around Arkansas. But it wasn't huge. Well, the *Gazette*'s first one was not so huge, either. But I do remember, though, that— I can't remember what the *Gazette* paid me. I don't remember.

JR: I think they just paid overtime.

JM: [Laughs] I remember once we talked them into using city reporters to help rewrite the high school football stories.

JR: Oh!

JM: That was after you left, I think, because we were having such little luck in getting high school kids to come in and do it, and who could do it and be competent. So Orville [Henry] finally talked them into using city reporters, and they had to pay them time-and-a-half. They would come back at time-and-a-half. I remember, particularly, that Bill Lewis was twice as fast as anybody else.

JR: Do you remember Chuck Miller?

JM: Oh, yes.

JR: And Bill Bentley.

JM: Yes.

JR: And George Bentley?

JM: Yes.

JR: They weren't related, but they both . . .

JM: Yes, I liked George Bentley. You're right.

JR: Bill was in sports. Didn't Jerry Dhonau work in sports for a while?

JM: Yes, he worked in sports for a while. I think he was pretty young at the time. He worked for Orville. He worked over there in sports before I came over.

JR: Okay.

JM: But he had worked there. So did Tom [Bygard?], who later . . .

JR: Oh!

JM: He later went really high at AP. He was in charge of AP's Tokyo bureau for a while.

JR: I had forgotten. Tom [Bygard?]. That's right. I'll tell you who else worked there: Eddie Kane. He became chairman of the board of First National Bank.

JM: Did he really?

JR: Yes. Nobody could ever explain to me who Eddie Kane was that he got that position. He was president or chairman of the board at First National Bank.

JM: Where did he work at the *Gazette*?

JR: He was a copy boy.

JM: Was he?

JR: He was a copy boy when I first started.

JM: Oh, yes, I remember several of them. Some of them went off to pretty good jobs.

JR: Did they?

JM: Yes.

JR: Well, Eddie did. [Laughs]

JM: Dickie [Richard] Allen worked as a copy boy and then as a rewrite guy. Then he worked for *The New York Times* for years. They sent him to Paris, and then they recalled him. He liked Paris so well that he married a French girl. He quit and took a job at the *Paris Herald Tribune*.

JR: Oh!

JM: That's what he's doing now. He's over there in Paris at the *Herald Tribune*.

JR: And then, of course, Larry Obsitnik, Gene Prescott, Willie Allen. What was the other photographer?

JM: Rodney Dungan. Patt Patterson came along.

JR: Patt Patterson.

JM: We had some good photographers.

JR: Yes. And I'll tell you one other thing—this really is not necessary—Gene Fretz stuttered. Remember Gene?

JM: Yes.

JR: Gene would sit at that typewriter next to the city editor's desk. I don't know what he was typing. He would click that thing with great force. One day, he had something to tell Ken Parker across the room. He tried to tell him, and he stuttered so much that they started laughing. Gene turned back to the typewriter

and wrote what he wanted to say, and he banged that typewriter so hard we thought it would break! [Laughs] He ripped out the sheet and gave it to Parker. [Laughs]

JM: Yes, I remember Gene. I had about forgotten him, but I remember. That was quite a crew. You were gone by then, but I thought that later that maybe the *Gazette* didn't get as many talented reporters in their later years that came in and went to work for them as they did in that period of time. There was really a stretch in there in the 1940s and 1950s . . .

JR: There was some great talent. You just named them.

JM: Yes. Mort Stern, Tom Davis, Roy Reed, Ray Moseley—a lot of those guys. And some copy editors. Well, Bill Whitworth worked there, you know, and he went on to be the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

JR: I didn't know that!

JM: Oh, yes. He just resigned and moved back to Little Rock, but he was the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, I'll bet you, for fifteen years.

JR: I didn't know that.

JM: He was the head editor.

JR: Tom Swint was one I worked with for a while in the slot.

JM: Yes. Swint was a guy who knocked out Ray Moseley one time.

JR: I don't remember what it was about.

JM: I don't remember, either. But everybody said he really cold-cocked him. Anything else in particular that you remember?

JR: No. The rest is rambling.

JM: Yes.

[End of Interview]