Gazette Project

Interview with

David Terrell
Little Rock, Arkansas
18 June 2003

Interviewer: Ernest Dumas

Ernest Dumas: This is Ernest Dumas, interviewer, and David Terrell, interviewee, on June 18, 2003, at my home in Little Rock. This is an interview for the *Arkansas Gazette* oral history project. First of all, David, I need you to acknowledge that you understand that the transcripts of this interview will be available for research or for whatever public purposes at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, including an online version.

David Terrell: I understand you.

ED: And you consent to that?

DT: That's fine.

ED: David, what's your full name?

DT: David Winston Terrell.

ED: And where were you born?

DT: I was born in Camden. My family lived down in Ouachita County south of Camden, toward El Dorado, at the time.

ED: And when was that?

DT: April 6, 1952.

ED: Who were your daddy and mama?

DT: H. Curtis and Marie Birch Terrell.

ED: Tell me a little bit about your mother and daddy — what they did. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

DT: My father was a bookkeeper. He later became a CPA [Certified Public Accountant]. He taught and had a business. At the time that I was born, we lived on family acreage. It hardly approached a farm. And he worked as a bookkeeper. It was land inherited from some relatives down there.

ED: Is this around Elliott?

DT: It was at Elliott. Yes.

ED: Which is in Ouachita County.

DT: In Ouachita County, close to what they call the El Dorado Highway. Yes. My mother had grown up — she was born in Iowa, a daughter of Norwegian immigrants. They'd had to move south when my grandfather developed bronchitis and couldn't stand the Northern winters anymore. They wound up down there. The two of them went to elementary and high school together down at Fairview Consolidated School. My father went on to the University of Arkansas and was a World War II Navy pilot. I had an older sister, Anna Marie, an older brother, Henry Curtis, Jr., known as Hank, and a younger brother, Jim. Jim is a CPA now up in Fayetteville.

ED: Did you grow up around Elliott? Did you go to school there? How long were you there?

DT: Oh, we lived — I spent part of my summers there until I was up in my teens, but we moved when I was about school-age to Pine Bluff. I went to elementary school there, and then on to Conway, which I still, more or less, consider home, I suppose. I went to junior high and high school in Conway and then Hendrix College.

ED: Was your daddy teaching at UCA [University of Central Arkansas] then? Why were you in Conway? Did he have a business there?

DT: He moved up there to become comptroller for the old Ward Body Works, which eventually became . . .

ED: Amtran.

DT: Amtran, yes. A school bus manufacturing company. And he moved on from there to what was then Arkansas State Teachers College, and then SCA, and now University of Central Arkansas, where he taught accounting and had a business on the side — doing things CPAs do. I've never understood what they do.

ED: So you went to high school at Conway High School?

DT: I did.

ED: Did you participate in athletics? Were you an athlete?

DT: [Laughs] Well, those are different questions. Yes, I played a little football and I ran track until I needed to make some money to go to college, and quit. I kind of ran again at Hendrix.

ED: When you were at Conway High School did you take an interest in journalism there?

DT: Oh, I did. We had a wonderful — [laughs]. We had a teacher who was there for two years named Beth Daniel who had been in the journalism program, I think, at ASU — Arkansas State [University] — over at Jonesboro, and she taught journalism. I took the journalism course and found it — I edited a little high school newspaper, a weekly paper in high school. Then when I was a senior I went over to the *Log Cabin Democrat* and started stringing for them, writing sports. Immediately after high school I went to work for them more or less full time, so it was an outgrowth of high school and the fact that there was this trade masquerading as a profession where misfits all congregated and seemed to get along.

ED: This was at the high school paper as well as the . . .?

DT: No, I mean at the professional level.

ED: At the professional level. Yes. High school paper is just all the yuppie kids doing something to . . .

DT: Oh, I don't know. Beth Daniel encouraged us to do some rather interesting things, which I think is why she wound up not there anymore after a couple of years.

ED: What were some of the things you did? Did she have you doing some investigative reporting?

DT: No, not that so much. This would have been 1968 or so, and 1969 — the Vietnam War years, and had a lot of — those were strained and emotional times, and a lot of youth rebellion going on. I guess some of that was reflected in some of the

work we did on the paper. It didn't go over so terribly well with the administration, it seemed.

ED: So you went to work for the *Log Cabin* during your senior year?

DT: Yes, in 1969, I guess. I graduated in 1970.

ED: So what kind of work did you do for the *Log Cabin*? This was part-time while you were in school, obviously — twenty or thirty hours a week.

DT: Part-time. I was just a stringer for sports until I got out of high school, when I went to work for them — I worked probably very close to forty hours a week all the way through college. I supported myself that way and paid for school.

ED: You went to Hendrix College?

DT: Yes. I was a reporter. It was a very small daily — 6,000 circulation or so, as I recall. So you get to do a lot of things. I was a photographer of a sort. After a time, I put out the Saturday edition as the only journalist down there. I stripped the wire and wrote all the headlines. I laid out the front page and the sports page. I supervised makeup, and did what stories there were to be done on a Saturday morning. Whatever — I wrote everything from obituaries to editorials there. It was great.

ED: This was while you were in college?

DT: In school. That's right.

ED: The editor at that time was Joe McGee, right?

DT: Joe B. McGee was the managing editor. The publisher was Frank E. Robins III. The two of them got along poorly to put it charitably. I had a desk between the

two of them. I was in the war zone, but I was mostly ignorant of all that at the time. I had a blast.

ED: Well, Why didn't Frank Robins fire Joe McGee, since he was, in effect, the owner?

DT: My understanding was that he couldn't, that Joe was in the Will left by Frank's father. I can't confirm that as fact. That was my understanding. But it was a strained relationship, and a terribly interesting place to work. But the thing was that they were both good newspapermen in very different ways. Joe was very old fashioned, and most people wouldn't recognize him as — most people wouldn't promote him to the managing editorship of a large papers these days, probably. But I learned an awful lot from that old fellow, and learned to love him. Frank was a musician and a mechanical engineer by education and, I think, by inclination, but he had a great talent. He was one of these fellows who could spot an error by a glance in the middle of a long story. Both of them in their ways and by the standards of the time and place exercised, I thought, a lot of integrity. They had some courage. It was a pretty good little paper.

ED: How many reporters were working there at the paper at a time?

DT: Oh, I guess, three at a time.

ED: Was John Brummett there at the same time you were?

DT: John came along . . .

ED: About the time you left, I guess.

DT: Yes, close to the time I left. We overlapped by a year or less, I would think.

ED: So you went to Hendrix. Did you graduate from Hendrix?

DT: I did.

ED: What did you do at Hendrix?

DT: Academically I survived. I took a degree in philosophy. As I said, I ran track. I participated in some of the dramatic productions. I made most of my lifelong friends — my oldest friends tend to be some of the folks I met while I attended that school.

ED: That tends to be the case with Hendrix. I don't know what it is, but people I know who went to Hendrix — that's kind of the coterie of their lifetime friendships are people that they've met at that little school.

DT: Maybe nobody else will have us. [Laughs]

ED: Oh, I don't know. It's kind of a remarkable school, I think.

DT: Yes. I think it is. I'm grateful to have been able to get through there. And I'll always be grateful to Frank Robins for the opportunity to work at the paper and to make it possible for me to do that.

ED: How much did he pay you?

DT: Oh, probably $85 a week — $95.

ED: That was pretty good for a kid then.

DT: Yes.

ED: Yes. When I was at the *El Dorado News-Times* a few years earlier than that, mine was seventy-five cents an hour. That's what I started at. And it eventually got up to eighty cents an hour. I went up with the federal minimum wages, so I

never got close to making even $40 a week at the *El Dorado News-Times*. Then when I went to work at the *Gazette* in 1960, it was for $80 a week.

DT: A lot of the reasons I went there seeking a job was that I was working at the state minimum wage level at a pizza place. I needed to make more money if I had any hope of attending Hendrix and paying for it. It was a private school.

ED: Yes. What was the tuition at Hendrix in those days? It was still the highest in Arkansas, I'm sure, at the time.

DT: I can't recall. I don't know. I know that it was very, very hard to pay for it. My family had had some reverses, and I got virtually no help from home. I didn't live at home and didn't live on campus, either. I ate a lot of spaghetti.

ED: All right. So you stayed at the *Log Cabin Democrat* all four years you were in college.

DT: Right.

ED: And what about after? Did you stay there after you graduated?

DT: No. I wanted to escape Conway, I suppose. And I wanted to go to Little Rock because it seemed that what I thought of as "metro journalism" was practiced down at Little Rock. Little Rock seemed like an awfully big city to me, you know, thirty miles away and all as it was. And, in fact, I think an awfully good brand of journalism <u>was</u> practiced in Little Rock in those days. I wanted to go down there, and I wanted to go to the <u>*Gazette*</u>. Everybody who thought much of himself at all, I think, and was in journalism in Arkansas at least <u>secretly</u> wanted to be part of the *Gazette* staff. I applied there first, and Bob Douglas talked to me

about a police reporting job. I was not interested, so I went over to the [*Arkansas*] *Democrat*. It was edited at the time by Bob McCord and Jerry McConnell.

ED: That's M-C-C-O-N-N-E-L-L.

DT: That's right. Two Ns, two Cs, two Ls. They were an interesting pair. Ol' McCord had been at the *North Little Rock Times*, I think, as an owner or part owner. And McConnell had been a sports reporter at the *Gazette*. He was plucked out of there and made managing editor of the *Democrat*. They were interesting gentlemen. If you look up "Southern gentlemen" in the dictionary, there's a picture of Bob [McCord] and Jerry McConnell. Fine people, and working under some pretty adverse conditions against the *Gazette*. I think they did a pretty good job. I worked for them. I worked a year, I guess, as federal courts reporter, and then I went out to the capitol, writing about state government and politics — covering the legislature. I wrote a little weekly column there, "At the Capitol."

ED: So you weren't there with John Robert Starr. He had not arrived on the scene at that time.

DT: Mercifully, no.

ED: Was it enjoyable working at the *Democrat* in those days? I gather in later years it was not, from some who worked there during the Starr years.

DT: Well, it was. I think . . .

ED: You had a small staff and you had an opportunity to cover important stories.

DT: Yes, that was a lot of it. There was a lot of craziness in the newsroom. We had some editors who were overworked and underpaid dealing with some terribly

young writers and with some older ones who were difficult. There were people around with problems with alcohol and problems with this and that — kind of a crazy, hectic, very fast-paced place to work. It seemed our opportunities for news in terms of time got squeezed a little further every month. Our deadlines were short. Nothing much happens before nine in the morning.

ED: And you were an afternoon paper.

DT: And we were a p.m. paper. With a noon deadline, we had three hours of generally a slow news day to cover breaking news. So we were at a great disadvantage against the *Gazette* in that way, and we hustled a lot. We took a lot of pride, I think, in what we did. I roomed with a fellow named Jim Allen, who was a reporter. He later went on to the Associated Press. He went out to San Francisco. Allen was my roommate and dear, close friend, and was a hell of a reporter. He was a good investigative man and did a lot of work on North Little Rock government and politics, and later on the PSC – Public Service Commission. That sort of thing.

ED: So you went to the capitol. How long were you out at the capitol for the *Democrat*?

DT: Oh, I think about a year.

ED: Were you alone out there for the *Democrat*? There were a couple of you out there, wasn't there?

DT: Well, we had Brenda Tirey.

ED: Brenda Tirey was there. T-I-R-E-Y.

DT: Yes. I was junior to Brenda. She went to the *Gazette* before I did. Jerry Dean would come out during the legislative session. Maybe I worked — it seems I worked a couple of sessions for them, so I must have been at the capitol more than a year at all events . . .

ED: So you worked at least one legislative session.

DT: Yes. Brenda, I think, covered the Senate, and I took care of the House for the most part — Supreme Court, of course, and all that.

ED: This would have been what years?

DT: 1974, 1975, 1976 — in there somewhere.

ED: So [David] Pryor was the governor at the time, I guess, when you went out there, or was [Dale] Bumpers still the governor?

DT: Pryor. Pryor had become governor. He was elected in the fall of 1974, and took office in January of 1975. Yes. In Bumpers's last year, I was covering the federal courts for the *Democrat*, so I went out there, more or less, with Pryor.

ED: And for the *Gazette* at that time, I guess I would have been out there, and . . .

DT: Doug Smith and Carol Griffee.

ED: Carol Griffee. Yes. Okay. What was that like? You still had that problem out there with that short time line. The capitol offices opened at 8:30, and noon was your absolute deadline for getting government stories in the paper that day.

DT: Yes, and we were on a fast treadmill and did the best we could. We also were stacked up against some good people, you and Doug particularly, who had been there for a long time. We were beaten on a regular basis. But we managed to pull

off a good one from time to time. Some of that stuff was investigative. I mean, that's one of the ways you can do things that are not time-dependent, and are not breaking news — things that are in the nature of news features. And we did some of those that were, I think in retrospect, pretty good work.

ED: And then at one point you went to work for the *Gazette*. How did it happen that you went to work at the *Gazette*?

DT: Oh, I think everybody at the *Democrat* had an application in at the *Gazette* all the time. I was no exception. I had the opportunity, as you said, to cover some pretty big stuff at the *Democrat*. I didn't mess it all up. So when an opening occurred, I got a call and got interviewed. I had been noticed, I suppose, and got an interview. I interviewed with Bill Shelton, the day managing editor — really, city editor, and Bob Douglas, the managing editor. They put me to work for a very short time on general assignments and then sent me to the Pulaski County Courthouse with George Bentley, so I was sort of a junior partner on a beat again.

ED: How was that — working with George Bentley?

DT: I loved George Bentley. I do. George is a marvelous man. He had been at the courthouse for a long time. Although he still had a lot of hustle for news, things had gotten easier, I think for him in that there are a lot of sources at the courthouse who would just come to George. He'd hold court in the courthouse coffee shop. He must have drunk 10, 12, 14 cups of coffee a day. People could come in and — and very little missed him. There was a lot going on in those days politically. We had old Roger Mears — kind of a bull-in-a-china-shop kind of

reformer as the county judge, chief executive of the county. The quorum court, having taken over as sort of a county commission with constitutional reform, was a new institution. And then Lee Munson was the prosecuting attorney. And old Judge Kirby and some of that old political crowd . . .

ED: William J. Kirby.

DT: Yes, Bill Kirby and some of that old political crowd with whom Munson was identified were entrenched, and they were always at war with Mears. We had a lot of local political work to cover in addition to the run of the court stories, which are always inherently dramatic themselves. It was terrific fun.

ED: Mears at one point, I think, was indicted, was he not?

DT: Later. Yes, later.

ED: That was later.

DT: Yes, I think that was after he was county judge, and I was gone. I don't recall what even happened to the case. He had a firebrand young assistant by the name of Jim Lynch, who's still around Little Rock, I understand, doing some fine work in local politics.

ED: Yes, he is.

DT: We had both sides of that political war angry with us much of the time, but in a position to need to talk to us. It was almost a reporter's dream there for a little while.

ED: So you split the beat with George Bentley. How did you do that?

DT: Oh, I don't know. George, I guess, in a subtle way gave me assignments. He was

the senior reporter on the beat, and I was perfectly willing to defer to him. But whoever needed to cover this or that took care of it. We watched out for each other the best we could.

ED: So how long were you at the courthouse?

DT: Oh, I guess a year.

ED: Which would take you up to around 1976 or so?

DT: Right.

ED: And then you went to the capitol?

DT: Right.

ED: How did that happen?

DT: Well, there were some openings out there. Steele Hays had come to work for the *Gazette*, also from the *Democrat*. Young Steele, as we called him. His father was a lawyer in town and eventually wound up on the [Arkansas?] Supreme Court. And I think when you left . . .

ED: That's right, I left . . .

DT: You left the capitol beat to go to the editorial page, and Steele went out there, more or less, at least numerically in your place, and then Carol Griffee was reassigned. And I went out as her numerical replacement. That's the way I recall it.

ED: This would have been about January of 1979.

DT: No, that's not right then. It must have been earlier. I can't remember. It's been a long time.

ED: I left and went to the editorial page in, I think, January of 1979 when Bill Clinton — about his first week in office. You might have come out before then. I don't . . .

DT: I must have come out before . . .

ED: Yes, Brenda Tirey was out there.

DT: Well, Brenda was already there . . .

ED: Brenda was already there.

DT: . . . when I showed up, I think.

ED: She took Doug Smith's place. He left for a year or two to write, and I think Brenda came out to take his place.

DT: Well, I was out there before 1979.

ED: Okay.

DT: But I can't remember how it came about. It's been a long time.

ED: All right.

DT: I find that my memory is not a very reliable instrument.

ED: So you were out there two or three years, I guess, weren't you?

DT: Yes.

ED: During the first Clinton term.

DT: Yes. I already knew Clinton because when I was with the *Democrat* I had covered his race for Congress up in northwest Arkansas against John Paul Hammerschmidt.

ED: In 1974.

DT: Yes, right. I had very little contact with him after that for a while. I got a couple of stories from him actually when he was attorney general. I covered that race for governor then. Did I cover that race?

ED: In 1978, that would have been the primary — he ran against Joe Woodward and Randall Mathis and Frank Leahy.

DT: I didn't cover that race.

ED: And then in the fall . . .

DT: You covered it.

ED: I probably did. I probably covered it in 1978. No, I covered that Senate race in 1978.

DT: Oh.

ED: Between David Pryor, Ray Thornton and Jim Guy Tucker. But you covered Bill Clinton also as governor in his first term for the *Gazette*.

DT: Oh, yes.

ED: You and Steele Hays were at the *Gazette* at that time.

DT: Right.

ED: What kind of relationship did you have with Bill Clinton?

DT: Fractious. I had sort of liked the fellow, and never got to the point that I disliked him. But I lost the ability, I guess, to communicate with him terribly well, as he became more cautious and, I think, suspicious of the press. And I had something to do with that, I'm sure. I'd walk around the governor's office and read people's documents when they were not there. I'd read upside down on people's desks,

and things of that sort. He tried to bar me from the governor's office a couple of times. He put out the word that I was not welcome in the governor's office and I couldn't be there. I ignored that and said, "Look, it's a public building. I'm coming in here." It was a little tense from time to time.

ED: Was this kind of a good cop/bad cop arrangement between you and Steele Hays? I'm sure Steele Hays was welcome.

DT: Well, Steele is a perfect gentleman at all times.

ED: He's always welcome everywhere.

DT: He's so courtly, and he's so handsome. So, yes, Steele was always welcome. But this was not a plan on our part.

ED: No.

DT: But, yes, I guess it was. I was the bad cop.

ED: Well, when Ernie Valachovich and I were at the capitol, it kind of worked that way. The people who hated him would — I could butter up to and confide in and then people that despised me would — Ernie would go talk to them and tell them, "I know what you're talking about. Dumas just can't be trusted."

DT: Yes. For a couple of rookies out there, I thought we did all right. I don't know that that view was shared by Shelton, for example. But I thought we did all right. We weren't really rookies. I mean, I had been at the capitol for a while for the *Democrat*. We both had some experience. Brenda was around. Brenda did a heck of a job. And I used <u>you</u> quite a bit as a resource. You gave me a lot of guidance.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

ED: David, this puts us — so you covered the entire first term of Bill Clinton, right?

DT: I did, and it was such a wild time. Clinton was so very young. And we were young. And it was almost as though we were playing at this business. I couldn't believe I was there, and I think probably Clinton couldn't quite believe he was there doing these things that seemed to be very important. And Clinton surrounded himself with these young assistants who were zealots about bank reform and environmental reforms. Steve Smith carried on a campaign against clear-cutting, for example. The legislature hardly knew what to make of all this, except they didn't like it altogether. It was very — it was a more unusual and, I think, more fascinating time than I had any reason to understand at the time. Clinton had three assistants, Rudy Moore, Steve Smith and . . .

ED: John Danner.

DT . . . Danner who was married to a woman named Nancy Pietrafasa, who also had an office in the capitol.

ED: They both worked up there, and they were both despised by the rest of the staff.

DT: Oh, they were. They were from California, and they dressed a little differently and they were a little supercilious in their attitudes, I thought. And they knew how these Arkies ought to be doing things. They had very little compunctions about saying so. Moore was sort of the senior member of this triumvirate.

ED: He was from Fayetteville.

DT: He was. He had been a state senator. Springdale, I believe.

ED: Yes, Springdale's state representative. Yes.

DT: He had a little more savvy, I think, than the other two, and wound up on top. This three-headed monster didn't last all that long. Moore was eventually named as something like administrative assistant.

ED: Danner was asked to leave, I think. The governor asked Rudy to go tell Danner and his wife to leave.

DT: Yes.

ED: Then Smith left in some distress — disfavor because he had upset the timber interests over his timber-cutting stuff. He called the timber companies corporate criminals, I think, so he . . .

DT: He was right about that, of course, but all three of them, Danner and Smith and Rudy Moore, had beards, so that kind of made the administration easy to caricature for the cartoonists.

ED: It did.

DT: The bearded hippy kind of guys.

ED: It did, and I just thought the new wave had arrived. I thought, by and large, they were all right and that they were correct in a lot of their political views, but they did not help themselves. And this goes for Clinton as well. They did not help themselves in trying to achieve a lot of change very fast by not taking care of those personal appearance matters and habit that help you to fit in and get along. Do you remember any particular stories that you did that were fun in the Clinton years? Any that pissed the Clintons off?

DT: Oh, I did. I mean, I wish I had the notes Clinton used to send me. I had no idea that he would go beyond the first term as governor of Arkansas. In fact, he didn't for a little while there. I would write things — especially in a little weekly column that would anger him terribly, and he would send me these crappy little notes. At the same time, we seemed to have a lot in common in some ways, and he was [laughs] — I remember one day I was coming into the capitol — I was carrying a copy of Barbara Tuchman's book on the fourteenth century, *A Distant Mirror*. And Clinton was coming to work — he was driving along toward his office, spotted that thing and said "Hey, if you like that, I've got a book for you. Come on up after awhile." So I went up there to the governor's office, and he had a book he had just finished. It was this — oh, my goodness, a thousand-page impenetrable tome about some monks in a convent in France in the Middle Ages. It was just — it was hideous. And I couldn't possibly read this thing, so I kept it a couple of weeks and took it back up to him and told him how great it was. He could probably cite you all kinds of statistics and stuff out of that damn book.

ED: He could.

DT: I don't know if he's ever had an original thought, but he is a great assimilator of information. I don't think of him as a particularly original thinker, but I've always underestimated him. I mean, while I covered Arkansas politics I thought there were two people who might be presidential timber. Two characters who might one day become president. Either of them. Dale Bumpers and Jim Guy Tucker. It just never crossed my mind that Clinton could do that. I was not the greatest judge of

some things political. But there were, I mean, to pick out one or two stories, I don't know. There were <u>many</u> covering all that business with the hearings on the timber industry. All that <u>fiery</u> rhetoric back and forth. Smith having fun and digging his own grave. We had such characters in the legislature in those days. They were regularly angry with him. Max Howell and Knox Nelson and — I cozied up a little bit to old Nick Wilson — I knew he was a bit of a scoundrel, but I liked him, especially because he was unashamedly liberal in his politics. There were others that I admired a good deal. Old Robert Harvey of Swifton, and U.D. Moore from El Dorado.

ED: Those years covering the capitol in the governor's office, were there rumors then about Clinton's womanizing?

DT: Oh, sure.

ED: Did you hear that stuff?

DT: Oh, sure.

ED: Did you ever hear anything specific, or was it just kind of the generalized . . .?

DT: Yes, I heard some specific things.

ED: Did you all ever decide to look into it?

DT: I didn't.

ED: At that time we didn't do those kind of things. We heard that about every governor, every politician just about, to some extent.

DT: Oh, every politician of any stature I have ever known has lived amid rumors about his sex life — "he's gay" or "she sleeps around." And, you know, politics, perhaps,

I mean — in the first place, this was the 1970s and things were different. Nobody had heard AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]. The sexual revolution was *fait accompli*, and there was a lot of sleeping around. The idea that a governor should do it, a governor who was, what, thirty-two years old, was not particularly shocking or all that interesting to me. In some of the cases, you know, in a few years' time you would look at some of the allegations that may be sexual harassment. At that time it hardly even seemed out of the ordinary. Moreover, there was nothing that suggested that what might have been going on was in any way connected to policy or politics. I should say also that not just in the 1970s, but also in politics — electoral politics, particularly — an enterprise filled with very young people, a lot of them handsome, sharing a cause and highly emotional atmosphere — there's some sex going on. I don't know that it's news. I still don't.

ED: Did you get to know Hillary Clinton very well? Was she very visible in that first term? Hillary Rodham?

DT She was more visible than I gathered she wanted to be. I had gotten to know her a little bit when she had come to run the headquarters in his 1974 race for Congress. As first lady she was not, as I recall, a terribly public figure more than any first lady is, but she attracted a lot of attention because she was not from Arkansas. She was from somewhere up north. She had this Yale degree, and she didn't take her husband's name — called herself Rodham. Along with the triumvirate of Smith, Danner, and Moore, she was a bit of a political impediment to him, I think.

ED: And she had gone to work for the Rose Law Firm, so she was kind of busy with a

young law practice. She was kind of a junior . . .

DT: She had her own career over there, and there was some — I think there was some public resentment about all that, not so much because of any conflict of interest, although there was some potential. It was because she was a career woman, and this was at a time when the term "Women's Lib" still carried a lot of negative baggage in our part of the country, at least, and she seemed to be a prototypical "women's libber." She was a symbol, not of her own volition — it just worked out that way. But I liked Hillary. I have to say I liked her a great deal. She was interesting, always seemed to have a little time to talk, and terribly, terribly bright.

ED: It was not until his second term 1983-1984, I guess, that she really became so visible in public policy. She got involved in the educational — school reform.

DT: She did. I remember some of her early speeches about that. She was so impassioned, and she could speak extemporaneously in long, coherent paragraphs, and she would say — I recall vividly — "We're a poor state. Education is the only hope we have." She was right.

ED: The first term Bill Clinton's big program was highways.

DT: Yes.

ED: And that's, I guess — he had a number of major programs, but the significant one, I think, in that first term was passing a tax program for the highways in which he raised not only . . .

DT: Car tag fees.

ED: Car tag fees, as well as the gasoline tax.

DT: Right.

ED: And I suppose that's what beat him, the car tags — one of the elements.

DT: One of the elements, I mean . . .

ED: Hillary was a factor, too, I guess.

DT: Hillary was a factor. The triumvirate was a factor. The car tags — car tags and Cubans was the slogan that went around. We had all these Cuban refugees housed up at Fort Chaffee near Fort Smith. He had to deal with that. Not really his own fault. But you add in the alienation of some of the most powerful economic interests in the state — timber on the clear-cutting issue and others, and then the trucking industry because of gasoline tax. It was a lot of — he expended too much political capital in too short a time, believing as he did in change. But he was — you know, over the course of his governorship he managed to make some very progressive changes, I think. He was right about the highways. You can talk to any unemployed coal miner in West Virginia and he knows that roads and schools are the answer to economic development. Still true.

ED: When were you at the capitol? Do you remember when you left?

DT: I left . . .

ED: Were you there for the Frank White administration?

DT: No, I left right before.

ED: You left right before?

DT: I left about the time Frank White declared his candidacy.

ED: So you weren't there for the fall election — the Clinton defeat?

DT: That's right. My wife was working over at the *Democrat* at the time. We weren't married yet. We were living together at the time in Little Rock. She was working at the *Democrat* and they offered her a job in Washington to cover Congress for the *Democrat*. That was her home and it looked like a good opportunity. Turned out, I think, not to be. [Laughs] But I looked at my situation and thought, "You know, this was the only job I ever wanted, but I don't know if I want to do it for forty years.

ED: She was Pam Murphy, right?

DT: Right.

ED: And she had somehow — had she come down here with you?

DT: Yes.

ED: You had met?

DT: We had met here, through a mutual friend. She lived down in Corpus Christi, Texas, for a while, then got a job up at the *Democrat*. She worked over there as general assignment reporter and then covering the courthouse after I was gone from it.

ED: So you were — so the arrangement was you were a capitol reporter for the *Gazette*, and your girlfriend — you were not married at that point — was a reporter for the *Democrat*?

DT: Right.

ED: Did anybody ever say anything about that?

DT: No.

ED: No problems, since you weren't on the same beat or anything?

DT: Well, if you will recall, Ernie, the merry-go-around of trysts and marriages among journalists in Little Rock at the time was pretty rampant. [Laughter] I don't think the thing raised any eyebrows at all. We never even swapped mates with anybody.

ED: Pam was an awfully good reporter in her own right.

DT: Oh, yes.

ED: She was a hell of a reporter and later an editorial writer.

DT: Right.

ED: So she's a much superior individual to me.

DT: Well, I won't quarrel with that.

ED: She got a chance to go to Washington. They wanted to send her to Washington to be their Washington bureau.

DT: Right.

ED: So you all had to make a decision.

DT: We did. It was a terrible, wrenching decision, not for her, but for me because, as I say, I had the only job I had ever wanted. I had grown up reading the *Arkansas Gazette* and admiring it and seeing these bylines like Ernest Dumas, and idolizing these people. And here I was, living kind of a dream. But as I thought about it, "If she wants to move — I don't want to leave her, and I don't want to curtail her opportunities, and I don't want to do this job for forty years. I can do something else. I can go to Washington be a big-shot reporter. I could do that." So I decided to do that.

ED: So you quit. You resigned from the *Gazette*?

DT: Right.

ED: Did you all get married then?

DT: Oh, eventually.

ED: So you all moved to Washington?

DT: Right.

ED: And she worked at the *Democrat*'s Washington bureau for a couple of years, I guess?

DT: Right.

ED: And then she left and went to — she joined United Press International?

DT: Right.

ED: Did that cover the time line?

DT: Well she joined UPI — I went up there, and to my shock, didn't conquer the world. I couldn't find a job in journalism up there that I wanted. So I took a job — Bob Douglas recommended me to Jim McDaniel, who was the managing editor of the *Commercial Appeal* down in Memphis. I went back down there, and Pam came down six months or so later, having taken a job with UPI in their Memphis bureau. I stayed with the *Commercial Appeal* for a couple of years.

ED: That's right. So both of you got married when you were at Memphis.

DT: Right.

ED: And she was with UPI at Memphis and you were with the *Commercial Appeal*?

DT: Right.

ED: A general assignment reporter, or what?

DT: I was a general assignment reporter until they moved me over to politics.

ED: And you covered local politics? State politics?

DT: Some of both. I covered Shelby County government and a lot of local politics. I covered the local party politics — a pretty active, interesting thing over there because of the make-up of Memphis — the demographics of Memphis and Shelby County. Shelby County government was dominated by white Republicans, and the city was dominated, barely, by black Democrats. A fascinating thing to cover. Then I covered the race for United States Senate that was won by the incumbent at the time, Jim Sasser. I eventually went to work for Sasser in Washington.

ED: So you were at the *Commercial Appeal* and Pam was at UPI there at Memphis for how long, do you recall?

DT: A couple of years — two and a half years, probably what it was.

ED: So this would have been in the early . . .

DT: Early 1980s.

ED: Early 1980s. Then she gets transferred to — did she get transferred to Washington for UPI? Or do you go up there with Sasser?

DT: Yes, what happened was that she — yes, she got transferred to Washington again. UPI sent her up there. She opened the northern Virginia bureau and then she eventually moved over and worked on their national desk and maybe their international desk. So I was six months late in following her. I had to find a job up there. I went to Sasser and asked him for help in looking for a job, and he said,

"Well, I'd like to hire you." I had never really terribly seriously considered working in politics, but he offered me a good job. So I worked for Sasser for four years, I guess.

ED: You were a press secretary and speech writer and . . .

DT: I was mainly just a speech writer and kind of a political operative. I did a little press work, but not a great deal.

ED: Speech writing was your specialty?

DT: Right. I wrote all the speeches.

ED: Was that fun?

DT: It was brutally hard work. Sometimes it was great fun. [Laughs] Yes, politics is fun.

ED: Sasser was kind of a fun guy, wasn't he? Kind of a liberal Democrat — at least as liberal as you can be from Tennessee?

DT: Oh, he had a more liberal record, according to the people who keep track of that sort of thing, than Ted Kennedy for a couple years there. He was a great — he was a protege of Estes Kefauver and was kind of a New Dealer in his heart. Yes, he was fun — a great fella to be around, and there were some staff members that became good friends. Those were good years, by and large. Hard work, though, and I eventually needed to leave because I traveled so much, and we had a baby.

ED: When did you have the baby?

DT. 1983.

ED: Christine.

DT: Christine. Yes.

ED: Your only child.

DT: That's right. The most nearly perfect person that I know — my daughter, Christine.

ED: You stayed with Sasser for four years and then went to — did you go from there to the U.S. Geological Survey?

DT: More or less. Well, I left there — I was going to write a biography of Wilbur D. Mills, a longtime congressman and chairman of the Ways and Means Committee from Arkansas. I did a lot of work on that and finally gave up on it because I ran out of money and lost my deal with Doubleday to publish it. It fell through after a reorganization of that publishing house and the firing of an editor, and so on. And through a political friend from Tennessee I got a job in the Department of the Interior at the Bureau of Reclamation. I worked there for about a year during the Reagan administration.

ED: That was fun, wasn't it?

DT: It was, actually. I worked for a fellow who was a Reagan political appointee. A true believer — Republican right-winger, and I thought I could — you know, "I gotta do this for a few months for some money, but I'll never survive. His name was Carl Gagliardi, and he was a great boss. He was a real pro, and I traveled around the West and did some fascinating work. After Carl left, I went over to the U.S. Geological Survey, and have been there ever since. It's been sixteen or seventeen years now.

ED: You were in the Washington office for a while and then you . . .

DT: Yes. I was chief of publications at one time for the National Mapping Division. Then I went out to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where we live now, working at the Earth Resources Observation Systems Data Center.

ED: That's where you are now.

DT: That's where I'm now. I ran for the school board out there — got all involved in . . .

ED: You were one of thirteen candidates for the school board, right:

DT: [Laughs] Yes.

ED: And you won?

DT: Yes, and I won big! It was great. [Laughs] It was the only — it was the first time probably since the Great Depression that anybody had won a city-wide race in Sioux Falls for public office with no visible support other than labor. [Laughs]

ED: You were backed by the bus drivers' union.

DT: Well, we had several unions. My best friends were probably the janitors, and the teachers supported me. They have a coalition of unions that makes endorsements. They helped a great deal. I used all the other groups that I had any contact with. I won a little political race. It was kind of fun.

ED: Served one term and then was eager to quit.

DT: Well, I was unable to put together a coalition so, I was — my political skills were no better than my political judgment. I lost all the votes. I only won one vote. On split votes I only won one in three years, and they overturned me the next year. I was a screaming liberal, and it's a progressive place in some ways, but you

wouldn't call it — well, it's just a conservative Republican place.

ED: Let's go back to the *Gazette* years.

DT: Yes.

ED: You were there a total of — I've forgotten.

DT: I think I worked there five years.

ED: Five years in all. Any particular characters you remember there?

DT: I remember a lot of characters from the *Gazette*. It was a very special place to work, and I want to say something here if I may. I think if there's one reason for that, it's probably John Netherland Heiskell. Mr. Heiskell was the editor of the *Gazette* for seventy-five years. And there were standards around the place, not published and not formal, but certainly commonly understood. And it was a combination of very different personalities who, because they had a lot of pride in what they did and in the *Gazette* as an institution, managed to work together very productively. We had these marvelous personalities — the sweet ones, like Brenda Tirey and old Will Greene. And some of the kind of wild and even caustic personalities, like Wayne Jordan in one way and Max Brantley in another. Bill Shelton, as city editor, was, in a subtle way, a very, very powerful personality. He had more influence on the daily news product, I'm quite sure, than anyone else. A hell of a pencil editor. Also the kind of fella who, if you made a mistake, could without saying anything make you feel like a worm. Unapproachable and still a very dear man in some mysterious way. We had our drinkers and carousers. We had Mike Trimble, one of the funniest men — one of the funniest, most

entertaining writers I've read before or since. We had you and Doug Smith, who were fountains of just encyclopedic knowledge of public policy. You know, I leave out a lot of names, but that's a sampling. It was a marvelous place to work. The organization included a lot of good writers, a lot of good reporters, some solid editors, and a great esprit.

ED: How do you account for that? That's kind of a theme in so many interviews with people who worked there. They talk about the peculiar esprit that they had, including people like you who have worked at four or five other different newspapers. Not just four or five other newspapers — four or five different careers outside the *Gazette*.

DT: Yes. I've seen a lot of organizations and been a part of many, and I've never seen that kind of magic in a group outside the *Gazette*, and I think it had to do with pride. We were an excellent newspaper, and nobody had to say so. The daily product was superb. To become associated with that . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

ED: This is side three with David Terrell. Were you in the middle of a thought?

DT. Yes, I was trying to say that going to work for the *Gazette* on the editorial side, as opposed to, say, in circulation or advertising, was to enter a kind of fraternity of folks — a fraternity that happened to include a good many women who were bound together by pride in their product and the standards that they maintained. But I think all of it goes back to the leadership of Mr. Heiskell, who was still alive when

I worked there, but who was a hundred years old and was almost invisible. But his influence was still very much felt there. We had weaknesses, but we were, on the whole, a pretty proud example of a time I still think of as maybe zenith in American print journalism. I worked in chain organizations, and they are unable, because of certain inherent flaws in the way they operate, to duplicate that kind of spirit and that kind of product, and they're not interested in it anyway. They're driven solely by profit. I worked in a Scripps-Howard organization over in Memphis. We tried hard, and it's a good, solid, sort of okay newspaper, but it can never be a great newspaper, nor could a Gannett newspaper ever be great. They don't know what the term means in that organization.

ED: So you didn't see the same esprit when you were in Memphis, although there were some bright guys there?

DT: There were wonderful people at the *Commercial Appeal* and at the old *Press Scimitar*, which was still alive in those days. But, no, you didn't have that magic that surrounded the *Gazette*. And I'd have to say another element of it was that we still had two newspapers in town. The competition between the *Gazette* and the *Democrat* and the contrast between them was real and was a wholesome thing.

ED: In later years after they became a morning paper as well, John Robert Starr became the editor at the *Democrat* and were locked in what was actually a life-and-death struggle. The competition might not have been quite as wholesome as it was during those years.

DT: Oh, I'm sure that's so, and I think it's a tragedy that in city after city, and finally,

including this one, we couldn't keep that up. The hiring of Starr, who was a good writer on occasion, but a mean-spirited, tyrannical character, and a goof-ball right-winger, signaled the end to all that was wholesome in competition at one time.

ED: What was your relationship with Bill Shelton? Did you all communicate a lot by the spoken word?

DT: We communicated a good deal by notes. He was my boss. Jerry Jones was the assistant. Max Brantley went on at some time in that period as another assistant city editor. But it was Shelton's desk. Shelton was mysterious but not inscrutable. It was plain what he wanted — what he approved of and what he didn't approve of, but I don't know exactly how he communicated that. He was the most unapproachable, stolid, fearsome character I can recall. I was never scared of another boss. I was <u>terrified</u> of Shelton. <u>Terrified</u>. [Laughter]

ED: Everybody was. [Laugher] And Shelton was just shocked to hear that. He thought he was . . .

DT: Oh, I'm sure that's true. As I said awhile ago, in a way I just loved him. Shelton could take a story and trim it down, and you never knew where he cut it. He was that good as a pencil editor. His judgment was not to be questioned. All editors are managers of a sort, and he certainly would be a square peg in today's world of teams, self-esteem, empowerment, and all that crap. Shelton's wish was my command to the extent that I could discern his wish and carry it out.

ED: Do you remember any notes you got from Shelton?

DT: I remember one time when he did speak to me. I had made a factual error in a

story, something I did too often. He came over to where I was sitting, to my little — we had moved into — it wasn't exactly a desk. I don't know. They had these rows of places in the new *Gazette* newsroom. He came over to my chair, and he was holding a piece of hard copy by the corner as if it were a dying snake, and he pointed at this particular paragraph. As soon as he did, I realized my error. I knew what he was talking about. He recognized that I recognized it as the flush rose in my face. With terrible contempt, he said, "Where did you get this? Just from your general knowledge?" And he turned and walked back to the city desk, and I thought I could die. The last thing I wanted to do was disappoint Shelton or embarrass the *Gazette*. And he was accusing me of embarrassing the *Gazette.* That was the nut of it. That was the real problem.

ED: What about Mike Trimble? Do you recall any Mike Trimble stories?

DT: I know a lot of Mike Trimble stories. Do you want me to add to his legend?

ED: Yes. Do you have any that you can add?

DT: No. The great stories about Tremble are actually these little marvels of phraseology that he managed to come up with. From time to time he would write a cutline — they had taken away the "Arkansas Traveler" column from him years earlier, which was where he wrote, I think, probably some of his most brilliant stuff. But he would write a cutline, which is caption for a picture. Occasionally he would write a cut line and slide it by, and I think Shelton — if Shelton saw it, he had enough humor in it to let it go. He would write one that rhymed. He'd write these little verses, and they would become cutlines in the *Gazette*. Trimble had a

marvelous — he was a great storyteller, and unlike so many good storytellers, there was no difference between his mouth and his fingers on a keyboard. He could spin these marvelous yarns in print. I have a great admiration and affection for Trimble. He's a gentle soul and a talent that this whole nation should have shared at some time.

ED: Do you have any Max Brantley stories?

DT: No, I don't. Well, I don't have any Max stories that I <u>ought</u> to share. Max and I both drank pretty heroically in those years. All that's a bit of an embarrassment to me now. It would be to him, as well, I guess.

ED: All right. Can you think of anything else, David?

DT: Oh, I'm sure I will think of a lot of stuff when we're finished here. I've had a lot of great opportunities in my life, most of which I've blown. But just to have the chance to work at the old *Gazette* was one of the top ones.

ED: All right. Well, let's at least for the moment, anyway, sign off.

DT: All right.

ED: And we may come back.

DT: Thanks.

ED: Thanks.

[End of Interview]