

An Interview with

Joel Vance

at The State Historical Society of Missouri in
Columbia, Missouri

6 September 2011

interviewed by Jeff Corrigan



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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PREFACE

Joel Vance was born on September 25th, 1934, in Chicago, Illinois, and he lived there until the age of thirteen. Mr. Vance recalls fishing and exploring the city's museums and libraries when he was a child. His dad moved the family to Dalton, Missouri with aspirations of running a farm, and this led to Mr. Vance's deep love for the outdoors. After graduating from high school in Keytesville, Mr. Vance studied journalism at the University of Missouri where he graduated in 1956. Immediately following college, Mr. Vance worked for the Montgomery, Alabama *Journal*. From 1959 to 1969, Mr. Vance wrote for the Mexico, Missouri *Evening Ledger*. For the next twenty-two years, Mr. Vance worked for the Missouri Conservation Department, where he played a key role in "Design for Conservation" which passed in 1976. Throughout his career, Mr. Vance has published several books and numerous articles. Now retired, Mr. Vance remains active as a freelance writer, but he cherishes the time he gets to spend with his family and Brittany dogs.

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [*]*. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Sean Rost.

Narrator: Joel Vance
Interviewer: Jeff Corrigan
Date: September 6, 2011
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

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[Begin Interview. Begin Track One.]

10 Corrigan: This is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri.
And I'm in the society's conference room today, Tuesday, September 6, 2011, to interview
Joel Vance. Mr. Vance is being interviewed today for the first time for our Missouri
Environmental Oral History Project. Also in the room with us today is Bethany Henry, a
15 student worker of ours. She's a senior studying history and anthropology who's interested in
oral history, and Joel's wife, Marty. Could you start by telling me when and where you were
born?

Vance: Okay. The when was September 25, 1934, in Chicago. South side of Chicago. I was
an only child. But my parents were, they actually both had roots in the country. My dad was
20 from a hard rock farm in Chariton County, Missouri, near Shannondale, Forest Green, that
area. And migrated to Missouri in the 1920s with his brother to find their fortune, I guess,
anything that was more than what they had down on the farm would have been a fortune. My
mother was from a small, very small resort town in northwest Wisconsin called Birchwood.
And incidentally we just got back from there about a week ago, visiting what few relatives
are still left. But at any rate, I grew up in Chicago through elementary school. In the eighth
25 grade, my dad was offered a promotion by the firm he worked for. He was a perfume oil
salesman, which was kind of an esoteric profession. The company he worked for had offices
both in France, it was actually a French company, and in New York City. And, I guess, in
Chicago, also. But he was offered a promotion to the New York office. And my mother and I
30 both did not want to go to New York City. It was just, the idea of it was intimidating. And he
was pretty ambivalent about it, too. He and his brother, the one that had gone to Chicago with
him, and another fellow, were in the process of buying a 970-acre farm near Bynumville in
Missouri.¹ And my dad just decided he'd forego the promotion and quit and move back down
to Missouri and take over the management of this farm, which is what we did. We had no
place to live. We really—this was almost spur of the moment. But my dad's partner, a fellow
35 named Larry Pillsbury, who was from the Chicago area, was one of these guys who was a
good guy, but he just couldn't pass up a bargain. And not too long before we moved, he had
come down to Missouri to kind of check out the property they were buying. And he wound
up buying a seventeen room hotel in Dalton, Missouri. And this was an abandoned hotel. It
had been a railroad hotel back in the days when the drummers would get off the railroad and
40 have to stay overnight. And so my mother said, "Where are we going to live?" And my dad
said, "Well, for starters, we've got a seventeen room hotel." Now there were three people in
this hotel: my dad, me and my mother. And a small dog. And that was it. That was the entire
population. So for a kid, it was kind of a cool deal because most kids would like to have their
own room. I had my choice of seventeen. (laughter) You know, I could go anywhere that I
45 wanted to. And I had two or three of them that I kind of inhabited at one time or another. But

¹ The farm was actually 640 acres.

at any rate, I was in the eighth grade and Dalton had a one-room school at that time. It was before all the consolidation. I either could go to a one-room school after coming out of an urban elementary school, or we could pay some tuition and I could go to Keytesville School, which was not a whole lot bigger, but at least they had an elementary school. And that's what my folks chose to do. So I rode the bus with the other kids from Dalton every morning for, oh, I don't know, four years, five years, I guess. Eighth grade and through high school. And it was six miles to Keytesville. In the wintertime, it was dark when we got on and dark when we got off. And it was a kind of Spartan existence. Because for one thing, this hotel had no running water. And it had an outhouse up the hill. And a cistern, there was a cistern for water. But with the outhouse up the hill, we decided—

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

Vance: —that we didn't want to drink anything out of the cistern, so my dad wound up borrowing water or getting water from the tenants on this big farm he had. Which made it kind of tough, you know, it looked kind of silly to have the boss getting water from the tenants, but that's what we had to do. We took baths in a galvanized wash tub. And I don't know if you've ever done that, but it's not very comfortable. I mean, you have to sit with your knees up around your ears. That's the only way you can fit in one of these tubs. So I guess we were poor in the sense that we had a lot of land. He and his brother also were buying a square section of land out in Kansas. So we had a lot of land. And in that sense we were pretty well off, but we didn't have any money at all. So in that sense we were pretty poor. And that went through, all through high school. I never had a car until Marty and I were married. So you know it was a lot different than it is today.

Corrigan: Yeah. Backtracking a little bit, what's your father's name?

Vance: Martin. Martin Benton. And the name is kind of carried on in our family in that our oldest son is Joseph Benton, and our second son, second oldest son, is Edward Martin. And our grandson, one of our grandsons, is named Martin. So that name has kind of carried through. So far, nobody's wanted to name any of them Joel. I'm not sure why.

Corrigan: And what's your mother's name?

Vance: Ann.

Corrigan: Ann. Was it A-n-n, or an e on the end?

Vance: A-n-n. Actually, it was Anna, A-n-n-a, but everybody called her Ann her whole life. And she was from a little town up in northwest Wisconsin, as I said. And it was an interesting family, too. Her folks had eleven kids. She was the youngest daughter of the eleven. And they lived a pretty much pioneer life. They were among the first settlers up in this part of Wisconsin. Came overland in a covered wagon from Ohio. Literally, covered wagon. Settled in this little town of Birchwood. And her mother ran a café for the loggers that were busy cutting down the virgin forest. And her father was both the town marshal and the town bootlegger. I mean, he literally was. And several years ago we were in Birchwood

to do a book signing and a woman came up to me on the street and said, “I knew your grandfather very well.” I never did know him. He died when I was quite young. But she said, “I knew your grandfather quite well. I was his lookout.” And I said, “What do you mean?” Because I never heard about this bootlegger thing. The family was quite protective of the reputation, so they just didn’t talk about it. But she said, “Well, you didn’t know?” And I
5 said, “Know what?” “Well, he was the bootlegger in town. And when the revenuers came, I would ring a dinner bell in our front yard and it would warn him out at his still. And he’d get rid of whatever he had to get rid of.” So I thought that was kind of cool, actually. I mean, I had some interesting relatives. My mother’s clan was kind of a wild bunch, and some of them
10 still are. I mean, the ones that still exist. One of her older brothers was out in the woods—I guess was a logger. And a tree fell on his leg and crushed it. And it was amputated on their kitchen table by the local doctor. And my aunt, one of the older sisters of my mother, saw this happen, watched it happen. She was fourteen at the time. And she was fascinated by this. And she later became an RN. And I still think that’s probably what influenced her to go into
15 medicine. But two of my mother’s other brothers wound up running the local bar in town. Hud and Bud’s Bar. And one of those two brothers later owned a resort and the other one owned a bait shop. So it was very much an outdoor-oriented family. I used to spend my summers when I was a kid in Chicago. I guess all of them in Chicago. Either up there or down on the farm in Missouri with my uncle and aunt. And so, you know, for most of the
20 year I was a city kid. But for several weeks in the summer, I was definitely an outdoor kid.

Corrigan: And what was your mother’s maiden name?

Vance: Soper. S-o-p-e-r.

25

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Corrigan: Is that still a common name up there in Birchwood?

30 Vance: At one time, they pretty much owned the town. My grandmother, after her husband died, was sort of the patriarch of the town and everybody knew her. And then my aunts, two of them, moved back up there from, actually from Chicago. Retired up there. And they were sort of the, I don’t know, the social belles of the town. And so they, yeah, they pretty much dominated the town.

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Corrigan: Okay. Now I’d refer anybody to read your book *Down Home Missouri* to get a full scope of your childhood and how you first came to Dalton and that. But a couple questions I did have, I’m curious to know when you would leave every summer, you would just, you know, you would be gone for several weeks out of the year. What did your friends in
40 Chicago think of it? Because it seems like you were never there in the summer in Chicago, you never spent a summer there.

Vance: Yeah.

45 Corrigan: That you would just disappear and go to Wisconsin or Missouri. Were you the only one that did that? Or was that common?

Vance: I don't know. I mean, I never thought about it. And I actually have never thought about it until you just asked the question. I don't know what they thought. They never said, you know, "where have you been?" They never asked. If they did, I don't remember it at all.

5

Corrigan: I'm just curious, because that's—

Vance: Yeah. I think it's a good question, but I have no answer for it. I don't know. I mean, I just went. And my folks said, you know, "We're going to the farm." Basically leave you there for the summer. Okay. Fine. So we went. And I was there. And came back and went back to school.

10

Corrigan: Okay. By any chance, do you remember the name of the perfume company?

15

Vance: Givaudan. Oh, boy, this is, I'm not sure how to spell it. G-i-v, G-i-v-i-d-a-u-n, I think. Dash Delawanna. And that's like the town in Delaware, I guess. D-e-l-a-w-a-n-a, I believe it is.² I'm sure they still exist. So if you have to—

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Marty Vance: I think it's just Givaudan now. It isn't the full name anymore. I just saw that someplace.

Vance: Could be. You know, this has been sixty years since my dad retired from there. But they had, one of their famous perfumes was Shalimar, which I think still is a viable perfume. But they were involved in the development of several pretty leading brands of perfume.

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Corrigan: And do you know how he got into that job?

Vance: I have no idea. They went to Chicago in the '20s. And could be that it was a job opening and he took it and just gradually worked his way up. I don't know.

30

Corrigan: Okay. Did you have any regular chores as a child?

Vance: Regular what?

35

Corrigan: Chores.

Vance: Oh. Not really. I was a spoiled brat. I mean, I really was. My folks were very permissive. And whatever I wanted to do, that was fine with them. It wasn't that I was a mean kid or anything or I got into trouble, although I did. But I wasn't, I was not regimented in any way. I was only rarely punished. And the only time I can ever remember having to eat soap like Ralphie in *The Christmas Story* was when I cussed some kid out for something. I called him a "son of a b." And I had no idea what I was saying. But I mean, I had heard other people say it. Okay, I said it, too. But my mother heard me. And she washed my mouth out with soap. And that was about as bad as it ever got. They were pretty content to just let me do whatever I wanted. And you know, if the, all of us were that way, all the kids in Chicago. If it

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² Givaudan-Delawanna.

was like, if it had been then like it was today, I don't think we would have survived. But we played out till way after dark. And I used to go down to the Field Museum or the Museum of Science and Industry or the various places like that all by myself. And here I was, I was maybe eight, nine, ten years old. And I'd get on the EL and ride downtown and spend the whole day at the museum and come home. I mean, what parent today would let their kid do that, especially in the city, of any kind. But we never thought anything about it.

Corrigan: And where did you live in proximity to like the Field Museum and that? Did you—

Vance: Well we were on the south side. First of all, I was born on Prairie Avenue, 60-something Street, I think. But then most of the time was around the eightieth block. So we were eighty blocks from downtown. And that's substantial. The Museum of Science and Industry was a lot closer. But not that much closer.

[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

Corrigan: Did your neighborhood have a, did it have a name? The neighborhood? The area?

Vance: Not really. But we were about, oh, three blocks from the Lake, from Lake Michigan. And South Shore Beach was one of the public beaches. And there was a library about two-thirds of the way to the lake. So I just, it was, I had everything I needed. It was perfect. I'd go to the library, or I'd just keep going and go to the lake. And you could swim in the lake then. You weren't afraid of God knows what. Microbes. But it was a great existence. It really was. And earlier, when we lived on Prairie Avenue, we had empty lots. This was during World War Two. And they actually, there was enough kind of empty lot country that the kids could play cowboys and Indians or whatever we wanted to play. And they had victory gardens, all the people that lived there. So it was almost an outdoor existence right in the middle of the city.

Corrigan: Did you guys have a victory garden?

Vance: Oh, yeah. My dad would never be without one. He always had a really good garden. That was, I think, other people would maybe play golf or bowl. Both of which he did, too. But he also, that was his relaxation was to work in the garden.

Corrigan: Did you have a very big yard?

Vance: Well, we didn't have a big yard. We had no yard at all. We were in an apartment building. But there were three apartment buildings. But next to that was about a whole block of just empty lot. It was almost like a prairie. You know, great big field is what it boiled down to. And that's where everybody had their gardens. And they'd have community get togethers where all of the families in these different apartment buildings would get together and have, you know, watermelon and whatever you have on like a Fourth of July type picnic. So it was really almost a bucolic existence right in the middle of a city.

Corrigan: Okay. Do you remember the name of your grade school or elementary school?

Vance: Yeah. Arthur Dixon Elementary School was about, oh, six blocks away. I walked to school winter and summer. Never, there was no such thing as a school bus. You just got there however you wanted to get there. Kind of interestingly, my, our son-in-law's mother, we
5 found out later on, also went to Arthur Dixon School. And I didn't even know that. Ron's mother [directed toward his wife, Marty]. I had no idea until after our daughter and son-in-law were married. And somehow we got to talking and it turned out she'd gone to the same grade school I did.

10 Corrigan: Okay. Do you remember at all how big your class was?

Vance: No. Well, I've got old pictures. And I'd guess, you've seen the pictures, twenty, twenty-five, [directed toward his wife, Marty] maybe, something like that.

15 Corrigan: Okay. So not too large. Okay.

Vance: No. Not big. Not big at all.

20 Corrigan: And you, did you attend, did you always attend there? Did you always live in that same place?

Vance: Yeah. That was the only school I went to.³

25 Corrigan: All right. Do you have any teachers that stick out in your mind at all?

Vance: Not from there, no.

30 Corrigan: What do you remember doing at school? Besides school, was there any activities? Was it a place for, for example, like down here in Missouri, a lot of things that were popular were like plays and pie suppers and things like that. Do you remember any type of, was the school ever used as like a community center?

Vance: If it was, I don't remember it. I was a shy kid, I really was. I was a very shy kid. I don't know any other way to describe it. I was not the one that sat in the front row and raised my hand. I just tried to stay out of sight as much as possible. And I was pretty much introverted in the sense that I read a lot and still do. But I just, I lived within myself a whole lot. But on the other hand, I was always active outside, playing baseball, especially, with the other kids. And we had no formal, in those days, nothing like Little League or any of those
40 formal activities that kids have today. We made up our own fun. And if it was baseball, it was sand lot baseball. We just found a field that was open and we played ball there. No organized teams. And a lot of yelling and hollering and I'll take my bat and go home type of reactions. So as far as the school goes, I don't remember anything. I don't think I was ever in a play in grade school or anything like that. I just don't remember.

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³ When Joel Vance's family moved to Yates Avenue in 1943, he attended Bryn Mawr Elementary School.

Corrigan: Do you remember recess at all?

Vance: Yeah. What I remember about recess—

5 **[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]**

Vance: —was that one of my friends ran into, we were playing some game were you run back and forth. I don't know what it was, some kind of tag type thing. And he ran into a wall with his head and it knocked him out. And I didn't know what to do. It was one of those things where I probably, well it was like Schwartz getting his tongue stuck on the pipe. Again, in the *Christmas Story*. I knew I should do something, but I just stood back and watched him. And finally, a teacher saw what was happening, and I've felt guilty about that for probably 70 years. I really have, I mean, I still, that sticks out in my mind. That's really the only outstanding memory of school.

15 Corrigan: But baseball was king?

Vance: Oh yeah, we loved baseball. Basketball, we had a rim in the alley and we'd shoot a basketball, but it was not a big thing, but baseball we loved.

20 Corrigan: Now you were from the south side. Does that make you a White Sox fan?

Vance: Well yeah, sort of. And I actually went to a Sox game with my dad. I remember that too. We sat way up in the stands and I remember him talking about Luke Appling who is a Hall-of-Famer, and was playing that, it was a night game, playing that night. And I think he led the American league one year in hitting, and I mean, he's a Hall-of-Famer, but dad called him "Old Aches and Pains" and that's what, that was his nickname, that's what everybody called him because he was forever injured in one way or another. But I remember that, and then the only other major league game that I ever went to was when I was in college and worked in Chicago one summer and a friend of mine and I took off work and went to a Cubs game. And make you feel bad if you're a fan now. It costs us \$3.50 to get a box seat right behind third base. I mean, it was, and the Cardinals were, the only reason we went, the Cardinals were playing the Cubs. And I watched Stan Musial hit a line drive that went between second and first base so fast that they didn't even move, they didn't react, and it hit the ivy out in right field so hard that it bounced all the way back to the second baseman and Musial was held to a single. I mean it was an obvious double, but he just, it hit so hard—and I can still see that in my mind, that line drive, just [makes swooshing sound], and it was gone.

40 Corrigan: Against the brick were the ivy is and just popped back.

Vance: Yeah. It just came back so fast that he didn't have time to get to second base. But those are the only two major league games I've ever been to, and I really have no desire to go to any others.

45 Corrigan: By any chance do you remember, did you take your lunch to school each day?

Vance: I think I did. I'm pretty sure I did. But, you know, I have no memory of what my lunch box looked like or anything like that.

5 Corrigan: Oh that's okay. I just didn't know if they provided it, or if you took it each day.

Vance: I don't even think they had hot lunches in those days. If they did I don't remember it.

10 Corrigan: And then you, so you went all the way through eighth grade in Chicago. Is that correct?

Vance: I was. No I went through seventh grade and then when we moved to Missouri I was in the eighth grade.

15 Corrigan: And that was at Keytesville?

Vance: Yes.

Corrigan: Was that the R-3 schools?

20 Vance: I guess, yeah, I guess it was an R-3 then. Actually it wasn't. I don't believe it was. They were still country. Well, put it this way, somewhere along the line they got reorganized after I got in high school, maybe I was a freshman. And the reason I remember is that we got our star basketball player because of the reorganization. He should have been going to Salisbury, because that's all the kids he'd grown up with and kids he went to elementary
25 school with, but instead he got reorganized into our district and wound up being a star for Keytesville and for Central College and still holds the record, the scoring record at Central College. So we lucked out.

30 Corrigan: Now you talk a lot about in your book the transition from Chicago to Dalton and Keytesville, but I'm curious. Knowing that you and your mother did not want to go to New York City, and the alternative was you had to go to Dalton. Did you, were you excited? I mean, or was it the, I guess the best of, you know, the two options you had, it was the best. Did you, I guess my question is: were you excited to go to Keytesville? Did you look at it openly like, "Hey this is a new adventure?" Or was it a—
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[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]

Corrigan: —it's not Chicago, but it's definitely not New York City.

40 Vance: Well, no, I didn't have a feeling of I was a city kid going down with a bunch of hicks. I never thought of it that way at all. And excited in the sense that yeah, it's a whole new world and a whole new life. But I think I wasn't quite to the stage of my life where everything was an adventure to be enjoyed. I was intimidated by the fact that I wasn't going to know anybody. I take it back. I had a cousin that I would be going to school with. But
45 other than that, I didn't know anybody. And I would have to make a whole new circle of

friends and have to leave my old friends behind. And that was bothersome. But on the other hand, I figured well, you know, it's a new thing and make the best of it.

5 Corrigan: Okay. I wanted to know what your—you had mentioned in your book about fishing with your father off the pier. Was that a particular pier in Chicago, or where did you guys go to go fishing?

10 Vance: Well, I couldn't tell you which pier it was because I don't remember. But it was obviously on Lake Michigan. And there were a lot of different piers that went out into the lake. And it was reasonably close to our house, our apartment. And we went there quite often. And my dad loved to fish and had always been a fisherman, especially after he married my mother. Going on vacations in Birchwood, that is what he did. He went up there to fish. And when we'd go to the lake, we would fish for two things. What we called lake herring, which are ciscos, and lake perch. Those two were the fish of choice. And we'd take a bucket
15 of minnows and fish off the pier. And we always caught some fish. And those are probably two of the best eating fish that exist. They're just wonderful. And I think I wrote about one time catching what was at that time a big cisco or a lake herring. And everybody was, oh, boy, very complimentary. And all these older fishermen, "Nice fish, kid. That's great." And, "Look at that! Wow, that's a big one. I never caught one that—" All that stuff they say. And I
20 was just all puffed up. That was great. And that was my triumph as far as fishing goes. But we always caught fish. And we just had a good time.

Corrigan: So the fish were plentiful back then? You never had a problem?

25 Vance: Yeah. No. Yeah, they were plentiful. We never caught any big fish, either. This was before they stocked salmon in Lake Michigan. We never caught any walleyes or anything like that. But those two species were very plentiful.

30 Corrigan: You just caught them with regular minnows?

Vance: Caught them normally with minnows. I think we might have used some worms. But mostly minnows.

35 Corrigan: And was that the major activity, the outdoor activity that you guys did was fish?

Vance: It was in Chicago, yeah. That was really the only outdoor activity other than like I told you, playing in the field.

40 Corrigan: Yeah. But as an outdoor activity with like nature or that, it was fishing and it was always off the pier?

45 Vance: But my nature exposure was mostly at the library. Going to check out books on nature. I don't know, I guess probably because of my summers spent in Birchwood and down on the farm, I just developed a real love for the outdoors. And especially the adventure type outdoors. So I read Jack London and I read Rex Beach and other authors that were involved in writing the tales of adventure. And in those days, there were magazines that they called

men's magazines, but they weren't at all like a *Playboy* or *Hustler* or whatever. They were about hunting and fishing and outdoor adventure. There was *Blue Book* and *Argosy* and there were some other magazines that I don't remember. And my dad and my grandfather and other people had subscriptions. And boy, I went through those like they were candy. They were just, I loved them and I would sit there and read those tales of derring-do and encounters with wolves and grizzly bears and all that. Boy, I thought that was wonderful.

Corrigan: And was that a Chicago public library?

Vance: Yeah. Yeah. It was just down the street from us. It was probably four blocks away.

Corrigan: Were your parents avid readers?

Vance: Yes. Always. And they belonged to probably the book of the month. They were forever getting books. Since those were the only books around, the ones I grew up with—

[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]

Vance: —a lot of the time were very adult books in the sense that they were not kids' books at all. But I read them because that's what was there. And I also read the kids' books of the day, which *The Hardy Boys* was an especial favorite. Plus all these adventure books. And a guy named Jim Kjelgaard. Kjelgaard? How does he pronounce that? We found out [directed toward his wife, Marty].

Marty: Kjelgaard is what we said.

Vance: Well, that's what we say. It's K-j-e-l-g-a-a-r-d. And he wrote many, many books of, they were young adult books. And I loved those. And oh, Albert Payson Terhune's books about his noble collies, I read those things to the point where I just knew the dogs better than I knew a lot of the kids in our neighborhood. That's the type of book that I read. And I read a lot.

Corrigan: Okay. So we're going to skip a big chunk here because you cover basically all of Keytesville and Dalton in the book. But one thing I wanted to cover is kind of moving forward a little bit to the University of Missouri was, well, neither of your parents went to college, so you would have been the first one. Was that talked about early on that you would attend at all? Or was that, going in high school, did you have an idea or did your parents ever talk with you about what you were going to do?

Vance: They knew what I was going to do, because I told them. I never wanted to be anything but a writer. I mean, from the very first time that I even thought about some sort of a career, it was to be a writer. And the more I read in high school the famous writers, mostly of the 1920s, the Algonquin Round Table and Hemingway and Fitzgerald and people like that, the more I read them, the more I wanted to be like them. Of course, I'm not, but I wanted to be. There was never any doubt but what I would go to J School. Just, that's just what I wanted to do.

Corrigan: So you attended the School of Journalism here for your undergraduate degree. And you graduated I have here in 1956. Is that correct?

5 Vance: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Corrigan: Okay. So you had always wanted to go, you always wanted to be a writer, so it made sense going into journalism. Do you think at the time there, do you think the program prepared you for that?

10

Vance: You mean the J School program?

Corrigan: Yes.

15 Vance: For being a newspaperman, yes. That's what I went into. And also for learning to write accurately and quickly. And in, I guess, journalistic style, because that's what I did. That's what they taught me to do. It was and of course still is a great journalism school. But it was a whole lot less, what, huge than it is now. For example, and it's a story I tell often, and I still am trying to figure out why it happened. Like I said, I was a shy kid. And that
20 carried into, well, until I took a psychology class and found out there's such a thing as an extrovert introvert. I always figured you're either introverted or you're extroverted. And I'm both. I can sit here and bullshit all day long and not be intimidated by it. But on the other hand, I'm still, as Marty can tell you, I like to get off by myself and not be a social person. But at any rate, when I went into J school, I was still kind of sitting in the back of the class and not raising my hand. And I knew instinctively and by reading that you don't do that if
25 you're a newspaperman. You better be out front and be able to ask questions and be up front. So I was kind of prepared to do that. But in those days, everybody that went into the news editorial part of J school had a beat. And the beat generally boiled down to they'd send you out to a two block square area of Columbia and say, "Knock on doors and see if you can get some news items." I mean, you know, it's a terrible thing. But on the other hand it does, it's
30 kind of like being a door to door salesman. You better be able to meet people and talk to them, because that's what you're going to be doing. No assignment at all. You just go out there and knock on doors and see if they—

35 **[End Track 7. Begin Track 8.]**

Vance: —got something that would work in the newspaper. And I lucked out and I found some people on my beat, which was down in this part of town, I guess a little farther east, who worked for the university. And Bill Elder was the director of maybe the fish and wildlife
40 part of the university. And he was on my beat. And they had had a big bird kill out at KOMU tower, a whole bunch of birds ran into the tower and were killed. And so I wrote a story about that, which made the front page. And I don't know if that had any influence or not. But when it came time to give, there were about five prime beats on the *Missourian* at that time. And one of them was city hall and police department and city council and the school board.
45 And I got the school board. Knew nothing whatsoever about the Columbia schools or the program or the issues or anything. And I didn't have a car. And I walked to the school, where

they held the school board meetings, which is almost out to Old 40 or old, it's not 40, the highway.

Corrigan: Old 63? Or?

5

Vance: Well, no, the one that goes east and west. Isn't it? I don't know, whatever it is. It's now I-70, but the one where—

Corrigan: Prior to I-70, yeah.

10

Vance: Ellis Fischel and all that is. And I'd have to walk all the way out there and cover a school board meeting. And then walk all the way back to Cramer Hall, which was my dorm, and write the story. And have it ready for the newspaper the next morning. And that was tough. I mean, it still would be. But the first school board meeting I remember very well because a reporter from the *Columbia Tribune*, whose name I've totally forgotten, got me aside after the meeting and said, "Do you know what's important and what's not?" And I said, "I have no idea." And he essentially told me what I should write. He said, "This was important, and that," he told me the whole thing. I don't know whether it was out of compassion or what. But he basically got me squared away to the point where I could then know who to talk to and what to try and find out about. And then when I was a senior I had two semesters and got two of the other three really prime beats. I had, I think, the police department, the city hall, I'm not sure what they were. I don't even remember for sure. But they were out of the like four or five prime beats, I had three of them in J school. And the guy that assigned these beats to me, his name's Dick Massa. And he was the, I suppose would have been a graduate assistant in the newsroom. And years later, when I was with the Conservation Department, I went down to Missouri Southern at Joplin to do a give a program. And it turned out that Dick Massa was the head of their communications department down there at the time. And I said, you know, I introduced myself and I said, "I used to be one of your students." And I said, "For years and years I wondered about this, and I hope you can tell me why of all the possible students that you had in your newsroom, why did I get these three prime beats?" Because I didn't think of myself as that promising a student. And he said, "I don't know. I have no idea." So I still don't know why I got those beats, but I did. And it was a making of me. And while I was there at the *Missourian*, I realized that they didn't have an outdoor column. And I thought man, I love to hunt and fish. So I started one called Fur, Fish and—

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Marty: Fur, Fins and Feathers.

Vance: Fur, Fin and Feathers. That was it. Fur, Fin and Feathers. And it ran while I was in school. I don't know, I think they deep-sixed it the minute I graduated. But that was my first outdoor writing, at least that got published.

40

Corrigan: Okay. So you did work at the *Missourian*. And that was all unpaid, right? That was just—

45

Vance: Oh, yeah. (laughs)

Corrigan: That was all just your student class work there. Did you ever have a job at the university, though?

5 Vance: No. Well, yeah, I did. Come to think of it. I worked in the library. And I worked there for two years. And I got chewed out by the librarian whose name I don't remember. Because I spent more time in the stacks reading old *New Yorkers* than I did filing books or whatever I was supposed to be doing. Yeah, I had to confess, yes I did.

10 **[End Track 8. Begin Track 9.]**

Vance: But boy, I got a real liberal education. And I mean, I started way back. Because I loved the Algonquin Round Table writers. Dorothy Parker and Robert Benchley and that whole group that got together at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City. I just loved their writing. And they were mostly the founding writers of the *New Yorker*. So when I found bound copies of the *New Yorker* in the library, I thought this is hog heaven. And I just started with their first issue and read my way till I got caught at it. And that kind of cooled my enthusiasm. It was either quit reading the *New Yorker* or get fired. And I needed the money. So I went back to work.

20 Corrigan: So was your job to shelve books in that, basically?

Vance: Mostly just shelving books, yeah.

25 Corrigan: Was that here in Ellis, or—

Vance: Yeah. In Ellis. Yeah.

Corrigan: Just upstairs in the library.

30 Vance: Right upstairs.

Corrigan: Okay. So that was the only other—was that your first paying job?

35 Vance: No.

Corrigan: Besides like farm work. You had talked about detasseling and things.

40 Vance: Detasseling seed corn was—

Corrigan: But outside of moving off the farm, or moving from Dalton and that, was that your first paying job?

45 Vance: Well actually I worked, there were two grocery stores in Dalton. Why, I don't know, because it could hardly support one. But there were two of them. And I worked in the B and J Grocery as a clerk. And did that for quite a while. It was mostly a summer job. I probably did

it for a couple of years when I was in high school. And that was a whole lot more agreeable than detasseling seed corn. But I'm not sure why they finally, why I finally didn't work there anymore. But I didn't.

5 Corrigan: Going back to the university here, being a graduate and that, is there anything today that sticks out in your mind from back then. Whether it be an activity that was held at the university, whether it be a sporting event, whether it was a class or a place on campus or, looking back as an alumni, is there something that you're like I, "I really like to walk by there or I really like to go there or I really like to attend there"? I just am curious what sticks
10 out in your mind today.

Vance: Well, if it was still there, it would be Andy's Corner. But it's not. It has been plowed under by the whole Rock Bridge complex. Andy's Corner was owned by, this was a bar out south of town, about where the Rock Bridge Center is. Actually it's Murray's has a plaque
15 that says, "The site of Andy's Corner." I don't know if it was or not because it's hard to tell, because highways have all changed and it's totally different. But Andy's was a, had been a kind of a rural bar where all the old farmers came in and drank beer. And two guys from my home town, from Keytesville bought it. The Foster brothers, Billy Dale and C.R., I guess was the older one. And Billy Dale lives here in Columbia now. Billy Dale Foster. And they
20 bought this bar. And so we obviously would patronize it because it was the home town boys. And I remember another kid and I served bar, tended bar there one time. We weren't either one of us old enough to drink beer. But we did. As I remember, Billy Dale was the bartender that night. And he wanted to go take some girl out or something like that. And he asked if we'd just look after the bar while he was gone. And we did and didn't get caught at it,
25 fortunately. But we used to go to Andy's Corner all the time. Marty and I dated and went there. That was one of the prime places on campus at the time. I mean, I hate to say that my memories are all of the bars, but they were. The Shack, obviously, was, you know, everybody's hangout. And oh, I'm just trying to think, any of the others that were particularly noteworthy. But Andy's and The Shack were probably 90 percent of the places I went.

30 Corrigan: As a side note, have you been to the new student center to see what they kind of, they call it Mort's, after Mort Walker—

35 Vance: Yeah, I know, I mean, they don't serve beer, either.

Corrigan: No, no, no. But how they recreated the, or, I mean, it's a brand new place but it's definitely on The Shack look where they carved into all the tables and everything. I wondered if you had seen that.

40 Vance: Well, take it from me. You have never seen the original Shack. But take it from me, there is no way on God's green earth they could recreate The Shack.

Corrigan: Okay.

45 Vance: I worked with Jim Auckley at the department, conservation department. Shared an office with him. And Jim had worked at The Shack when he was in—

[End Track 9. Begin Track 10.]

5 Vance: —college. And they had a pet cockroach. And you know, I said, “Well, how can you tell one from another? Pretty much all look alike, don’t they?” But he said, “Well, I don’t know. It just come out when we were cooking hamburgers and everything.” And that was The Shack. If you want it summed up in one sentence that was The Shack. So there’s no way that an antiseptic place could recreate it.

10 Corrigan: Yeah. So that’s what sticks out in your mind, Andy’s Corner and The Shack.

Vance: Mm hmm.

15 Corrigan: Okay. And then you mentioned, so is that where you two met, then, was here at the university?

Vance: Uh huh.

20 Corrigan: Because you mentioned you went on a date there.

Vance: Well, we didn’t go on a date here. Actually Marty’s from Macon. And my folks had moved from Dalton to Macon somewhere, well, I guess I was a sophomore in college. And they bought a place up on the Macon Lake. Or they didn’t buy it, they rented it. But I didn’t know anybody in Macon. And I wanted a date. And one of the guys in our dorm was from
25 Macon, a friend of mine. And he said that he knew this girl who had just broken up with her boyfriend. And so I said, “Well, could you get, could you kind of be the intermediary and get a date for me, and we’ll double date?” Which is what ultimately happened. But it was in Macon where Marty and I and this other couple went out for the first time. And then we dated for three or four months, five months. Then got engaged. And got married that fall. So
30 we started dating in what, about March, February, March, April, and got married in September.

Corrigan: And what year would you have been here? Was that your—

35 Vance: ’56, senior year.

Corrigan: Oh, senior year. Okay. Okay. And what were you studying?

40 Marty: Well—

Vance: Education.

Marty: Education, I guess. Yeah. In my third year. So I never finished here.

45 Corrigan: Okay. But you were studying in education.

Marty: Uh uh.

Corrigan: Okay. So you graduated in '56. So you're already, you're married at this time. You didn't have any children.

5

Vance: We didn't get married while we were in college. Right after I graduated.

Corrigan: Oh. Right after. So then, because your first job, I believe, was at *The Journal* in Montgomery, Alabama.

10

Vance: Right.

Corrigan: Could you tell me, how did that come about? You graduated here from the J school. And then—

15

Vance: Well, I had to go in the army at the—in the fall. I graduated in April, May, rather. And I had to go in the army in, I believe, September. So I needed a job to get started. And through J school to job placement, this was it. I had been asked if I was interested in the *Chicago Tribune* outdoor editor's job. And being from Chicago, and being an outdoor columnist for the *Missourian*, I thought, well, you know, I've got that knocked. But the guy said at that time, I think his name was, oh, boy, I can't remember. But anyway, the then outdoor editor needed an assistant because he was thinking about retirement. And whoever he hired would then take over the outdoor page. And he said, "I can't wait. I've got to have somebody right now." So I lost that opportunity. But probably was the best thing that ever happened because I would not have wanted to spend my life in Chicago. At any rate, the *Journal* job was open. So I grabbed at that and went to Montgomery.

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25

Corrigan: So it was before Montgomery that you had the military service?

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Vance: No. Afterward. Well, in between, actually. I went down for the summer and then came back to it when I got out of the service. I was only in for six months. It was kind of a neat, I was in ROTC. And they asked our preference, whether we wanted six months of active duty and six or eight years, six years, I think, of reserve duty, or two years of active duty and I think four years or two years of reserve. And I opted for the least amount of active

35

duty. And if I could have gotten six days, I would have gone for that. And out of our whole class, there were only three of us that got six months. The rest of them all went on for two years. And we went to Fort Bliss in Texas, which was an anti-aircraft artillery post. And most of the people that went down there were in missile training. At that time, that was the big thing. But we got stuck in the old guns, akak guns—

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[End Track 10. Begin Track 11.]

Vance: —quad 40s and twin 50s, I think, they were, caliber guns. And it was kind of fun in a way in that we'd get to shoot at these, what they called R-cats. They were radio-controlled little planes. Pretty good-sized little planes that they'd fly by remote control. You know, you'd shoot at them like they were enemy planes. And it was kind of like quail hunting

45

again. I really enjoyed that, because you're burning up a lot of ammunition and making a lot of noise. And we shot down, I don't know if we were just lucky or what, but they had like four or five of them and they cost a lot of money because they were, you know, elaborate model airplanes. And we shot down all of them in about an hour. And the instructor was
5 really ticked off at us because we'd ruined his whole day. He didn't know what to do with the rest of the day. And plus we'd burned up all his targets and he wasn't very happy about it.

Corrigan: So you did that for six months, active duty and then you were in the reserves for six years?

10

Vance: Six years. Six or eight. I can't remember which it was.

Marty: Six years, I think it was.

15 Vance: I stayed in, actually, for thirteen years in the National Guard. And didn't get out until 1969, when I came to Jeff City. And I kind of had to choose whether to stay in the Guard. By that time I was freelancing outdoor stuff quite a bit. So it was almost like having three fairly full time job. The Guard took up a lot of time. And the freelance writing was what I really
20 wanted to do and it took up a lot of time. Plus working at the conservation department. And I just decided it was time to get out. I was a battery commander when I left Mexico. Captain. And I also would have had to make major or they would have dropped me from, I mean, I had to be promoted or get out one way or another. And I just decided to resign my commission.

25 Corrigan: It's at the, did you have to do, since you're in the reserves, was that the, kind of like today where it's one weekend a month, two weeks a year?

Vance: Yeah.

30 Corrigan: Okay.

Vance: Yeah. We protected Minnesota from invasion by Iowa or whatever. And then we'd go to Camp Ripley in Minnesota. One year we went to Wyoming, to Camp Guernsey in Wyoming. Every time our firing batteries would shoot around, they'd start a forest fire and
35 we'd have to go put it out. And that was basically the whole two weeks was almost shoot one round and then spend the rest of the day or the night putting out a forest fire. So I got a little training in forest fire fighting, which I never want to do again.

Corrigan: But you were outdoors, though. (laughs)

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Vance: I was outdoors, yeah. One of our sergeants, one of my sergeants came in one night and said, "Sir, we've got venison for the whole battery tomorrow." And it turned out he and some of his other guys—this was almost like a MASH unit. I mean, they were irreverent—
45 they went out, jacklighted a deer. And we had venison. They butchered it along the highway or road, gravel road, and brought the meat in and the cooks fixed it the next night for dinner for everybody. And our battalion colonel said, "Where did this meat come from?" I said,

“Well, I think we got a special issue from the quartermaster. I’m not quite sure.” And he damn well knew where it came from, but he didn’t say anything. Just ate his venison along with the rest of us. (laughter)

5 Corrigan: Okay. So you were out of the reserves in 1969. So I want to ask you about what you did at the *Journal* at Montgomery, in Montgomery, but we’re right at the one-hour mark, so let’s go ahead and take a few minute break here.

Vance: Okay. [pause in recording]

10

Corrigan: —couple things down you did. Okay, we took a little bit of break there. We were talking about you took the job in Montgomery, Alabama, at the *Journal*. I had that you worked down there from 1956 to ’59. Is that about—

15 Vance: Yeah. That’s, well actually ’57 is when I got out of the army early, early, mid- spring or late spring and was there until 1959.

Corrigan: Now I have that you worked on the copy desk, you were a reporter, and occasionally you were the editorial writer. But could you talk about what you did there?

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Vance: Well, most of my work was on the copy desk. That’s what I was hired to do. But I would do the occasional reporting story. The *Journal* was the poor relation of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, which was the morning paper. And we were the afternoon paper. And I think we only existed to keep competition—

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[End Track 11. Begin Track 12.]

Vance: —out of Montgomery, competition for the *Advertiser*. Because they got all the money and the *Journal* was pretty much a collection of old kind of washed up people, and
30 young hopeful type people like me that couldn’t get a job anywhere else. And it was a motley assortment. They don’t even exist anymore. The paper’s gone under. It was an interesting mix. The copy desk was my favorite spot, because first of all, that’s where I worked. But this was in the old days when they had a horseshoe-shaped desk. And the copy editor sat inside this horseshoe and they called that the slot. And then we were the rim people. And he would
35 decide what he wanted to do with any given wire story. Pass it out to one of us, whoever’s available, and say, you know, “Cut it down to such and such size. Write a headline for it of such and such size.” They told us what to do. And there were, I think there were four of us on the rim. Ed Mohr was the slot man. And Ed had been a radio announcer, but he’d been at the *Journal* for quite a while. And Ed was a fascinating guy. He was very urbane. Dressed like,
40 oh, a Southern gentleman, I guess, in the lightweight suits. And just always impeccably dressed. He would come in promptly at eight o’clock in the morning. Sit down, take his jacket off. Hang it up, sit down. And he would work until I think it was three o’clock in the afternoon. And vanish. It was almost like he dematerialized right there. And from what I heard, he went right across the street to the nearest, to the bar that was across the street. Had
45 a couple of martinis, and then he went home. And he lived with an old doctor who had actually bragged that he had delivered Nell Rankin, who was a leading soprano at the

Metropolitan Opera. And Ed was an opera fan. And one of the other guys on the rim, Arch McKay, also was an opera fan. So they kind of introduced me to opera. And it was either learn about opera or, I guess, be ostracized, I don't know. But I became a lifelong opera fan, especially Italian opera, by listening to these guys. And Ed would, they would talk about opera like other people would talk about baseball. They knew who was doing what and who was leading, the whole thing. And it was fascinating. And Archie was married to a blind woman who had a seeing-eye dog. And she had been to Morrystown to the seeing-eye school to learn how to operate her dog. And during that long summer that I was separated from Marty and from Missouri before I had to go into the service, they would occasionally invite me over. And Archie and Lou were pretty much beer and pretzel type people, whereas Ed was more the martini and hors d'oeuvres type, very sophisticated. But I'd go over to Archie and Lou's and listen to opera and drink a couple of Jax beers. And that was the high point, believe me, of that summer, which was otherwise miserable. I lived in a rooming house. Had a, not an apartment, it was a room in the upstairs part of this old Montgomery house. And downstairs there were like four or five girls that had various rooms. So you know, it sounded like a paradise, one guy and four or five girls. But the house mother, if you want to call her that, was a kind of a dragon. And she wasn't about to have this guy close to these girls. She found out I was engaged, so I guess that was okay, I wasn't going to mess with her girls. But it was hot. I didn't have, I had a fan but I had no air conditioning. It was just, it was kind of miserable. And I was glad to get out of Montgomery when the time came to go to the service. But then I came back there after the service, again because it was the job I had, not necessarily the job I wanted. And Marty and I were there. We got married and almost immediately we went down, moved down to Montgomery. And I was—

25 **[End Track 12. Begin Track 13.]**

Vance: —there for the next, what, year and a half, I guess.

30 Corrigan: So you were married in fifty—

Vance: In '56. September, '56.

Marty: September, '56.

35 Vance: And so we basically spent, we had a honeymoon at the Lake of the Ozarks. That was all we could—we couldn't even really afford that. I mean, we had no money. Zero money. I did have a job. That didn't pay much, but it paid enough to live on. That was about it.

40 Marty: We got to see what's his name in Montgomery.

Vance: Yeah, I got to see Martin Luther King. He was at that time the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. And they had, this was in the interim between the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which he organized and which he was the leader of. And it had just ended when I moved to Montgomery. And it was before the Selma freedom marches and all the real unrest. But it was a tense time in racial relations, especially in Montgomery. There were no real overt incidents, but there was always this underlying kind of like a high tension wire. You

can almost feel the vibrations. And just as an example, Auburn got put on football probation for recruiting violations. And the editor at, sports editor at the *Montgomery Journal* swore up and down it was a Yankee plot. Because by God, Auburn's got a better team than any of them Yankee teams, so we're going to get them one way or another. And that kind of attitude was pretty prevalent. And it was really kind of, in a way it was a progressive newspaper. The *Advertiser* was owned by Grover Hall, whose father had won a Pulitzer Prize for opposing the Ku Klux Klan back in the 1920s, probably. But they had no black employees. And it was strictly a segregated community. But on the other hand, their attitudes were probably a little bit better than the worst of the worst, which were, in those days, the Klan and the White Citizens Council. And I did go to a Klan meeting, or Klan rally one night with a reporter, just because I wanted to see what the heck those people did. And they held it in the parking lot of a supermarket. And burned a cross, did all the stupid things that the Klan does. And I, Joe, oh, I can't remember his last name, his first name was Joe, was from New Orleans and he was Catholic. And that particular night, the Klan, whoever the speaker was, was concentrating on anti-Catholic hatred rather than anti-black. And Joe was pretty upset by that. He was kind of a neat guy anyway. I think his attitudes were better than most. And we were standing there listening to this guy spouting off. And some little kid ran by just as he got right in front of us he just projectile vomited. Just, [makes vomiting noise] and that was it. And Joe said, "That seems about right." (laughter) So that's one of my few memories of Montgomery that is almost a highlight.

Corrigan: And where did you say you saw Martin Luther King?

Vance: On Dexter Avenue. They held a march to the Capitol. And I'm not sure what, whether it was a protest march or just a solidarity thing, but—

Marty: They were upset because a black boy got, what, was going to be put to death because he supposedly touched a white woman or something like that?

Vance: Well, it could have been. I don't remember the reason.

Marty: It was some little thing like that. And they were upset about it.

Vance: You know, so they held a march. And he was there, obviously, and Ralph Abernathy who was, at that time, sort of the leader of the Birmingham contingent of probably the NAACP, was there. I was close. Could have gotten closer if I wanted to. I stood on the sidewalk and watched this march go all the way up to the Capitol up Dexter Avenue. And later on I saw the White Citizens Council have an effigy hanging on Dexter Avenue. They had, I wrote an editorial about that. They held an effigy. And that may have been in protest of the desegregation ruling. I'm not sure what that was all about. But the cops just stood there and watched it happen. And it was pretty disgusting. And I heard some little kid—

[End Track 13. Begin Track 14.]

Vance: —tugging at, it was a little girl, I think, tugging at her mom's dress. And saying, "Mom, what's this all about?" And her mother said, "I don't know, honey. I have no idea."

And that quote stuck in my mind. There was some other racial incident I'm trying to think of. I mean, this all began to wear on me. It just really was getting me down. And even though it wasn't as bad as it would get, it was bad enough for me to want to get out of there. And Marty's sister called and said that the *Mexico Ledger* was looking for a sports editor. They just, guy had just moved on to the *Post-Dispatch*. And was I interested? Well, up to that point I had not been interested in being a sportswriter. But it was a job in Missouri. It paid more. And it was a chance to get out of the South. So we took it. I called up Bob White, the publisher and editor of the *Mexico Ledger* and said I would take the job. And was there for the next thirteen years, I think? Thirteen? Well—

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Marty: No, it wasn't that long.

Vance: Let's see, '59, '60, no, ten years.

15

Marty: Ten years, yeah.

Vance: '59 to '69.

20

Corrigan: Yeah, that's what I had, '59 to '69. Because I had read in an article somebody had wrote once that they asked you why you left Alabama. And the reason you gave was because you couldn't stand grits and, you couldn't stand grits and the prejudice in the state.

25

Vance: Yeah. Well. I was making a joke, obviously, although I don't like grits. But that wasn't, I could have lived with the grits. But I couldn't live with the racial attitudes. I just—

Corrigan: Yeah. So just wore on you after a while? But you also mention your salary. At the time, I mean, were reporters' salaries pretty dismal back then?

30

Vance: Oh, yeah. Sixty-five dollars a week. That was it. I made fifty a week detasseling seed corn. So it was almost as much doing menial labor as it was working for the *Alabama Journal*. And I got bumped up to 85 at the *Mexico Ledger*, which was a substantial jump. I mean, in those days, you could get by with that kind of a salary. It wasn't much. But it was enough that we were able to save money enough to make a down payment on a house and buy a car. And we bought a brand new Ford station wagon, 8-cylinder station wagon for \$2800. That today would be \$40,000, probably. So a dollar went a lot farther then.

35

Corrigan: So you left and went to work at the Missouri, or the Mexico, Missouri, evening *Ledger*.

40

Vance: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: Is that the name of it? And you were the sports editor there. What kind of sports did you cover?

45

Vance: Everything.

Corrigan: Okay.

5 Vance: I say everything. But a lot of the things that today are in schools, we didn't have then. Soccer was a prime example. Today everybody's got soccer or volleyball teams. They, we didn't have them. Most schools around were either, well, they were football, track and basketball. Those were the things. And girls' sports, we didn't cover them at all.

Corrigan: But you did cover high school sports—

10 Vance: Yeah. Just high school and the university. That was Missouri. I didn't cover any of the other colleges, because there was just not enough of me. But—

Corrigan: Yeah. Did you pick up anything ever for like what was going on with the Cardinals? Or what was going on, was that just—

15 Vance: I used wire stuff for that.

Corrigan: Okay. All right.

20 Vance: That was—

Corrigan: So mostly is that what was, I know from your book in Keytesville, basketball was king. What was the sport, was it football or was it basketball in Mexico?

25 Vance: It was both, really. They had a pretty good football team. They had a really good basketball team. Gary Filbert was the coach at the time.

Corrigan: Filbert?

30 Vance: Gary Filbert.

Corrigan: Filbert. Okay.

35 Vance: Who wound up being the director of the Show-Me State Games. Just died not too awful long ago. And Gary and I got to be really good friends. We went canoeing together once, I remember. And we were really good friends. And I've got a couple of good stories about him. He used to motivate his team. If I wrote, if the basketball team played a lousy game, I'd write about it. And I'd say, you know, I wouldn't put it quite so bluntly, but I let everybody know that they were sub par. And so the next game, Gary would motivate the team by saying, "Are you going to let that little son of a bitch write about you like that?" And they [growing], "No, we're not!"

[End Track 14. Begin Track 15.]

45 Vance: And they'd go out and they'd win. (laughter) And one of the players told me about it. Well, actually it was one of the players that I hired as an assistant. I finally got Bob White to

spring for enough money to, so I could hire a kid to help me, especially on Saturdays when there was, Friday night games were a ton of them, and it was hard to cover them. So I got one of the basketball players to help me gather scores and everything. Joe Bailey told me about Gary's motivational speeches. But my favorite story still is about this kid from Morocco who was hardly older than I was. But he was the coach of the Moroccan national basketball team. And somehow he came to Mexico on some sort of program. And he got to learn about American basketball so that he could take all these skills back to Morocco. French Morocco. Name was Moktar and I have no idea what else. It was just Moktar. So Gary and I were talking about this kid showing up. And Gary said, I don't know if he asked me if I knew any French or I said, he said, I think what he said, "He only speaks French. He knows a little English, but he's not comfortable with it." And I said, "Well, geez, I had 15 hours of French in college." "You're my interpreter." You know, my God, I only had mostly written French. I didn't have conversational French. But I had my French/English dictionary. So anyway, Gary went to Saint Louis to pick up Moktar at the airport. And in the meantime, the Filberts, his wife, especially, organized a kind of a welcoming party. And there was an awful lot of beer at this party. So by the time and it was a really cold night. I mean, I think it was February and it was like 20 degrees. So here's this poor kid from a desert country who shows up in Saint Louis and its 20 degrees. Somebody in a strange country. And he can't speak the language. And Gary brings him back to this party where we've all got pretty well oiled on beer by the time he gets there. He probably was Muslim and didn't drink on top of everything else. And of course we're all hail fellow well met. And I've often wondered since then what he thought about this welcome to the United States. And then we go to, Gary came over to Columbia, to University High. Why, I don't know. But he wanted Moktar to meet Kent Kurtz, who was the basketball coach at U high. And they were going to talk about basketball. And the very first thing was Gary says to me, "Tell Moktar how Kent runs a fast break." And I said, "Fast? I don't even know what the French for that is." So I'm looking up "fast" and "break." All Moktar could say was, "Fast break? I do not understand." And we just had this mostly sign language and pointing and great dramatic gestures. And that's the way we communicated for the time that he was in this country. And I've often thought, wonder what happened to Moktar.

Corrigan: And how long was he here?

Vance: Oh, just a few days. Like five or six days, I suppose.

Corrigan: A few days, okay. So just a visit.

Henry: I'm sorry Jeff I've got to head out to class. I'm sorry.

Corrigan: Okay.

Vance: But that was my—

Corrigan: Hold on one second.

[pause in recording]

Corrigan: But anyways, okay, let's start back up again. Okay, so we took a little break there. Bethany's now left to go to class. But, so you write at the *Mexico Ledger*. You're working there. You work there until 1969. And then you switch to the Missouri Department of
5 Conservation. And I wrote down here that you work for 22 years there. Could you tell me how that came about? How the job came about and how that transition was from sports to outdoor writing, which you hadn't probably done since you were at the *Missourian* here.

Vance: Not, well, yes and no. I wrote some feature articles for the *Ledger* on the outdoors.
10 And I wrote a series on pollution problems around Mexico. There were some water pollution things. It was a series that I kind of took it upon myself to do it because I was interested in environmental things and in conservation. And it won an award from the Outdoor Writers Association. And Jim Keefe, who was the head of the, what at that time was the information section at the conservation department saw it. And he—his newsman had just left for another
15 job. So he needed a newsman. And he got in touch—

[End Track 15. Begin Track 16.]

Vance: —with me. I had been looking for a job as an outdoor editor for about, I don't know,
20 maybe even a year. And I'd applied to a lot of small newspapers around the Midwest in areas that had good hunting and fishing. But I found out that these newspapers all had either existing outdoor editors who were not about to retire, or they had some old guy. But there always was a young reporter who was just waiting for the old guy to retire or die. And if I wanted to be an outdoor editor, I was going to have to start at the bottom and wait ten or
25 fifteen or twenty years for an opening. So this job at the department came along. And I was torn. You know, I didn't, I was, I had never worked for the state. I had always worked for private organizations. Still wanted to be an outdoor editor. But on the other hand, this was outdoor writing. I would be producing a news package for the department. And be able to write for the *Conservationist* magazine. So finally I said yes that I would take it. And I think
30 it came down to Keefe saying, "I need somebody and you better make a decision or it's going to be too late." So I said yes, okay. And we moved to Jeff City and spent the next twenty-two years there.

Corrigan: Okay. And could you talk a little bit about your work with the department? How
35 that process went? How your projects came about or what you decided to write on?

Vance: Okay. Well first of all, my job was to produce a news package for the, all the media, news outlets in the state. Newspapers, probably, I guess, probably radio and television. They all got this package called All Outdoors. And the way I set it up, I really didn't know what
40 had gone before. I didn't pay that much attention. I was going to do it my way. My way was to have one or sometimes two what I would call major stories that might run a page and a half of copy or two pages about some issue that, or a feature type article that would be of interest. And then a couple or three short two or three-paragraph items that would serve as good fillers, because newspapers always were looking for filler items. And at least one of
45 those short ones I always tried to make a humor type article or piece. And I would read through the agent narratives each month. They had to turn in a report, a narrative. And a lot

of times it would be something funny like maybe an agent would stop some guy who was fishing and say check him and he would be legal. And then the kid would say, “Well how about those little—” The man’s son would say, “How about those little bass in your cooler?” Or something like that. Get Daddy caught. And the agent would write these down as a kind
5 of a humorous aside. And I always picked up on those. And I thought those were great stories. And they got run. Sometimes the important issue stories didn’t get run, but the little ones did. The little funny ones almost always got good play. That was my primary job. But I found out real quickly that a news release package was about what I had been doing in one day at the *Ledger*, where I was the only sports editor and I might have eight or ten stories to
10 write. And here I am, I’ve only got maybe three or four to write and I can do that in a day and I’m done. What am I going to do with the other four days of the week? So I decided that I wanted to write for the *Conservationist*. And my job description said well, you can write occasional articles for the *Conservationist*, but I thought heck, I can write more than occasional ones. Never was I told, was I given an assignment in all those many years. I
15 shouldn’t say never. A couple of times I was. But mostly it was just what I decided I wanted to write. And it ranged from bicycling trips to hunting, fishing, camping, canoeing. Whatever I was doing, I wrote about. And it was great for me. It was like a license to steal. You know, any writer wants to be given complete freedom to do what they want to. And I was. It was just a, it was a great job.

20 Corrigan: And who did you report to?

Vance: Well, Jim Keefe was the chief. Mac Johnson was the magazine editor at the time. But I really didn’t report to anybody. If I wanted to go somewhere and do something, I just
25 did it. That’s a change from the way it is—

[End Track 16. Begin Track 17.]

Vance: —now where it’s, I hate to say it, but it’s more bureaucratic. It’s more regimented.
30 More 8:00 to 5:00. We never paid any attention to hours. And I say “we.” None of our people, and that includes the whole department. It was job-oriented as opposed to method-oriented. And if we had to work, you know, twenty-four hours a day, we did that. If we got through early, we did that. And we didn’t have to fill out timesheets. We didn’t have to turn in a diary of our activities or anything like that. We just did it. And it was a very loose
35 environment. Keefe was a very permissive boss. As long as you did your job he didn’t care how you did it or when you did it. Results were what counted. You can’t ask for more than that.

40 Corrigan: So with these packets you’re making, basically you were like the AP wire for Missouri outdoor. So you would package this material up, and then other reporters, newspapers, would just siphon off what they needed or what to fill itself—

Vance: Right. It was mailed out in those days. Now they do it by email. It was mailed out. And what happened to it was up to the newspaper, the individual newspaper. I tracked it
45 some. We had a clipping service, the Missouri Press Association offered, maybe still does, offered a clipping service. And we subscribed to that, so I could see kind of what, what kind

of coverage we were getting. And pretty much I think we were getting more coverage than any other agency in the state. I mean, I don't like to brag, but I think my stuff was just more entertaining than the other ones. They mostly wrote, kind of the formula news release where the transportation of MODOT today said that such and such was going to happen. And I
5 always said, you know, the department of conservation never said a word. It's just a big building. And the people there—and I tried to make my news releases reflect the people that work for the department. Make them personalities and I think that over the years we probably created more of a family atmosphere by the news that we put out because the readers felt like they knew some of the biologists that were quoted. And I did the human interest type stories
10 about these people. And these things got run. And the editors appreciated them. And I think we got more coverage than any other agency.

Corrigan: So the department itself didn't really have an objective on what they wanted to get out there. It was really whatever you were providing, right?

15 Vance: Yeah. Well, of course there were policy things that had to be reported. We had to report the stories, setting of seasons or if the conservation commission took a policy stand on something, that would be reported. But most of the time, those things, most of the time my reporting was what various members within the department were doing. Foresters, wildlife
20 biologists, fisheries biologists, what they were doing. And I'd come over here to Columbia to the research section and just go around from office to office and say, "Okay, what's new with you?" These guys were really good at recognizing the human interest news value of what they were doing. And so they made my job easy because they almost always had something, and they all wanted to get their name in the paper, too. So they would kind of save up things,
25 I think, and wait for me to come around. And all I had to do was just put it in entertaining form. And it was pretty easy.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you have, since the department really didn't have a goal for you, did you have your own goal about what you wanted to cover in Missouri, or—I mean, did you
30 cast a big net? Did you want to cover it as a statewide or, you know, was it focused on location-wise, you happened to be in mid Missouri or, can you tell me about your thought process? Or did you use it as an opportunity to really see the state and learn the state?

Vance: Oh, yeah. I traveled all over. And again, this was just because I enjoyed doing that.
35 But I would go to things like the Nixa Sucker Festival and write about that, write a magazine article about sucker grabbing in the spring, and Nixa having this big to-do, which I think is still going on. Things like that were not specific to our mission, which was fish, wildlife and forestry, but—

40 **[End Track 17. Begin Track 18.]**

Vance: —they were part of the outdoor scheme of Missouri. And I felt like they needed to be covered because nobody else was doing it. And why not us grab the glory for, you know, being the friend of the outdoors wherever it is. And, oh, gosh, I'd write about coon hunting
45 and go out with some guys and do that. Or just whatever was happening. I was, and Marty can tell you, I was gone from home an awful lot. Probably more than I should have been. But

I enjoyed it and I still do, to a lesser extent. But I still do enjoy just going somewhere and all these things were new. And all the people were new and fun to meet and fun to be with and talk to. I made friends all over the state. I enjoyed the heck out of it.

5 Corrigan: You started freelance writing in 1967, I have down here.

Vance: Yeah.

10 Corrigan: But then you started really doing it full time once you retired from the department in 1991?

Vance: Right.

15 Corrigan: So the freelance, could you tell me a little bit about the kinds of assignments or projects that you decided to take on? I'm curious to know, did you decide "I'm going to write on this" and find an outlet? Or did you have these outlets—like I saw that you wrote for *Audubon*, *The North American Fisherman*, *Gun Dog*, *Bassin*, *American Hunter*, *Wing & Shot*. I'm curious, you know, how did that process work? Was it, you know, they're looking for this, I'm going to write that. Or was it ever, "Hey, Joel, we need this, will you do this?"

20 Vance: Well, both. But mostly I would write something. And I'd have an experience. I'd go somewhere and I'd hunt or I'd fish or do whatever it was. And I knew I was going to write about it, because that's what I do. And I would write the article and then I'd go looking for a place to put it. But you build, it's like building a house. You build it one brick at a time. And
25 over the years I would sell to, let's say a magazine, a given magazine. And that made it a little easier the next time because they knew who I was and they knew my style. And if I had an idea or if I sent them a finished manuscript, it was maybe a little more likely to get taken up. And you know, the more you do that, the more contacts you make. But nothing is forever. I had, the *Audubon* column was probably the, certainly the most lucrative and probably the
30 most prestigious of anything I've ever done. And it happened because the managing editor of *Audubon* at the time, Gary Soucie, was in a bar at an outdoor writers' conference. And I just—and I knew the guy he was with. So I went over and said, "Hey, how you doing?" to the guy I knew. And he introduced Gary to me and I didn't know who Gary Soucie was. I had no idea. Just another guy. And we're sitting there sharing a beer. And Soucie said, "How
35 would you like to write some stuff for us?" And I always say yes. Oh, heck yes, that's fine. Still didn't know who he represented. And somewhere in the conversation I picked up on the fact, my God, this guy's the managing editor of *Audubon* which is the ultimate of the ultimates as far as environmental and nature writing goes. And it turned out they wanted me to write a column. And I did that for about two years. I said, "What do you want me to write
40 about?" And Gary said, "Whatever you want." It was just like here, take all this money for doing what you want to do anyway. So I did that for a couple of years. And then the *Audubon* got in financial problems. Their budget got cut. And Les Line was the editor in chief. And he had his little stable of writers, and Gary had his little stable. And unfortunately, I was in the stable that got cut. So I lost that column. But the *Gun Dog* column came about
45 because of all these contacts. It's all a matter of contacts, I swear it is. Ollie Torgerson was the wildlife division chief. And he had gone to high school with a guy named Dave Meisner.

And Dave Meisner founded *Gun Dog* magazine. And Ollie said, told me, said, “Meisner, my friend, my high school classmate, is looking, is starting this magazine on gun dogs. And it’s going to be about bird hunting and everything which you do. But he’s looking for a conservation columnist.” So I don’t know if Ollie gave me his number. I don’t even
5 remember the first contact.

[End Track 18. Begin Track 19.]

Vance: But now I’ve written the conservation column for *Gun Dog* for over thirty years, and
10 I’m still writing that one. And Meisner is dead now. He died a long time ago. And the magazine has sold to different publishers oh, maybe two or three times since then. But I’m still doing the column. And that’s kind of my pet project right now. I did a humor column for *North American Fisherman* for twenty years. And that came about because I was in the Outdoor Writers Association with the guy who was their first editor, Mark LaBarbera. And
15 he asked me if I wanted to write a humor column. Well, I love to write humor and I have done that for all my written life. So I said, “Shoot, yeah.” And I did that for twenty years. And then they just decided they didn’t want a humor column anymore. Just, “Nope. Sorry. You’re out.” So I, in fact I never do them damage, I’m going to do it. But I haven’t found a good way to get revenge yet, but I will one of these days. But anyway, almost everything I’ve
20 ever done has been as a result of the contacts I’ve made. A lot of it through the Outdoor Writers Association. Because we’ve gone to virtually every conference they’ve had since 1970, I think, was the first one. And I know people all over the country. This book I just finished, the prairie grouse book, came about because I sat at a board meeting with Tim Christie who told me about Noppadol, who was looking for a writer for the prairie, at that
25 time, prairie chicken book. And so that came about through a contact. But that’s just the way it’s always worked.

Corrigan: Is there, out of any of those, is there one in particular that you were most fond of?

30 Vance: You mean—

Corrigan: The outlets. I mean, did you really, did you enjoy *Audubon* over *Gun Dog* or did you, was there any one of them in particular that, out of all those, because you had so many publications, that you just—

35

Vance: Well, I think the *Gun Dog* column has been the most rewarding because it’s about conservation, and I’m pretty well dedicated to wildlife conservation. And they’ve been very nice about letting me write pretty much what I want to. Including sometimes when I was contrary to what they personally believed was the way to go. They’ve been very pleasant to
40 work with over the years. But *Audubon* was probably the best because they just let me write whatever I wanted to write. And I did some really fun things for that column. And, you know, the humor column was fine, because I enjoy writing humor. That’s just fun. Probably the easiest money I’ve ever made was doing short spots for Field & Stream Radio. They were like four or five minute segments. And I kind of patterned them after some of these little fillers on NPR, the little feature type articles. But I would find somebody that had an
45 interesting story and just. It was the easiest interviewing ever. You get somebody that can

talk. And you just say, “Well, tell me about,” and just sit there for five minutes and it’s done. And it was just, without a doubt, the easiest money I ever made. But like I always tell people, nothing is forever and that one wasn’t either.

5 Corrigan: You mentioned something about writing sometimes against the view of maybe the magazine. Did you ever run into that? Did you ever write anything in the department, the conservation, and they say, “Joel, why did you write that?”

Vance: Well, no. Not really. A couple of times some of the wildlife guys got upset with me because I wrote in the *Gun Dog* column about things that they, that were contrary to what they thought. But I never wrote against department policy. I mean, that was, you’re just asking to get fired when you do that. But I did write some opinions that were contrary to the opinions of some of the wildlife people from time to time. Not very often, but it did happen. Mostly around ducks, I think. It was just, they had some theories and I had some theories and mine didn’t agree with theirs. But that was a rarity that almost never happened.

Corrigan: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about the writing workshop? I saw that you, it was at Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, Vermont—

20 **[End Track 19. Begin Track 20.]**

Corrigan: —and it was called Wild Branch?

Vance: Mm hmm.

25 Corrigan: And you did that for years.

Vance: Fifteen years.

30 Corrigan: Yeah. Could you tell me a little bit about how that came about? And what was the purpose of the workshop and who attended?

Vance: It was founded by Annie Proulx, who was the author of *The Shipping News*, won the Pulitzer Prize for that. And she was from Vermont at that time. She lives in, I think, Wyoming or New Mexico now. But she was, I’m going to make a noise with the cap. But she was, founded it with a fellow named Dave Brown who taught at Sterling College. And her idea was that most outdoor, environmental and nature writing could stand to be improved. So that was the focus of the workshop were those three areas: outdoor, nature and environmental writing. And she was with the workshop for the first couple of years. And then she began to get famous and began to write to the point where she didn’t want to do the teaching anymore. So she wanted to back out. And that was just when I retired in 1991. And I don’t know where, I think I saw it in the Outdoor Writers newsletter that they were looking for an instructor. And I thought well, I’ll get in touch with them and see if maybe I could get the job. So I got a hold of Dave Brown. And he had read my stuff and knew something about what I did. And he welcomed me aboard. And so I took over for Annie Proulx. And I was there for fifteen years. And we had, usually had anywhere from twenty to thirty students.

And there were three, originally three resident faculty and then went up to four before I left. But we would each have anywhere from five to ten students, depending on who they signed up with. And it was really rewarding. They came from all walks of life. And they all wanted to be better writers. That was the focus. So most of them had, not most, but many of them
5 had worked for agencies as news release writers and they were used to writing in the bureaucratic sense, like what I said about some of the Missouri agencies. They would write, such and such, “The fish and wildlife service today announced that such and such was going to happen.” And that’s dull. And we tried to bring them out of that and bring their personality into what they wrote. And make it more first person and more emotional. And that was our
10 focus was to, you know, get you to lay your guts on the table. And I was there for fifteen years and the last eleven of those, one of my fellow instructors was Ted Gup, who was one of Bob Woodward’s protégées at the *Washington Post* and wrote a bestseller on the CIA. And just recently, the last couple of years, wrote a thing called *A Secret Gift*, I think it was, which made the *New York Times* bestseller list and sold a lot of books. Great guy. Just one of my
15 dearest friends. And *Orion Magazine*, which you may or may not be familiar with, they had kind of co-sponsored Wild Branch for several years. They gave them money and kind of kept it afloat. And they took it over, took the workshop over. And they basically fired Ted and me and just said, “We’re going to have our own people teach the workshop.” Which they’ve done now for four years, five years.

20 Marty: The president had retired, too.

Vance: Yeah. Their president, the college president retired.

25 Marty: If he had stayed in, it would have stayed the other way.

Vance: So anyway, the interest in Ted and me was waned, I guess. So I’m not doing that anymore. But I started a writing workshop that was patterned on the way Wild Branch used to be, which we had in Missoula last year. Missoula, Montana, which is the headquarters of
30 the Outdoor Writers Association. And they sponsored it and we had a really successful first go around. But this year we didn't get enough people. So I’m hoping it gets revived again next year.

35 Corrigan: Now speaking of books, you’ve written a number of them. I was just going to run down the list here really quick. It was *Grandma and the Buck Deer* in 1980, *Upland Bird Hunting* in—

[End Track 20. Begin Track 21.]

40 Corrigan: —1981. *Confessions of an Outdoor Maladroit*, 1983. *Bobs, Brush and Brittanies* in 1997. *Tails I Lose* in 2000. *Down Home Missouri*, which is the book I referenced earlier, in 2000. *Autumn Shadows* in 2002. And then the newest one that you were talking about on the birds, *Billy Barnstorm*.

45 Vance: *Billy Barn Storm* is not, it’s actually a continuation of *Grandma*. It’s the same characters – it’s a fiction book. Same characters, but instead of being in grade school, they’re

now in high school. And then the prairie grouse book is not, it's titled *Save The Last Dance*. And it should be out before the, well, I hope before Christmas. *Billy Barnstorm* just came out about, oh, a month ago or less. And it's just now beginning to—actually, the official publication date isn't until November 1. But I've got it now for sale. And I'm willing to sell it
5 to anybody that's got the money.

Corrigan: Okay. So *Billy*, you actually have two books coming out this year.

Vance: Right.

10

Corrigan: That one and then the prairie chicken and the grouse one. So that's also 2011.

Vance: Mm hmm.

15

Corrigan: Not that you want to talk about all of those, but in general could you talk a little bit about how you approach a book? How you yourself decide, you know, like for example *Billy Barnstorm* is a continuation of your very first book, so you had a lot in between there. But I'm just curious, do you follow any specific rules that you tell yourself? Or do you follow a, do you have any tried and true methods that you use to say, you know, this is how
20 I'm going to accomplish this book?

25

Vance: Well, most of my books are collections. And basically that's a matter of just writing enough until you've got a book. They're, *Grandma* and *Billy* both are, they've got the same characters and they have a loose organization. But they are pretty much collections of short stories. Same thing with *Maladroit*. It's a collection of humor essays. And *Down Home* was a memoir. You approach that by just essentially—some of the chapters had been written as magazine articles. And I thought well heck fire, I know more than that about my life. So I expanded that into a book. But the ghost book, I've always wanted, that was *Autumn*, pardon me, *Autumn Shadows*. I've always wanted to, I've always enjoyed ghost stories. Everybody
30 does. And I'd written a couple that were published. And I just started writing ghost stories. And again, it was until I got enough to call it a book and it got published. A couple of them were, I was asked to do, the *Upland Bird Hunting* book, I was asked to do that by the Outdoor Life Book Club. So that was written on assignment. That may be the only one other than the prairie grouse book that I've ever written as an assignment. The other ones were all
35 either, either I got enough stuff together to have a book and somebody wanted to publish it. Or, well, I guess that was, that's the way it went. So.

40

Corrigan: Do you have any, how do I want to put that, do you have any, when you sit down to write something, do you have a specific way that you always do it? Do you have your office and this time of day and Marty, please don't talk to me for the next hour? (laughter) Or is it a, how do you go actually about approaching it? Is it indoors? Is it outdoors? Do you have to set aside time? Or do you just do it as it comes?

45

Vance: No, I do it as it comes. I know people that are almost like eight to five writers. But I can't do that. Early in the morning is my best time. I think that's true of most writers. So I go down to the office in the morning. Especially, I think probably the biggest motivator is an

assignment. If you've got a deadline, you've got a definite assignment, or if I do, I want to get it done. And I will work very hard. And a lot more. But if I'm just speculating, I write as I'm inspired to write. And sometimes it comes, I can do a whole article in a day. Sometimes it takes weeks. It just depending on how much the juices flow.

5

Corrigan: Do you have any particular writers that you look towards for inspiration? Or that you particularly enjoy? That you like their column or you like, is there anybody—

[End Track 21. Begin Track 22.]

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Corrigan: —specific that you know, you just look to and you're like you know that's I like to read that guy, or I like to read that woman's work?

Vance: Well, Annie Proulx puts down sentences the way that if I was easily intimidated I would quit writing because she's so good. But my influences when I started wanting to be a writer were some of the great humorists of the probably 1920s through 1940s. Robert Benchley and S.J. Perelman. H. Allen Smith and laterally, Woody Allen. I have what's called a style. I've had people say, "Yeah, I can recognize your style." But it really is an amalgam of people that I've admired over the years. And I can look at something I've written and say I can see the shadow of Perlman in that, or Robert Benchley or whatever. I know that that's subconsciously where I got the approach that I took to a given piece. But I don't know. Those were my big influences. And it's kind of interesting. I don't know if you're familiar with Pat McManus. He's a humor writer. He's a millionaire. He's sold, he had a column in *Outdoor Life* for oh, twenty years, I guess. And has written and sold, I don't know, countless books. And he's been a lot more successful financially than I have. But anyway, Pat and I were on the board of directors of the Outdoor Writers at the same time and got to know each other. And he lives in Spokane, Washington. And it turns out that his influences were identical to mine. He and I are the same age. We read the same people growing up and decided to become humor writers. We both sold our first piece, humor piece, to the same editor, *Field & Stream*. And both of them were about kids growing up. My stories became *Grandma and the Buck Deer* and his became a whole bunch of other books. But you know, it's almost like we're running in parallel tracks for so many years. And I've told him, if I could just cash your checks, it would be really a neat deal. But it hadn't worked that way so far.

35 Corrigan: Okay. Switching to a little bit back to conservation in Missouri, these are just general questions about you know, in your opinion, people always say Missouri's always been ahead of the game in conservation. Missouri's always been 10 steps ahead. Why do you think so? Or what do you see that Missouri does right in conservation?

40 Vance: Well it was a citizen-created department. That was the major thing. It was created by initiative, petition and referendum in 1936. And it was non-political as opposed to the old political fish and game department, which was riddled with, you know, favoritism and nepotism and God only knows what. And whoever the founders of the new department were, they were visionaries and they decided early on it was going to be a very professional department. And you weren't going to hire somebody because of who they were, but because of what they knew. And so— (coughs) Pardon me. So gradually the department developed as

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a thoroughly professional fish, wildlife, and forestry organization. And when in 1976 the sales tax passed, the conservation sales tax, we also became the best-funded conservation agency in the country. So we were able to start programs that other state agencies, other states' wildlife agencies, couldn't do because they just don't, didn't have and still don't have the money. And we've got the money to have an education section, have a natural history section or division. All these things that other agencies would love to do if they just had the wherewithal to do it. And it still is a very professional organization. Prides itself on being that. And it prides itself on being a service agency to the people of the state because they're the ones that created the department, and they're the ones that passed an initiative to fund the department.

Corrigan: Now you actually wrote the "Design for Conservation" pamphlet. Is that correct?

[End Track 22. Begin Track 23.]

Vance: Yeah, I did. But I'm not going to take credit for being the author of the "Design for Conservation." I did the words. But the people that were the prime movers were Carl Noren, who was the director at the time, and Charles and Libby Schwartz, Elizabeth Schwartz, who were, were and are, Libby's still alive, but the true geniuses. They were absolutely as good as it gets. And oh, Jim Keefe, my boss, was an idea man. Those four people probably did more than any of the rest—not that the others didn't work, but they did more to form, formulate the plan, than anybody else.

Corrigan: Now originally the plan was to go after a soda pop tax.

Vance: Right.

Corrigan: And that failed. And then they, the group came back again. And then they did get that 1/8 of one percent conservation sales tax in 1976. How was that initial failure? Was it, because I mean, some people could have quit and stopped. Was it easily seen what the, what maybe the flaw was or the problem or what happened that you needed to change to make it—because it then was passed without really a problem. Was it just the approach? Or—

Vance: Well, first of all, we knew that any pop tax was going to be opposed by the bottlers. And what we didn't take into account was that 7 Up had its world headquarters in Missouri. And Budweiser, or the beer people. So that's two pretty powerful enemies. Plus the Chamber of Commerce wasn't very happy with the idea, either. There was a study done by the university, and I don't remember the name of it. But they came up with various alternative sources of income. One of them was an extraction type tax where you would tax like minerals or things like that. But that's non-renewable once you've taken all the whatever it is out. That's the end of it. I'm not sure if there were other ones or not. But anyway, the consensus got to be that a general sales tax was about as equitable as anything could be. Because it taxed everybody equally and it involved everybody equally. And it would raise the money that the people told us we would need to do what we wanted to. Again, it was opposed by the business interests. And we were told by consultants that a special election, it probably would pass, because people don't tend to vote very heavily in special elections. If it

went to the general election and it was, the more people that came out, the more likely it was to fail. And as it turned out, it was a record vote that year in 1976. So we thought boy, we're doomed now, because voters were flocking to the polls. And that, anything that's controversial tends to bring out the aginners. So we were sweating it until about, what, two or
5 three in the morning, I think it was. We were at the Ramada Inn, which is now the Truman, whatever it is. And we just watched the returns come in. And they were pretty depressing. Kit Bond got beat that year for governor. And he was a popular governor. But I guess there were enough people that just wanted a change. They voted him out. And it finally wound up being something like fifty point, less than fifty-one percent for and almost fifty percent
10 against. So it was as close as a vote can get and pass. But it did pass, and that was the important thing.

Corrigan: Now and part of the success of that, though, was also the help of the Missouri Federation.
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Vance: Oh. It wouldn't have happened without the Conservation Federation. And the federation was formed back in nineteen-thirty, probably, five, to get, to take Missouri conservation out of politics. That's what organized them. And over the years they became a blanket agency, or not agency, a blanket organization for conservation groups. Everybody
20 from the Sierra Club to the hunting clubs and fishing clubs and whatever. And it still is. I don't know how many organizations they have, but it's a bunch. And they represent—

[End Track 23. Begin Track 24.]

Vance: —every part of the spectrum of the outdoors. And when it came time for the, to see if we could increase the funding for the conservation program, the federation spearheaded it and formed a group called the Citizens' Committee for Conservation, which brought together various people from, again, from the whole spectrum of conservation or outdoor interests in a kind of a supergroup to plan and to recommend what way to go. And then the federation did
30 the grunt work. And it involved putting out, mounting a petition campaign. And you had to have, I don't remember the figures, but in seven out of the ten congressional districts had to get a certain percentage of their voters to sign a petition to get it on the ballot. And the first time, the pop tax one, the petition was flawed because I guess we didn't have the right lawyers or something. But it did not have in it what they called an enabling clause, which is simply the words "be it hereby enacted that" and then they tell you what's going to be
35 enacted. And for some strange reason, the petition didn't have that five or six words on it. And the Supreme Court threw it out. And that was a crushing blow. It really was, because we'd worked for a year getting the petition signed and so we went back. And after the study, to figure out what would be the best source of income, it was decided to go after a sales tax.
40 And we went back and got the right kind of petitions this time and it got on the ballot and got passed.

Corrigan: Okay. And now you mentioned the influence of Charlie and Libby Schwartz. And Charlie's one that had passed away and so we don't have his personal words now. But I do, I
45 usually ask people that did know him. Could you talk a little bit about, in your own opinion,

just what kind of contribution that Charlie and Libby made—she’s still living – but what kind of contribution they made to conservation in Missouri.

5 Vance: Oh, they were pioneers. And they went back to, I think they were hired in 1941. I say “they.” Charlie was hired. In those days, there was no such thing as women’s lib. Libby was an unpaid assistant for many years after Charlie was hired as a biologist. And he was assigned to do prairie chickens. That was his only assignment. But he and Libby traveled all over north Missouri, especially north Missouri, doing prairie chicken research. And at the same time they were doing research in Missouri, the Hamerstoms were doing research in 10 Wisconsin under Aldo Leopold, who was called the father of modern conservation. And the two couples got, became very, very close friends. And shared their information about what was happening in Wisconsin and here with the prairie chickens. And Charlie wound up being the illustrator for *A Sand County Almanac*, which was Aldo Leopold’s bible of conservation. And over the, and then when it came time to do a study of the department in the 1970s to see 15 where we were and what we needed to do for the future, Aldo Leopold’s son, Starker, was the head of the team that did the study on the Missouri department and made the recommendation that basically your program is good but you’re not doing enough for the sixty or seventy of the people that don’t hunt and fish. What you are is a hunting and fishing agency with forestry. But what about the canoeists and the hikers and the campers and all 20 these other people. Nature lovers. You need to do something for them. And the corollary to that was, you need to have money to do it with. So that’s kind of, their report, it was called the Leopold Report, became the inspiration for the “Design for Conservation.” And basically what we said was okay, they told us we ought to be doing this. How are we going to do it? Here’s what we’re going to do. And the “Design for Conservation” was a result of that. And I 25 forgot what your original question was. (Marty laughs)

Corrigan: It was about the Schwartzes, their—you’ve answered it—

30 Vance: Oh, the Schwartzes, yes, yeah. Well, Charlie and Libby were role models for Marty and me. I mean, they absolutely lived—

[End Track 24. Begin Track 25.]

35 Vance: —their lives the way we would, have always tried to live ours as outdoor people and as interested in everything people. Charlie was, I’ve told people, the only true genius I’ve ever known in my life. He was just, you know, larger than life. And until the day he died, he had the enthusiasm of a teenager about learning about things. And Libby was the same way. When she was in her seventies, she started taking guitar lessons because all their kids were out of the nest and they’d go on float trips. And the kids would always brought along guitars and banjos and whatever. And they had music on the gravel bar and the kids weren’t around 40 anymore. So she started taking guitar lessons so she could do it. I mean, that’s the way that those two people were. And I just, John Madson, a great outdoor writer, once visited Charlie. And Charlie had just gotten a new canoe. And it was out in their backyard. And when John came around the house, Charlie was sitting in the canoe playing like he was paddling a 45 canoe. And John said later on, “Charlie Schwartz is sixty-five years old, going on fourteen.” And that’s just the way he was. They were just wonderful, wonderful people.

Corrigan: Hold on one second.

[pause in recording.]

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Corrigan: All right, let me get this back on. Okay, we took a brief break there. And we were just finished up talking about Charlie and Libby Schwartz. I was curious to know, when you were at the department in conservation, what areas do you think the Missouri Department of Conservation is spot on, and maybe what areas do you think that they, that they work in and work on that they could improve on? In your opinion.

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Vance: Well, we talked a little bit briefly during the break about the, I guess it would be reorganization. And I don't know, I think everybody, every time there's a new director or a change in commission, you have the possibility of a reorganization. I'm not sure, but what that's not what bureaucracies do just to make everybody think they're doing something. But one of the things that I was not real happy about was the incorporation of the natural history section, actually it was a division by then, into a, I'm not sure what they even call it now, but into a larger division. And I think it took away some of their identity. The natural history section originally was a creation of the design for conservation. And the first director, first boss of that section was John Wiley, who had been a forester, was the assistant state forester. And a great naturalist and just a real wonderful human being. And he hired all the original biologists and botanists and herpetologists and whatever that were a part of that section and basically created the whole thing. And it was a great group. It still is. I'm not saying that they're going to pot. But they are now submerged in a larger division. And I can't help but think that that loss of identity has not been the best it could be for the future of that particular division.

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Corrigan: Okay. Now you've traveled the whole state. You've been everywhere, you've seen lots of different things. You wrote about all those things in your long career. These are some general questions, just some observations. How are our, you know, bodies of water in Missouri? Are they clean? Are we growing too fast? Are we developing too fast? How are the fish and animal populations? You're a hunter. How are things at the moment? Do you think they're in check, or—

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Vance: Well I think it's obvious, Missouri is a leading outdoor and wildlife state. We have deer and turkeys that other states envy. The populations are excellent. We've reintroduced a number of species, like river otters. Which, if you'll listen to some of the small-mouthed bass fishermen, they've actually become a problem. Of course, deer, you're going to hear complaints about deer being a pest animal. But that's going to happen. Canada geese, we were pioneers in the reintroduction and the encouragement of the giant Canada goose, the Canada maxima, which is the—

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[End Track 25. Begin Track 26.]

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Vance: —largest of the subspecies of Canada goose. And they now are, can be a real problem because they eat a lot of gardens and golf courses and they mess up with their

droppings, mess up golf courses especially. So you're always going to have people that complain about too many critters or damage to crops or this thing or that thing. But I think on the whole, Missouri's wildlife resources, fisheries resources, are excellent. Clean water, there's always going to be problems. You know, Lake of the Ozarks has had problems with bacteria. But Lake of the Ozarks also has about ten zillion cabins and lodges and resorts and whatever. And inevitably you're going to have some sort of pollution. The Missouri River has improved, I think. It's our major waterway right through the middle of the state. It's a great untapped resource. I've canoed the river. And if you can ever catch it at low water, this year it's been kind of tough, but there are great big sandbars that can be camped on. It's a very pleasant place to boat or canoe or enjoy. So I think all these resources are enviable. Missouri is a centrally located state. We have a variety of geology and geography and topography. Everything that you would want. It's just an all around, darned good place to live.

15 Corrigan: Okay. Good. Now I'm going to change the subject a little bit and talk about your family and your, and what you're doing in your retirement now. Your wife is here. And we talked about when you got married. And you have five children. Can you go ahead and name them all?

20 Vance: Okay. The oldest is Carrie. And she's a high school English teacher in New Prague, Minnesota. And married and has two children, both of whom are in college. Two boys. Both of them in college at the present time. Then J.B. is our oldest son. And he's in Ohio working. And—

25 Corrigan: J.B. is Joseph—

Vance: Joseph Benton. And—

30 Corrigan: Okay. Because you mentioned that the name carried on, right? So that was the Benton—

Vance: Yeah. Benton was my dad's middle name. So—

35 Corrigan: So Joseph Benton, okay. He's in Ohio.

Vance: And Eddie lives, actually lives on our place. Is single. He was married but he's not now.

40 Corrigan: He carries another part of the name, correct?

Vance: Pardon? Edward, well, Edward was, I think, Marty's dad's, what, middle name?

Marty: Uh, yeah.

Vance: Yeah. And Martin was my dad's first name. So those are both family names. And his family is three labradors. And then Andy is the third oldest son. And he also lives on our place. We've got 40 acres out in the country and it's on a dead end gravel road.

5 Corrigan: And that's actually Russellville, right?

Vance: Yeah. Its five miles out of Russellville.

Corrigan: But that's the address.

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Vance: But that's the mailing address.

Corrigan: Okay.

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Vance: And it's, well, the kids actually own 10 acres of the 40. So Eddie's house is on part of that 10 acres. And when we bought the place there was a cabin, a concrete block cabin, and that's modern. And that's where Andy lives. And his family is the six Brittanys and one lab. And he's not married. And the youngest is Amy, who is married to a fellow named Brad Binkley. And they have, it's the second marriage for both of them. And they have three kids that were Brad's. One is college age and then one is high school and one, I guess, the youngest boy's still in grade school.

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Corrigan: And where she's located?

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Vance: She's in Jeff City.

Corrigan: Oh, Jeff City. Okay.

Vance: She works for MODOT.

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Corrigan: Okay. Now really quick here, we mentioned it during the break. But I read an article. And it was about how there's a road named after you called Joel Vance Avenue. (Vance laughs) And it's near Dalton. Maybe you can tell me more specifically where it's at. But I'd like to know the story behind how you found out about it. And you visited there now. And the mystery behind how you actually have—

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[End Track 26. Begin Track 27.]

Corrigan: —a street in Missouri named after you.

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Vance: Well it's not a street. It's an avenue. (laughter) There's a difference. A street—I don't know, the definition is different. But an avenue is a step up from a street. A boulevard's probably the top of the line. I haven't gotten there yet. I don't know. This is a mystery as to why it was named and how it was named. And I've tried to find out and I have yet to come up with a satisfactory answer. But it is about two miles south of Dalton. It's a dead end road, gravel road, that dead ends at the Dalton Cutoff, which was kind of my playground when I

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was in high school. Swam in it in the summer. Fished in it. Ice skated on it in the winter. So it's kind of fitting, I guess, that my road should end at the Dalton Cutoff. I've tried different agencies, naming agencies. And you know, the 911 system calls for roads to be named. They all have names. In some countries, there are numbers. But in ours, there are names. And so
5 somebody somewhere along the line decided to name one after me. And I didn't know anything about it. Didn't know it existed until I got a phone call from an old high school and college friend, Karl Miller, who lives in Columbia. And Karl is from Dalton originally, also. And he said, "I've been someplace you haven't been." And I said, "Well, where would that be?" And he said, "Well, it's Joel Vance Avenue and its south of Dalton." And he said,
10 "Most people have to die to have something named after them. How are you feeling?" (laughter) So the next day, Marty and I drove up to Dalton. And sure enough, there was this road sign that said Joel Vance Avenue. And we set up the self-timer on the camera and took a picture of ourselves under the sign. And as far as I know—well, it's an interesting thing. The next gravel road toward Dalton is Val Verde Avenue, which is named for the plantation that
15 General Sterling Price had before the Civil War. And General Sterling Price captured my great-grandfather and his brother, my great-granduncle, during the Civil War. They formed a kind of a jackleg militia that they call Vance's Rangers. And they were going to go down and protect Glasgow from those awful Confederates. And they lasted about an hour, and got the whole company captured. And the Confederates, Sterling Price's army, I guess slapped them
20 on the butt and told them to go home and quit playing soldier, which they did. But somehow there's some sort of historic synchronicity between Joel Vance Avenue and Valverde Avenue the next one over.

Corrigan: Okay. So to be continued, and you may never find out.

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Vance: I may never find out. I haven't so far.

Corrigan: So currently you're retired and you're still writing. And you have six Brittany dogs. Is that correct?

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Vance: Six Brittany's, one lab. Well I, actually, Andy, the youngest son and I, kind of co-own the dogs. But yeah, six Brittany's, one lab. And then Eddie has three labs. So we've got 10 labs on the, I mean 10 dogs on the place.

35 Corrigan: And then I also wrote down that you play the guitar, mandolin and banjo. But with the dogs, why Brittany's?

Vance: Well, I don't know. I kind of fell into Brittany's many years ago. One of my friends had a Brittany and I liked it. And being a bird dog, I mean, a bird hunter, quail hunter, I
40 wanted a bird dog. And it just kind of seemed natural to get Brittany's. And once you get a Brittany, you're in love forever more, I think. Probably true of every breed. But I just think they're smart dogs. And they're family dogs. And they think they're people. Even though they're not, they think they are. And I just enjoyed Brittany's. And I got into French Brittany's, which are the original dog. They obviously all came from France, being Brittany. But I got
45 into French Brittany's, and I've had those now for 30 years, I suppose. And they're just wonderful dogs.

Corrigan: Okay. And I read this article, too, where it said, you know, it mentioned that you played guitar and mandolins and banjos. But you said yes you did, but not very well, and someday you hope to master them.

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Vance: Oh, I won't. It's a little late for that now. But I've had, when I was probably fifteen, I got a guitar. I wanted to be Gene Autry. I always thought he was the coolest singer that ever was. So I got a guitar. It was an old Silvertone—

10 **[End Track 27. Being Track 28.]**

Vance: —Sears Silvertone guitar. And I played that for a while. And then the year I spent, the summer I spent detasseling seed corn, it was to make enough money to buy a good guitar. And I bought a Martin 0017, mahogany-top guitar, which I still have. And that's kind of my baby. And I've had that now for, oh, since nineteen-fifty, probably three. Somewhere in there. So I play guitar better than I do banjo and mandolin. But I enjoy them all.

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Corrigan: Okay. And what kind of writing are you doing now? You just finished the prairie chickens book. Are you still doing just freelance articles, or—

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Vance: Still writing the conservation column for *Gun Dog*. And I write a column, kind of an opinion column, for a magazine out of Saint Louis called the *Outdoor Guide*. And just freelance wherever the opportunity arises. Sometimes it's travel. Sometimes it's humor. Sometimes it's outdoor stuff. Sometimes it's fiction. Whatever strikes my fancy. That's kind of the advantage of being retired is that I don't have to do it. So I can kind of make my own assignments and have fun with it.

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Corrigan: Okay. I was going to mention some of the organization, we've talked a little bit about them. They've kind of popped up throughout the interview. The organizations you're involved in. You're involved in the federation. They awarded you a Conservation Communicator of the Year. What year was that?

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Vance: Mm hmm. Oh, lord, it was a long time ago. Back probably in the 1970s, I think.

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Corrigan: And then you were a member in the OWAA, the Outdoor Writers Association of America. And they've given, I had that you were quite involved in that organization. Past president. Board chairman. Group historian. They honored you with the excellence in craft honor, and the Ham Brown Award for service. And that you're one of only three members in its history to be awarded all three of its top honors.

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Vance: Yeah.

Corrigan: The Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers awarded you with an excellence in craft honor. And then the Circle of Chiefs which, from what I read is, it's a group of people that select their—the current members select the future members. And it's kind of like a little club. Is that—

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Vance: Yeah, it's the conservation communicators. People that are outstanding in the world of conservation communication. And we've had, oh, some really, well, almost anybody you can name that is well known, is or has been a member of the Circle of Chiefs. Which was
5 founded, by the way, but Werner Nagel who was a fellow that worked for the Missouri conservation department for many, many years. And wrote the book *Cy Littlebee's Guide to Cooking Fish and Game*. Which still is selling after probably fifty or sixty years. And Werner was a member of the Outdoor Writers. And decided that the conservation people should have some sort of award that was specific to them. And he founded the Circle of
10 Chiefs. And I got selected to be a chief. Of the many honors I've had, that's by far the most meaningful to me. This belt buckle I'm wearing is given to each chief. And there was an original belt buckle that was designed, and as each chief got it, they would scratch their initials on the back part of the belt buckle. But we ran out of room, so there's now a second belt buckle. That stays at the Outdoor Writers headquarters. But each of the chiefs gets one of
15 their own, too.

Corrigan: So it says OWAA Conservation Award, jade of chiefs. And there's a, it looks like, is it arrowheads on each side of the—

20 Vance: Yeah. It's a, there's jade in the middle and then the pewter buckle. And it's, it's my greatest honor I've ever said.

Corrigan: Good. These are the organizations I found. But are there any other ones that you're involved in?

25 Vance: That's pretty much it. OWAA takes a lot of time. Well, and Missouri Outdoor Communicators, yeah. That's the group that actually we're meeting this coming weekend. And I was the first board chair of that. And one of the founding members. And we've been around now for I'm guessing twelve years. And it's a going organization.

30 Corrigan: Yeah, I wasn't sure. There was always the possibility that there was more out there. This is what I was able to scrape up from—

[End Track 28. Begin Track 29.]

35 Corrigan: —and learn about. That's really all the questions I have. But if there's anything we didn't cover. If there's a story we didn't hit or if there's something you'd like to mention or a topic or anything, feel free to. That's all the questions I have. But, and if I left something out, feel free to—

40 Vance: You've been very comprehensive in the whole interview. And I've probably talked way too much on some of the stuff. I mean, I've got stories. That's what I do. I tell stories. So there are many, many. All you need to do is just kind of prime the pump and I'll talk all day long. But I think you've covered all the bases pretty well.

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Corrigan: Well, and what's nice, too, is like I mentioned before, is that your work's out there. You can read it.

Vance: Yeah.

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Corrigan: You can track down the article, the columns, the books, the stories. A lot of it's out there. So I was trying to kind of bring all that work together with kind of the behind the scenes and learn more about you.

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Vance: Well I would mention, I should have thought of this earlier. But I do have a website, which is hard to remember. It's joelvance.com. Really tough. But I also sell books there. And I've got several that are only e-books. They're not on, they're not printed. They're on, you can get them for a Kindle or a Nook or one of these e-readers. One of which is a continuation of the *Down Home Missouri*, picking up where that one left off and carrying through college.

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And it's a memoir. And then I've got a fishing humor book that's just an e-book. So there are other books out there by me. It's just they're not in print form. I also donated to the Missouri Historical Society a biography I did of a French professor I had here in college named Ward Dorrance who was a writer of some Missouri renown. He wrote a number of books of both history and fiction. It's kind of an unfortunate incident in Missouri history in that he was run

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out of the university because, and of the state, because he was gay. And he was the most influential teacher I had while I was at the university. And he just vanished one day. We didn't know what had happened. The story was given to the class that he'd had a heart attack and had to move to England. Well, it was during my research found out that no, he hadn't had a heart attack. He'd been harassed out of the state. Probably threatened with prosecution

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for being homosexual. And I kind of got into this because I admired him first as a teacher and then as a writer. And I thought that I wanted to start researching, not really researching, just find out more about him. Found out he had just died a couple of years before I got interested in him. And it turned out he was in his nineties, so I guess his heart was in pretty good shape. But he spent a year in England, came back, and became a professor emeritus at Georgetown

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University. And that's where he wound up. But he never came back to Missouri. He owned a house. It's the Guitar House here in Columbia, which he named Confederate Hill. He was an unregenerate Confederate. And it was a fascinating, almost ten years, pretty close to ten years, that I researched the guy. And I never could find a publisher. And I finally just gave it to Gary Kremer and said, "Here, for the archives. You can have it." So that's somewhere in

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the stacks.

Corrigan: Yeah. It will be in there. And that's interesting, too about, you've kept up with the craft. You mention the Kindle and the e-reader and moving books onto electronic formats.

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Vance: Yeah.

Corrigan: It seems like you, throughout your writing career, you've kept up on whatever the media outlet was at the time that you're on board. It's just a different way to disseminate your writing, but it's still just writing.

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Vance: Well I think you better these days, because the printed word is becoming almost obsolete. And that's kind of scary to me as an old print man. But better do it or get out of the business.

5 Corrigan: So. Sounds great. All right. Well thank you both for coming. Thank you for giving me your whole morning here.

Vance: No, it was fun. It really was. It was enjoyable.

10 Corrigan: And I really appreciate it, too. So I'm going to go ahead and shut off the recorder now.

Vance: Okay.

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[End Track 29. End Interview.]