

An Interview with
James C. Sterling

In Bolivar, Missouri

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[Tape meter, 003. Begin Side One, Tape One of Two. Begin interview.]

RB: Mr. Sterling, what I like to do starting off is learn a little bit about you in biographical terms. Your full name is James...?

JS: James Clark Sterling.

RB: And where were you born exactly?

JS: I was born in Detroit, but I lived in Dearborn, Michigan when I was young.

RB: Okay. And your birth date, then?

JS: November 29th, 1942.

RB: Born in Detroit. Did you grow up there?

JS: Actually I started to school in Boston, and went to kindergarten in Boston. Came back to Michigan and went to the first grade. Went to Chicago for the second, third and part of the fourth, and went to Michigan for part of the fourth. And then moved to Bolivar for the fifth grade. So I've been here most the time since that time.

RB: Oh, way down here to Bolivar by the fifth grade. So your family must have been moving around quite a bit.

JS: We did through that period of time. My father was in a vegetable packing business and was the superintendent of a plant in Boston, and went out there to run that for a while. Then they sent him to Chicago to run the plant there. And then he got sick and was in the hospital. He was in [the] Mayo Clinic for 100 days in the early part of 1952. They gave him a year to live, so he thought he'd better come down to where he grew up and where his brothers and sisters could kind of take care of my mother, my sisters, and myself. He

died 1992, forty years later. So I guess there's something good about the water here.
Helped him with that.

RB: And what year was that? In 1952?

JS: That was in 1952.

RB: That you moved in here, and you were just a young fellow.

JS: Yeah. And he needed something to do, so he asked his brothers to find something that was needed in this community. They said they needed a print shop -- that there was two newspapers here and they needed somebody that could get letterheads and envelopes out, because it was a five or six week process -- because the newspapers were busy all week and they only printed on Saturday. So he looked around and found out offset was something brand new at the time, or relatively new. [There] was nothing like that around here, so he went into a shop in Chicago and learned it in about six weeks, enough to come down [and run his own.] [He] bought a little press [and a] copy camera, and came to Missouri.

RB: And he had no other prior experience in printing?

JS: No. None whatsoever. And didn't do any newspapering, either. He just ran a print shop [Ozark Offset Printing Company]. But eventually he got into office supplies [Sterling Office Supply], and then sold boats and motors [KFTO Boat and Tackle Company], and had two or three businesses going out of the same building.

RB: So he was a businessman! I mean, even back when he was in Boston.

JS: Well, yeah, he worked for somebody else but he ran a vegetable packing company.

Two things I think are interesting about his career: He went to the eighth grade down here at a rural school and then went to Michigan, but he eventually went to Wayne State University and MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and took night courses and that sort of thing, all the chemistry and classes like that. So I don't know how that got him into vegetable packing, but he was...

During World War Two, he was deferred. Couldn't get into the Marines. He kept trying to sign up but they wouldn't let him in because he had bad feet. Hurt them playing baseball.

But he was involved in early plastics development at the Ford Motor Company, and in soybean developments and using soybeans to make plastics out of them.

RB: In Detroit?

JS: Yeah, in Detroit and Dearborn. After the war, everybody was coming home and he just didn't think he had much of a chance, but he probably would have had a pretty good career if he just would have stayed there and stayed on that. But as a child, I had plastic toys. I had pistols cut out of plastic, and swords, and a radio made with a plastic case, and a bank made out plastic -- had a bell in it -- different toys that you didn't think anything about it, it was just something your dad brought home for you to play with.

And you could see through them. They were all clear plastic.

RB: But it wasn't as common in those days.

JS: No. Then after[ward] he went work for a man that he knew that ran this vegetable packing plant, and worked in a couple of locations for him. But he got where he was working sixteen hours a day in Chicago and he had [a] mostly Hispanic workforce. He'd

hire a hundred people one day and have to lay them off two days later. It was just whenever the spinach or the lettuce, whatever, came in from South Holland, south of Chicago, there. It came in. It had to be processed in a hurry before it spoiled and get it out to the grocery stores.

But when he came back from Mayo, he worked at home for a while. They said, “You can’t go back to work.” There was too much pressure. Had ulcerated colitis and some serious stomach problems like that.

So he used some of his chemistry background and sat at home and did experiments with french-fries and cutting up lettuce and cabbage and making salads and putting them in cellophane bags.

[Tape meter, 050]

But that was probably thirty years ahead of its time for people rushing home and stopping at the store and buying a prepared salad. But you see them in the supermarkets today. There’s a whole section of prepared salads of different kinds. But he was doing that in 1952. And actually they’ve had those in the stores. French-fries, the big problem when you cut up a potato is that it turns black. And he was treating them with different things to see if you could keep them from turning black. Today, I don’t think anything about it. You pull pre-cut potatoes out and lay them out on the counter and I don’t that they’d turn black if you left them there out two days! But they’ve been treated with something, so I don’t know. But that was something that was a long, long way away, too.

I thought he was a bright guy and worked. Within the framework that he was working, he just didn’t have a chance to go try to market that on his own in any way.

RB: But when he came down here, you say there was other family members already here?

JS: Yeah, this is where his dad and mother [James B. and Susan Sterling] lived. They were on a farm just north of town.

RB: Okay, so *he* was born here.

JS: Yes, he was [from a] family of thirteen children. Second youngest.

RB: So he had left to make his career.

JS: He left when he was either twelve or thirteen, just after he got out of the eighth grade. Graduated from eighth grade school and went to Michigan. All his brothers and sisters that were older had all gone up there too. So there were jobs in the car factories.

He worked for the Wayne County road crew originally, then got on at Ford's. Worked on the Ford farms. They grew a lot of vegetables and that sort of thing. He worked when they were putting together Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum. See, he used to tell me about when they were laying the floor -- and there's a parquet floor in there like the old Boston Garden used to have. He said he'd take a lunch break... They were starting to bring in some of the antiques, and there was a bicycle for -- I think maybe twelve people would ride this bicycle in a row -- and he said they used to get on that and ride that around inside there, and play around in the old cars and things.

RB: What was his name, again? Did I ask you that?

JS: His name was Kenneth Clark Sterling.

RB: Clark. So that's a name that passes down?

JS: Yes, I guess. I think that probably came from his grandfather [who] was William Clark Sterling, who was either named after William Clarke Quantrill or... (laughs) I don't

think that would be right, because he was probably a contemporary of Quantrill in age. But Lewis and Clark were important people in this area. And it may have been a family name somewhere, I just have never seen it pop up back in there. I've done some research back in the [family tree.] His mother's side, they were Shumates and Hales and Purdues, back in Maryland and Virginia. But on my grandfather's side, I don't know what they were back. I think maybe there was a Wilson name in there someplace. But just don't have much on my grandfather's side.

RB: And now when he moved back in the '50s, were your grandparents still alive?

JS: My grandfather was eighty-seven at the time and died later that summer.

RB: I see. So you didn't get to know him very well.

JS: Not very well. I had seen him on other occasions in the past. I was named for him. So out of all the kids I was Jim Sterling and he was Jim Sterling.

RB: Did he have a farm?

JS: He lived on a very small farm at that time. They had about a forty-acre farm when they had all the kids little further out. But they had moved in closer to town in their senior years, yeah.

RB: So you really didn't start school until you came down to Bolivar, and so did you start here in...?

JS: I started fifth grade in Bolivar. I started kindergarten...

RB: Oh, yeah, that's right. You were, I was thinking, five years old. You were [in the] fifth grade, you had already gone to other schools.

JS: Yeah, I started to a private school in Boston. I was four and a half when I started school. I think my parents felt sorry for me because we lived just outside of town in a farmhouse next to where the plant had been. It had burned by that time, but next to where the plant *had* been. So this was a house owned by the company. And we lived out there. I just played by myself. I had a sister that was a baby. There was a lot of snow that winter. It was a record snow in Boston, so it was just piled up as high as the garage outside. So I couldn't go out very much. You know, a couple kids would come walking by, and they might be first graders or second graders out on the road. I'd have a fit. My mother finally decided that she needed to put me someplace so that I was around some other children.

RB: So you started school pretty early, then.

JS: Yeah, I don't know if it would have been a year early or not. I don't know that it was, because I was one of the youngest ones in my class but there were still kids that were younger than me as I went on through school. So it was probably the right year.

[Tape meter, 100]

RB: Then you went to Detroit, and you had some other schooling. You were still in elementary school, then?

JS: I went to Michigan and started the first grade there. Dearborn. It's Dearborn Heights today, but...

RB: So you had something to compare when you came down here to Bolivar.

JS: I was kind of excited about Bolivar. This looked like the Wild West to me. I thought there were probably horses tied up to hitching posts down here.

RB: Was there at that time?

JS: Oh, no more than anyplace else.

RB: (laughs) But it was in the country compared to where you had been.

JS: Yeah, I always enjoyed coming here. We did a lot of family vacations. I don't remember ever going anywhere except to down here on vacations, because we lived close to my grandparents in Michigan. In fact, we lived in the same house with them most of the time. It was kind of like The Waltons. There was an uncle and a couple of cousins [that] lived there, and then...

RB: Extended family.

JS: Yeah, there was people of a lot of different ages all living in the same big house.

RB: So the elementary school went to eighth grade at that time?

JS: Yeah, it went to the eighth grade. Actually, it went to the seventh grade in the school buildings, the two grade school buildings. I went to south ward building for the fifth and the sixth grades, and then I went to the north ward building for the north side of town for the seventh grade. Then the eighth grade was in the high school building, but it was the north ward... Eighth grade, so it was the same class that was in with seventh graders, the same group of us were eighth graders together in that. And then four years in the same building in high school.

RB: Then they moved to.... What was the high school? Was it just Bolivar?

JS: Just Bolivar High School.

RB: Well, now, I see a baseball bat there. Were you involved in that? Were you a baseball...?

JS: Oh, that belongs to another guy that has this office right now. But, yeah, I really liked baseball. I was a Detroit Tiger fan all my life and still am, and looking forward to this summer to go in to... This is the last year they'll play in the old stadium, I think.

RB: Isn't that going to be a big switch?

JS: Yeah, I just hope they get something built that's really nice!

RB: It's just hard to see that come down _____.

JS: Yeah, the opening day was the day my dad was born. I just always thought that was significant.

RB: What day is that?

JS: That was April 18th, 1912. Same day Fenway Park opened.¹

RB: That's a historic site right there.

JS: Yeah. But the old stadium just... It's been taken care of over the years, but it... They played football there. The Lions used to play their home games there, and they'd spray it with saltwater to melt the ice in the wintertime. So the salt ate away a lot of the steel in the concrete, so I'm not sure if they ever filled the thing up and everybody started stomping their feet the whole thing wouldn't fall down.

RB: So there's that problem.

JS: And it's been... It's Tiger Stadium now, it was Briggs Stadium, and before that it was Navin Field, and it goes back to 1912. And it's been built onto a lot of times, so it's not something they can fix very well. So they might as well go build something new that's like Jacob Field in Cleveland or the Oriole Park in Baltimore.

¹ Fenway Park in Boston opened on April 20, 1912.

RB: Yeah, _____ projects, there. So your dad had this printing business. Did you end up working with him or for him some while you were growing up?

JS: Oh, when I was growing up, you know, if your dad's got a business you pretty well work for him. I was an expert at putting together, collating, three-parts things or duplicate things, anything that was printed on pink, yellow, and white paper. I had to sit there and figure out a way to get them in order. I ran the paper cutter and I'd pad things. I never did run the press 'til...

RB: What kind of equipment did he have?

JS: Oh, it was just a _____ press. It was very simple offset equipment.

RB: It was offset.

JS: Yeah.

RB: And so he was sort of a pioneer in that, wasn't he? I mean, at that time.

JS: Yeah, there really were no other offset shops around the area. I'm not sure that there was even one in Springfield at that time. So it was pretty hard to go find somebody if you needed help.

[Tape meter, 150]

He came in here, and they opened a drive-in theater in town that week or that summer. They guy didn't want to have to send off and get the mats for all the shows.² They sent them these big books and they had all these different promotional pictures in there and ads, so my dad said, "Well, I'll just take that book." And he just cut little

² Referring to the mats used in offset printing. In this context, the theater owner didn't want to send off for those pre-made by the movie company or distributor.

pieces out of that and put together a show bill for them. So they kind of got started together, the guy that the theater out there.

And then he worked [and] did some printing for the electric company, did some for the county, and eventually had quite a good little business.

RB: So there were a number of steps in that offset process, including setting the type -- well, not setting the type, but putting the words onto it -- and then this rubber mat thing. Did you learn all that? How about developing film and all that?

JS: You know, I learned to develop film and make photographs after I was out of college and working for a newspaper, but I developed film off the copy camera where you shoot somebody's letterhead. Put it in that camera and shoot it, and then take it in and put it in the developer and fix and move it through like that, and squeegee it off and dry it, make plates, mask up the plates, and do that sort of thing. So [I] sort of understood that end of the business ahead of time.

When I got in the newspaper business at Union, Missouri -- this was several years later -- we were still a letterpress operation, so I had a chance to work in a letterpress shop for almost two months before we switched to offset there. But I felt like I knew something about offset when I went in.

RB: What encouraged you to go in the newspaper business? You graduated here [from] high school.

JS: Yeah, I didn't know what I wanted to do in high school. I thought my dad had been a chemist, so I thought I'd be good at chemistry and math and all that sort of thing. But I really wasn't very good at numbers or science in any way. So I took all the classes, and

in retrospect, probably could have done an awful lot better if I'd paid a little bit of attention, but I was spending a lot time drawing pictures in class and looking out the window.

But I had an English teacher -- I liked English; I liked to write stories -- I had an English teacher [who] said, "I think that you could be good in journalism. You ought to look at going to [the] Journalism [School] at the University of Missouri." That's the first time anybody ever suggested anyplace I could go to school.

RB: Had you been involved in the high school paper or anything?

JS: No, that was a senior project. Actually, when I was going into my senior year, by that time I thought I would like to do that and maybe do the sports on the school paper. So I went to the principal, because it said that you had to have typing to take that course, and I hadn't had typing yet. But you could get a waiver if you went and talked to the principal. Well, I went and talked to the principal, and he said, "No, I want you to take typing." Which probably [was] the single best advice anybody ever gave me in school, because I did take typing and it's something that's just been second nature to me ever since. If I hadn't taken typing at that time... You know, I had a great story to tell him. My dad sold records at the office supply and I could learn to type on my own, and [so] on. He said, "No, you go in and take a typing class. You learn to do it. You'll learn a lot more there than you'll ever learn in the journalism class." Which was true, because it wasn't a very good school paper back then. So now it's really very difficult to sit down and write a letter longhand to anybody. It's an awful lot simpler to sit down at a typewriter or computer and just knock it out today.

RB: So you were encouraged then to consider MU [University of Missouri].

JS: That's where I wanted to go, but I really didn't have very much money at the time.

[Tape meter, 200]

Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar was at that time a junior college. It cost like \$400 a year to go there -- this was in 1960 -- which wasn't *real* cheap back then, but it was a lot less expensive than going to the University of Missouri and having to live somewhere besides at home. So I stayed here and...

RB: So you graduated from high school in '60?

JS: Graduated in 1960 from Bolivar High School. I went to Southwest Baptist for two years and transferred all my credits from here up to the University of Missouri and then went up there.

RB: Who were some of your professors up there?

JS: At Southwest Baptist or University of Missouri?

RB: Either one, [any professors] that particularly impacted your [life.]

JS: Well, there was a teacher named [Dr.] Harlie [Kay] Gallatin, there was a history teacher that gave me my only "A+" I ever made in college. But I really always enjoyed history. It's been something that throughout my life I've enjoyed.

I wrote a book on Polk County history, 1985, on the sesquicentennial of the county with another man [George Francis Hooper] who at that time was seventy-five, so he'd lived here half the 150 years.³ For somebody else, it wouldn't have been a very

³ This book was Polk County Classics: sesquicentennial photography album. (Bolivar, MO: Published by the Bolivar Herald-Free Press for the Historical Society of Polk County, 1985.)

interesting project. For me, it was just -- I just thought it was fantastic [to] look at the old pictures and get involved with that.

RB: Local history.

JS: Yeah. Well, any kind of history, really. But he was a good professor. Rachel Caldwell, she was the wife of the minister at the Second Baptist Church in Bolivar at that time, and a young woman from Mississippi. Just an *excellent* English teacher. I could have taken English with some of the other professors at that time, but I don't think they would have held me to the standard she held me to. She knew I wanted to go to journalism school, and she insisted that I learned to do things correctly. I really haven't seen her since I was a freshman in college, and I always wondered what happened to her. She and her husband went on someplace. But it's somebody that you... Like the English teacher I had in high school. I always wished that years later I could have walked up to her and given her a hug and said, "Thank you," but I think she had died by that time.

RB: People [that had] made an impression.

JS: Yeah. You hope that as you go through life that you can an impression on people and help them along the way sometimes, too, like that.

RB: The professors there at MU -- you were able to take journalism, then, specifically -- who were some of the [memorable ones]?

JS: [William H.] Bill Taft is one that my first semester up there, he taught "History and Principles of Journalism," which almost everybody hated. But I thought it was a pretty interesting course even if it was at eight o'clock every morning. I made an "A" in there, so I got five hours of "A" to start off at the University of Missouri. That got me on track

to being the top ten percent of my class up there, which was something I never got close to when I was in high school down in Bolivar. But I think by that time I'd gotten interested in something. I was interested in all my classes.

But Bob Haverfield and Milt Gross were the advertising teachers, and eventually that's what I did was major in advertising. I worked with them as a student grader and lab assistant. So I worked my senior year in their courses and helped them with that. All of them were friends as long as any of them were around.

Bill Taft, you know, of course, has written the history books on newspapers in Missouri. And the year I was president of the Missouri Press Association, it was really kind of an honor for me to invite him to be the official historian of the Missouri Press Association.

[Tape meter, 250]

So he started coming to all the past presidents dinners at that time. It's just been real nice to be around him and be in touch.

Dean [Earl F.] English was the dean at the time. A great man. Had a background in newspapers. Although I hardly knew when I was in school, he's somebody I've gotten to know well since that time. Somebody I admire a great deal.

RB: Let's see, was [Walter] Williams even talked about anymore at that time?⁴

JS: Yeah, there was still the journalists' creed. I've still got it hanging on my wall here on the other side of the room. We still talked about that.

⁴ The first dean of the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

In the Journalism School at that time you had to take advertising along with the editorial side to get through school. I think that they've changed that so you kind of be an editorial type these days and not really know much about advertising. I didn't intend to work for a newspaper. I started out thinking that's probably what I'd do, and then I got interested in advertising and was going to work for an agency. When I finally graduated, I had enough that I could go work for a newspaper. The only thing I didn't have was photography, and wished that I had taken that.

RB: So what was your next move then? You had got out of school and...?

JS: I worked for the Missouri Press Association first. I fooled around in...

To graduate from journalism school, you have to have thirteen hours of foreign language. I started out in junior college by taking Latin. Again, Rachel Caldwell said, "Don't take Spanish, don't take French. I don't think those will help you as much." She thought that Latin would help me a lot more in understanding language if I was going to journalism school. And I think she turned out to be right. The professor I had was a good family friend, but he was a Greek professor, and I guess somebody had been fired or left that taught Latin, so he was having to teach Latin too that year. And he was about two pages ahead of us. I always did very well in vocabulary and never quite understood how the words were supposed to go together and the endings and the beginnings of the words. But I got to the University then, and I had to take the last three hours.

I started school my junior year about a week late. I had a summer job on the Great Lakes working on a ship up there, and didn't want to miss the trip to Montreal at the end of the season with the rest of the kids in the crew.

RB: Was it a cargo ship?

JS: No. It was a passenger ship. Last passenger ship to be regularly scheduled on the Great Lakes.

RB: Where did it dock?

JS: Oh, it ran from Buffalo to Duluth every week and back. And went through Detroit. Once in a while, we'd go down to Chicago. Were up in Mackinaw Island. I'm getting ready to leave now to go up in northern Michigan up around close to Mackinaw for the summer. And these places I'm going to be around this summer are places that we used to go on this ship. So I'm really looking forward to all that.

RB: So you had to finish off that language business.

[Tape meter, 300]

JS: Had to that up. Got into class and sat down, and the professor who -- I thought of him as being a big Russian because he had a Russian name -- and he came into the room with a bundle of books under his arm, said something in Latin, and everybody laughed. I didn't know what he said! I looked at this girl next to me, and her eyes were kind of big and she didn't know what he said either. I only saw her one other time in my life, and that was that afternoon when we were checking out of that class at the window down in Jesse Hall!

So I thought, "Well, I'll just come back. I've got two years to take this. I'll go home this summer, work for my dad at the print shop..." No, I was going to work on a freighter on the Great Lakes, on a cargo ship that summer. So I thought, "I'll just take my Latin book and I'll just be a real scholar." You know, I'd read about all these great

writers that'd went off by themselves and studied, learned. Well, I drank beer and did everything else that the guys on the ship did! (chuckles) And slept a lot, too. So I didn't learn any Latin that summer.

So then everybody else that was in my class had graduated by that time. And I thought, "Well, I can still come back this fall, take it, and I can start in graduate school at the same time." So I went to Bolivar that summer, worked with my father, and studied Latin.

Well, I didn't study much Latin that time either, so I got up there and this time we had a visiting professor from Cambridge. He was just a delightful man, but he had a very structured style. He would ask somebody to translate a passage from Virgil's Aeneid, and then I'd sit there and write it down in my book. He would go through and he would translate what he considered to be the correct way. And I'd go through and correct it. Then he'd go to the next one and I'd do the same thing. Well, he went around the room alphabetically, so I could always figure about the day I'd have to translate. I wouldn't go to school that day, cut the class, and get this fellow that sat next to me to give me the notes. And I'd come back. You know, he didn't write anything down in his grade book on it. He'd just called you, and if you weren't there, you just weren't there. And [I] got through the first test with a "B." Had a car wreck before the second test and missed it. Went in to find out if I could take it, and he said, "Well, you've got a 'B.'" Just take that into the finals with you." So [I thought,] "Well, that's pretty good. I may graduate yet." So I got into the finals and did very well on vocabulary, didn't do very well on the other part other than I had memorized the first six pages of the Aeneid, I think. (chuckles)

[Tape meter, 350]

And still can almost quote some of it today. But I remember that I'd read somewhere that if you listen to a tape recording at night while you were asleep you could learn, so I put it on a tape recorder and turned that thing on and [would] go to bed at night. Somehow I graduated. Got a "C" for the course and got out of there.

RB: That's great. Then did you start grad school too?

JS: I was in community development, which I thought... By that time I was interested in community newspapers. I'd had a roommate whose family had the paper in New London, Missouri, the Fisher family.⁵ New London was up in Ralls County, just outside of Hannibal.

RB: And what was his name?

JS: His name was John [Porter] Fisher, [III], and he runs the paper [the Montgomery Standard]. Has run the paper in Montgomery City for a number of years. His dad and mother, [John] Porter [Fisher, Jr.] and [Alma M.] "Sally" [Fisher], were just like a second set of parents to me. I'd go up to Hannibal and water ski on the Mississippi River and live pretty well. They'd make me go down and cover the election or some sort of thing to pay my keep for that week, but it was fun. Because of John, I'd taken a class in community journalism that [William A.] Bill Bray taught. And Bill was head of the Press Association. Went up to King City, Missouri, which was Bill's hometown, and a fellow named Louis [N.] Bowman was there.⁶ Louis had graduated from the university

⁵ Then known as the Ralls County Record. By the time of this interview, it had become the Ralls County Herald-Enterprise and was being published by Gene and Judith Statler.

⁶ Mr. Bowman was with the King City Tri-County News.

in 1919, and he just was full of stories. [I've] just always admired people from that era, the stories they had about the business and what it was like. It's not nearly as much fun these days as what they seemed to have. They worked awful hard but they also had a lot of fun.

[Tape meter, 381. End Side One, Tape One of Two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin Side Two, Tape One of Two.]

JS: Yeah, he was... You could look around when you sat in Neff Hall -- I've thought about this a lot after that -- you sat around there and looked at all these people that got journalism honor medals, and a lot of them were classmates of his. Mary Margaret McBride, who I'd heard for years on the radio, was one of his best friends. She was a Theta and he was a KA [Kappa Alpha.] You know, that was a sister sorority to the KAs at that time. So he'd kind of gotten Bill into that fraternity. And then I was in that and John had brought me into that fraternity. So there were a lot of newspaper kids in there, too, because of Bill Bray. So I got to know a lot of people that the families were in the newspaper business from around the state of Missouri. The Sowers family [of Rolla], J. W. Brown [Jr., of Harrisonville.] [He] didn't have any sons, but he had two son-in-laws at different times that were both in the fraternity with me. And Kirk Powell was there, and Kirk's been president of the Press Association the last few years. Just a number of people that were around and have come since that time and there have been several after that, too.

RB: [Have] taken positions in their community.

JS: Yeah, most of them have gone back and been in the family newspaper. Like Craig Watkins, he was from Chillicothe, and Craig came down and started his career in Bolivar here. He graduated probably five years after I did from the university, five or six.

RB: Did you all stay at a certain...? Was it a fraternity house?

JS: Yeah, we had a fraternity house. It was at the corner of College [Avenue] and University [Avenue.] It was about three blocks east of the journalism school, so that was a good location.

RB: So you have some happy times from your college memories?

JS: Yeah, and really... They say that you'll meet people [and] be friends all your life, and that's true. Tom Sowers was a pledge brother of mine, and his family owned the newspaper at Rolla and later owned the papers at Rolla and Waynesville. Tom's the godfather to my second daughter and I'm godfather to his oldest daughter. We're still talking and still being friends after all these years. I was in his wedding.

RB: Godfather? Are you Catholic?

JS: No. They're Episcopal.

RB: Oh, I see. So they have that same tradition in there.

JS: Yeah, I'm three times a godfather, but none of them have ever been Catholics. One Methodist and two Episcopal.

RB: So you got out of school [and] went into community development then.

JS: Well, I didn't stay in school long enough to graduate in that. But I did that, and I also got in... Took kind of a dual major in graduate school in community development and newspaper publishing. I thought that would set me on the right track if I ever wanted to

go this direction. At the same time, I still thought I might go to an ad agency and work there.

My job at the Press Association was as just kind of a general assistant. Then the fellow that was their ad director left and they needed somebody to fill that job for a while, so I did that. And then they hired [Edward L.] Ed Steele [in 1967], and I sort of stepped back in more of an assistant position because they knew I wasn't going to stay forever in Columbia, that I was going to go someplace.

But I thought I had a chance to go either into newspaper publishing, or meet somebody in an ad agency because I called on the agencies in St. Louis and Kansas City. So I thought I'd go one way or the other, as it worked out [B.] Wayne Freeman [of the Franklin County Tribune] in Union, Missouri needed some help when I was there, so I left and did that.

RB: So that was the first job you had right after [college]?

JS: First job, it was in Union, Missouri.

RB: All right. And [in] what role were you [placed at Union]?

JS: I went over as ad manager. Got there -- and I think they had an eight page paper that week, because it was the county seat and six miles, seven miles from Washington.

Washington at that time had the best weekly newspaper in America. It was a huge big thick paper over at Washington.

RB: Who was running that?

JS: The Miller family at Washington. [I've] since become great friends with all of them over there, but it tough to start in the newspaper business when you had that good a newspaper to compete.

We had an editor on the Franklin County Tribune that lived in St. Louis and he drove a Cadillac. (chuckling) And he'd drive out there everyday to work and then back to St. Louis. So he wasn't the most popular person in town, and he didn't want to be there after the sun went down, he wanted to go home! First weekend I was there, he asked me if I'd go take a picture for him. Somebody told me how to shoot the camera. He said it was kind of a little do-gooder thing; it was some Boy Scouts and [the paper] ought to get a picture of it. So I said, yeah, I'd do that. Well, it turned out there was five new Eagle Scouts, and Washington at that time had a weekend edition that was a tabloid size, and they used it for the full front-page picture. So I was sure glad that I had a picture of those five boys getting their Eagle badge.

Then I always liked sports, so I started writing sports, too.

[Tape meter, 050]

Put together a sports page for them. Then another guy came to town. He hired another editor before long after we'd gone offset. For about six months there we ran about twenty pages or more a week, and probably ran more twenty-page papers in that six months than they had in the hundred-year history of the newspaper.

RB: So it really expanded. It was the Union...? What was it?

JS: Franklin County Tribune.

RB: And they went to offset while you were there?

JS: Yeah, that was in probably March or April of 1967. I'd been in the Army for about six months in 1966, and had got married at that time after I got out of the Army.

RB: So you married after you got out of college?

JS: Yeah.

RB: You had gone in the Army _____?

JS: Went in the Reserves. Vietnam was going on at the time and it's kind like what, sounds like what Dan Quayle did. But a friend of mine came by and he said, "I think it's getting hot in this deal in Cambodia, so maybe we ought to just see about getting in the Reserves, National Guard." So I said, "Okay." So we went down and they said, yeah, if we wanted to, come on down and sign up. They had a unit that would have 180 men if it was full, and they had about fifty openings at that time. So we went down and signed up, and two days later there was 200 on the waiting list. So that's how quickly things changed around.

RB: What was the deal? If you were in the National Guard at that time...?

JS: Well, if you were in the National Guard... I always thought that if Vietnam really got serious that they'd have the National Guard called up. That's what I always thought the National Guard was for. Well, as it turned out, they didn't call up very many National Guard units. They just drafted everybody they could draft. So I didn't go to Vietnam. [I] went to military police school and was in a unit in Columbia. We had units in Fulton and Warrenton in east central Missouri. There were some racial problems in Kansas City and St. Louis coming up in '67, so they started training us for riot control. I was the point

guy on the wedge. I was the one with bayonet out in the middle with every... I couldn't see anybody because they were all lined up behind me on both sides. (chuckles)

RB: (chuckling) Oh, boy, what an envious position!

JS: It was kind of fun in practice, but I wasn't sure I wanted to go into any kind of situation. I think we eventually got called up and went to Kansas City. By that time, I was down in Bolivar working for the paper here at that time, and had switched to the Navy Reserve. They had a program for people with a degree in journalism or worked for a media company of some sort that they'd give you a direct commission in the Navy Reserve. So I was a Lieutenant JG [Junior Grade] in the Navy at that time doing press releases for a training center in Springfield. So I didn't go into any riot situations. But it was real hard to get used to returning salutes instead of initiating salutes when you met somebody.

RB: So you had met your wife...in Columbia?

JS: Yeah, that was my first wife, Charlotte. She was at Stephens College, and she was from California. We met after I got out of the Army. Just met early in May and got married in July. Nice lady. She kind of started her media career in Bolivar helping me with the newspapers here a little bit, and she's now the vice-president for Marriott's Corporation, first woman to be at that level for Marriott Corporation. She runs all the public relations, advertising, everything for them today.

RB: Does she live here _____?

JS: No, she's lived in Washington, D.C. for a number of years.

RB: How long did you stay in Union?

JS: I was there from about the first of February 'til the end of November. My dad called me and said that a fellow named Ralph [E.] Stufflebam, whose family had owned the Bolivar Herald since 1906, that Ralph had come in [and] he'd taken the paper back. He'd sold it twice. And he took it back for the second time and he went down the street and bought the Free Press, which was the Republican paper in Bolivar at that time. Herald was a Democrat. And the Free Press was the strongest of the two newspapers, but he came took it [the Herald] back and then went out and bought the Free Press for, I think, \$5,000. There was a free paper [the Polk County Times] that had started a couple of years earlier after the owner of the Free Press [Marshall Gravely] had been killed in an auto accident.

[Tape meter, 100]

So [Bolivar] ended up with three newspapers in town. One guy came in and bought the Free Press for \$60,000 and two years later sold it for \$5,000. And somebody started one from nothing and sold it for \$20,000 in two years... I don't know what, and they just kind of took the Herald back, but it didn't have very much value.

RB: So it was Stufflebam that was buying these places?

JS: He bought them. He was the general manager at [television] channel three, KYTV, in Springfield, an NBC [National Broadcasting Corporation] station.⁷ But his father [Francis L. Stufflebam] had run the paper for a number of years, and he grew up in it.⁸ His son ran it for a while. Then he sold it to some other people, ended up taking it back a couple of times.

⁷ Mr. Stufflebam had also been a sales representative for KWTO radio in Springfield.

⁸ The Stufflebam family had run the Bolivar Herald for fifty-three years before it was sold. Source: Missouri Newspapers by William H. Taft. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1964), page 335.

He came in and needed somebody to run it, so my dad called me and I came down here. He had kind of the staff of the three papers put together: the Polk County Times, the Bolivar Herald, [and] the Bolivar Free Press. And then decided he would merge the Herald and the Free Press together because they were legal newspapers with paid circulation. He came out with one called the Bolivar Free Press-Herald, because he was a Democrat, but his was the smaller paper so he thought he would give the Free Press top billing on that. So when I went to work, I said, “I think we ought to call it the Herald-Free Press.” Because it sounded better to me. Just about anytime you put “Herald” in a merger situation like the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, the Boston Herald-Traveler, “Herald” was always first. And the New York Herald-Tribune. So I thought Herald-Free Press sounded better. So after two weeks we became the Herald-Free Press, and that’s what we’ve been ever since.

RB: So what sort of relationship did your dad have with this Mr. Stufflebam?

JS: Oh, they knew each other. That was about it. He just *heard* that Stufflebam had bought the paper and said that I ought to call him, that he’d be looking something.

And we [the Herald-Free Press] didn’t do any [job] printing. My dad had a print shop, so we didn’t do any printing. We have since started a printing company, but it’s just been web offset. We’ve never gone to sheet-fed, and never have run small envelopes or that sort of thing. We do that in our Buffalo newspaper [the Buffalo Reflex], but we don’t [here.] That’s mainly for Dallas County and that community. So the company that my dad started, Ozark Offset [Printing], is still a going business in the town today, but you know, the people that he sold it to years ago have continued to run it.

RB: And they kept the name. Was that the first name that he started it under?

JS: Yeah, Ozark Offset.

RB: Now, when you came to work [here], were you working for Mr. Stufflebam?

JS: We had a lady that sat at the front desk [that] took the classified ads, answered the phone, and set all the type for the paper on a Frieden Justewriter. You typed it once and it punched a [paper] tape. Then you ran the tape through the second machine -- looked just about like the first one -- and then it came out and it was justified so it looked like a newspaper column. But it was sort of [an] automated way to get type that was lined up on both sides, aligned correctly. We didn't have very good equipment back then, but we managed to get a [newspaper out.]

RB: Was it still a linotype or was it offset?

JS: No, we didn't... All the linotypes were gone by then. All three papers were offset.

RB: Just what year are we talking about _____?

JS: This was December of 1967 and the start of 1968. We did our headlines on -- I think it was an Addressograph headliner. Or anyways, a headliner. Or maybe... Yeah, I think that was the name of it. Headliner is what I know. But it was a big plastic disc that you put in, and you spun them around, and when you got the right letter you stopped, and you pushed a button, and then you spun them to the next letter. And we ran that up 'til the first of March.

Stufflebam had told me that he wanted to sell the paper and wanted me to buy it, thought maybe I'd get Tom Sowers to work with me. Well, Tom didn't want to leave Rolla. It was real hard to borrow any money for a newspaper. My dad and I went to the

bank up here that he'd always done business with, and they said, "Well, we'll loan you \$7,000, and you can buy a new set of adjustowriters if you want to start your own paper, but..." (chuckles) But they wouldn't loan anything on any other one. It's just the nature of the business. It's always been hard to borrow money for a newspaper.

So I went over and bought the paper at Fair Play.

[Tape meter, 150]

Fair Play Advocate. I don't know how old a newspaper it was, but it was a *tiny* little paper, letterpress. Highest ad rate was fifteen cents an inch. It was kind of a mini-tabloid they put out. The publisher and his wife -- his name was Bernard [L. Ellis] and her name was Bernice, so they both went by "Bernie" -- they lived in the building. My dad and I bought it for \$4,000 from them. At that time you could *move* a newspaper anywhere within a county. So I thought if I couldn't get this purchased after leaving a good job and coming here, I'd just go buy another paper and we'd go back into the newspaper wars if I had to. But I thought that might give me enough leverage to get the other one bought. And I thought I gave Stufflebam a good offer, but he really wanted somebody he knew had the money behind them to sell it to them.

What happened was Jac [W.] Zimmerman from Willow Springs, who'd known when I worked at the Press Association -- Jac had been president of the Press Association, so we'd traveled together some and knew each other -- Jac came in and bought the paper. I think he paid \$50,000 for it that year.

RB: Now he'd [Jac Zimmerman] been gone for how long?

JS: Jac died in 1979. He sold the paper to me October 1st, and I think died around the 10th or 12th of October.⁹ But he was gravely ill at the time.

RB: And yet his career, did it start out in Columbia, you say?

JS: Jac's? No, I think the first paper he had [the Miller County Autogram] was at Tuscumbia, county seat down not too far from Camdenton, below the dam at Lake of the Ozarks. Then he went to Willow Springs and ran the paper [Willow Springs News] over there in Howell County, and then came up to Bolivar in 1968 and ran it [the Herald-Free Press] for twelve years.

RB: But didn't he work for the Press Association?

JS: He was the president, which is an elected position.

RB: I see his name pops up...quite a bit in all these various papers and then also as the president [of the Missouri Press Association.] Did he have an education in journalism?

JS: No, I... Like a lot of men through that period of time... A lot of people didn't go to college back in the '30s and '40s. War broke out, Jac was in the Navy, and had a wife and a child. Came home and had a couple more children. For some reason, [he] had a chance to get into the newspaper business, and went down there... You didn't have to have a lot of formal education as long as you were willing to work. You know, he may have worked... I don't know if in high school if he worked for the newspaper to learn to run the linotype or what he did, but he could kind of run the linotype and the equipment. He was handy with the equipment; I think that helped him do that.

⁹ Mr. Zimmerman died on October 18, 1979. For his obituary, please see the Bolivar Herald-Free Press, October 25, 1979, page 1.

But he was a real pioneer in the business. He and Lane [E.] Davis at Houston, Missouri bought an offset press. So in the early '60s they had an offset newspaper. It was [a] four pages [press.] If you were a sixteen-page paper, you had four press runs and you stuck them all together. So it wasn't like thumbing through a sixteen-page paper, it was four sections of four pages each. But he took that challenge very early. Of course, everybody else followed before very long.

RB: So he was one of the first to go into offset.

JS: That's right.

RB: Where was his first offset business?

JS: The press was at Houston, Missouri. Jac, and Lane Davis, and I don't know; there may have been some other people involved, but I know Jac was one of the lead people along with Lane in doing that.¹⁰

RB: I wonder what that offset [was acquired]?

JS: I think that was probably 1962 or 1963, somewhere in there.

RB: So that was pretty early. But it changed pretty rapidly after that, then. When you were at Union or anytime before, were you ever around a linotype very much?

[Tape meter, 200]

JS: No, I never had the experience to be around a linotype. I saw them at school. At that time they still had a linotype school at the University [of Missouri.] A fellow named

¹⁰ Other members of this group were Jack Stufflebaum of the Mountain Grove Journal and G.E. Derrickson of the Licking News. Collectively they were known as the Van Press. Source: Missouri Newspapers and the Missouri Press Association: 125 years of Service, 1867-1992, by William H. Taft. (Marceline, MO: Heritage House Publishing, 1992), 17. The press was "centralized" and served the printing needs of all their papers. According to Taft (cited above,) "This was the first offset plant put into operation and owned by a group of publishers in the nation."

Tom Bell taught that. And it was down kind of in the pit where they at one time had the press for the Journalism School to print the [Columbia] Missourian on. They had just moved a number of linotypes in there, and there were still young men [that] would come to school there and Tom Bell would teach them to be linotype operators. And that's kept a supply of people for the newspapers of the state. The Press Association and the newspapers were very close to the Journalism School at that time.

RB: So the people that needed, for instance, printers or needed these machine operators, they had a connection there.

JS: That's right. They had a connection. They knew there was always somebody that they could recommend, that they could hire that way.

RB: Now, the training of these people must have phased out, too, along with the machines pretty quickly.

JS: Yeah, I don't know when it quit exactly. I know Tom Bell was teaching some offset while I was finishing up in Journalism School. He was teaching some offset at that time to kind of go along with the linotype.

RB: So you came in right there at that time when it was changing.

JS: Yeah. And your dad had been a kind of pioneer, too.

JS: Yeah, in some ways he was, my father was.

RB: You met...Jac Zimmerman while he was the president [of the Missouri Press Association], then?

JS: Jac decided he wanted to visit every newspaper in the state. At that time there was 340 newspapers, I think, in Missouri. And the year that he was president, he visited every one

of them. He came into Columbia one day and he had two more to see, and they were fortunately just in Boonville. It was twenty-five miles over to Boonville, so they sent me to ride over with Jac with a camera to take a picture of...

RB: His visit.

JS: Yeah, I knew how to take a picture. I didn't know how to process them, but I knew how to at least point the camera. So I took a picture of Jac with E. J. Melton at [the] Cooper County Record and the fellow that ran the Boonville daily [Boonville Daily News] at that time.¹¹

RB: And that was an important association, that brief visit was, right there, for your...

JS: Yeah, and I kind of knew him. Then at the Press Association, I knew Jac. And Jac had a daughter, Janice, that was close to my age, so you know, the younger people all kind of hung around together anyway. Then he had twin sons. One of them, Dan, eventually went to Journalism School and came out and was the editor here for a while, then went out west and has run some papers of his own, and is a publisher for a Pulitzer newspaper out in Petaluma, California today.

RB: So now, you bought the Fair Play Advocate?

JS: Yeah.

RB: Bought that thing, and then Jac had come down and bought from Mr. [Stufflebam]...

JS: He bought the Herald-Free Press.

RB: And then how did you all end up getting together?

¹¹ Oliver T. Maxwell was the publisher and Bob Macy was the editor of the Boonville Daily News around this time period.

JS: He came by the house and said, "I've just bought the paper and I want you to work with me." I said, "Well, here's my paper right here. I can start it next week." He said, "Oh. There's no sense in doing that. Why don't we all just work together? You can be the co-publisher." So we worked out a thing. It was his money, but he was able to list me as somebody local being the co-publisher on the thing. But it was really Jac and Rheba [Wade] Zimmerman [that] ran the papers.

RB: What was Rheba's role?

JS: Well, Rheba, she did the bookkeeping.

[Tape meter, 250]

She may have written something once in a while. I don't really recall. Jac wrote some and kind of pasted the paper up and sold ads and did that side of the thing. But he was a businessman, too, on the thing. But Rheba was real good at keeping the books and keeping track of that right down to the penny on things. That was one of the reasons we were successful that way is because she was so good at what she did on that side of things.

And I was young and had a lot of spirit and didn't know there were hours on the clock or days in the week. I just worked as much as I needed to work to get it out. It was my hometown and I just wanted to put out a great newspaper here. I'd gone from what I'd seen in the newspapers when I was in high school here, which I wasn't particularly impressed with and didn't think there was any way there would be a career here... Like I never even gave it a thought to four or five years later coming back and running the

newspaper. So I decided if I was going to do it, we were going to do a pretty good job with it. We've had good luck over the years.

RB: You actually moved from like [the] advertising department in Union right into the publishing part. Did you ever have a period where you were editor?

JS: Oh, I think at different times I was just about everything here. I've even turned the press on at different times. But I've rolled a lot of paper off of trucks, and masked things in the back, and developed film and pages, and shot pictures. So I've really done a little a little bit of everything. When I first came to Bolivar, yeah, I was editor and ad manager and everything, because there wasn't anybody else. There were some ladies that put ads together and some that set type and one ran the addressing machine. And the Stufflebams, Ralph and Clessa, they'd come down and work on it, but they did mostly the bookkeeping side of things. Olive Teegarden, a lady that was a friend of theirs, came in and sold a few ads, but generally I was doing the ads, and writing all the news, pasting it up, taking the pictures, and doing that. The first few months 'til Jac bought it, it was pretty tough. Then even after he got here, it still was a lot of hours that you worked because we started having big papers.

The town of Bolivar was kind of pleased to have one newspaper instead of three. When we started doing things they'd never seen before, people started to read the paper and it started to grow. We started selling papers over the counter rather than just by subscription. I think we started out by selling 300, either at the newspaper office or at Wood's Supermarket, which fortunately started about the same time we did, the first big

supermarket in town. From that point on, we just continued to grow. Today we're up close to 8,000 paid circulation, and half of that's newsstand sales.

RB: And you reach over a pretty large area, too, don't you?

JS: Well, generally we're a Polk County newspaper. We sell some in Hickory County and some of the counties on either side of us. But since 1979, we've owned the three papers in a row at Cedar County, Polk County, and Dallas County. Stockton [Cedar County Republican], Bolivar [Herald-Free Press] and Buffalo [Reflex].

[Tape meter, 300]

So you really don't sell many once you get in the next county. They're more interested in their school news and their community activities. They don't care much about what's going on in the next town other than... We do sell some advertising back and forth now that we wouldn't have done before that, probably.

RB: Part of your growth during that period had to do with the machinery, too, didn't it? I mean, really you expanded and got some capabilities there that other papers didn't have.

JS: Well, we started out with adjustowriters and eventually...Compugraphic came out with their first machines. We started using those. We didn't have a press. We printed at Lebanon, and then we printed at Clinton, and then Marshfield.

But by 1970 we were ready to move into a bigger building and to buy a press, so we found an old building that had been an automobile dealership that was next to the post office. It was a *huge* building. It was about 25,000 square feet. I guess. I've the same problem with numbers I had when I couldn't do math. It's 10,000 feet on each level, so we had lots of room for paper storage and lots of room to expand. Put a press room that

was right next to... You know, you open the pressroom door and roll the cart out across the alley and right up the ramp to the post office. When you deliver your newspapers like that, it was an easy way to do it. Today that room is our mailroom and we've got our equipment back there for mailing, but we've got a bigger pressroom. We started out with a two-unit press. We printed eight pages at a time. Now we've got a seven-unit press. Do a lot of full color these days.

RB: And then at the same time, a lot of these smaller newspapers around were going to offset. Did they need a press; is that it?

JS: Yeah, when you can usually count on some other papers to come and print with you. We had Stockton from the beginning, we had Buffalo generally -- we owned Stockton, but we didn't own Buffalo at that time -- then we had Hermitage, and we had St. Clair County papers at Appleton City and Osceola, and there was others that would come and go. We did a little other work, but generally we just printed newspapers.

But there's more papers around with presses now. You go to the east and there's Lebanon and Marshfield, and you go to the south and there's Springfield and you've got presses down around there. To the west there's some not too far away over there at Nevada. And then Hermitage bought their own press. They wanted to be a complete newspaper operation and wanted to have their own press. So they bought it, and do a good job with what they do up there.

[Tape meter, 350]

So that kind of cuts you off from most directions. You've got to drive past another newspaper to get here.

RB: Right. But now isn't there a larger...? When you're talking about the business of newspapers, at this moment you own how many of them?

JS: Today we own three newspapers, and we're a minority partner in the Springfield Business Journal, but we really don't have much to say or do with that. We go to a board meeting once a year.

RB: But there are some other larger conglomerates now that own... They're starting to be the more common thing out there, [are they]?

JS: Yeah, a lot of the daily newspapers have been purchased. And sometimes weeklies are close or maybe were owned by the daily that sold. Yeah, there's quite a bit of that. It's happened a lot in the last ten years. Started a lot back in the middle '80s. In fact, it seemed like a such a good business, acquiring newspapers, that in 1987 I started working with Robert [N.] Bolitho as a newspaper broker and sold newspaper properties and did appraisals and worked on that all over the country.

RB: Which company was that?

JS: This was Bolitho-Sterling (was the name of the company), but it had been Krehbiel-Bolitho before that. It was really the oldest brokerage company in the country that just did newspapers and magazines.

RB: And you would broker between any...conglomerate that wanted to buy any other...?

JS: That's right.

RB: How would you get your business? Would you find a newspaper that wanted to sell or maybe that you wanted to buy?

JS: Well, some of it both ways.

[Tape meter, 382. End Side Two, Tape One of Two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin Side One, Tape Two of Two.]

RB: ...your brokerage company that you had [worked with] and the way that you [operated.]

JS: Yeah, we had files dating back to 1923 that we worked from. But it was a company with a good reputation. I worked there from 1986 [until] 1991. But during that time there were an awful lot of papers sold in America, and a lot of dailies. A lot of small dailies changed hands, and groups like American Daily Newspapers, which was out of Canada -- their money came out of Canada, but that was their American company -- bought an awful lot of daily newspapers. Then there was another Canadian company, Thomson, had bought a lot of a little bit bigger daily papers. So there got to be conglomerates that owned a lot of the dailies in Missouri and other states around the country.

RB: At the same that you were working for this brokerage company, were you still running your [newspaper]?

JS: I still owned the papers, but David Berry had stepped in, [and] from about 1986 on has run the newspapers in Bolivar.

RB: And his background? Did he [attend journalism school]?

JS: David went to Southwest Missouri State and studied journalism down there. Always wanted to go back to his hometown of Aurora and run the newspaper there. [He] got a chance to come here. He's just been a first-class citizen of Bolivar, Missouri ever since. He's been president of the Chamber of Commerce. His kids have been born and raised here. Now he's got a son graduating from high school this year, his oldest son. But David has run the papers very much the way I like to see them be run, so I sort of step

back. When I quit brokering papers in 1991, I just didn't feel like I wanted to come back in. There was too many people that were doing too good a job for me to come in and stick my nose back in the middle of it, so I've sort of stayed around the fringes on it.

RB: And what role would you say you have right now?

JS: Oh, sort of "Senior Advisor," I guess is as much as anything.

David's been the publisher for a number of years, but he also...oversees the Stockton and Buffalo papers. But they both have publishers for those papers, too.

Jim [E.] Hamilton's been at Buffalo since 1979. Jim was the editor at Bolivar before that, so he's somebody I've had a long acquaintance with. Really done a good job. He's an excellent writer and seems to like this business.

Jeff Jasper was publisher at Stockton for a number of years. Kind of followed in my footsteps. He came down to Bolivar on a journalism field trip because he thought it'd be an easy class, I think, and ended up thinking it was interesting and marrying a girl from Stockton that went to journalism school. She came in as editor and he came in and ran the paper. He one time, [in] one year's competition had the best weekly paper in the state of Missouri. But a lot of effort put into that. You know, we've had three good papers for the three counties over here over the years. Jeff's moved on to another job finally, I think, just got burned out from it. That's hard when you're kind of the whole show in a small town and there's not much staff. And Stockton's a lot smaller paper than Bolivar. In Bolivar, if you get a little tired, you might take a week and go somewhere on a trip, but [at] Stockton it's real hard to even get a vacation out of there.

RB: That's what I've heard from a lot of these smaller papers is that the responsibility was just non-ending. (chuckling) Once you got started, there was no chance to stop!

JS: Sure, I remember Porter Fisher telling me that when he wanted to take a vacation, what he did was -- this was all letterpress; [he] put the whole paper together -- [he] put a little box on the front page and said, "We're going to be taking a vacation next week, and you're going to get a paper very similar to the one you're reading right now in the mail next week." Because you had to publish a paper every week. So he made that run, mailed those, and then took that box and changed it to, "Now here's this week's paper. Please bear with us. We'll be back with more news next week and we'll catch up on everything." And he just changed the dateline on the paper and reprinted the whole thing, got it ready to mail and [his] cousin came over, I guess, and stuck it in the mailbox on Thursday. He complied with the post office on that.

RB: That's one of the characteristics, it seems like, of rural papers then is that kind of commitment from year to year and year round. The other thing is that people hardly ever, it seems like, finally do *really* retire. (chuckling) I mean, it seems like there are a lot of "hangers-on."

JS: I used to think that the happiest people I knew were the people that were former newspaper owners, because now they didn't have to work every Tuesday night, they didn't have to... Everybody in the world thinks they know how to run a newspaper and a restaurant. And neither one of them are very easy. I hope I'm smart enough in life to never to get in the restaurant business. But the people that have published newspapers... It is hard, because there's a certain amount of feeling that it's... Everybody feels that

newspaper is *theirs* in a community, and so they don't hesitate to tell you what you're doing right or wrong.

[Tape meter, 050]

But when you do try to quit, it's real hard not to have that sense of importance and sense that you're doing something in your community just to suddenly wake up some Monday morning and realize you don't have to go down to the office anymore. So I suspect that there are a lot of people that hang on, try to write a column and do things. I always recommended to people that when they sold their papers to take about a month's vacation and go somewhere, get away so that nobody could come to them and tell them how much they missed them. And they kind of give the new person a chance to get started. And you don't have read everything that you don't agree with that the new one does and wish that you hadn't sold it to him. Then when you come back you've kind of gotten over that hump, and by that time everybody seems to think they like the new one okay fine by then. So life kind of goes on.

RB: Were you ever inclined to encourage this operation here to go with a larger conglomerate?

JS: Oh, I think we all think at times that we'd like to sell the paper and see if somebody will pay us a whole pile of money. When I was brokering papers it seemed to me like, oh, if I was going to do that, why not get my money out of it, invest. Maybe I'd want to buy a paper somewhere else. I had opportunities because I knew what was up for sale. But I've always had too much debt on this. [The] Zimmermans made it very easy for me to buy the paper. But by being easy, it also took a number of years to pay it off. So I never

was in a position where I'd make very much money out of it, and I thought as long as it ran -- David and the other people seemed to enjoy what they were doing, and their jobs weren't in jeopardy, that might be if somebody came in new to that... So I let them do it, and they've done an excellent job. They've won a lot of awards. And it's been a paper that I've been very proud of over the years.

RB: So how about philosophically, now? Do think there's a difference between a paper that would be more independent or locally managed than one that you see [managed by a conglomerate]? How do these conglomerates work? I'm sure there's some variation here, too, among their management.

JS: Yeah, I don't think they ever tell anybody what they're supposed to say. I don't think they say, "Write an editorial for so-and-so for President because all our papers are going to back this person." I don't think that happens. I think each paper's kind of got their own editorial integrity.

What they don't have is they don't have the money usually to do this. A lot of times papers sell for huge prices, but then they try to manage them and make them profitable and pay off the debt at the same time. They ended with papers that just weren't as good an editorial product, didn't serve the communities as well as the old paper had back when it was family ownership or somebody that lived in that community owned it.

Then another thing you see is you see people come and go. They may come in and be in a town for a year, year and a half, then they get moved to some other newspaper in that group or maybe they get a job at the hospital as public relations or [at] a television station or they do something, because they don't pay a lot of money sometimes.

But also you're restricted so much in what you can do because there's just not enough dollars around on the editorial side to do a real good editorial product sometimes. Now, some have done a good job, and I wouldn't want to throw this out as a blanket thing, but I think looking at them in general that's what's happened is that the editorial products aren't as good as what they *may* have been at one time before. Some cases are better, but a lot times they're not as good because the people just don't know the community, don't have the commitment to the community and don't know they're going to be there six weeks from now.

RB: Well, it certainly seems...to me, being a newcomer to this industry,...looking back on the history of it,...[that] there [were] a lot of independent newspapers in the past. Some of these have long, long histories, just unbelievably long histories, in the same family. Now the business atmosphere must be completely different. [It] must be changing, I mean, [as] you say, within the last ten years. That must make some sort of difference there. Do you think that trend is going to continue or do you...? I'll say another thing that I see [as] pretty well a constant theme in Missouri papers is the family involvement, and perhaps one of the reasons why some of these papers stayed for so long is because they just passed from generation to generation...in the same family.

[Tape meter, 100]

Do you see that continuing today?

JS: Yeah, not as much as what it's been. Who knows where newspapers are headed in the next ten years, anyway? When you look at what's happening around them with the electronic changes... Now, I guess you could go back to the '50s when television was

coming up and there was all this radio out there and you thought, “Well, this might be the end of newspapers.” And it certainly wasn’t! The greatest days were ahead for newspapers in many ways.

But I don’t what the internet means. I look at it as something that’s pretty risky out there in the future. I think it’ll be a long time before every home has a computer in there, but I think that the homes with money are going to have them. There are going to be computers and television sets and something else that are all together, and they’re going to be simple to use. And they may just be in every room in the house! And you can flip it up if you want to do that. I don’t know how many times I’ve sat in the corner of my bathroom a little there with the commode in there and looked at the blank side of that door and think how nice that it’d be to have a thing about a quarter of an inch thick and about one and a half times as big as a newspaper front page that I could just sort of sit there in the morning and read the morning paper without having to flip through any pages. Just sort of [use a] toggle switch right there on the wall with the thing [and] it’d go by.

RB: (laughs) Well, really there’s just one more step, isn’t there? I mean, you use the computer right now to produce all of the paper, just about.

JS: Yeah, we’re to the point that for a few more dollars if we wanted to do it that way we could cut out a couple more steps, but right now the majority of our pages are being made up on the computer. We never see the page until it’s a negative coming out of a processor in the back. Yeah, we see them on computer screens, [and] we have a pretty good idea what they’re going to look like, but we never have it pasted up like we used to.

Now, we still do part of the paper like that, but we're rapidly moving to the point where we don't do that. And what we're doing is coming to film, but it's just one more step to come into plate where you don't even have the film. You just come right out and print on a plate.

RB: You brought up the internet topic. It seems to me the next step might be just taking a computer screen and publishing to the 'net. So that's the question: ...Whether you think that will [happen]?

JS: Yeah, and I don't know that anybody's found any way to make any money out of that yet. The newspaper's a browsing product that you pick it up and you read it back to front or you grab the sports page out of there. You read what you want to read first. Well, you can do that on the internet, too. You can go in there and find what you want to find and read that first, but in the newspaper there's ads on those pages and on the computer screen there aren't ads on the pages. There may be a banner across the bottom that says, "If you'd like to look at so-and-so department store's catalog, touch this." Well, you can touch that and now you've got the whole catalog to look at. Some of that may be full motion with full sound and everything else, which is a lot more dramatic than [any ad] a newspaper's ever been able to present. But somebody's got to want to look at that catalog, whereas in the newspaper you can kind of catch somebody's eye like you can in a magazine. As you're just sort of turning a page and all of a sudden you see something that's interesting. So you stop, or you remember that your tires are getting a little bald, or it's getting cold and it's going to start to snow before long, and maybe you ought to have

some snow tires, and there's an ad for snow tires. But anyway, that's the way advertising's always worked.

RB: So advertisement in the newspaper business, that's the real marriage, there, that keeps it...together.

JS: Yeah. Of course, it's easy for any company or any product to come up with their own web page. So you don't need to go through the newspaper to access anything; you can go through... Say you want to look at tires. Well, you can call up [search for] "Goodyear Tires" and you can find out everything about them and all the specs [specifications]. You can get testimonies; you can read anything you want to on it. And then they probably will give you a list of the closest dealer to you, or they'll mail them to you directly, or they've got some outlet center of their own. It's all kind of scary.

[Tape meter, 150]

The big thing about newspapers, I think, in the next few years is if they just *grasp* what they have and understand that they've got a franchise in any community that they're in where they're doing a halfway decent job at all. I think we've got to forget that we're newspapers and start looking at ourselves as being communications companies in whatever way we communicate. But we need to be the information center for the community. We're already positioned to do that and there's no sense in us giving that away to somebody else by not moving on ahead and doing some things electronically. So there's a lot of bright newspaper people out there doing that, and that's been one of the things that I tried to do in the last two or three years working with some people in

Columbia: Electronic classifieds, just ways that you deliver something into the home besides printing it on paper.

I think we're going to be printing on paper for a long time still, but I'm afraid what we're doing is we're going to see a loss of the higher income reader because they can go to a computer and get something instantaneously. Once we lose the higher income, then you've got [a situation where it becomes] real hard to produce a newspaper, because maybe some people on the low side of the scale don't care if they read anything or not, they just want to see if it's a good price for groceries. When the grocer gets their own web page, and you can order it directly from them and just go by the store and pick up a box...

RB: Now, there's a certain number of people [that] have always, I think, been drawn to the editorial. And to the attitude, perhaps, or the...message that particular paper puts out. How important is that relative to...? You know, instead of it just being something that passes information,...it also passes a certain attitude.

JS: Well, in Columbia, Missouri the last couple of years they got a Columbia Interactive Network -- I don't know what all the letters stand for, but it's COIN, I think, is what they call it.¹²

RB: Yeah, that's right.

JS: On COIN, you can get the school board report, has the minutes from the school board. You can get the school lunches; you can get the honor roll; you can get the homework assignments; you can get a lot of things that many of which are just standard staples for

¹² Columbia Online Information Network.

the local newspaper right now. Now, if you start losing all those, you know, it's going to be hard to compete. The one thing that a newspaper can still do is make sense out of the school board meeting and put it in the proper context. So instead of having to read this one and the last one and the one before... And still you're just reading the minutes, so you're really reading it from the board secretary's viewpoint. The newspaper person can put that in a proper context and help you understand what's going on. And I think that's where the role of the newspaper will be, even electronically, is to put things in the proper context. Put them where you can find them, put them in a short view. You've got to know you want to go read about the school news to go do it the way it is on COIN today, whereas in the newspaper you can start to read something else and here's a story that looks interesting to you, because maybe you've got children in school [or] at least you're paying school taxes and you want to know what they're doing over there.

RB: If there's a shakedown in education, then you need some attitudes about that, or somewhat like you say, [an] interpretation.

JS: Sure. And the question was about the editorial side of it, about writing editorials. I think there's always going to room for viewpoints. That's the reason talk radio's gotten so popular. People call in and they've got a chance to say what they think. Then they've got somebody there that's their leader on there that they all listen to. In many ways that's what the newspaper did for a lot of years. The newspaper lead editorial writer and the publisher wrote things, and people wrote letters back and disagreed with them or agreed with them. It's a good public forum.

RB: Sometimes one paper might have a competing editorial in the same paper.

[Tape meter, 200]

It seems like the history of these papers here... Like you say, at one point there was a Republican paper and a Democratic paper [in Bolivar.] [They] must have been opposed to each other.

JS: You've got to go back a few years to really *enjoy* reading their editorials, because in the later years, up in the '60s, they didn't write any editorials at all, either one. One was just known as being Republican, so the Republicans took it, and the other one was Democrat and the Democrats took it. And actually for a number of years after that... One store downtown, the Western Auto Store -- where the husband was [from] a Democrat family and the wife came from a Republican family -- and she'd ask me how things were at the Free Press and he'd talk about the Herald when I was talking to him.

RB: (laughs) They continued to read their own...

JS: And you could tell who was new in town because they were talking about the Bolivar Herald-Free Press. But the old families were either the Herald or the Free Press.

RB: So was there an outcry when that kind of blending took place?

JS: There was Democrats that felt like they weren't going to have any say anymore. They hadn't had any say for a long time, and then we started *giving* them a chance to have a say. I kind of came in as a Democrat and Jac as a Republican, and so we sort of allowed that. But we've become more of a Republican paper. I've become a Republican over the years, although I'm pretty much a middle ground person but probably lean more to the Republican side. When I was on the Board [of Curators] for the University of Missouri [from 1987 to 1993] I always thought it was funny that [the] two of us that were

Republicans on the nine-member board were the two most liberal ones on the board.

Some of them that were Democrats were the most conservative. But that's just kind of Missouri politics, anyway.

RB: But the newspaper does have a role in politics somehow?

JS: Yeah, a lot of newspapers will endorse candidates. Years ago we decided we were not going to endorse candidates. Now, the little paper at Humansville [the Humansville Star-Leader], when Gary Sosniecki was there [from 1980 to 1986]... Gary and Helen, his wife -- both Journalism School graduates and both good journalists -- they felt like that was one of their roles was to endorse a candidate for every position. We always respected that. We just felt like in our position in this community that a lot of times we had two candidates and neither one of them were very good candidates. Picking one over the other, all we were going to do was make a bunch of people mad. Probably help the one we picked against more than the one that we picked for. So we just decided that once we got below a congressional level that we just wouldn't pick it on the local ones, because really oftentimes there was not much to choose from between the two candidates. Sometimes there were two real good candidates. And again, how do you pick one over the other? If you picked a bunch of Republicans and not the Democrats, they'd say, "Well, you're a Republican paper. What else would we expect from you?" There just was too many times there just wasn't enough difference, and we didn't want to jeopardize who we thought we were by trying to pick somebody when there *really* wasn't enough difference to pick one or the other.

RB: So if you think of the newspaper as the item that influences votes... But on the other hand, it might backfire if you try to influence...

JS: Yeah, and I think the people are so suspicious of the media today that if you come out and really get behind a candidate sometimes it can go the other way! A lot of it's the candidate, though.

RB: What do think about that in general? That's something that's changed over...time, and probably during your career in the newspaper business...your status [has changed].

[Tape meter, 250]

Well, I'm not saying your personal status, but the status of newspaper people, for instance, or media people altogether, has changed in [the course of] your [career].

JS: I just don't think the public *trusts* us the way they used to, and it's really too bad. I always took the position that even if I didn't like something that I had to cover, I tried to be fair about it. But the truth is, it's real hard to be fair about something if you think something wrong is happening and you've got to report it just the way it's happening. That's where your editorial side comes in. Then you can walk over to the other side of the desk and write your editorial about it. But you ought to really try to be straight in your stories. And yet what I've seen happen too many times in recent years is, you know, somebody goes out with an idea for a story it seems, and it doesn't matter what the facts are, they're coming back with that story.

I think that there's a lot of people [that] just don't trust us much anymore, and that's too bad. I think that there's still a lot to trust in community newspapers because I don't think we try to do that. We're not in the keen, competitive situation that a daily

might be [in] that's got a couple television stations or maybe another daily newspaper coming at it. But there's some weeklies I don't think... They pretty well get out on the edge in the way they report things, too. But generally, I'd rather be a little bit duller newspaper but know that when I went to bed at night that I'd told it straight and that anybody that reads it ought to be able to understand what had happened in a situation.

A thing you always hear is people say, "Well, this is something just to sell newspapers. You've done it this way just to sell newspapers." And the truth is we sell about as many newspapers one week as we do the next week. It doesn't matter too much what we put in the paper as far as much difference in that. People are just creatures of habit. They buy the paper every week. We've done readership surveys of this newspaper that show us as high as ninety-seven percent readership in this county.

RB: (chuckling) Maybe they like to cuss the editor sometimes. Even if it's not what they want, they'll buy it anyway.

JS: Well, once in a while... You know, that's where the personal columns we run... David has always been somebody in his personal column that tells funny stories and tells things that are funny. Makes fun of his wife once in a while and so there's people that get mad at him about that and think he's just awful. They're really surprised when they meet him because he seems like such a nice person. (chuckles) And he absolutely is! But he kids his wife, and she seems to take it very good-naturedly. She just thinks that's David doing what he does.

RB: David Berry?

JS: David Berry. There's a David Berry in Miami [Florida] that's a great writer, one of the funniest people in the country, and they invited Dave Berry from Bolivar to come to Columbia one time to introduce Dave Berry from Miami at an [event.] [*Motions to a photograph.*]

RB: (laughs) Oh, that's him there?

JS: Yeah. So all these people were excited about Dave Berry coming to town. They introduce him, and all of a sudden Dave hops up from here and strides the microphone. Everybody's saying, "Well, who's this guy? This isn't Dave Berry."

[Tape meter, 300]

Well, [he said,] "Hi, I'm Dave Berry and my job is to introduce Dave Berry."

RB: (laughing) I'll bet he could tell pretty good jokes, too.

JS: Yeah.

RB: Well, we've covered a lot of ground, Mr. Sterling. I guess just in the last moments, I'd like to ask first if you have anything else you'd like to add to what your reflections are about the newspaper business.

And another thing is if you have any suggestions about who we...should include in our project. We're pretty flexible and open-ended in our focus as far as this project is concerned, though most of the people we've talked to so far come from the publishing side. You know, they were...owners of newspapers or perhaps editors. Maybe to get a full range of the historical experience in the newspaper,...we need to talk people from different [occupational] experiences. In some ways, each paper is a different experience.

JS: Sure. You know, I could probably sit down and give you a whole *list* of people that I think ought to be part of this project that have run papers in different communities across the state.

At the risk of sounding like a heretic, I would suggest a couple of guys at the University of Kansas who are Missouri graduates. John Ginn, who teaches ethics over there, has had a wonderful career in the newspaper business across the country. Never very much in Missouri, although when John was on the Columbia Missourian Board of Directors -- Advisory Board, I guess is what you'd call it -- he was the one that got the steps started to build a new journalism building, Lee Hills Hall over there. Because one night we were driving around in the car with John and Ron Martin and Tom Eblen, and John hadn't been back in Columbia for a number of years. We drove past the Missourian and he said, "Is that what I think is out there stacked up against the building?" And I said, "Yeah, that's newsprint." Well, it was raining that night and the newsprint was outside. He said, "You know, I've always thought that we ought to build a building here and name it after Lee Hills." -- who had been a chairman of the Fiftieth Journalism Week in 1958 when John was a student. So John got that started and knew the right people and eventually they got a brand new building across the street. John Ginn was the person kind of behind all that. But a *wonderful* person with a great vision. Great thinker. Then Tom...

RB: Where is he located?

JS: He's at the University of Kansas. Teaches ethics over there. Then Tom Eblen runs the [University of Kansas] Daily Kansan. But Tom is Missourian, too, that was in school with John. And was an editor for the Kansas City Star.

[Tape meter, 350]

[He] has run the Fort Scott [Kansas] newspaper as publisher, but he's run the student publication at KU for a while. Tom's a very bright guy, and he speaks all over the country about the newspaper industry and the future of the newspaper industry. So these are people that are sitting around *thinking* about these things all the time. I'm not sure what I think about all the time, (chuckling) but I know these guys are spending a lot more time thinking about the industry than I am. But they'd be a couple of good suggestions.

RB: How about...the person...whose angle or side has not been told? Some of these people who, say,...who write more or whatever?

JS: Oh, I don't know the answer to that. But I was thinking about another person that if you haven't talked to would be good. That's Jim Kirkpatrick. Jim has been in the newspaper business for a *number* of years, and graduated from the Journalism School back in the '20s sometime. He's been in politics a lot, too, but he's always been around the newspaper industry and owned the paper at Lamar [Lamar Democrat] and Windsor [Windsor Review].¹³ And has worked for other papers in the state. I think Jim could kind of bridge from today back to '20s.

[Tape meter, 378. End Side One, Tape Two of Two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin Side Two, Tape Two of Two.]

¹³ James C. Kirkpatrick, a Democrat, served as Missouri Secretary of State from 1965 through 1985.

JS: ...Springfield newspaper for a number of years. J-School graduate from Missouri. Ran an "Ozarker" column for a long time. And a good writer, but just an absolutely good thinker and just believes in this business forward and backward. He can, I think, bridge not only the large papers with the small papers for you, but also reach back into the '50s. He was in school in the '40s in Missouri and played basketball up there, probably during the war sometime when he was too young to be in the war, playing on the team. But he grew up in Mansfield, which is a small town in southern Missouri. But Dales in Springfield, I think, would be an *exceptional* one and I think could tell you lots of stories because he wrote a column where he stole clips each week from publishers from around the Ozarks and put them together.¹⁴ So he's got all those stories. Funny stories [that] people wrote, and knew the characters pretty well that did that. Just in trying to mentally scan the state, I'm trying to think who would be just really strong that you ought to talk to. Bob White [Robert M. White, II] I think would be one. Bob's family has owned the Mexico [Missouri] paper [the Mexico Ledger]. He was a third generation president of the Press Association in 1984, I think.

RB: Third generation?

JS: His father was president of the Press Association. Mitch [Mitchell] was back like 1922 and his grandfather, R.W. -- or I think it was R.W. White, Bob White, Robert White -- was back in the 1860s sometime when they first started or 1870s. No, I think it was like

¹⁴ Probably referring to Dale Freeman, who was the managing editor of the Springfield News-Leader. He had a column, such as described, entitled "Ozarks Notes."

1885 was his grandfather.¹⁵ Because I thought at one time to get him to switch years with me being president of the Press Association so he could do it on the 100th anniversary of his grandfather[’s term as president], but it was something that just didn’t work out at all that way.

RB: How about the Press Association? Has it changed at all in, say, gender? Slightly?

JS: Well, the newspaper industry has changed as far as gender, certainly. It was a long time before there was a woman that president of the Press Association. Avis Tucker from Warrensburg, I think, was the first one.¹⁶ But Avis really got in the business because her husband Bill Tucker had owned the paper at Warrensburg and died, so as a widow she carried it on. Then later Betty [Simpson] Sparr from Odessa -- and you’ve probably talked to Betty.¹⁷

RB: I’ve met her.

JS: Betty’s from an old newspaper family in the state, the Simpson family. I guess there’s just been two women that have been president.

RB: Now you see...quite a few women serving as editors,...wouldn’t you say?

JS: Sure. Two of our three papers [have] women editors. It’s like a lot of things. It’s just taken a while for the people to want to do that, and have an opportunity to do that, and to start to do it. But Judy Kallenbach has been editor here for, gosh, I don’t know how long

¹⁵ Mitchell White was president of the Missouri Press Association in 1921, and his father, Robert M. White, I, was president in 1885.

¹⁶ Publisher of the Warrensburg Daily Star-Journal. She served as president of the Missouri Press Association in 1982.

¹⁷ Publisher of the Odessan. She was president of the Missouri Press Association in 1988. In mentioning that Brassieur had probably talked to her, Mr. Sterling is referring to the fact that Betty’s father, William Lester “Les” Simpson had been interviewed earlier as part of this oral history project. Please see C3965, Missouri Newspapers Oral History Project, a.c. 6.

now. Since probably 1980 or so. And just been top notch. Just a very good editor. She came in with good credentials as a writer and then ran our 'People and Living' section for a while very well, and then just became editor. But you see this everywhere, and you see it in a lot of fields, too. When I went to school at the university, there was maybe one woman in law school at that time. Now it's fifty percent women. Veterinary College is fifty percent, Medical School's fifty percent. Journalism has always had a lot of women in it since I've been around it. There were a lot in Journalism School when I was there, but a lot of them were going into advertising, too.

RB: Right, different roles that they play. And it seems like...they've had various roles whether they've had education or not. In fact some people... I think Mr. Simpson was telling about his dad's business long years ago where they had women...hand-setting type.

JS: Well, you know, this is [an audio] tape [recorded interview], so you can't see these things, but there's some pictures of the Bolivar Herald in 1908 or 1909, and there's women setting type in those pictures up there. So it's just exactly what you say.

RB: 1909?! So they've always had some role in it, either working or if they were the wife of a publisher or wife of an editor. Perhaps they had another sort of role.

JS: And I think this business really opened up a lot of opportunities *earlier* than a lot of others did. But it's taken a long time to get to where it ought to be, and I don't know that it's there yet.

[Tape meter, 050]

But you see the big companies have got a lot of women that are publishers today. We would certainly look at that. You know, that's what we're doing at [the Stockton Cedar County Republican]. We haven't replaced Jeff Jasper with a new publisher, but we've got a team of women that are running the newspaper over there right now, and doing a good job with it! None of them really want to be publisher; they just want to do their job. It's more of a committee than it is of having one person being publisher.

RB: These are some tremendous photographs you have here on the wall. The one that's on the top right, there, with the woman setting type...is about the only I understand. (laughs) Or at least start to understand. The one on the left, what are they doing in that one?

JS: That's job printing. Those are presses, and there are men standing there in they're printing flyers or something one sheet at a time.

RB: And the job presses themselves are run by way of a series of belts [and]...pulleys hooked to the ceiling.

JS: Yes, pulleys and...

RB: And that was right here in [Bolivar.]

JS: That was down on the north side of the square in Bolivar.

RB: How about the photo on the bottom left? What sort of machine is that?

JS: Well, it's not a linotype, but it's something similar to a linotype. I don't know if it's an intertype or quite what it is. But it was something different. I can't tell you that much about it. I think I've got in this book on the history here, and I think I may explain it in

there, but I've forgotten what all it is. (chuckling) But that was kind of the weight of the equipment that you were dealing with and the complexity of it.

RB: It was massive, wasn't it? I see you have sort of a museum of things here in this room. Are all of these pieces...from this paper or are they just [a] collection?

JS: Oh, some of them came out of Fair Play and Stockton. That Cottrell and Babcock was a plate that ran on the old sheet-fed press that we printed the Stockton paper on. Right above that [are] Republican and Democrat headings that you put on the top of ballots when you printed ballots.

RB: You know, there's a material culture here...with regard to [the] newspaper business...that's very, very interesting. Who would you say -- that you know of -- would be the foremost expert in the material [culture of the newspaper business]? Or *an* expert in that; someone that's really been interested in [it]? Perhaps that would be [a] good [person to interview], because the technology has changed so fast that even from linotype to offset... Then all the linotype machines went out; they were all thrown away... Do you know of anyone?

JS: We have a museum at Arrow Rock and there's a curator over there. I think his name is Miller. I think he probably is pretty well up to speed on a lot of that sort of thing and would be a good person to talk to. A fellow that used to run the Missouri Ruralist magazine worked over there, and his name is Cordell Tindall. I'm not sure... I think he's still alive. Lives at Boonville. And Cordell ran that museum for a number of years

and would probably...¹⁸ And Bill Taft has watched the changes. Dean [Earl F.] English is still in Columbia and he has certainly seen the changes. He started out as a linotype operator and went [on] to [become] the dean of the Journalism School.

RB: It's fascinating to someone...who doesn't [know a lot about the newspaper industry]...to appreciate where that business came from.

JS: Sure. I would say about Bolivar newspapers, it's really been... This is my thirtieth year here and it's been an exceptional experience in my life. I can't imagine living my life much better than what I've done, being in the newspaper business in my hometown and being able to contribute to this community. I picked up a book when I was at home before I came down here, and it was The Hundred Best Small Towns in America. And Bolivar's been in the two times they've printed the book. It just sort of dawned on me as I was coming out the door that we've had some things to do with that.

Jac Zimmerman and I sat down with [Thomas Hart] Benton Dunnegan in the Polk County Bank one day. Mr. Dunnegan called us and said, "I want to show you some numbers. These are the communities in Missouri that are smaller than Bolivar that have a hospital. These are communities that have less bank deposits than Bolivar, and they have a hospital." This was in 1976. So we came back down and started writing editorials about it was time to *seriously* have a hospital in Bolivar. By 1980 we had the thing going full blast, and by '82 it opened. It's been ranked as one of the top ten rural hospitals in America.

[Tape meter, 100]

¹⁸ Cordell Wayland Tindall, who lived in Fayette, died on November 23, 2002. He had volunteered as a historical printer in Arrow Rock for eight years. Tindall became editor of the Missouri Ruralist in 1938.

We've editorialized on rural roads to get where there's been some serious accidents where young people have been killed in car wrecks that the state ought to come in and paint yellow lines on those roads rather than just have them be blacktop roads. Somewhere we finally convinced some people to do that.

When they first started having investigative reporting, we won the first year for best investigative reporting series on this. It wasn't the happiest situation, but there was a young fellow that got elected a prosecutor here, and after eighteen months he still hadn't prosecuted anybody. We got the sheriff to start to talk about it and eventually [we] wrote a story and he [the prosecutor] resigned from office. He resigned the day after our paper came out that week. So Springfield had the story -- the daily paper -- but still it was a thing that was driven by the newspaper in the community. And that's what you really ought to do with that.

Now, we haven't done *very* much. We don't go around every week trying to turn over rocks and find something there [that's] wrong, because some people think that there's something wrong everywhere all the time, and I tend to think that most everything is *right* all the time. When it becomes wrong, then maybe you need to do something about it.

RB: So you see that as very much a function of a community paper? A citizen advocate?

JS: Yeah, and I'm more of a "glass half-full" instead of "half-empty" type of person. I don't want us to just be a booster for the community, but I think that we miss out on a vital role if we don't boost the community when we can and do things about it.

There was a publisher and president of the Press Association back in, I think 1899 -- somewhere thereabouts -- but his name was J. West Goodwin in Sedalia, and he published a paper called the Sedalia Bazoo.¹⁹ And his motto on his paper was: “He who tooteth not his own bazoo, the same shall not be tooteth.”²⁰ Of course, I never met the man [and] I never really saw his paper but I read something about him in Dr. Taft’s books. He was maybe the father of newspaper promotion.

I’ve been active over the years in the Newspaper Promotion Society and national... I think it’s got a different name now, but a lot of times we were the smallest paper in the country to show up at a meeting. You know, you go there and some project that the Palm Springs Sun was running or the Detroit Free Press was running, we’d come back and alter it and do it Bolivar, Missouri.

RB: Ends up being interesting to learn from.

JS: Yeah. You know, we’ve tried to give people opportunity. The college up here has... Some of the first minority students and minority people living in Polk County came here through the college. Some of them were basketball players and some of them were just students. Some of them were foreign students. But if they needed a job and we could help them with that, there’s been some that have worked for us. They haven’t been the best jobs in the world, but we felt like we trying to give anybody an opportunity that was here.

¹⁹ Mr. Goodwin was president of the Missouri Press Association in 1891.

²⁰ “Whose bloweth his own Bazoo, The same shall not be blown.” Source: The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo, Tuesday, December 31, 1895, page four.

A lot of kids have come through Bolivar High School. We've got a guy that works for us part of the time that teaches journalism and English at the high school. They've got one of the best school papers in the country now because we just gave them great leeway as how they put it together. So they're running full color pictures in their school paper and really do a nice job with it.

We've always tried to help students that came out of Bolivar that went off to journalism school or were interested in this area, so we've got a pretty good alumni group out there, people that have come through the doors here at one time or another [during] the last thirty years and have gone on to be news directors at TV stations, and anchors, and editors of papers, and ad managers, and own their own papers, and lawyers, and doctors, and everything else. So we've tried to be good citizens in Bolivar and Polk County and at the same time do a good job as far as being in the newspaper business.

RB: That's a great career to look back on.

JS: Yeah, I really wanted to get thirty years in (chuckles) on the thing. So I don't know what I'm going to do next.

RB: Yeah, that's in your future. You're still a young fellow, aren't you?

JS: Oh, I've been looking into a number of projects and a lot of them involved electronic publishing.

[Tape meter, 150]

One thing: I'd really rather not get too far from the newspaper industry if I can, or get beyond where I can use the things that I've learned...in promotion or advertising or publicity or information. So probably it will be somewhere in that field. Right now I'm

going to Michigan for the summer and going to help run some t-shirt shops up there. So I don't know what kind message I'll have on the t-shirts, but (chuckles) it'll be fun to write! It'll be fun to write them and sell them and enjoy some of that, too.

RB: Well, I would...be one of those that would subscribe to an electronic newspaper, just because of it would be easy to find things and...to store and save things that you needed. You don't have to put it in a brown paper sack every week to (chuckling) _____ and then find out what to do with it.

JS: Sure. Well, you know, one thing that's really tough about the newspaper business is that environmentally you're getting hit on both ends on the things. There's people out there [that] don't want you to cut down the trees to make paper out of it. Once you've made paper, they don't want you to throw the paper away. You've got to recycle it, and recycling paper's not the sweetest process going out there. But a lot of it's being done these days, and a lot of it's being recycled. I'm *glad* to see that all happening, but there's a *lot* of people in this world that'd be happy if we didn't print anymore newspapers and we'd put everything up on something that didn't hurt the environment when we were through in some way.

RB: But that recycling business has got to be very important today. Do you all have any kind of facility like that anywhere around?

JS: We used to send all the trash to the dump, and now somebody comes in and picks it up and takes it out here. I'm not sure what they do with it but I think they bundle it up and recycle it somehow. And we take all our pop cans and throw them in another box and do that. And we run a column each week on [the] environment. One of our employees that

sells advertising for us, she likes writing that column and doing the things that are important environmentally.

I've got two daughters, both of which are sort of in the media industry. One of them designs magazines in New York City and is, I think, really pretty good at what she does on that. And the other one's in Albuquerque...

RB: Which magazine?

JS: Well, Stephanie was working for Allure magazine in New York, and is doing House and Garden now. Doing about sixty percent of the pages, I think she told me last time. And Elizabeth is her older sister, and she is in Albuquerque and does electronic presentations for an insurance company for their marketing department. [She] does that, and runs the literacy department for the City of Albuquerque. So she's got a couple hundred people that are volunteers that help her with the "English As A Second Language" program down there.

RB: What is her name, now?

JS: Elizabeth Sterling.

RB: Sterling. She's not married, then?

JS: No. [The other daughter's name is] Stephanie Lawrence. She's married to Jim Lawrence, who she met at the School of Journalism in advertising when they were both students. Graduated [from] the University of Missouri. So we've got second generation going through there. Elizabeth once in a while says she thinks she might come back and go to graduate school and do that. Her mother, after we were divorced, went up and got her degree in journalism. At Stephanie's wedding last summer, we had about fifteen

people that were journalism school graduates. Friends of theirs, or friends of their mother, or people that had been friends of mine in school, that were out for the wedding in Washington, D.C.

RB: That aspect of it is the hallmark here in Missouri. I don't know if it's like that generally in this business...in the country, but families seem to be pretty important.

JS: Well, it's kind of a Midwestern thing, I think, at least in journalism, because some of the great journalism schools are right here in middle America.

[Tape meter, 200]

RB: Did that not have something to do with Mizzou becoming such a [renowned] journalism school? Is there some kind of a history already here of newspaper in the country before Mizzou ever really...?

JS: Yeah, and Missouri was really the first journalism school in 1908. And the [State] Historical Society [of Missouri] and the [Missouri] Press Association were the ones that really drove the beginning of the Journalism School and helped put it together. So I'm glad to see that the Historical Society is continuing with the project in newspapers. I know I first became acquainted with what they did when I was a student. Dr. Taft says, "You've got to write a term paper. What I'd really like you to write a term paper about [is] your hometown newspaper if you live in Missouri." Which he then took and used for his book! (laughs) So I went over to the [State Historical Society newspaper] library and I went through there and started doing that, came down [and] interviewed the... I did the Free Press. Somebody had already done the Bolivar Herald; there had been a student five

years earlier, I guess. So I got to do the Free Press and I really got kind of interested in it by that time.

RB: Especially if you get a chance [to study]...a paper like that [which] has...such an ancient run. If you had a chance to look at the older stuff [you would find it interesting.] All of that material, was it passed on? Probably it was passed on to the State Historical Society?

JS: Yeah, well, I've got the number one book [of bound Free Press issues] right here in the corner from 1868, sitting here four or five feet away from us right now. I'll show here in a minute if you'd like to look at it.

RB: I'd love to. Is it a one of a kind type of thing?

JS: Yeah. There may be one *like* it in Columbia, and it's on microfilm in Columbia.

RB: Oh, it's on microfilm, that's good.

JS: Yeah. It may have been that it's on microfilm and was returned to the newspaper at some point. A lot of the papers were lost over the years, but I think we're pretty good. We ran pretty well through the years without having fires [which] wiped them [other papers] out.

RB: That's one thing I've been doing as I go around. Some of these papers have such ancient history that I just ask...if they have [older copies.] I have picked up a couple of very old issues.

JS: We send everything up to [the State Historical Society newspaper library], and they microfilm it today. And then we've got bound volumes for the last thirty years downstairs. There's a little bit of a gap in the '60s when the papers were [in] just kind of hard times and they were all just kind of scrambling. So we don't have from about '63,

'64 to about '67. There's some missing issues in there. We've got some of them around the office here that are in boxes or in one place or another, but I don't think they're as complete as they should be.

RB: What was the crisis at that time?

JS: Well, it started when Marshall Gravely, who was one of the brothers that owned the Free Press, was killed in an auto accident coming home from Springfield. Had a very dangerous highway out here, and somebody hit him. His older brother -- who had gone to journalism school -- had had a stroke, I think, by that point, so it sort of fell on Marshall's wife to try to hold the paper together. A fellow that worked for her wanted to buy it, and I guess didn't have the money to [buy] it.

[Tape meter, 250]

So they ended up selling it to somebody else, and the other guy went over and started a paper then. And then the Herald was always still here too.

The three of them... There was times when [the] Polk County Times, which was circulated *free* to everybody in the county... It was the first offset paper. The front page of it had news on it, all over it, and it looked bright and it had pictures and you could see who was in the picture. So it looked a lot better. Then the Free Press went out and bought a one-unit press -- Thatcher press -- and put it in, and they were going to be the first local offset paper. Then the Herald went over and bought a sheet-fed offset press and they were going to be the first to put color on it, because they could run it through theirs twice and add color. So everybody had a gimmick at that time. And nobody was making any money. That's when [the] Stufflebams bought the whole thing, and that

when I came to work. So it was a good time to come and it was a bad time, too. Nobody trusted much what we *might* do because it had been such a mess, but on the other hand we were able to pull it together and make it work.

RB: That's what you were talking about [earlier], the newspaper wars.

JS: Yeah. Those were our newspaper wars in Bolivar in '66 and '67.

RB: And it somewhat had to do with technology...at that time. Those that could get the little better machine or whatever, the better process, [would have an advantage.]

JS: Well, the Polk County Times could have never started if they had to go out and buy linotypes and set up. So five years earlier, they couldn't have started that paper. But they were able to start it with some typewriters, and take some pictures, and take it over to Lebanon, and get it printed. Boy, it came out looking good! And people were impressed with that.

RB: Introduced some pressure in the business.

JS: Sure!

RB: And you think that was replicated in other communities?

JS: Oh, I think so.

RB: General kind of turmoil that was happening at that time, when it was generally good times in the country, I guess.

JS: Well, if you had a neighboring paper... You know, maybe this county that had two or three newspapers in that county, and somebody was offset, and somebody ran an ad they liked, they'd just clip that ad out and they didn't have to set anything then. (chuckles)
All they had to do was paste it up in their paper and run it. Looked about as bad as it did

in the letterpress, but that's what people were used to. But they didn't have to set any type to do it, and if they wanted to really make it good, they'd reset part of it or put a picture in there. All of a sudden you could start to see pictures and it meant that you could no longer use the same printing plate for a car wreck and a wedding two weeks in a row just by turning it sideways one week... (chuckles) Bill Bray used to say that there was somebody that... You know, they'd take a picture and send it off and get an engraving made and send it back for somebody's wedding, and then the next week there'd be a car wreck and they'd just turn it sideways. And people couldn't tell the difference (chuckling) between a bride and a car wreck turned sideways in the printing quality on some of those old presses!

RB: Well, we've talked for quite a while. We've just about gone through two of these tapes. I really appreciate you taking this much time.

[Tape meter, 300]

JS: Well, I hope this is helpful to you and what you wanted to try to have.

RB: We've got a good start on several different avenues there: Business and the specific history of Bolivar, and then, of course, your career. We really appreciate [you] taking that time.

JS: Well, thanks for coming to Bolivar today.

[Tape meter, 306. End Side Two, Tape Two of Two. End of Interview.]