

AL 96

Interviewee: Basil C. Rafferty

Interviewer: Kathleen Perucci

Date: February 15, 1988

Basil Rafferty has spent most of his life in journalism, working for a number of newspapers in a variety of capacities. In the interview he discusses much of his life work. He is presently working on a textbook on beginning reporting.

Rafferty was born September 5, 1908, in Miller, South Dakota, but the family soon moved to Watertown. Rafferty sold newspapers as a youth, earning several dollars a week. He also wrote articles of events at school for the paper. He still has in his possession a copy of an extra from November 11, 1918, which announced the war armistice. He then worked as a "printer's devil" for the Watertown weekly Herald, doing general chores. When he was in high school, Rafferty moved to the daily paper and continued to write, particularly on high school football. He sent stories to other nearby papers as well. He graduated from high school in 1926.

Rafferty then attended Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, where he had a double major in political science and economics. He finished college during the Depression, and he recounts the series of odd jobs he had. He worked for a number of newspapers, selling advertisements and circulation, operating a linotype machine, and doing editorial work. He recollects the pony wire, where he got news stories.

Rafferty was ineligible for military service during the war. Afterward, he went to work for Associated Press, where he held various positions until 1972. He then went to Wichita State to teach (a friend of his, Loyal Gould, was the department chair of journalism) and then to Baylor.

Rafferty expresses his views on basic reporting. His principle is to convey the essence of the story quickly, and then expand. The reporter should make certain that what is in his head gets down on paper. Above all, keep it simple. He notes that the greatest change in journalism is the computer and satellites. Rafferty laments that journalists allow computers to do too much of the editing, that humans are needed to do more proofreading. Mistakes on the air are quickly forgotten, but mistakes in print are frozen. He feels that news reporting has become too subjective and that too many euphemisms are used. Finally, he wishes for more respect for the language and for accuracy of concepts.

P: My name is Kathleen Phlyer Perucci, and I am interviewing Basil Rafferty for the Oral History Project with the University of Florida. Today's date is February 15, 1988. The interview is taking place in Mr. Rafferty's home in Gainesville, Florida.

Would you state your full name for us?

R: My name is Basil C. Rafferty. Most people pronounce that differently, but this is the way my family pronounced it.

P: How do most people pronounce it?

R: Basil.

P: What date were you born?

R: September 5, 1908.

P: Where?

R: In Miller, South Dakota.

P: Is that a little town?

R: About 1,500, I suppose.

P: And it is cold I bet, right?

R: Yes. Today I did not notice in the paper, but I think it is probably ten or fifteen above zero.

P: How long did you live in Miller?

R: Well, we moved away from there when I was about six.

P: Where did you move to?

R: Watertown, South Dakota.

P: Is that a long distance away?

R: Probably less than two hundred miles.

P: Why did you move there?

R: My father closed out the business that he had and went to Watertown because there were better opportunities there.

P: What kind of business was your father in?

R: The year I was born my father put down an artesian well and built a little lake and a swimming pool with the water from the well. In the winter he put up the ice. In the summer he sold the ice and operated the swimming pool. Since this was in the prairies, in the middle of South Dakota, both the ice business and the swimming pool were very popular.

My father was a very convinced prohibitionist, and he refused to sell ice to anybody that he even suspected might be trafficking in alcohol (liquor). So he made a lot of enemies, and they made it tough for him. Really, I think that is what forced him out there. The people opposed to Prohibition tried to force him out of business. They just put too much financial pressure on him.

P: When was Prohibition passed?

R: Well, Prohibition was passed some years later, about 1917 or 1918, I believe. I would have to look that up. But those were the days when the agitation was getting strong. There was Carrie Nation and her hatchets and all of that noise about the demon rum.

P: How would your father find out that someone was involved in the liquor trade?

R: He would not necessarily find out. If he just heard a rumor, he would shut people off so they could not buy ice. Many of the stores--drug stores, for instance, with the old fashioned soda fountains--bought ice for their soft drinks.

P: If he thought the owner of the drug store was using alcohol, he would not sell ice to him?

R: Using it or selling it. He did not have to know it, only suspect it. As I recall, and of course my recollection is not the best, he was not too particular about verifying these things before he clamped down. He thought he had things pretty well under control because he had the only ice plant in about a fifty-mile radius.

P: So there was no other place they could really go without going to a lot of trouble?

R: Right.

P: So they kind of ran him out of town, then.

R: Yes, to be blunt about it.

P: Did he put up the same business in Watertown?

R: No, no, he did not go back into that business. This was just something he had tried out. His real interest was in real estate development, and when he went to Watertown he tried to continue with that.

P: Did you grow up in Watertown?

R: Yes.

P: What were your parents names?

R: My father was Will Thomas Raffety. Some documents show his first name as William, but the best information I can find and what checking I have done shows that Will was his real name. My mother's name was Myrtle Amelia. Her maiden name was Rice.

P: Did they grow up in South Dakota as well?

R: No. My father grew up in Iowa and my mother in southern Minnesota. She came to South Dakota to visit her older brother, and that is when my father and mother met.

P: Let us talk about when you attended school. I assume this was in Watertown.

R: I do not remember whether I started first grade in Miller and then moved to Watertown or whether we moved during the summer break. I do not remember any first grade experience in Miller. It might have been that we moved during summer break, and I started first grade in Watertown. I am not sure.

P: What was your school like? How many grades were in it?

R: I went to the Central High School there. There were eight grades in the elementary school, plus the high school, all in the same block.

P: Were they in the same building?

R: No. Eventually they went into a junior high school system there. One of the things I remember is when they decided to build a new high school they moved the old high school across the block. This was a stone building. They put it on jacks and pushed it clear across the block to make room for the new building.

P: A stone building?

R: Believe it or not.

P: Did you see them do that?

R: Oh, yes.

P: How did they do it?

R: Well, they got everything up on jacks and rollers--I suppose logs--and then they

braced the jacks against the building. Then the foreman would signal with a whistle, and every blow of the whistle they turned the screw on the individual jacks just so far so that all the jacks were being pushed the same distance at the same time. They must have spent thirty or forty days moving that thing across the city block.

P: Why did they want to move it?

R: To make room for a new high school.

P: Okay. What did they use that building for?

R: They restored it and used it for a junior high school.

P: It sounds like Watertown was a pretty good-sized city.

R: About ten thousand. We had six ward schools plus the high school and the junior high school. [Mr. Rafferty looks for a book.] You may or may not find out some things that are none of your business! I had a copy of the yearbook. I thought that would show us a picture of the high school. I think it is in another place.

P: Well, that is Okay.

R: I do not think you care that much. I was just trying to see if I had a picture of that old high school.

P: Did you graduate from that school?

R: Yes.

P: What year did you graduate?

R: 1926.

P: Did you go directly to college then, or did you work for a while?

R: I went directly to college for one year, and then I stayed out for a year and worked. Then I went back and finished college.

P: Where did you go to college?

R: Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa. It is older than Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

P: Really!

R: It is almost as old as Baylor [University in Waco, Texas. Cornell was chartered in] 1853, and I believe Baylor was [started in 1846].

P: Yes, 1845 or 1846. What did you major in?

R: Political science and economics. I started in economics and finished that major. I had a little time left, so I finished up in political science.

P: But you had a double major?

R: Yes.

P: Did they offer journalism?

R: Oh, they had a couple of courses that some people pretended to teach. The people who taught them were very limited in experience, and it really was not journalism.

P: Did you take those classes?

R: Yes.

P: Were they just basic writing skills?

R: One of them, I think, was editorial writing, and I forget what the other one was. They did not amount to much. The people who were in that class were mostly people like me that had grown up in paper work. We had some idea what we were doing, and we made a joke out of the classes.

P: At this point you knew you wanted to go into journalism?

R: I had already been working at it for several years.

P: Can you tell us what was your very first job in journalism?

R: Yes. I started out selling papers. [Mr. Rafferty holds up a newspaper.] This is the extra that was published at the end of World War I. At that time I was importing papers from the Twin Cities [Minneapolis and St. Paul]. The papers I got in that day, November 11, 1918, were early editions, so they had nothing about the armistice in them. I heard the kids selling papers on the street, so I went out and discovered what they were doing. When I went and got my papers

from the train I went by the *Public Opinion* plant [the local newspaper plant] and picked up some of the extras and sold them along with the papers I was selling.

P: So that was not actually the paper you were supposed to sell?

R: That is right.

P: Did they mind giving them to you?

R: No, they were glad to have anybody sell them who would.

P: What was the feeling? Was everybody excited?

R: Yes, very much. I forget what day of the week that was, but I know everything came to a halt. There was no school, and we were all running around town. I remember my mother loaned me a little .32 caliber revolver she used to keep for protection when we lived out at the lake. I went down to one of the hardware stores and bought a box of blanks and ran all around town shooting off this revolver.

P: You were ten?

R: Whatever the calendar shows.

P: When did you first start selling newspapers? Do you remember how old you were?

R: I was about nine when I started.

P: Did you sell them after school?

R: I sold them early in the morning. Watertown was a railroad division point. There were a lot of trains in the morning because a lot of commercial men traveled by train in those days. I would go down to the train station and pick up the paper as it came in from Minneapolis and St. Paul about six o'clock in the morning. Then I would go to three other depots between that time and time for school and sell the papers at the depots. If I had any extras I might sell them on the street corners or in the hotel lobbies, but I did not run up and down the street much because I could get rid of them by picking my locations.

P: How many did you sell a day?

R: Oh, thirty or thirty-five.

P: What time did you have to be at school?

R: Eight-thirty.

P: So you had roughly two and a half hours to sell them all.

R: I rode on a bicycle, and it was a small enough town that I could get around. Three of the depots were within a two-block area. The fourth one was some distance away, but it was near my home. That was the best one because the train was starting there; it was not coming in from somewhere else.

P: So no one had had a chance to buy a newspaper?

R: No one had had a chance to buy anything.

P: How big were those newspapers? How many pages?

R: Oh, twenty-four pages maybe. Papers vary. Minneapolis and St. Paul were pretty fair-size cities even then.

P: What about this Watertown paper?

R: Oh, eight to twelve pages.

P: Was it a daily, seven days a week?

R: Yes.

P: Do you remember how much the newspapers sold for?

R: Yes. Everything sold for a nickel. The reason I got these out-of-town papers was I discovered I could have them laid down in Watertown for a cent and one-quarter apiece. I sold them for a nickel. So I had three and three-quarter cents profit on each paper. My subscriptions paid for the newspapers each week, and everything I took in from cash sales was profit. I made six or seven dollars a week.

P: How long did you keep that job?

R: Probably about three years.

P: What did you do then?

R: By that time I had decided I wanted to stay in newspapers, so I got a job as a printer's devil with the weekly paper there in town. [We had two papers.]

P: What was its name.

R: The Watertown *Herald*.

P: What does a printer's devil do?

R: I did the sweeping and cleaning and kept the furnances going, and I learned how to take the type out of the forms and get it back into the cases. It took as much time to get the type back into the cases for reuse as it did to set it in the first place. A printer's devil was cheap labor.

P: How did you get started writing?

R: While I had this job as a printer's devil I started writing little pieces about the school. I would turn them over to the newspaper and they would print them. They would print anything [laughter].

P: Did you stay in that job until you graduated from high school?

R: No. After I went to high school I started doing the same thing for the daily newspaper. The editor of the daily paper asked me to cover high school football, because he did not like to stand in the cold. In South Dakota at that time there were not many colleges, so high school football was pretty good copy. After I started writing football for him I started writing brief football reports and sending them by telegraph to other newspapers in Minneapolis, Chicago, Sioux City, Denver, Sioux Falls, and Aberdeen. I had, I think, seventeen or eighteen papers that were taking them. I made about thirty dollars a month doing that. I kept that up through high school. Then I went to the newspaper editor and suggested I do a daily column on school news. I went to the ward schools on my bicycle after school and picked up little scraps and wrote a column that night or on my way to school the next morning. I did that for a year or two.

P: You graduated in 1926, went to college for a year, and then stayed out to work. What job did you have then?

R: I worked in a garage. I kept the books and greased the cars.

P: So after a year of that you went back to college. Did it take you the traditional four years to finish?

R: Four years and, I think, a summer school. I forget how many summer school [terms] I went to.

P: How did you decide on economics and political science? Did you think they

would be beneficial in your newspaper career, or were you just interested in them?

R: I thought they would probably be beneficial. Certainly there was no point in trying to study journalism in a place like that. Actually, I intended when I went down there to spend only two years there and then go on to [the University of] Wisconsin, which had a pretty good journalism department. But after I got down there and got involved in my second year I discovered my wife, and that put an end to any further discussion [of a move].

P: You decided just to stay put?

R: Yes.

P: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

R: No.

P: Did your parents have college education?

R: No. My father put a little time in at a business school. I do not think my mother even went to high school.

P: Really. Did she marry real young?

R: No. But, after all, we are talking about a couple generations back. [She was a farm girl.]

P: True. So it would make things quite different. They may not have had a high school.

R: Oh, I think they had one. But I am not sure they did, come to think about it.

P: You are the first in your family, then, to go to college?

R: Yes. But I know that both of my parents were emphatic; they insisted that I go to college. As long as I lived they kept saying, "You have to go to college! You have to go to college!" So by the time I was ready there was no doubt in my mind about what I was going to do.

P: While you were in college, the Depression set in, right?

R: No, not until after I got out of college. See, by staying out a year I got out in 1931, and the Depression was just getting tough. It was not getting started

[when I started college]. It started in 1929. Actually it started a little earlier than that, but it began to get severe in 1929. If you wanted to attack it statistically, 1931, 1932, 1933 were worse years than 1929.

P: But by that time it was starting to get a cumulative effect, when most people were losing jobs.

R: Yes.

P: Did you notice while you were in college that there was a drop-off in the number of students, say from 1926 to when you finally graduated?

R: I did not notice it particularly. This was a school where nearly everyone worked. We worked at maintenance jobs, so we were not as aware of family income problems as we might have been if more of us had been dependent on our families for support. Of course, in 1929, 1930, and 1931 it [the Depression] was just beginning to hit us. We had just moved out into that impossible labor market. If I had gotten out even a year earlier, I think my experience would have been different.

P: What do you think would have happened?

R: I think I would have gotten a job I could hold. Maybe not, but I think I would have. I went from 1931 to 1935 without having a job that I felt I could hang on to. Finally in 1935 I got a job I thought might be permanent.

P: Could you tell us what that work experience was for those first four years? What was your first job?

R: Well, the first job I was hired for was in Madison, New Jersey, to sell advertising. I was told I was the eighteenth ad man they had had in twenty-four months there.

P: During the Depression.

R: I lasted a full six weeks, and then I was fired.

P: What happened?

R: I could not sell advertising.

P: Oh, the Depression.

R: Yes. So then I came back to Iowa, and within less than a month I found a job in northwest Iowa--Rock Rapids, to be precise--doing the same thing, selling

advertising. Nineteen days after I got there the last bank in the county failed, and we went almost as long as I was there without a bank. [We had] just a clearing house to give the merchants change. That [job], of course, kept going downhill, and finally in the spring of 1933 I was dropped from that job. I was the only one who was not a hometown kid, and while most of us there in the shop were single, I was also the newest employee he had, so it made sense that I would be the [first] one out. I remained friends with my boss. He did his best to help me find something else, which was very difficult in those days.

Then I hitchhiked to the west coast, to Idaho where my parents were then living, and I just did any kind of work I could get a hold of. [I did] manual labor: I dug irrigation ditches, I unloaded coal, I hauled lumber back from the lumber mill, and I worked in the fruit [and vegetable] harvests. I am not sure whether I may be telling everything in the exact order that it was in.

Then I got a job selling circulation over in eastern Oregon. A publisher over there had bought a defunct newspaper, one that had burned out, and he had to re-establish the circulation list, so he sent me up to the hinterlands to try to re-establish that list. I worked there until it got pretty cold. I was just sort of living off the land. I was riding a bicycle up and down these little valleys and trying to sell a little advertising in town, which was very difficult, because these were the NRA days. You could order a bill of goods, and they might come at a different price than the salesman had specified on the order of the goods, so the merchants were completely up in the air. They did not know what to do. There was not much business.

P: An interesting time to try to start up a newspaper again.

R: Well, this man was not starting a newspaper. He already had two small papers, and what he was trying to do, actually, was to extend their circulation into this area that had been served by the burned-out paper, so there was not that much cost involved. He had the operation. All he had to do was make a few changes on the masthead, get new folio lines, and print whatever news he could get out of that territory and whatever advertising he got. I do not think you care all that much about the economics of it. It was interesting in a way, because I was out there dealing with the people who read newspapers, and I found out what they read and why. This was a time when they had what we used to call a patent inside. Ever run into those?

P: Never heard of it.

R: Well, we bought Ready Print. I guess that is what they called it. We bought the sheets of paper, four page size, from various companies that had some timeless material in advertising imprinted on one side of the paper. Then the local

[publisher] would simply print [local news on] the other [side]. So we had a paper twice as large as we could normally print, with all this timeless material on the other side of the sheets. They used to have a serial story, they had recipes and family medicine, a little farming agricultural advice, and things of that sort. I discovered when I was working that job that people read that stuff. Some of them liked to read it because that was the only reading matter they got, the only reading matter they had outside of the family Bible. So they had an interest for it, [which was] something I had not realized. It was really a good learning experience for me.

P: How long did you do that then?

R: Probably no more than five months.

P: After this job, then, in Oregon that lasted for four or five months, where did you go?

R: I went back to Idaho and stayed a few weeks. Then on Thanksgiving week I hitchhiked back to Iowa. I tried to sell electrical installations to farmers. This was before the REA came in.

P: REA?

R: Rural Electrification Administration. Until that came in with federal help it would cost a farmer better than \$2,000 to get electricity onto his premises. Then he could start getting appliances and lights. Needless to say, I did not sell much. I am not sure that I sold anything. I tried that for a few months, from Thanksgiving until early spring. And I did a few other odd jobs. I do not know what they were, but they had nothing to do with newspapering.

Then a friend of mine who had been coaching me and letting me work in his plant while I was in college told me that if I could learn to run a linotype I could go to work for his brother who had a weekly paper up in northwest Iowa. So I set about to learn how to operate a linotype in about two weeks. I went up to Sibley, Iowa, to work for this man's brother.

P: Can you explain what a linotype is?

R: Well, it is a typesetting machine. It is a linecasting machine. That is where we get the word linotype, because it molded a whole line of type instead of just one letter. Have you not ever seen those?

P: I am not sure.

R: Well, you have probably never seen one. The machine had a pot of molten

metal in it and the brass matrices that are put into a vise. As the metal is pumped against them it makes a mold of the full line, and then it cools very quickly. You use the molded line for your type and then just dump it and reset it every time. I have samples of all that stuff here, but I do not know that you want to take time to see it.

P: I would like to see that.

R: All right, I will dig it out. I have done quite a bit of explaining of this one time or another. That is one of the things I take a little pride in. I started working this business not too many years after the linotype was put into use. The first ones were installed in about 1896 in New York City. Out in South Dakota I saw them and cleaned up after them as early as 1916, so that is only about twenty years [later]. Then in the middle 1930s I worked on them for a time. So I kept track of the typesetting equipment as it developed.

P: Now, when did you get this job up in Iowa?

R: About June of 1934.

P: How long did that one last?

R: About six months. I was never the best linotype operator in the world. I could not really keep up with the needs, and I had to have another man help finish up the week's production. We used about forty galleys of type a week, and I could not set that much.

P: This was a weekly paper, then?

R: Yes. One of the other printers came in overtime to help catch me up. We did that for several months, and finally the boss said he just could not afford it anymore. I do not remember now whether I got the job before I left there or immediately thereafter, but at any rate I got a job over at Watertown, Wisconsin, where I was mostly doing editorial work instead of selling advertising.

P: That must have been a welcomed switch.

R: It was, except that there was a catch in it. The first week the man paid me my salary, which was negligible. The second week he said if I wanted my salary I should go out and collect bills to pay for it. So I went to the county attorney and complained. He got my salary for me, and I told this guy I would do one more week of work to get his paper out and then I was leaving, because I could not afford to work if I did not get any money. I was in pretty bad shape financially. Then came a kind of an interesting experience, in a way. I have not said very

much about my wife in these days. When I left Wisconsin it was just after Christmas. She was home on Christmas break; she had been teaching. I went out to her home, and while I was there a letter caught up with me. It had been sent first to northwest Iowa, to Sibley where I was working, and Sibley had forwarded it to Watertown, Wisconsin, and they had forwarded it to me at my wife's home. It was offering me a job in Winfield, Iowa, in southeast Iowa. Of course, that was a long time since they had offered me that job, and I had been moving around, [which is why] the letter had not caught up to me. At any rate, I got on the phone and called them, or wrote them. I do not remember. Well, they said they had filled the job. The man they had hired had not worked out, so the job was open for the second time. I went down and took it. That was right after the Christmas break of 1934-1935. That appeared to be a steady job. That was my first steady job. So we were married in August of that year in this little town of Winfield.

P: Your wife had already graduated and was teaching and living with her parents, is that right? Did she teach high school?

R: She did then. My wife majored in history, and she earned a Phi Beta Kappa key. There is how we looked just after we were married. At any rate, we stayed there in this little town, [and I worked for] this weekly paper. I did everything there. I set type on their linecasting machines, I ran job presses, I fed the [newspaper] press, I sold the advertising, and I wrote the news.

P: How big of a town is Winfield?

R: About 1,200.

P: Okay. This was a weekly, then, so you had time to do everything.

R: I stayed there until I guess about March of 1937. Of course, I had been looking all the time trying to get into the daily newspaper business. Finally I did locate a job in Carroll, Iowa, and we moved there. I think it was in March of 1937. We stayed there until June 1944, with the exception of four months I spent in the army. Then we moved to the Associated Press in Omaha. I worked there until the end of 1972. Then I went to Wichita State with [Dr. Loyal] Gould for a year, and then we both went to Baylor and stayed there until December [of 1986. Dr. Gould went to Baylor as chairman of the journalism department. He is an old and valued friend who was responsible for my getting into teaching after I retired from the Associated Press.] I finished up the first semester of 1986-1987. I spent all of 1987 here.

P: So it would have been 1986. Now, this job that you had until 1944, what did you do for that newspaper?

R: I was the editor.

P: Oh, you had the whole shooting match then. And that was the daily. What was the difference as far as the technology? Were you still using the same basic type of equipment, or had it changed?

R: Well, [it was essentially the same. The main difference was] that I was not having to use it. I was supervising it but not doing the mechanical work.

P: How many reporters did you have at that time?

R: Well, we had a couple of reporters. Part of the time I only had one. I did most of the reporting myself, and I did the layout. We had a pony wire, which some people, I find, do not even know about.

P: Tell us. What is it?

R: Well, it is a conference call, and they dictated the news report. They had so much dictation every day, maybe twenty minutes, twenty-five, thirty. We would take about three calls a day. There were four newspapers on the hook-up, and we copied it on our typewriters as they dictated it. As long as I was there, we managed that. We had a couple of girls that were pretty good with the typing, so I did not have to do it regularly. But I had to be available to backstop, which I did. Anyway, after I went to the Associated Press [AP] I had to read that pony to another paper, which was one of the very last ponies to operate in this country. The system was being phased out.

P: When was that that they phased it out?

R: Do not pin me down too closely on dates. I would say by 1945. You see, the technology kept improving. Originally when you took a wire you would have to take a full cycle, which was really eight hours. We had three cycles. Then we cut down to accommodate smaller newspapers. We developed in Iowa, and possibly in some other places, although I do not know for certain, an abbreviated cycle. We ran from about seven till one instead of seven till three. That was enough of an economy to allow some smaller papers to get on the wire. By eliminating the pony system costs, it was economically feasible. From that time on everything was serviced by wire.

P: Would all of these little newspapers want to have been on wire at that point, during the war?

R: They wanted it, but until they developed that abbreviated wire, smaller papers

simply could not afford it.

P: But your paper always had?

R: We had some kind of wire service. You could not get out a newspaper without it. Of course, we had what the AP used to call Extraordinary Occasion Service [EOS]. If you had a big development in the news, you would telephone all these people that were off the wire and were without service. We would phone them and notify them what was coming up.

P: So that they could run the story?

R: Yes, so they could run the story or do an extra. I remember the last one we did was when the "phony" war started in 1939 when the Germans started invading the Low Countries before they really got England and France involved. We tried to do an extra on that, but by that time radio was sufficiently prevalent that people just turned on their radios and did not bother to even come outside and buy the papers. We had the thing all set up and were all ready for it. [We had] everything but the lead story, and we were expecting it. When it came time, when the extra finally came, and we got the EOS bulletin. It took us about an hour and a half to finish resetting the paper, making over the previous day's paper, putting in the new material, and getting the boys together and transporting them around the county to sell the papers. We sold very few, so we never tried an extra after that.

P: Then after the war actually got started, people, I would think, would buy papers. Did business pick up after that?

R: Well, they bought papers, but there was not the occasion for putting out extra editions.

P: Because they would have already heard it on the radio?

R: That is right.

P: When did radio start getting really prevalent, roughly?

R: Well, I would say that it was about the start of World War II. You are pushing me a little bit on dates that I am not very clear about. I would have to look up some of these things to be precise.

P: That is all right. The dates that are world events or something we can look up. There is no problem.

R: That is something that people can determine, and I did not attempt to document

these things. I just thought I would ride on my recollections.

P: How did you get this job with AP? Was it 1945?

R: 1944. Well, that is another long story. When the war started, when we got involved in it, it looked as if it were going to be a long war. At that time we had no children, and I thought I might be drafted, so I went into the army on what they called volunteer enlistment. I volunteered for induction. The army agreed that I would either be commissioned or released and returned to my former draft status, so I went in under that. When I went to take my final physical exam before I was to be sent to Officer Candidate School--the program VOC, Volunteer Officer Candidate--they discovered a spot on one lung large enough that they would not consider me good for the army, so they released me. That put me in kind of a nebulous position. I was returned to my original draft status, 2B or 2A, I guess it was: married but no children. That made me considered very liable to the draft, so nobody wanted to hire me.

I was trying to move up by that time. I had been in Carroll since 1937, and I decided it was time to move on. The AP offered me jobs several times, but when they discovered what my draft status was, they decided they did not want to take the risk because they were afraid I would be yanked out on the draft. Finally I decided I could not live that way the rest of the war. The army did not want me, yet nobody else would take me.

So I went to the draft board and told them to send me down, to induct me, and I would take my chances on whether they would keep me or not. Of course, I did not think it was a very big chance, because I had the discharge which showed I was physically unfit for service. I was pretty certain that they would not accept me. They could have taken me for limited service; that was my risk. At any rate, they did not accept me, and then I got a new classification that showed that I was discharged and was physically unacceptable [for military service]. So then I was back in the labor market [with a clean slate]. Within a few weeks the AP came up with another offer, and I went to work for them. It gets kind of involved, does it not?

P: It sounds like they did not have equal opportunity employment rules or whatever.

R: No, it was equal enough.

P: They were discriminating against you because of your draft status?

R: They were, except that there was no reason for them to buy this kind of liability. I could not complain really.

P: What were your responsibilities when you started with AP?

R: I was just a general editor bringing in news from around the state, writing it for the wires, sending it off. I went there in May. By about September they made me night editor, and I worked nights for about five years. Then I became the swing editor. I worked three nights and two days for another five years. Then I became a state editor, which meant I was responsible for overseeing the reports that came in at various points over the state and for doing the planning. I had that job for--the mathematics are not quite holding up here--I would say twenty years. The total gives me thirty years if I divided it into those three parts, but actually it was twenty-eight years I was with the AP, so I am fudging a little bit somewhere.

P: Did you ever have the idea of wanting to get posted somewhere overseas when you first worked for them?

R: Yes. We agreed we would take a swing at it, but then we got into family problems. Her parents and my mother all moved in with us at one time. Before that we were afraid to get too far away because their health was precarious, so we sort of gave up the overseas stuff at that point. Then when they moved in it was obviously out of the question. Had it not been for the family obligations, we would have gone overseas, or attempted to.

P: Did you have any idea of where you wanted to go?

R: Well, everybody wanted to go to London or Paris. Most of them ended up in India or the Philippines.

P: Maybe you were better off.

R: I think it is an open question.

P: So after twenty-eight years with AP, why did you decide to go into teaching? Did you decide that the reporters you were seeing were no good?

R: No. I had known [Loyal] Gould. He was one of the men that I broke in when I was state editor of the AP in about 1955. We became friends and have remained friends. He went on to work the state house and the cable desk and then went overseas. I think he was overseas in Germany in the Iron Curtain countries for about eleven years. Then he came back and went to work for NBC as a roving correspondent. He roved and he roved and he roved, and he finally got tired of that. I think his wife got more tired of it. So he decided to go back to teaching. His situation, as you may recall, is unique in that he started out to become a reporter after he had a doctorate in comparative linguistics.

P: So he had taught before he became a reporter?

R: Yes.

P: I did not realize that. I knew he had a Ph.D.

R: Yes. So he went back to Ohio State where a mutual friend of ours was head of the department. Then he was offered a chairmanship at Wichita State, and he asked me to move with him to Wichita State when he took that department. For various reasons--mostly economic, I guess--I did not do it.

Anyway, when it came time for my retirement, shortly afterwards, another man and I put on Sigma Delta Chi's annual awards banquet, which you are familiar with, I believe, and he was up there for that conference. While he was there one of his instructors in Wichita called him and asked for a leave of absence. I suppose his presence there gave him the idea. Maybe not. At any rate, he went back to Wichita. In a couple days he called me and asked me if I would come and teach for a year. He had the opening, and he said, "You do not have anything to do anyway." I said, "Well, I have never taught." He said, "What do you think you have been doing all these years." The fact was I did not have anything much of any consequence to do. I do not know if I was reluctant or not, but it seemed a better idea than just going down in my workshop in the basement and playing with my woodworking tools, so I agreed to do it.

We were at Wichita State that one year, and then he was offered the job [of chairman of the journalism department] at Baylor, and I told him, "If you are going to go down there, why do you not take me with you?" So he went down, and I guess it was when he signed his contract that he asked me to come down. Another man who was at Wichita and I flew down and were interviewed by John Belew, Bill Toland, Herb Reynolds, and Abner McCall all at once, and they hired me.

P: What classes did you teach at Baylor?

R: I started out teaching beginning reporting, advanced reporting, editing, and [communication] law.

P: Everything.

R: Everything. We had a pretty slim department there at the start. They had terminated several people and others had resigned, so we came to an empty department. That was one of the reasons why Gould has found it so satisfactory is because he was able to build his department with the people he wanted and selected instead of having to contend with tenured people who might not be in sympathy with what he was doing.

- P: Right. So how long were you in a position of having to teach everything before you were able to pare it down to one or two different subjects?
- R: Four or five years, I think. Then I cut back. I can fit my time frame more in terms of people. When Dennis Hale came, . . . You never knew him, did you?
- P: No.
- R: He took over the law. Don Williams was there for a time. I do not think you knew him either. He took over part of the writing stuff, and I think Dr. [Jean] Berres and I had the editing. We each had a section of editing. Then I got out of beginning reporting. I had advanced reporting and editing. I remember I had two sections of something, I guess. At any rate, I got it narrowed down. Before you knew me I guess I had given up teaching altogether, and then I came back and took that lab. You were taking beginning reporting. Then the next year I took the responsibility for all the labs. But, actually, I had retired from Baylor before you went to school.
- P: Right. So then you came back and retired again?
- R: I am retired again, yes.
- P: Now you are writing a textbook for beginning reporting, right?
- R: Well, I have written it and revised it several times. Actually, I have it revised once more, and as soon as I get it all printed out, which should not take me more than a couple of days if I get at it, why, I will start shipping it out again.
- P: What are you saying in that textbook that is different from most textbooks that are out now? You must have felt like there was something essential that was being left out.
- R: No. Of course, this book is really a compilation of all the things I lectured about over a fourteen-year period. I placed quite a bit of emphasis on the value of imagination in seeing the possibilities, and I also tried to put considerable emphasis on the relationship with news sources, on how you might expect them to react to reporters' questions and what some of their concerns were. I spent considerable time on the problems of good speech. If they [interview subjects] cannot understand you, how can they answer your questions? Then I spent some time on the value of habits that keep you from forgetting things, and I put a little emphasis on listening to the pros, allowing time for copy reading, and a little bit about communications law and regulations and what the concerns of the sources were in cases like that.

You start by telling a story, because the story has to be told. You can tell it in simple direct language, and you can put it into written form easily enough. I do not know how much different that is, but I thought that the whole approach was probably a little bit different than most of the textbooks that I have seen. In fact, I have never seen any one that had this particular mix.

P: I have not, either. The books we used were mostly just nuts and bolts--how to write a lead sentence and that sort of thing.

R: Well, I have an approach to the lead sentence that is a little bit, I thought, more realistic.

P: What is it?

R: Well, something happens that you witness. You come home and you are going to tell your family about it. You are in a hurry, of course, and you do not have all that much time. The excitement is there, and you suddenly blurt out the essence of that story. "I saw somebody almost get killed." And they ask, "How come?" So then you say, "The window washer who was working outside of one of the buildings down there, one end of his safety belt broke and left him hanging there until people reached out from inside of the window and pulled him back in." You spend about ten seconds giving them the essence of that story orally. Now you have to start expanding. Out of that essence you put it into printed language, and there is your theme. It is not really the essence in itself, because it is not phrased well enough and it does not give you enough collateral detail to make a lead. But it gives you the idea of doing it quickly and not covering it up with extras.

P: That is a good way, I think, for the students to visualize it.

R: Well, you have to say that because you are here. But that is what I thought.

P: Well, that is a tough lesson to learn when you are first taking beginning reporting. That is one of the major things they spend time on.

R: I think a lot of people make it too difficult. They burden you with a lot of caveats when really all you are trying to do is find a simple, direct way to tell a story. I have pretty well given you an outline of what is in it, but I do not mind, because I have lectured this way all the years that I have taught. I wish somebody would buy the book, but so far they have not.

P: Have you had any nibbles?

R: Yes, I had one. The first publisher I sent it to asked me to revise it, which I did.

But I could not do all the things they wanted, because they were trying to make me write a kind of a book that I was not equipped to write and one I was not interested in writing. They really wanted more of a book for broadcast [journalism]. They wanted more emphasis on broadcast in the book. There is only a limited amount of broadcast material that I felt I could put into this book. I have done broadcast writing, a lot of it.

P: When did you do that?

R: When I was working for the AP. It was just part of the job. But I had always felt that you have to learn the business of doing a news story. Once you know that, it is fairly simple to put it into broadcast form. Good broadcast work is complicated, yes, but it is not that mysterious. It is just learning to do things in a different way, avoiding alliterations, watching your breath control, and finding things [to which people] will react. I do not want to give you a lecture on that, but it is a refinement that these people who do it well have worked hard at. I do not mean to suggest it is simple, but the mechanics are relatively simple. The target, the thing you want to do, is fairly simple. So much for that.

P: I would like to wrap this up by asking you for your impressions. Your career in journalism has spanned so many changes, and I was just wondering if you had to pick, what would be the major change you have experienced in your career, perhaps like a technological change or whatever?

R: We are probably now in the midst of the greatest change, and that is the computer revolution. So many mechanical things and technical things have happened. Wires disappeared with transmitting by satellite, and distribution of type is no longer a problem because we are using photo composition. Instead of having a lot of type to dispose of, we have a piece of paper to throw away or an image on a computer screen to erase. With that we have eliminated a lot of the intermediate steps that we used to have to take. Where that is going from now on is anybody's guess, because we are right in the midst of it. This is probably the most significant change that has occurred since World War I. That is when I began to become aware.

P: Do you think there is going to be any kind of ethical problems that arise from going so heavily into the computers?

R: I do not know that I would make that the reason. I think we are getting a lot of ethical problems, but I do not know just how I would tie that to the computers.

P: What kinds of ethical problems do you see right now in journalism?

R: Well, I do not know that I am actually correct in this, and I thought you would

probably throw that at me. We deliver so much information in so many different ways that the reporter who simply delivered factual information has pretty much disappeared from the scene. We are interpreting and we are reacting to the information far more than we used to. A lot of that is replacing the business of simply relaying information. Nobody is completely objective on anything.

I think we need to be more careful about getting subjective views get into our work. I do not think we are looking at that squarely enough. We talk about the labeling that we do. We talk about abortion as right to life, and we talk about anti-abortion as freedom of choice. Well, that is true enough, but it is a euphemism. We do not talk about "poor" people: we talk about "disadvantaged" people. We are doing too much of that.

If you notice, in this political campaign--I think it is more evident this year than it has ever been before, although it is not really new--we are striving for one-liners. Everybody is trying to say something in a nice, tight, quotable line. If you notice the way they discuss things, we play football, we fight battles, we play games--we do everything except discuss the thing we have in front of us. We try to put it in some kind of a framework of easy understanding, and I am not sure that is totally accurate always. So I think we are probably getting careless. I think that is an ethical problem.

P: What do you think is the best way to try to combat that?

R: I think the only thing we can put away is to try to teach people respect for the language, accuracy of their concepts, and whatever morality in their relationships they can acquire. I do not think there is anything new or different, but I think we need to be a lot more careful about what we do.

The analogy that I always think of when I am considering that is an experience that I had once. When they were converting from propeller-driven tankers to the jet tankers refueling aircraft, I went on a VIP flight where they were demonstrating all of that. We spent more time in the briefing room before and after the flight going through useful and necessary details than we did on the flight itself. In that same connection, I think that the speed with which aircraft fly has far exceeded the ability of the human to react. With our computer technology, the increasing speed with which everything is done is beyond our ability to cope with it.

Now, I do not know that I am suggesting that we slow down on things, but I do not think that we can afford to take some of the shortcuts that we do. For example, look down the right-hand margin of a newspaper column and look at the abominable word division. You will see lines where there are maybe two long words and two great gaps of space. The [computer] dictionary is not

programmed to accommodate all those options in word division, and nobody takes time to go back and repair those things manually. We do not read proof anymore in the newspaper. There is no reason to, because we take the writer's copy and it goes right through. Mechanically, there is nothing to correct. We assume the computer will get it right.

P: You mean with computerized spelling checkers and that sort of thing? Is that what you are referring to?

R: However it leaves the copy reader. If you read copy on a computer, then there are no other human hands that touch that copy. So there is no reason to read proof and see that it is done right.

P: Oh, I see.

R: In doing that, we have not allowed enough time for the copy-reading function. We did a shortcut. We tried to say that we can read copy as fast as we read it when we still had proofreaders, when we still had linotype operators. The best spelling authority I ever had was a linotype operator. He probably never even got out of high school, but he learned how to spell. He used to sit at the linotype and cry tears under pressure, but he never misspelled a word. The publisher told me, "If you want to go and look these things up, you go ahead and look them up. Be my guest. But when you look them up, you are going to find out that Hart (that is the operator's name) is right, because he does not make mistakes on spelling." And he did not. We do not have people like that anymore. We have no need for them. I do not know that we are giving enough thought to the kind of product we are producing.

So much of our information now is oral, and mistakes are not as telling because we think people's minds will play tricks on them or they will forget, so we do not worry as much about mistakes as we used to when they were in print and were frozen. While we still have print and there are still mistakes to be considered, we have an awful lot more information going out orally, and the care is not there.

P: Do you think part of this trend of trying to put things into a nice, neat little package, a one-sentence type of deal, to sell it to the public is from the effects that TV has had? People are used to hearing big stories that normally might take up a lot of room in a newspaper in a 30-second swig on the TV, so they have gotten used to wanting it capsulized.

R: It is. Yet we have forgotten--that means we do not talk about it anymore--a basic principle of advertising that I studied in school more than fifty years ago: one man tells another. Of course, since then we have come to the stage where one woman tells another, and some of these feminists are destroying our

language by insisting on non-sexist language. But that is a separate question. The principle of me telling you and you telling me is as old as communication. Now we say it is TV. Well, it is, but they have the opportunity because of the nature of the medium to make the best possible use of the oldest principle we know of.

P: Or to take advantage of it, either way.

R: Yes, take advantage of it. There is nothing new about this. TV is making use of something we have always known, and because of the nature of the medium they can take advantage of it and make use of it. I still prefer to have something that I can read, because if I do not get it the first time I can go back and try again, which you cannot do with any broadcast message. I think about that a lot, but I do not have all the answers. I wish I had more. I do not know if I am answering your last question.

P: That is fine. I do not have any more questions. Do you have anything that you feel we have forgotten to talk about or anything you have suddenly remembered?

R: I do not think so. I could go into a lot more detail on some of these things, but I do not know if they would contribute any information. A lot of these things I have been through; some of these things I have learned.

I remember when I was selling circulation one of the stock answers of people who did not want to buy was, "I cannot read." Your stock response was, "Of course you can. Let's stop the kidding." A man pulled that on me one night and said he could read, and I gave him the stock answer. He turned around and faced me, [and he was] blind. He had lost his eye sight in an explosion.

One time I had a woman on the staff that was writing the social and personal notes, and she had a kind of formula writing [style]. I could tell in the first few words, or thought I could, what the story was going to be about. I presumed that one day. She had written a story about a girl who was going into a convent. The way she started out the story it sounded like it was an obituary, so I put a headline on it as though this girl had shuffled off this mortal coil [that she had died]. It got into print. Fortunately, her father was a friend of mine, and I went over to his place of business and squared it with him, and he managed to keep the women in the family quiet. But that sure scared me.

I suppose that ties into what I am talking about now, of our not taking time to do the things that we should. One of the arguments that I make in my text is that one of the biggest problems that the writer has is conveying the things that he has in his mind. I keep using the "he" generically here; I am not really against women.

P: I know.

R: [The writer is] getting it all on paper, because when you put something down you assume that it is all there. But half of it is in your head. You think of it; you think of what is in your head and what is on paper in one package. It is not in one package. The trick is for the good writer to make certain he has it all in one place. That is one of the hardest things you have to do. I have written about writing the body of a story [in my book]. I was working on this the last few years, particularly in the labs. I was making people devote a part of their writing time [to editing]. You allow so much time to write the story, and then you allow a specific amount of time to edit it before you turn it over to anybody else. You do that deliberately. I have watched too many people work write right up to the last minute. Then they make a couple of hen scratches on the paper and assume it is edited. Well, it is not edited at all. You have to stop and think about what you put on paper and what you have not put on paper.

You are talking about the same thing when you talk about broadcasting as when you talk about print writing, because the broadcast copy is written before it is broadcast, as you well know. So it is still the same thing. You should not get me started on this, because I get wound up.

But to get back to your question, I do not know anything more that I really want to add. I can ramble forever, but I do not know what point there is.

P: You have hit all the high points?

R: I think so. I have pretty much covered the area that I tried to cover. One thing that I am aware of is that I never worked a day in my life that I did not have to learn something that I did not know the day before about how to do something. I think that is one of the fascinations about this business.

P: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I think it has been a very good interview. I appreciate your time.

R: I hope so. I am delighted that you picked me out and spent the time with me.