

An Interview with
Kenneth Cope

In Neosho, Missouri

03 March 1997

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Oral History Program
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[Tape meter, 003. Begin Side One, Tape One of One. Begin interview.]

RB: Okay, we could go ahead. Mr. Cope, I'd like to start out with just asking you a couple of questions about your own personal biography.

KC: Okay.

RB: Just so we can have a baseline to start from. Your full name is Kenneth...?

KC: Yes. Warren Cope.

RB: Kenneth Warren Cope. And you were born...?

KC: I was born in Neosho.

RB: In...?

KC: 1935.

RB: 1935. Your birthday is...?

KC: September the first.

RB: September 1, 1935. How about your education, now? Went to school here in...?

KC: Graduated from Neosho High School and went to... Well, I graduated from the University of Texas in 1959.

RB: University of Texas in Austin?

KC: Yes.

RB: Did you go there specifically to study journalism?

KC: Yes, I did. Kind of unusual for a Missouri guy to go to Texas, but my wife had an uncle that was a professor down there and he encouraged us to come down and look around. We liked it, so we went down there.

RB: Which professor was that?

KC: Dr. Rosenquist.

RB: Rosenquist. Was he a journal[ism professor]?

KC: No.

RB: Oh, he was different. Did you know about the University of Missouri at that time? Has a journalism school.

KC: Oh, yes.

RB: But you decided you were ready to...?

KC: Well, I'd spent a couple years in the U. S. Army up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It seemed like I'd had enough winter for a while, and the thought of going South was very appealing. Even though the University of Missouri is actually a journalism school, Texas also had a good journalism school.

RB: I feel certain they did. Yeah, their spring semester down there is what they call winter semester up here. (laughs) It was quite a difference for me when I moved up, too, from Texas.

Now, were you involved with journalism before you left to go down to school?

KC: No, I had... When I got out of the Army I came back here and went to Missouri Southern [State College] -- it was Joplin Junior College at the time, it's Missouri Southern now -- went to school there for a little over a year.¹ And worked at the printing plant that my father-in-law owned. He also owned the newspaper [the Neosho Daily News] at that time. That was in 1955.

¹ At the time of the interview, Missouri Southern was still designated as a college even though it offered four-year baccalaureate degrees. However, in 2003 when this recording was being transcribed, the school had just officially been renamed Missouri Southern State University.

RB: And your father-in-law was...?

KC: Howard [L.] Bush.

RB: Howard Bush, that was your father-in-law. So you married Howard Bush's daughter.
And what is her name?

KC: Anne.

RB: Anne Bush Cope. And when did you all marry?

KC: 1954. Wait a minute, it was 1955. I'd better get that right!

RB: Yeah, that's right, that was an important question to some people! (laughs) So he was
owner at that point...?

KC: Yeah, he bought the paper in 1952. Then he died in 1969. It was after that that we
bought the other family members out in the next few years.

RB: Just that you married Mr. Bush's daughter... Is that where your interest in newspapers
started?

KC: Yeah, it was! He encouraged me. Always liked English and grammar in high school.
And I had thought about a career in electrical engineering, but after going to school for a
year and then going into the army... When I got out of the army, the thought of a
different career was appealing to me.

RB: Did you begin to work for the paper at that time?

KC: I did. Well, I worked for the printing shop. Ran the press and stuff like that.

RB: Was that your first job in [the newspaper], was running the printing press?

KC: Yeah, here. That was prior to going to get my journalism degree.

RB: So you started really at the printing press end of [the] field of journalism, field of newspapers, there. What kind of equipment did you have at that point?

KC: Oh, it was an old Goss...

RB: The linotype was still going on?

[Tape meter, 050]

KC: Oh, yeah. We used the linotypes until we changed over in 1970. We changed over to offset. After we got rid of the old press downtown, we... When we moved out here in '59, we bought a Goss Cox-O-Type press -- I do remember the name of that one -- and it was a rotary press.² And we kept that until we went offset in 1970.

RB: But you were working on the older machine before you moved out here?

KC: Oh, yeah.

RB: Did that make a big difference, the change in the equipment?

KC: Well, yeah, each step has made a big difference. We thought when we went from the hot type to the phototypesetting that was a big... And it was, it was a big change. Later when we went to computer typesetting it was another big change.

RB: Since we're talking about the changes... You've seen quite a bit here. What would you say was the bigger change? Was it the mechanical changes that occurred? How did that compare with, say, going to computers?

KC: Oh, the computers were the biggest change, yeah. You can do so much more and so much more quickly.

² A source on the internet states that another name for the Goss Cox-O-Type was the Goss Comet.
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/letpress/message/14636?source=1> Accessed October 24, 2003.

But Mr. Bush died in 1969 -- I don't know whether I mentioned that or not -- but then we bought other family members out in the ensuing years.

RB: Other family members? Because his family had owned a group of papers?

KC: No. They owned this paper, but it was a stock company.

RB: Oh, I see.

KC: You know, different ones had different amounts of stock. He had two sons that worked here at one point. Channing Bush and Richard Bush. Richard was the editor until 1981 or '82, somewhere along in there.

RB: So [the Bush family] had been here a pretty good while?

KC: Since '52.

RB: That's when the name changed, is that correct?

KC: Yes. Changed from the Daily Democrat to the Daily News.

RB: And that was because that's the point where Mr. Bush bought the paper?

KC: Yeah, right. He didn't want it associated with a political party.

RB: Okay, that's another question I had about it. That name change brings that question up to the front. First of all, Daily Democrat, here in Neosho, is that an unusual thing to have? Would it be in the minority party down here, for instance?

KC: Well, you know, there's [the] Dunklin Daily Democrat and there's some other Democrat papers in the state, but I think it was highly unusual particularly in an area such as southwest Missouri where it's primarily Republican. But I don't know as that was the motivation behind it. The main thing was he just didn't want it aligned with a political party in the masthead.

RB: Was it aligned in any way?

KC: No, I don't think so. You know, it might have been in prior years, but I don't know that.

RB: Yeah, I would have thought -- just guessing, just from the name and knowing something about the politics of this area -- that that would have been sort of a controversial -- or *could* have been a controversial...

KC: No, I don't really think... You know, it's one of those things people don't think much about because there wasn't a heavy alignment with either political party.

RB: So when Mr. Bush changed the name. But it always was a daily, right?

KC: Oh, since 1904.

RB: Since 1904. That's quite a long daily. That's a lot of paper to put out for that period.

Neosho, has it maintained the need for that kind of daily news? Because a lot of places I go around, they just have a weekly. Sometimes a pretty large town will still only have a weekly.

KC: Well, in Missouri we've got a lot of daily newspapers the size of Neosho and Carthage, and there's some smaller such as Monett in this area.

RB: Monett has a daily, too?

KC: Yeah. But I'd say if you'd look down the list of daily newspapers in Missouri, there's more in the 5,000 circulation class than any other category. Say, from 4,000 to 6,000 circulation.

RB: Do you all compete with Carthage and other daily papers? You have a certain boundary or so that you...?

[Tape meter, 100]

KC: Well, yeah. [*Pauses briefly.*] Not really. Of course, we own Carthage, too, so...
(chuckling) The company does. But yeah, there's a point where... County lines have a lot to do with it. I mean, people in Newton County, they're going to probably be more inclined to take Neosho because of Neosho's the county seat. In Jasper County, they'll probably be more inclined to take Carthage or Joplin newspaper. Because that's in Jasper County.

RB: They get the county news, police reports, courthouse...

KC: Well, county, and the shopping habits determine where people [buy the newspaper.] Usually there's some pull toward the county seat of each county for that reason.

RB: Now, to go back: We had here you working as a printer, there, with Mr. Bush. Is that where left to go down to the University of Texas, then?

KC: Yes.

RB: But you were already married at that point.

KC: Yeah.

RB: And stayed down there for how long?

KC: 'Til 1959. We graduated in June of '59, then we moved back here and went to work. I went to work in the ad department and my wife taught school for one year. But then she was always involved in the newspaper, because as a girl growing up, she always had a paper route or wrote stories and so forth. And then after we moved back here, she did payroll and other jobs that no one else wanted to do. (chuckles)

RB: Right, she was holding it together, she doing all that.

KC: Well, she always stayed involved. (chuckling) I don't know if she was holding it together. She was very willing to do about anything that needed to be done. When her brother sold out, when Richard sold out, Anne took over as editor. I think that was 1982.

RB: So when you all came back, you went right to work with the ad department then. And you were selling ads? Is that what you were doing?

KC: That's it. My degree was in news editorial, but it just so happened when we got back here there wasn't any openings in the news department and there was in advertising.

RB: Who was the editor at that point? Was it one of Mr. Bush's brothers or...?

KC: No, no. No, it was -- I think Dick Fisher, but I can't be sure about that. The guy's name was Dick Fisher.

RB: There's a guy up in Kansas City, isn't there, by the name of Fisher that puts out [a newspaper]? That's not the same one?

KC: No. This guy's dead.

RB: So you sold ads for a period of time and then...?

KC: I did. Sold ads for a number of years. Then Mr. Bush traveled quite a bit, so [I] really worked with all aspects of the newspaper plus ran the job shop that we had at the time.

RB: The job shop, would that do print work for other...?

KC: Well, it was job presses, not newspaper presses.

RB: Oh, I see. It'd be like posters and things...

KC: Yeah. Letterheads, envelopes, and so forth.

RB: So he had that business. Did he have that business going back, like say, in the '50s? Or was that something new that...?

KC: Well, yeah. You know, it was expanded, but yeah, it went back to when he got here. It wasn't a separate company at that time. He created a separate company about 1956 for the printing, Neosho Printing Company.

RB: So then the Bush family, though, owned the paper, as you say, as a corporate owner?

KC: Mm-hmm. They bought it from the Anderson family. 1952.

RB: Well, let me go back now. You were selling ads, then you became really working in many different aspects of the paper.

KC: Yeah.

RB: Did you write an awful lot or _____?

KC: No, I wrote some but not much. (chuckles) Just always too busy selling ads and running the business.

[Tape meter, 150]

RB: Besides selling ads, what would that mean? You'd hire and fire, I guess, you'd have to do that.

KC: Well, if somebody takes a day off back in... You know, if somebody's sick on the linotype back at that time there wasn't any way to get somebody else to come in, so either he or Mr. Bush or myself would do -- or *both* of us -- would be back there running linotype some days. Or if you had an extra large issue to put out, somebody had to...

RB: Somebody had to have those skills anyway. You had to have the skills of anyone that might be absent.

KC: Well, you know, that kind of goes along with my theory of running a business. It's hard to run something you don't know anything about, so I've always tried to enlighten myself on all the aspects of the business.

RB: Now that's what I've found to be one of the sub-themes of this entire subject matter is the *family* business. There are a lot of local papers, it seems like, [that] have *long*, long family stories and histories like that. So it's sort of grown out of that Bush family in a way, and then you say when Mr. Bush died...

KC: In 1969.

RB: Then you had to decide at that point -- or the family had to decide -- whether to stay on. And some decided to [stay.] One was an editor. Did he stay on?

KC: Yeah, he stayed on. You know, there were different time periods. [The] Bush family had two sons and three daughters. The daughters didn't live around here, so they sold their interest. Then Channing and Mrs. Bush sold their interest later, and then Richard finally was the last one. And I think we finished buying him out in 1982, I think it was.

RB: When you say he sold, who was buying exactly?

KC: We were.

RB: It was you and your wife?

KC: Yes, Anne and I were.

RB: Okay. So it became still family-owned, but [a] man-and-wife family-owned business.

KC: Well, and our children were involved in [their] high school years, and then our son Randy -- who's presently the publisher at Fayetteville, Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas Times,

another APC [American Publishing Company] property -- he was working with us at that time. He'd just graduated from college himself.

RB: What is his name?

KC: Randy Cope.

RB: When did that come about, the APC?

KC: When did we get involved?

RB: Well, I guess that's the name of the company, now...

KC: American Publishing Company. It was formed in December of '86. We sold out in July of '87, and since that time I've worked as... Well, [I] started out as a regional manager and then became a senior officer and a member of the board of directors. And it's continued to grow. Started from a few papers to the largest in *numbers* of any company in the United States today.

RB: So it was you and your wife that started it out?

KC: No, no. We sold *out* to them.

RB: Okay. Now, where were they headquartered when you sold?

KC: Southern Illinois at the time. Today Hollinger International is the broad name for the company, and Hollinger International is located in Chicago. [It] has holdings in Canada.

[Tape meter, 200]

Owens controlling interest of Southam Newspapers in Canada, and Sterling Newspapers [also in Canada.] Wholly owns the Daily Telegraph in London. And other holdings in the United States.

RB: Now, you've made your way up in this business. In APC. You're the Deputy Chairman at the present time.

KC: Yeah.

RB: So it was a big organization. I guess it grew a lot during that...

KC: No, it was a small organization and grew into a huge organization just in a matter of [the] last ten years.

RB: Oh. So it has continued to acquire other papers and expand just within the last ten years.

KC: Oh, yeah. That's when it was put together.

RB: When you first sold to them, do you recall -- what sort of changes would you say occurred? See, I have a kind of a naïve (I'm sure) concept of what a local paper might be, especially a family-run paper that decides on what type of editorial philosophy or whatever goes on. Was there big changes like that?

KC: None whatsoever. My wife continued as editor for the next four or five years. No, we don't make changes. The only way we'd [the APC would] make changes is [if] somebody went off the deep end somewhere and got a lot of complaints from town or something. We might say, "Hey, what's going on here?" But no, we don't get or give any editorial direction to the papers. It's up to the local publisher and the editor [to determine] what their policies are.

RB: So as far as local news, that's what it is, still. That still remains.

KC: Basically, the only thing we insist on is that they cover the local scene and not fill it up with AP [Associated Press] wire [reports.] (laughs)

RB: Okay, so this APC then is interested in continuing that.

KC: Oh, yeah. We've taken a lot of papers that we've bought and made a lot better local products out of them. And it could be buying papers from other chains or buying from individuals. There's a lot of individuals that own very poor newspapers, I mean poor quality editorial products.

RB: But there's some other conglomerates, aren't there, that have a different approach completely? I mean, they would send the news out to the [local newspapers.]

KC: They may have a wire service, but that would be all. Realistically, they've got to cover... The purpose of the local newspaper is to cover local news. So why would they send out [canned generic news?] They'd be cutting their own throats. They might [have their own wire service to cover statewide events of interest.] You know, like Cox News Service has their own wire service and Thompson had one. Well, there's several different ones [that] have their own wire service. Mostly maybe for state reasons, cover state news a little better.

RB: But you guys have places throughout the Midwest. I guess that's where your biggest collection [of newspapers is located,] looks like.

KC: Well, Pennsylvania, New York, and... Yeah, we're in twenty-nine states.

RB: And the parent company is in Chicago.

KC: Well, that's where the financial office [is located.] We've got that in Marion, Illinois -- which is [in] Southern Illinois. We've got two offices. And then the senior officers are scattered in different sections of the United States.

[Tape meter, 250]

(chuckling) We believe we're better off operating out of more or less a scattered environment as opposed to everybody being in the same place. If you're in a central place you have a tendency to have... Everyone gets to thinking alike on everything.

RB: So this office here, that you have here in Neosho, is actually an office of this larger company.

KC: Yeah. Well, *my* office is. Mine and my helper. Then I've got a circulation guy that works with properties west of the Mississippi that operates out of this office, and then our national classified salesperson operates out this office too.

RB: So you have these various -- I would think of [as] larger -- corporate responsibilities with this company.

KC: Yes.

RB: What is your role at present with the paper here?

KC: Here? Well, we operate the company... Actually, we've got several different areas, but we've got the overall corporate picture. Then in order to manage that a little better we've got what we call "super regions." We've got [it] divided in fourths, the United States. And then within that super region... Like I've got a super region that I look after, too. I've got six regions within that super region. (chuckling) Then I also have a region of my own. Everybody has a region. *[Apparently referring to a map or other materials]* But if you'll follow that. And Neosho would fall under my region and my super region and my overall corporate [responsibility.] So they get a lot of input from me. Maybe too much.

RB: Too much! (laughs)

KC: You ask Valerie [Praytor], the publisher, she'll tell you, too much. She used to be my assistant for about five years. Very knowledgeable, hardworking young lady.

RB: Would you say you were the publisher up until what [time?]

KC: Until I sold out. Randy Cope was then after me. [When] we bought [the] Fayetteville, Arkansas [newspaper,] we moved Randy to Fayetteville. It's a larger paper. And moved Valerie in as publisher here.

RB: How did you first get a connection with APC? Did they approach you?

KC: They approached us.

RB: Did they have the idea that you would -- or did you have the idea at that time that you'd not only sell to them, but also be working then for them?

KC: Well, that was part of the deal. I really wasn't interested in selling the newspaper until they came along. It was a new company, and there was lots of opportunities. I probably wouldn't have sold to someone else where there wasn't any opportunities to move on and do some things. But I'd had this desire for a long time to either own a larger newspaper or do something on a larger scale other than run [the] Neosho, Missouri [paper.]
(chuckling) I'd done that for a number of years.

[Tape meter, 300]

I was fifty or fifty-one at the time, and the thought was, "I either need to shift gears and go on to something else, or be satisfied with what I've got." And I wanted to be challenged more.

RB: And since then you've been traveling some.

KC: Yeah, a lot.

RB: Because you need to get around to these various places in the region.

KC: Well, in the super region, too. I try to make [it to] all the papers in the super region once a year, and all the other papers in the company as often as I can. Up until this past year, I had *everything* west of the Mississippi, and that was just about too much to make all those stops. And I'm also in charge of acquisitions for the company.

RB: Acquisitions of equipment?

KC: New properties.

RB: New newspapers. So you have to go in to places to make a deal.

KC: Wherever. In the United States, yeah.

RB: What's the furthest place you have? [*Apparently looking at a map*] I see in California you have one?

KC: Yeah, we've got some in California and Washington and New York. Depends on which direction you're looking.

RB: Are you down in Beaumont, do I see, down in Texas?

KC: It's Port Arthur and Orange.

RB: So, yes, that's quite a bit of travel. I noticed in Mr. Taft's book that you became involved in the Missouri Press Association.³

KC: Yeah.

RB: Of course, I guess you were involved just as a member for...

KC: Yeah, we've always belonged to the Missouri Press Association, and I served on the...
Well, as the representative from Missouri to NNA [National Newspaper Association],

³ Probably referring to Missouri Newspapers and the Missouri Press Association: 125 Years of Service, 1867-1992 by William H. Taft. Marceline, MO: Heritage House Printing, 1992.

and then I went on the Missouri Press Board and served a term there. And then I think about the time that term was over with, I was made Second Vice President and then First Vice President, and President in 1989.

RB: What would you say the main goals are or accomplishments that you've seen the Press Association [realize]? Of course, they're located there in Columbia. I guess that's where they've always [been.]

KC: Yeah. Well, it's a very successful press association. A lot of the press associations in the United States are fairly weak, because they don't have very many newspapers in some of the smaller states. But Missouri is very fortunate. We've always had a good crew at the Missouri Press office. [William A.] Bill Bray before Doug Crews. It's always been a real upbeat association and it's worked well with the newspapers, and been very successful.

[Tape meter, 350]

RB: They knit things together some way. Do you have an annual event that that occurs at?

KC: Well, they do have an annual meeting, yeah.

RB: It calls in people from all these newspapers.

KC: Yeah. Everybody that will come.

RB: I know there's awards, and you're [the Missouri Press Association] very active in choosing outstanding newspapers and recognizing people, and that work continues. So are you still very active in that association?

KC: Well, I have been. I'm not as active as I was before, but the newspaper here is. The publisher here is the treasurer of the Missouri Press [Association] this year. I still

strongly believe in [the] Missouri Press Association and being involved with it, you know, our newspapers.

RB: You get to meet, probably, some older people there that were working... It seemed like there were some that had been there for a *long* time involved in it.

KC: Yeah. It's kind of an unusual situation about Missouri newspaper people. They hang out together for as long as they can. Once a year we have a dinner for the past presidents, and that's coming up in May, but it's the time when all the past presidents that are alive get together and have an evening together.

RB: And how many are there of them now?

KC: Oh, I don't know.

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

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

RB: It's hard to find what you'd call a truly retired newspaper person. (laughing) The publishers or whatever, they might be semi-retired but they still come into the office. Older people just... It's hard to stop doing it.

KC: They love the business. Many retire but they'll continue a column or continue some minor involvement, anyway. It's hard to get away.

RB: Yeah, continue to have an office and have people coming in and that kind of thing. Looking at that group of people who have been outstanding in Missouri, would you think of anyone that has had influence on you particularly, or impressed you in certain ways?

KC: (chuckling) Oh, there's been a lot of people that's influenced me and impressed me. You know, I hesitate to single out any particular ones. Of course, my father-in-law was

the one that got me started in the business, so obviously he had a great influence on me. You know, just being around different people through the years has been an inspiration.

RB: Yeah. How did Mr. Bush get his start in it?

KC: Well, he moved down here from northern Ohio. He owned three weekly newspapers up there, and decided to sell out and buy a daily newspaper somewhere. And this one came available. Anyway, he bought this one as opposed to one somewhere else.

RB: And that's what brought him here to Neosho.

KC: That's what brought him here.

RB: And your wife was born here, though?

KC: No, she was born in Michigan. She was a junior in high school when they moved here.

RB: What was your folks involved in? You were born here?

KC: Yes. Well, my dad was a contractor. We had no family involvement in the newspaper business.

RB: Did you see anything that you'd recognize as a philosophical change over the years?

KC: Not any more so than from one manager to the next. Everyone has a different way of managing and dealing with different problems.

RB: I would think one difference from paper to paper would be in how much emphasis they put on different segments of the news. For instance, whether politics are particularly important, or the social scene, or is it sports. What would you say about this paper?

KC: Oh, I think the goal is to be a well rounded [newspaper.] You touch on all of those things, but certainly the local news and sports is what our main interest is. We primarily cover two counties here in Newton and McDonald Counties, and we try to cover all the

council meetings and the school board meetings and the sports in all the high schools involved.

RB: Do you all maintain a morgue here of the papers?

KC: Well, most of that's on microfilm. You can keep only so many papers. (chuckles)

RB: That's right, since what, 1904?

KC: 1904, yeah.

RB: Wow. Do you keep any of the old stuff here, or is it all...?

KC: Just special things. You don't have very many.

RB: So all of that has been recorded on microfilm, and now it's probably part of the newspaper library at [the State Historical Society of Missouri.]

KC: Yeah. Actually, I think right at the present time it's down at the city-county library so people have better access to it.

RB: Locally.

KC: Yeah. And I think the State Historical Society has copies.

RB: I'm not sure at the moment, but we have those records of who all the... They have quite a few, and I would suspect they would have this one or be interested in having it, for sure. So you see another generation [getting involved in the newspaper business.] Randy [is in the business,] you say. Are any of your other children involved?

KC: No. He's the only one.

RB: How old is he now?

KC: Thirty-six.

RB: But he's been involved at a pretty high level in newspapers...

KC: Ever since he got out of -- well, before he went to college, but certainly he's worked full-time since he got out of college. But he graduated from Missouri Southern College. It's probably been about twelve years ago. (chuckling) I don't know exactly.

[Tape meter, 050]

RB: So in that time he's been involved in the management, really, or the administration of it.

KC: Yeah, well, he's done everything.

RB: And now he's a publisher.

KC: Yeah, he's been a publisher for several years. He's publisher of a larger paper now, at Northwest Arkansas Times in Fayetteville.

RB: Does he have children coming along, or do you think it will...?

KC: He's got two children.

RB: Too young [to] see what interest they'll have [in the newspaper business.] Do you have anything you'd like to add? [Anything you might] think about that'd be important to [include in this interview]? This is your opportunity. You know, [do you] have a statement or anything you'd like to say about the business in general or...

KC: No, I don't really...

RB: ...changes that have occurred, for instance, in journalism in general, maybe?

KC: I feel optimistic about journalism into the future. It's been a good life for me and I've enjoyed it. It's always been exciting. But I feel like we'll have newspapers around for a long time to come. Some people may choose to have them delivered over a computer or laser printer or something like that, but I think the majority of the people will -- at least seventy-five percent of people -- will still value getting that newspaper delivered to their

homes every day. And it will be similar to what it is right now. But possibly twenty-five percent of the people will want it delivered some other way.

RB: Well, I guess there have been some changes already since magazines, television, and that [have] been on the rise, hasn't it?

KC: Yeah. Well, some. But we really -- as a company, we haven't had... We've got a lot of our papers on the internet, but to me it's something that... It's a good way to check lots of different newspapers, but it takes a lot time to go to the internet, pull up pages. It's just not quite the same as putting one in your lap and sitting there and reading it. I just don't know how many people in general [would] be willing to devote the amount of time that it takes to sit in front of a screen, especially if they've had a screen on all day at work. I don't know. It'll be interesting to see, and I think it's one of those things that... You know, your *level* of interest maybe is higher right at first than it is on down the road. Maybe not. I don't know. Guess we'll find out.

RB: The newspaper as a physical item, you think, has a good, strong future.

KC: Oh, yeah. Like I say, I think at least seventy-five percent of the people will want -- even after this thing gets perfected on the screen -- they'll still want to get their paper delivered to them.

RB: Journalism has had some criticism over the years, I guess especially over the last, what, five or so years, or ten years, maybe, [from] people who think it's [become] sensational. It might attempt to be focused on stories that have either a lot of glitter or a lot human [interest] -- some kind of a tragedy or something like that -- at the expense maybe of

some other news. Do you follow that at all, or do you see any change, say, on the national level?

KC: Yeah. Well, you know, I've heard that complaint for a number of years, but there's no such thing as just a good news society. We don't *live* in a good news society, and people do want to know about the tornadoes that hit Little Rock and so forth. They do want to know when there's a murder or a rape or whatever the situation is. We might complain about the bad news, but in general I think people want to know that. And I don't think it's probably any different today than used to be. Possibly people [are] getting more from television, because it's so graphic -- and didn't used to have television -- so maybe they're getting two or three doses of it as compared to one dose twenty-five, thirty years ago. But the newspapers need to cover all aspects. The good news, the bad news, and the indifferent news.

RB: The controversy I heard coming up here, by the way, was the one about the... Is it the Dallas [Texas] Morning... They were reporting this [Timothy] McVeigh letter.⁴

[Tape meter, 100]

KC: Oh, Dallas Morning News?

RB: Morning News, right. And the defense attorney is saying that that newspaper is not very credible anyway.

KC: Ahh. I don't know. When you put your wares out for display every day that you're going to get a certain amount of criticisms.

⁴ Referring to allegations that the Dallas Morning News broke into the computer files of the legal firm representing Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing suspect, Timothy McVeigh, and stole hundreds of confidential documents. The Morning News printed a story based upon what it said was a memo from the defense which stated that McVeigh had admitted his guilt.

RB: And that's where you're at, every day...

KC: Yeah.

RB: ...in the eyes of the public.

KC: If we don't report it, well, we're not doing our jobs, and if we do report it, we're being sensational. So you just try to hit the medium road and go with it.

RB: I know this one might be tough, but what would you say here in Neosho were some of those sensational stories that you can recall?

KC: Well, you know, I think we come up with stories on a smaller scale such as Watergate. What would have happened to Watergate if somebody hadn't been sensational? Probably nothing! And we had a local situation here that was one of those pawnsy schemes, you know, where a local accountant and his wife were bilking people out of their money. We started digging into it and finding it. They ended up in prison. But, you know, I'm sure early on people thought, "Why doesn't the newspaper leave this alone? These are good people, they wouldn't do anything wrong." But they did!

RB: So you do some investigative reporting...

KC: Oh, yeah!

RB: ...from here.

KC: So you do need to look into...

RB: What year was that?

KC: That was the early '90s, I think.

RB: In a way, you have to interact with your reporters, don't you? Train them?

KC: Yeah, the publisher does. The Missouri Press Association has meetings that are intended to equip reporters better, and then our company... Of course, we're a big enough company [that] we have the same thing. We've got a meeting set up this summer. Not all of our reporters and editors [will attend], but depending on the size of the newspaper, [that size will determine] how many will come. We've got a meeting in Dallas, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

RB: You'll talk about issues like ethics or _____?

KC: Well, yeah. And how to better cover your news. We've got one person that we work closely with, the editor at the Fayetteville newspaper, Mike Masterson, that works with... He'll actually go in and work with the staffs or critique their papers. Yeah, we're pretty conscious of whether or not somebody's trying to do a good job.

RB: Well, that's an issue there, I would think. You know, an investigative reporter, someone who has to [know] how far do you go.

KC: Usually it's taking it a step further. You don't just take what people give you, sometimes you have to go a step further and find out. Most of our small papers don't have what you call "investigative reporters," but you can ask the tough questions and come up with some answers.

RB: Sometimes they're needed at the local scene just as well at any other.

KC: Sure!

RB: Mr. Cope, in all your travels there -- and you travel quite a bit, and then you've been affiliated [or] associated with the Missouri Press Association and all that -- do you have any tips about who would be good to interview and get the history of [the Missouri

newspaper industry]? I could see just for instance this one, like I say, sub-theme (sort of) of family-owned businesses.

KC: If you want another *family*, I mean, there's several *families* in the state that's involved [in the newspaper business.] Have you talked to Avis [G.] Tucker at Warrensburg, Missouri?⁵

RB: I haven't talked with her. She is on our board of [trustees] at the State Historical Society.

KC: Yeah, but, you know, she goes back a long ways. Steve [Stephen E.] Sowers, who's our publisher at Rolla, Missouri -- we bought that [newspaper,] that was a family company -- Steve stayed on and ran the paper [the Rolla Daily News.] I mean, his dad...

[Tape meter, 150]

He goes way back. There's several newspapers around that still have families involved. Mostly weekly newspapers, but there are a few dailies.

RB: Who have older members who would remember what _____.

KC: Yeah, the guys up at Washington, Missouri.⁶

RB: Uh-huh, I haven't got them.

KC: [*Pauses, thinking. Apparently moves across the room, looking through reference materials.*] You know, he's a past president [of the Missouri Press Association,] too, [Thomas L.] Tom Miller, [Sr.] And let me see... Let me look at the dailies and see. The weeklies, Bob Mitchell of down at Cassville.⁷ He just recently sold out. His family's been involved.

⁵ Publisher of the Daily Star-Journal at the time of this interview.

⁶ Referring to the Miller family, publishers of the Washington Missourian.

⁷ Editor of the Cassville Democrat. Mrs. Kathryn Mitchell was the publisher.

RB: I was trying to get in touch with him during this trip, but I was unable to. He must just [have] been out of town. But he's involved in there for many years, hasn't he?

KC: Yeah, he has.

RB: And that's an old paper, too, isn't it, Cassville?

KC: Yeah. I was trying to think, over at West Plains... Frank [L.] Martin [III] and his family has owned that paper [the West Plains Daily Quill] for a number of years. *[Thoughtful pause, sound of pages turning]* I mean, if you're looking for *family* people, [I've] got some...

RB: How about other influential...?

KC: Well, [Charles E.] "Chuck" Haney was the past president [of the Northwest Missouri Press Association.] He's up at our paper at Chillicothe, Missouri [the Constitution-Tribune.] Chuck's been around a long time.

RB: Later on this week I'm supposed to meet with Mr. [William Lester] "Les" Simpson [who has worked at various Missouri newspapers over the years.] Do you know him?

KC: Yeah, I do. He's a great fellow.

RB: And Mr. Wallace Vernon [of the Eldon Advertiser.] I was supposed to meet with [him.] He's also an older [newspaper man.]

KC: *[Continuing to look though reference materials.]* Let's see, I was trying to think... So many of the papers have sold, there [are] no longer people involved that's been there a long time. I was trying to get an idea.

RB: Let me ask you one thing about the technology. You were saying that you changed machines in the '50s, I guess, around the mid-'50s.

KC: No, we had linotypes then. We changed in 1970. We went to phototypesetting; we went offset. But phototypesetting was right before the computers.

RB: And then the computers came out and you had to change again.

KC: Yeah, it really... Computer technology, [it was the] mid-'80s or something like that before it really became...

RB: Available enough that you could go...

KC: Well, as far as I know, so that you could afford it on our small newspapers.

RB: When you say each time this changed, now, you could do more work with fewer people?

KC: That's probably... At least you could do it a lot faster, so, yeah.

RB: Well, then, do you have fewer people working today than you did doing the same job, for instance?

[Tape meter, 200]

KC: You'd have fewer people in the typesetting area. That'd be about the only area. Yeah, they've still got the same number of reporters.

RB: So you've reduced in that one area, but you still have all of the other...

KC: Yeah, the rest of it doesn't change much. Circulation people are about the same, and the advertising department is about the same.

RB: It seems like a monumental work to put out a daily. How many employees do you have at a place like this?

KC: Here? This is a pretty small paper. There's about eighteen full-time people -- and I don't know that, you'd have to check with Valerie -- but I'd say around eighteen full-time and

depending on who else you count -- whether you're counting the inserters and...

(chuckles) You know, there's a lot of part-time people.

RB: But you take stories, for instance, from people that are not on the staff.

KC: Oh, yeah.

RB: A lot of people write, and write different columns and such.

KC: *[Continuing to look through reference materials]* I was just trying to find somebody that goes back a ways. You know, you find people that go back ten or fifteen years, but that's not what you're really looking for.

RB: Do you ever see a person who stays in the printing business, for instance, I mean as a printer more or less but doesn't go...? Just in terms of occupation, I thinking of. Started out as a printer, but stays a printer, doesn't go to the level of either editor or publisher or anything else.

KC: Well, probably not. I mean, yeah, you have, but not that owned the newspaper or so forth. I mean, you got a lot of printers that stayed there.

RB: They may have an interesting story as well, having worked with technology or worked with the machines all these years and such.

KC: Yeah. There's another family that's been involved [with the newspaper business] down in here for quite a while. It's George Pogue down at Noel, Missouri. His family, his dad owned the paper before him. I don't know whether his dad's still involved or not. Quite truthfully, I don't remember. I just *can't* remember. George Pogue at Noel. And they own [the] Pineville newspaper [the McDonald County News-Gazette,] Noel [the

McDonald County Press,] and Anderson [the Anderson Graphic.] It's the next county down.

RB: That's just about as close to, what, Oklahoma as you can get, isn't it?

KC: Oklahoma and Arkansas. Yeah, both of them.

RB: Gosh, that's right in the corner! What about that here in Neosho? Do you get the situation...? I know when I was in Southeast Missouri, it seemed like people were in some ways more attuned to the news in Tennessee and in Arkansas than they were in Missouri.

KC: No, I don't think so, here. I think people are pretty well interested in Missouri news. You know, there may some things *of* interest in [neighboring states.] Of course, we've got Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. But they're wanting to know the general information in the four state area, but primarily they're interested in Missouri news because that's what affects them.

RB: Your T.V. station, where is that located from?

KC: Well, there's two in Joplin and one in Pittsburg, Kansas. So there's three in this area.

RB: Sometimes they'll report upon politicians in their area. Gubernatorial [races] or whatever they might [be] talking about, some of these other...

[Tape meter, 250]

KC: Yeah, they have to cover all three states, too.

RB: Do they think of this as -- I'm sure they do -- a tri-state area?

KC: No, the four state area. There's four states. Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri.

RB: Do you see a regional identity here, I mean, among people who live right in this corner, say, for instance? Do they share an identity, or would you say these are Missourians and people from Oklahoma...?

KC: Oh, probably... Here again, it goes back. Depends on what you're talking about, their shopping habits or... You know, Joplin's obviously the trade center for this area. Right here, you get down in the southern part of McDonald County, they may be pulled toward the mall at Fayetteville. But generally speaking, it's the distance people are willing to travel to do whatever.

RB: Okay, Mr. Cope, did you have any other comments you'd like to make?

KC: No, I don't think so. I'm getting ready to go out of town tomorrow, so I've... (chuckles)

RB: Got to get ready for that?

KC: Got get ready to [leave.]

RB: I sure appreciate you [speaking with me today.]

[Tape meter, 269. End Side Two, Tape One of One. End of Interview.]