Everett Ray Call interviews

Section 1, Pages 1 - 30

Three interviews with former Emporia Gazette editor Everett Ray Call conducted by Emporia State University professor Loren E. Pennington. The first interview addresses Call's boyhood days in Sedan, Kansas, his early days as a newspaper photographer, and his commentary on William Allen White. The second interview continues Call's comments on William Allen White and follows with his commentary and analysis of the Emporia Gazette under William Lindsay White as editor and publisher. The third interview covers events of his own career with the Gazette, including famous murder cases, local, state, and national politics, and the newspaper's relations with Emporia State University and its presidents and with the Emporia Chamber of Commerce.

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FLINT HILLS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
COVER SHEET

Interviewee's Name: Everett Ray CALL, retired Executive Editor, the *Emporia Gazette*
Date of Birth: February 5, 1932
Place of Birth: Lowe, Kansas

Date of Interview: Not indicated, but early July, 2007
Interviewer: Loren E. Pennington, Emporia State University Emeritus Professor of History
Interview Editor: Loren E. Pennington

Editor's Note: This is the first of what became three interviews with Mr. Call. It is of special interest for his relations of his boyhood days in Sedan, Kansas and his early days as a newspaper photographer, and for his commentary on William Allen White. Mr. Call never knew White personally, but the commentaries include incidents Mr. Call picked up during his long career at the *Emporia Gazette*. Mr. Call's interviews are notable for their analytical and frank nature. In reviewing the interview Mr. Call made only a few additions and some small changes. The additions, as well as minor corrections by the editor, are enclosed in square brackets. Taken as a whole, the manuscript closely follows the material on the tape.

Release Form: Enclosed

Interview Tapes: 2 audio cassette tapes: Tape 1, Side A & Side B; Tape 2, Side A to count 401 (total count per side of tape is 436)
Manuscript Transcript: 40 pp.
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Manuscript Contents by Pages:

Everett Ray Call interviews

This is a Flint Hills Oral History Project interview with Mr. Everett Ray Call, who resides at 927 W. 24th Avenue in Emporia. Our subject is the *Emporia Gazette* and its owners, William Allen White and his descendants. Mr. Call was a long-time employee of the *Gazette*, beginning as a part-time photographer and retiring as executive editor. [This is tape 1, side A.]

Loren Pennington: Ray, I should note here that you and I have known each other for more than forty years as social friends, so this is definitely not an arms-length interview, and we shall keep it as informal as possible. I should like to have you begin with a sketch of your life before you started working at the *Emporia Gazette*, where you were born and grew up, who your parents were, what they did for a living, how your family fared during the Depression and World War II, and your education and your occupational life before you came to the *Gazette*.

Ray Call: You asked me to distill thousands of memories into a four- or five-minute summary, Loren, but briefly, I was born in a little village of Lowe, Kansas, which is about ten miles west of Sedan, Kansas, which is just seven miles above the Oklahoma border, down in southeastern Kansas. Both my parents were brought up on farms west of Sedan, Kansas. My mother was from a family of eight children. My father was from a family of seven children. They grew up on the farm. One unusual aspect was [that] my father was stricken with polio when he was about eight years old, and his left leg was left paralyzed for the rest of his life. And he was one of those who chose to ignore his handicap, and I think watching him get through that handicap has had quite an effect on my life, because we all have ailments as we get older. Anyway, my Grandfather Goode (my mother's maiden name was Goode, sort of a German extract) had perhaps a little

better farm than my Granddad Call did. They had a fairly average house, they had animals, they raised crops.

LP: Let me interrupt you. You did live on the farm, then?

RC: No.

LP: Okay, I'm sorry.

RC: I'm talking about my mother. My mother was brought up on the farm.

LP: Oh, I see.

RC: My Grandfather Call's farm was not quite as prosperous. They had natural gas, and one of my vivid memories of growing up was being involved with my dad and his brothers drilling for oil. It was rather like a scene out of *God's Little Acre*, for those who lived in that period, in that they would drill on one part of the farm and maybe find a little bit of gas but no oil. Then they would move the rig over and try again, and so on and so on through the years. And as I got old enough, I became what they called a tool dresser on cable tools drilling for oil, and then worked for my uncles a little bit growing up. That was also a forming experience.

LP: Ever find much oil?

RC: No.

LP: Any at all?

RC: No, but I got an education about the oil sands of southeastern Kansas from the Peru Sands down to the Bartlesville Line, or the Mississippi Line, rather. So I have a lot of memories growing up from that. On my mother's side, I spent several summers out on the farm and was involved, as young men were, very young men in those days, bringing in the cattle to milk the cows in the evening or helping carrying water to the men who had

a threshing machine, putting up grain, putting into shocks milo and kaffircorn and things of that sort. Those memories came from both sides of my family. As I said, they were farmers and it was expected that I would probably follow in that rut, as I saw it.

LP: Now, this farm that your grandfather owned, you did not live on it?

RC: No.

LP: You lived in town?

RC: Yes, we lived in town.

LP: But you worked out there on the land?

RC: Yes, in the summertime and after school and so on. Because Dad was paralyzed in one leg, he was not able to work on the farm, to do physical labor as much as other people. He went to the business college at Winfield, Kansas. He got a certificate or whatever they gave there. And then he became, not an accountant, but a little bit more than a bookkeeper. He eventually ran for county office, for county clerk, and he was, I thought, pretty well qualified for that. And it was a job he held on and off for most of his adult life.

LP: You say on and off; is that because he won some elections and lost some?

RC: No, he won every election he ran in, but he swore if anyone ever ran against him, he would pull out of the race and withdraw. Well, perhaps because he became a fixture, the people just accepted him as the county clerk and elected him year after year after year. He did go over to Missouri for a time and try a semi-retired life and worked as a bookkeeper for a newspaper. But generally I grew up around the Chautauqua County courthouse, which is a fine old three-story building. And when you go in it, it just echoes. I remember as a little boy, or a young boy, going in there to see my parents and

singing in the hallways to hear my voice reverberate all around the halls of the courthouse. My mother worked at a number of clerical jobs, and at one point she was elected county treasurer. They [my father and mother] had adjacent offices. But I would say she served in that job probably five or six years.

LP: I take it they continued to work their land, to work the farm?

RC: The grandparents did, but my mom and dad were not involved in that.

LP: Oh, your mother and father were not farmers at all.

RC: No, they were not.

LP: Okay, so your experience out on the land was on your grandfathers' land on both sides.

RC: Always with grandparents, except for the oil thing, I think my dad invested in some of these oil wells that they tried to drill on the family farm, much to my mother's dismay. But generally, my growing-up years were spent in Sedan, my parents working at the courthouse. And in the Depression, all the kids in Sedan worked. We worked delivering groceries in an old Model A Ford for the grocery store, one of the grocery stores. We worked at the soda fountain at the drugstore, all kinds of odd jobs when we were growing up.

LP: Now you talk about delivering groceries, that's something that wouldn't be done today.

RC: No, but I did that and several of my friends did that. The Harmon's Grocery Store hired kids to work for a quarter an hour, or something like that.

LP: That's pretty good in the Depression.

RC: It wasn't too bad, but thing that made it attractive is we had access to this delivery truck. And all my friends, or several of my friends, worked at Harmon's or other jobs like that. And I remember vividly, we delivered groceries twice a day.

LP: Did people buy their groceries by calling in?

RC: That's right, they would call in.

LP: You didn't go to the store and pick your own groceries out?

RC: You could, but not to be delivered. You called in and said you wanted a dozen eggs and quart of milk and so on, and it went out on the next delivery. We were learning to drive, and I remember, the groceries were put in metal boxes about two feet long and a foot wide and foot deep, a galvanized metal basket.

LP: Each customer had a box?

RC: Each customer had a separate basket, and these things would slide on the bed. It was a wooden floor back there with sides on it, and it was great fun to go around a corner at a pretty good speed and see all of those metal baskets slam over onto one side, and the next corner you'd swerve the other way, and they'd slam over on the other side, eggs not withstanding.

LP: Knowing you over the years, I know you have a big inclination for automobiles.

RC: Oh, yes.

LP: Is this where this started?

RC: Really, yes; but one reason I was fascinated by automobiles is that when I was old enough to drive, we had no money, but my dad helped me buy an old Model A Ford that wouldn't run. He taught me about cars by having me overhaul that Model A Ford. I would go out every morning, and he'd say, "Now today, I want you to take the head off

the engine. Here's what you'll do." And then he'd come home in the evening, and we'd go over what we'd done. And we went gradually step by step through that, grinding the valves, putting new rings on the cylinders, putting shims in the bearings, and putting the engine back together. And miracle of miracles, it started and ran, and this was my first car.

I should mention that my mother was a clerk at this grocery store at one point. As I said she moved around. She worked for the Federal government, the ASCS [Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service], the federal farm help agency. It was a town of about 1,500, 1,600, no I take it back. They bragged [about] population, and it was on display on the sign as you went into Sedan; the population was 1,800. So there were virtually no strangers in town. The boys ran from one end of town to the other. I remember we played in every place, from the local depot where we could climb around on the cars, and we'd put pennies on the tracks when the steam locomotives went through, and it was a thrill to go down and watch the telegrapher. We would go to places like (to be a little off-color) we would go down to the sewer, and with our BB guns, we would shoot at condoms that were floating on the water down there. It was just a growing-up experience. Everything from the water tower at the north end of town to the railway station at the south end. We had the run of the town. Most of us had dogs. I knew Kenneth Webb's dog's name was Tubby. And Billy Moore's dog's name was Skippy. This sort of thing. It was almost a scene out of the movies of that day.

I was born in 1932, and as you know, the war broke out in 1941. . . .

LP: '39, actually, but the U.S. became . . . .

RC: Yes, but Pearl Harbor was '41. I'm one of the few people who does not remember Pearl Harbor. All my friends can remember. My wife remembers. I don't remember. But I do remember World War II and the effects of it. We followed World War II first of all by watching newsreels at the local theater.

LP: May I interrupt you just a second?

RC: Yes.

LP: Were you paying much attention to foreign affairs before the United States got involved?

RC: Oh, no, we were completely isolated. When my wife heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, she thought it was near a little town of Peru, seven miles south of Sedan, east of Sedan. So we had no notion of such things.

LP: Did you have a radio?

RC: Yes, oh, yes, we definitely had one.

LP: Ever listen to the radio news before the war?

RC: Yes, we listened before the war, yes, I remember listening to *The Lone Ranger*, to *Jack Armstrong*, to *Terry and the Pirates*. These were radio serials.

LP: Probably *Little Orphan Annie*?

RC: I don't remember *Little Orphan Annie*. But we would go—these were after-school shows—we would go home and gather around the radio, and listen to these serials. There were probably four of them after school. So that I remember, but I don't remember being aware of world affairs until World War II.

LP: Until Pearl?

RC: Yes, till Pearl Harbor. Dad was an avid listener to Fulton Lewis, Jr. We didn't

listen much to H.V. Kaltenborne, but there were a number of commentators, and Dad was a very regular listener.

LP: I would point out that Fulton Lewis, Jr. was an extremely conservative, right-wing correspondent.

RC: Exactly right. I don't remember any left-wing broadcaster from that period, but there probably were some, but not down in southeastern Kansas. And since we're on the topic of the radio, this was farm country. The music, the cultural music, that is the music of the culture down there, was mainly country music, hillbilly music. In fact my Granddad Goode had a wonderful red barn. I mean it was a really nice barn. It was one of my favorite play places in all my youth. It had a hay loft, and you could drop hay down to the horses.

LP: You were farming with horses at this point?

RC: Yes. In fact, I don't remember a tractor out there until after World War II, so growing up, they farmed with a good team of horses, a very good team of horses. The barn had bales of hay, and it had hay hooks, and you can imagine all the adventures that we got into down there. But my Granddad Goode, who had the red barn, played the harmonica, and my father played the guitar, probably three or four chords. I had uncles who played violins, and it was the custom, they would on Saturday night clear off, not every Saturday night but on occasion, they would clear off a big area in the hay loft, which had a wood floor. And they would go up there and this pick-up band would play square dances and schottisches.

LP: Did people come from outside?

RC: Yes, all the neighbors came in.

LP: Sounds a little like Cottonwood Falls on Friday night today.

RC: Yes, exactly, exactly. My grandparents only lived about ten miles apart, and so they were part of this community out around [Lowe], which is west of Sedan a little bit. All the families knew each other, and they were all farming. Nobody had money to speak of, but they had the livestock, and they raised their own food.

LP: While you're on that subject, let me ask you what was raised on these farms. Were they mostly animals, were they row crops, or what, on your two grandparents' farms?

RC: Okay, on Granddad Goode's farm, they raised feed, mainly, kaffircorn it was called, milo nowadays. They put up corn. I don't remember much wheat down there; mainly animal feed is what I remember.

LP: [Did they raise] food for animals and raise animals?

RC: They had cattle and hogs and turkeys and chickens and guineas and all sorts of game.

LP: They raised beef cattle, didn't they?

RC: Yes, they raised beef cattle, but they also had a small herd of milk cattle, milk cows.

LP: Did they sell milk?

RC: Yes, and I have memories of that. As I said, one of my real thrills was going down to a pasture about a quarter mile west of the farm house with my two uncles. They would go down, the cattle would usually be gathered in there at the gate waiting to be milked. We would bring those cattle back to the barn, put them in a corral there, and then they would be milked by my uncles and my granddad.

LP: By hand?

RC: By hand, oh yes, by hand.

LP: Didn't have any milking machines then?

RC: Later in life, during World War II, I spent a couple of summers with an uncle who had a dairy and had milking machines, but not until after the war.

LP: And where was this milk sold?

RC: The milk was put into what they called cream cans, which are galvanized metal cans about three feet tall, about eighteen inches in diameter, I would say. And then they were either taken to town or, in Granddad's case, they were put on a dairy truck that made the rounds of the farms and picked up the milk and took it in. By the way, later I worked in the local dairy, which I'll talk about later. But anyway, they sold milk in order to make money.

LP: They sold, we might say, meat and milk?

RC: Didn't sell the meat. They sold live cattle, but they butchered their own hogs for pork. They butchered a steer every fall.

LP: They sold animals?

RC: Yes.

LP: Did they sell hogs?

RC: Yes, [but] mostly cattle. The Missouri Pacific had a line that ran really very close to both farms, and I suppose, I don't know when, but I think it was probably in the fall, they would load cattle. At Lowe, Kansas, the little town where I was born, they had a loading chute there. They would take cattle into there, load them into a stock car, and then they would get into the caboose and ride with them up to Kansas City to market. I've heard that talked about.

LP: You never rode?

RC: No, I never rode. I spent a lot of time up at Lowe, Kansas, and, as a matter of fact, early on, after my dad worked in the little general store there and was the postmaster up there, it was all just one little operation, I remember when the train went through and not the cattle train, but when the regular train went through, they threw a bag of mail off, and they picked up the outgoing mail with a metal contraption and a little arm that suspended the mail bag out over the track or near the track, and when the mail car went through, the man on board grabbed it with some contraption, I don't know what. The train didn't stop. They threw off a bag of mail and picked up another bag of mail.

LP: Was this a passenger train?

RC: Yes, because one of my teachers [for a time] rode that train out to the country school where I started. [She rode it] in the morning and rode it back in the evening.

LP: The train would stop and let him off and pick him up.

RC: Let her off.

LP: Or let her off.

RC: I started school when I was five years old, in the first grade. And the school I went to was called Rogers, and it was closer to my Granddad Call's farm than Granddad Goode's.

LP: This was out in the country?

RC: Yes, this was out in the country.

LP: But you said you lived in town?

RC: I did.

LP: You're the only person I've ever [known] that lived in town and went to a country school.

RC: Well, there's a reason. I started school too early to meet the requirements in Sedan. In other words, I was born in February, and they wouldn't let me start in Sedan at five years of age. However, this country school district would allow me to go to school. So I rode out—at that time, they had a teacher in Sedan that drove a car—and I rode out and went to school the first year, one year only, in that country school. And most people had cars and trucks and so on, but I had one friend who rode a horse to school during that first year. He's a friend yet today.

LP: Before we go on, one of the things I interrupted you on, but you got off on this farming business, which is fine, but you were talking about these Saturday-night affairs in the barn.

RC: Yes.

LP: I know that you yourself are a musician of some repute. I'll ask again, is that how you got started?

RC: No, and as we go along, and as we talk about William Allen White, I'd like to relate a story.

LP: I'll defer the question until then.

RC: But I didn't finish that story. We were talking about radio.

LP: Oh, yes.

RC: And those who have seen the film *Coal Miner's Daughter* remember the scene of her family in the cabin listening to the Grand Old Opry, beautiful scene. That home pictured in the Grand Old Opry was somewhat more primitive than we had, but the

families in the Depression in that area, every Saturday night listened to the Grand Old Opry. It was a ritual. And during the day, Dad often walked home at noon because we were near the courthouse, and another ritual was listening on the radio to Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. I see you don't recognize Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, but they ended up in the movies at one point. And they played Western swing and so on. So these were kind of my musical backgrounds as I was growing up.

LP: Well, we had started talking about your schooling, maybe how you started school.

RC: All right, World War II has come along, and it started in 1941, and I was nine years old. So during the war, I was mainly in grade school. I graduated from high school in 1949, so if you go back to 1945, you can see that the war was ending probably when I was in what, junior high. But I remember during the war years, the boys became acutely aware of the war, of world events. We knew about Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, all the islands of the Pacific. We knew about troop movements in Europe. Each of us had an army of miniature soldiers. We had little what we call pot-metal P-38s. I don't know what alloy it is, but it's a metal used in making toys. We had P-38s, and we had P-51s and all that. We played at soldiers. We pretended to be soldiers. Some would be Nazis, some would be American soldiers. We had helmets we bought at the dime store. We had plastic pistols and rifles and we shot at each other and pretended to fall into the dirt and all that. So the war was very much a part of the grade school years. And in fact, I was in the Boy Scouts, and during that period, they drilled us as soldiers. They taught us close-order drill. I don't know that this was a policy of the Boy Scouts, but they thought they should prepare us for war.

LP: What were your thoughts on this? I mean, you say, the boys were very interested in the war. Did they look forward to taking part in it if it went that long, or did they look on it with trepidation?

RC: No, there was no trepidation.

LP: Nobody was worried or afraid?

RC: It was very much like wanting to be a high school athlete. The whole community revolved around the high school football team and basketball team. And as younger boys, you aspired to be a football player and/or basketball player. I was neither. I was a terrible athlete. But anyway, it was the same hero-worship that we had for our uncles; I had, let's see, one, two, three, four uncles in the war. One of them was in the Battle of the Bulge, for example. I remember when he came home—his name was Claudie Goode—when he came home from the war, he trembled, his hands just quivered all the time. He had just come home on leave from the Battle of the Bulge. I remember so vividly he brought home to my grandfather a souvenir, a German Luger. And I must say this was the most desirable piece of metal I've ever seen in my life. I mean we would have given anything to be able to play with that German Luger, that marvelous piece of machinery. You pinched those two little round things on top of it and pulled back on the mechanism to load it. I can see it to this day. But the older folks didn't talk about it [the war] to us, to the children. He [Claudie] had been sent home after the Battle of the Bulge for battle fatigue and then later went back in. He literally trembled, and I remember it well. The family would gather around him and listen to his stories. He told us stories that you've heard many times of the Germans and the Americans throwing hand grenades back and forth until they exploded at one place or the other. That's a familiar story, but

my Uncle Claudie remembered that. So World War II was very important. We watched newsreels.

LP: At the movies?

RC: At the movies. It seemed to me they were on almost every night, but I'm told they were mainly on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. But you saw everything. I remember they would run filmstrips from the gun cameras on American airplanes. And you could see them actually shooting down a German plane. This was a truly exciting thing. I can remember movies of the German death camps. After the Americans went in, they had newsreels of those. And they were horrifying, just terrible things, but fascinating to young boys. At school—and this came mainly late in the war, I think as I was in junior high, and this was in study hall at the combined junior high-senior high level—*Life* magazine was a wonderful source of information and fascination about World War II, or that is it created fascination. Again, the liberation of the death camps, the actual battle scenes, the flame throwers in the South Pacific. Live Japanese soldiers running. . . .

This is tape 1 of the first interview with Ray Call, and this is side B.

LP: When we ended side A, you were talking about the battle scenes in the Pacific, so if you want to pick up there.

RC: Yes. I was describing the scenes, and we saw them often, flame throwers that the Americans used in the South Pacific. I remember them not so much in Europe, but in the South Pacific, in such places as Iwo Jima, they aimed these flame throwers into caves, and the jellied gasoline coated these Japanese soldiers. They can running out like flaming torches and fell to the earth and finally died. And you know, those things make quite an impression on a twelve-year-old boy or whatever I was. So your question was,

what was our attitude toward the soldiers and toward the war? We worshipped them as heroes, and we looked forward, hoping we would have a chance to fly a P-38 or kill Germans or kill Japanese.

LP: War was the great adventure?

RC: That's exactly right, and we didn't leave Sedan, Kansas. All this happened in the back lots, or in the vacant lots and in the backyards of our homes. As the war ended, we went into high school. The war completely changed Sedan. Before the war, it was a bustling, prosperous farm community. Saturday night was a bustling market night. People, the farmers, came into town to buy groceries, and the streets were packed with cars. After the war, people began to drift away. Many of them had gone away to work in defense plants in Wichita, several of my uncles and aunts, and as they say in the song, "How are you going to keep 'em down on the farm?" So gradually Sedan began to shrink and began to deteriorate, but even in my high school years, it was still going pretty well. Sedan High School was a three-story brick building, and it also had the junior high school in it, as I mentioned. During the Great Depression, some limestone buildings had been added to the campus. The National Youth Administration hired local people to come in and build an industrial arts building, a gymnasium, cafetéria, those kinds of things. So it was mainly this three-story brick building with some limestone buildings around it. After fourteen years of age, most of us, somehow, most of the boys got cars. We had jobs and you could buy Model As, which were then, what, twenty years old, or twenty-five. [Model As were first manufactured in 1927—ed.] This was a change from World War II, when there were no new cars, and gasoline was rationed.

LP: You could afford to buy the used cars at that time which, right after the war in fact, were selling for practically more than new ones? But you're talking about buying a car about when?

RC: Well, let's see. Let's look at that. I was born in '32, and by the time I was fourteen, would '46.

LP: '46. But the war would have been over.

RC: Yes, the war was over.

LP: But cars were still hard to get.

RC: Yes, but these were, these were really considered relics. Model Ts, Model As.

LP: I drove a Model A myself.

RC: All right, so they were just a little beyond the pale. They took a lot of care, and there were a lot of them, so most of us had some kind of an old car like that, an old Dodge or something. Not all of us.

LP: Cars that were made in the Twenties or early Thirties.

RC: Yes, right. Exactly right. So they were a part of our culture and, by then, cars had radios. Not the ones we drove, but our parents had cars that had radios. I remember—getting back to music—as I grew older and grew away from the music of my childhood, I became a great lover of jazz, of New Orleans jazz. I can remember we would load a car with boys and drive down to the Peru beer joint and we would listen, on a Sunday evening, to the New Orleans Jazz Club, and to musicians like Sydney Bechet and Louis Armstrong and Kid Ory and all the rest.

The American Legion was still popular in Sedan, and dwelling on the social side, the Legion held a youth dance every Saturday night. We had a juke box. The music we

danced to was mainly left-over music from World War II, Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey and Frank Sinatra, and on and on, Artie Shaw. And as we became aware of girls, we went to places like dances in the Legion. Generally, we didn't mix. The girls were in groups, the boys were in groups, and we went around in cars. But on occasions like that, we would get together and dance and all the old adolescent juices would begin to flow.

As I said, I was not an athlete. I tried football and basketball. I loved baseball, but I had no talent for it. I was absolutely paralyzed with stage fright when I was out on the field.

LP: Afraid the ball would come your way?

RC: Afraid people would look at me, that all the attention would be on me, and I would be out there, and I still have some of that to this day.

LP: Were you playing in the outfield.

RC: I really didn't ever play. I practiced with the team. They urged me to play with them, but I was too frightened to play with them.

LP: Ah, so you didn't even in play in games at all.

RC: I went out for football. Part of this was the fact that I started school a year early. I was scrawny, I was a small child. I was bookish. I remember getting my first book, which was Louisa May Alcott's, not *Little Women*, but *Little Men*. Someone gave me that for Christmas, and I remember it vividly, but that started me down a more bookish trail. But as we got on into high school, we dated more and became a little more confident in our driving, and we played games like ditch 'em. On the academic side, I think it's important to remember this was a limited high school. The school did not offer languages. It did not offer chemistry. It did not offer journalism. It did not offer Latin,

for example. It was a very limited curriculum. I got by pretty well because I had a pretty good I.Q., but if I had been pushed, and had more courses available to me, I wonder what course I might have taken. But that's neither here nor there.

LP: Oh, I think it is here or there.

RC: So, a fairly normal high school, lots of fun, lots of mischief. And I should mention, I suppose at this point, that I became aware of a girl who was later to be my wife. Her name was Helen Dalton. She was from a different walk of life. Her father was an attorney. His name was John Dalton. I remember him pretty much like Gregory Peck as Addicus in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He was tall, very soft-spoken and thoughtful. He was that kind of a guy. He was from a good family in Junction City. The family had a contracting firm and, in fact, built some of the buildings on Fort Riley. And so he had gone to Michigan law school, had married a girl out of Junction City, Helen's mother. She not only had a degree, but got a master's degree. She was teacher in the high school. He was headed into politics, he had run for congress when he was stricken, probably—we really don't know—by a form of epilepsy, [as well as heart disease]. He had had some football injuries, but anyway, he was suddenly unable to practice [law]. Although the family was able to keep a very nice two-story white house near the courthouse, one of the nicer houses in town, not the largest, but a nice, nice home, it fell upon her to bring in the income and keep the family together. So this was Helen's family.

LP: Now you say it fell on her, you mean on Helen or on her mother?

RC: On her mother.

LP: On Helen's mother.

RC: She had just been a "Housewife," but now she had to teach and renew her certificate and really had to struggle. Helen has a brother named Jack Dalton. He's an attorney out in Dodge City. He's six years older than Helen, something like that. While her mother was working, Helen often had to do the cooking, the chores, which was really nothing new. We all grew up having to work. But that was her family. She was a close friend of my sister. In fact we literally, not quite literally, we were within two doors of each other in the same neighborhood; [she was] almost the girl next door. I digress because I lived in probably a dozen houses in Sedan. After mom and dad were married, and they struggled through the Depression, they had some fascinating stories. One of the things dad did to make ends meet was to buy an old run-down house. And then in the evening, he would repair it, paint it, put it back together—he was pretty handy at that kind of thing—and then sell it for a profit.

LP: I take it he got around pretty well in spite of his handicap.

RC: As I said, he had no use of his left leg.

LP: How did he walk?

RC: He had crutches. He could mow the lawn, play golf.

LP: On crutches?

RC: On crutches. I remember one time, we had a pretty comfortable home by this time—I mean by those standards—and the house needed a new roof. And he decided he would put it on himself, and so he got up the ladder, and it was my job to carry up shingles while he put a new roof on the house. He had an iron will, an iron will. The story is told that at one time he had a toothache—I don't know if this is of interest—he had a toothache, and he decided to jerk the tooth out himself. So he got some fishing

line, which was braided in those day and pretty tough stuff, 25- or 30-pound test, and wrapped it around the tooth and jerked on it until he finally broke the line, and [then] he doubled the line and finally got the tooth out. I think his handicap formed that kind of a will. He was unbelievable. I was talking about how he repaired houses. We would be in a house maybe a year and repair it and then sell it and make a little bit of money and move up to a little bit nicer house and do the same thing. And I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say we lived in a dozen houses in Sedan through the years as he did that, starting back in my grade-school days.

So I graduated from high school in 1949, and my parents agreed to let me go to Coffeyville Junior College, which was twenty miles to the east. They would give, as I recall, twenty dollars a week, and this was to pay for my food and my expenses. I would drive to Coffeyville on Monday and then I would come home to Sedan on the weekend.

LP: Were you making any money on your own during this time?

RC: Yes, doing a couple of things, and one of the things, one of the skills I picked up in high school was playing in a dance band. This is the one thing William Allen White and I really have in common. He did the same thing. He made money playing piano in a dance band in El Dorado and Emporia just as I did.

LP: But you didn't play the piano.

RC: No, I played the drums. I took lessons from an old jazz drummer there in Sedan named Bunny Garrett, learned how to hold the sticks and do a press roll and so on. Well, to be honest, there weren't that many drummers in that part of the country, so I had no trouble getting jobs playing dances. Back then, the union scale was fifteen dollars a night, which was pretty good money, and twenty dollars on a Saturday night or on New

Year's Eve. So, you know, I picked up some money doing that. And during the summer, I worked, but mainly I lived off my parents. They fed me and put me up in the summertime. So I went to Coffeyville Junior College for one year and then got a thirty-hour teacher's certificate, which was the lowest standard at that time.

LP: To teach at what level school?

RC: To teach in country, rural schools.

LP: Grade schools?

RC: Grade school, first through eighth grade. I taught fourth through eighth. Then after going to school the first year then, I taught at a little school called Hillsdale. I think I had probably twenty-five students and the other teacher another twenty-five. I was just a terrible teacher. You can imagine. We went through the textbook and passed the tests, but at the end of the first year then, the state raised the requirement for teaching certificates. So I had to go back and take more hours during the summer at Coffeyville Junior College to meet the new requirements. And I did that for three years, two years at Hillsdale and one year at Cloverdale.

Meanwhile, the Korean War was beginning to breathe down our necks. I had joined the Reserves, let's see, it must have been about the second year out of high school. Anyway, I joined the Army Reserve there in Sedan. Again, that was a source of income. You went to summer camp and made a little bit of money there, and also you got to wear a uniform. You got to fire an Army carbine. During the summer I got to drive an Army tank one time, and so on. So there was some glamour to it. But I went into the Reserves, and by the end of my third year of teaching, my name had come up for the Korean draft. So I volunteered to go on active duty. This was in 1953, and the combat, the fighting,

was over in Korea. But we were still in what they called the Korean Emergency. My basic training was at Fort Riley, and on my first leave home from Fort Riley, I became engaged to Helen. We'd been going together for a year and a half. And I gave her a diamond ring and we became engaged, and then we married in 1954. And then after I finished training, I was sent to Port Whittier, Alaska. And because I had gone into the Army as a corporal, because of my Reserve training, I was able take my wife with me to Alaska. So we were married in April of '54, and she then followed me to Alaska. I was the personnel sergeant, actually, of the port. The port of Whittier was an Army post, and its role was to unload ships that brought in Army material for all of Alaska to this warm-water inlet in Alaska, near the Cook Inlet. It was on the west side of the mountains, so the Japanese current brought in a continual flow of moisture, but it really didn't get much colder there than it did in Kansas. But we had rain all the time in the summer, and in the winter we had like, thirty feet of snow. It covered the buildings. The streets became little canyons down through the post. Snow removal was one of the main occupations.

Needless to say, Helen became pregnant soon after she got up there. We had an interesting social life. I was playing in a dance band up there, the military post band that played for officers' club dances and the NCO club and so on. I remember, one strong memory of Helen when she was probably eight months pregnant, and she was boarding the camp transportation, which was climbing up some iron stairs into the back of a six-by-six Army truck, which was covered with a padded cover to keep it warm. It was a little difficult for Helen up there. And our son John was delivered when we were in Alaska. Helen went into Anchorage to the post hospital up there at Elmendorf Air Force Base, I think. And John was born a little, let's see, a year after we were married, which

would have been in, just almost exactly a year, in 1955. By coincidence, our anniversary was on April the 4th, our first anniversary; Helen's father died on April the 5th, and then John was born on the next day. So we had a lot of adventures in Alaska. We went through an earthquake. We were almost killed in a trailer fire, and we were saved by two cats we had. This may be more than we want, but the earthquake caused the electricity to go off in the port. Our oil heaters had thermostats, and they operated on electricity, so when the electricity went off, the oil heaters just continued to go on and on and on. Our little trailer lean-to, which was a little building attached, a little living area attached, was separated by a wall, and the cats raised such a ruckus trying to crawl under this wall that they woke us up. And when we opened the door, the plastic decoration and vases and so on in the living room had melted, it was so hot. The air was almost blue. So we had some adventures in Alaska. We went to the salmon runs and so on.

So this would take us back to college. After I was discharged from the Army, I came back to Kansas and decided to get a degree in commerce, which was teaching typing and shorthand and so on, because I had done those kinds of things.

LP: You had never thought of being a journalist at this time?

RC: However, before I went into the active duty, I had been, and something I had forgotten, I had become a photographer. In Sedan, I became interested in photography. I developed my first film in my bedroom closet and made contact prints, and then gradually moved to an Argus C-3, and finally saved enough money to buy a little Speed Graphic. And I opened a little studio in Sedan that operated in the summer and in the evenings. And we made a little money with that.

LP: You were actually in the photography business?

RC: Yes.

LP: I see.

RC: But it was pretty limited.

LP: You weren't making a living at it?

RC: No, not really. I was teaching, and this was a part-time affair.

LP: More than a hobby but not really a job.

RC: Not really, but I did weddings and so on and made some money. One of my jobs was a stringer for the *Coffeyville Journal*. Whenever there was a news event, I would go out and take a picture of it and take it to the *Coffeyville Journal*, and I was paid for it.

LP: So you were somewhat involved in journalism.

RC: Yes. When I went in the Army, I became more interested in journalism and took a USAFI course, which was a military correspondence course in journalism, basic journalism. That was the only training I had in the Army. But when I got out of the Army, I determined that I would become a commerce teacher. And I decided I'd like to come to Emporia State University because I had been here for the music contests they had every summer here.

LP: This was while you were in high school?

RC: Yes, while we were in high school. They called them music festivals, I think then, but all the competitors would come from high schools across Kansas, and I fell in love with the campus. So we decided to come back to Emporia. Again, we were living on our military. . . .

LP: G.I. Bill?

RC: Yes, the G.I. Bill, that's what I was trying to say, the G.I. Bill which was pretty limited. We lived on West Street in a second-story apartment, and we needed more money, so I got a job at the *Gazette*. No, let me back up, the first job I had was as *Bulletin* editor.

LP: *Bulletin* editor?

RC: Yes, editor of the Emporia State *Bulletin*.

LP: Editor of the Emporia State University *Bulletin*.

RC: But not for that long, because I was hired and I was paid, and as I remember, about halfway through the semester, I had an offer from the *Gazette* to become a part-time photographer there, which paid more than the *Bulletin*.

LP: In other words, the *Gazette* approached you.

RC: Yes.

LP: How did they know about you?

RC: [I had applied for a job there earlier.] I was hired as a part-time photographer.

LP: How much of a part-time were you?

RC: Oh, evenings and weekends.

LP: Would it be as much as half-time?

RC: Yes, I would think so, twenty hours, yes, easily. And then I also made a little money by shooting fraternity parties. I would go to a fraternity party and take pictures of the couples and then sell them a picture for a dollar apiece, something like that. So I was pretty much into photography. I had had just this little taste of journalism, and so I got on down at the *Gazette*. Eventually, I dropped out of college and became a full-time photographer there. And I did pretty well at that and had a job offer from the *Kansas*

City Kansan, which I took. And we really struggled. We could hardly make a living at that. But when I was at the *Kansas City Kansan*. . . .

LP: I take it you moved to Kansas City.

RC: Yes, we moved to Kansas City to a very basic house way out on State Street. While I was at the *Kansan*, I was sent out to photograph a story—it may have been the tornado that hit Ruskin Heights and Hickman Mills—but I was also asked if I could write a story about what I'd seen and what I had done. Because I had had this USAFI course, I had some basic knowledge of journalism, and I wrote it, and they decided, maybe I should be a reporter-photographer. And then I became more of a reporter.

LP: Was this still at the *Kansas City Kansan*?

RC: Still at the *Kansas City Kansan*. Then I had a call from Ted McDaniel of the *Emporia Gazette*, asking if I would like to come back down to Emporia. And we were starving, well not starving, but we were really in trouble.

LP: Did you still have only one child at this point?

RC: Yes, although our second child was born in Kansas City. So we decided to come back to Emporia. And I then began in the newsroom, as a photographer and then also in the newsroom in a dual role, reporter/photographer. And I took one detour from that. After a couple of years, I had a call from my old hometown paper in Sedan, the *Sedan Times-Star*. The editor there was getting a divorce, and he was going to put his wife in the asylum at Osawatomie, and he needed to go Reno, Nevada, so he could get a quick divorce and marry another woman, and he needed somebody to run the paper. And he promised that when he got back he would sell me half interest in it, and I thought, "Oh, that's what I want to do."

This is tape 2 of the first Call interview, and this is side A.

LP: Ray, you were talking about your connection with the *Sedan Times-Star*.

RC: Yes, I had been hired down there to run the paper while the owner went to Reno to get a divorce from his wife, and he had promised that when all this was said and done, I could either buy the paper or buy in with him. Of course when he got the divorce and everything was finished, he remarried and he didn't need me anymore. But, fortunately the *Emporia Gazette* did, so I went back to the *Gazette*. By this time. . . .

LP: This is the third time you've worked there.

RC: This is the third time, that's exactly right.

LP: You could always go back and get a job there.

RC: This covered a period of about a year. So I went back to the *Gazette*. By then, I was ready to become wire editor, that is, to edit the Associated Press copy and write headlines and that sort of thing. And from then on it was just a steady climb. I became city editor; I became managing editor; and eventually [I became] executive editor. So that is how I evolved into a retired editor.

LP: This is a kind of peculiar thing we're about to embark on here, because ordinarily in oral history, we want to talk about things the interviewee knows about directly. But we want to start with William Allen White, who was of course dead and gone by the time you arrived there. I don't know what we would call this. I guess, maybe we would call it a look at folklore, because in the years you were at the *Gazette*, I'm sure you heard a great deal about William Allen White. Maybe we ought to start with this. When you went to work for the *Gazette*, obviously the *Gazette* was a very famous paper. William