ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM E. JONES

Interviewed by Ford Risley

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Risley: OK, it's June 4, 2010. We are here in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and I am interviewing Bill Jones, a long-time reporter and columnist with the *Johnstown Tribune Democrat*. Thanks for doing this. I guess, first of all, tell me when and where you were born.

Jones: I was born at Memorial Hospital in Johnstown, April 2, 1931.

Risley: Tell me a little bit about your parents and your family.

Jones: Well, my parents were Francis and Mabel Jones. They lived in Conemaugh Township, Somerset County. I grew up in Conemaugh Township and attended schools there.

Risley: OK.

Jones: As a matter of fact, in the first grade I went to one of the old one-room schools, and I think I probably learned more in that one year than any other year in my education.

Risley: And where was that school?

Jones: It was along the Somerset Pike about five miles south of Johnstown.

Risley: OK.

Jones: They closed it after that first year.

Risley: Where did you go to high school?

Jones: Conemaugh Township Area. I was there for six years, junior and senior high school.

Risley: How did you get interested in journalism?

Jones: Like a lot of young people, I thought of different careers. I got interested in high school journalism. I had four years of journalism, four years of English classes. I told my mother once that I thought I should go into law or chemistry or something like that. It sounded good to me. She said, "You're a writer." So I graduated on May 23 of 1949, and two days later, I was working night staff as a copy boy on the old *Johnstown Democrat*.

Risley: How did you land that job as a copy boy?

Jones: I am not quite sure. I was just lucky, I think. My buddy and I both were hired and started the same night out of Conemaugh Township.At that time, there were probably, I think, about either seven or eight Conemaugh Township graduates working here.

Risley: Really?

Jones: And I fit right in.

Risley: What were the copy boys' responsibilities back then?

Jones: Oh Lord, almost anything. We had to man the teletypes, and we had three news services at that time. We had AP, UP, INS. And as breaking stories came in we'd tear [the copy off]. Often we had to glue them together, and the telegraph editor's desk was just a pile of teletype copy. If a new lead came in or a new insert, we'd have to go in and find the original story, cut the part out that was changed and glue the new part in. It was pretty good work. Now that was one of the things you did. You also got coffee and cigarettes for any of the reporters or editors that wanted them and other errands. We posted news bulletins in the front window.

Risley: You posted news bulletins in the front window of the office here?

Jones: The office here in the *Tribune*, yes.

Risley: The office was here?

Jones: Yes, it was here on Locust Street in downtown Johnstown.

Risley: You worked nights?

Jones: I worked all nights. I would work until 1:30 in the morning. And I loved it.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: I think they paid me $20 a week, plus $1.60 for night differential. So at every stage, I would think, "Boy, the guys that were getting $24 must be rich." And when I got up to $24, I was looking at the guys making $30. I never got rich, but it was a very enriching profession and experience. And incidentally I always considered journalism as a profession, not as a job.

Risley: Good, good. So you went into the army after a couple years?

Jones: Yeah, in between. I think I'd been here eleven months when they advanced me to a desk. We called them cub reporters in those days.

Risley: OK.

Jones: And I had to learn the style book for one thing. We had a city editor by the name of Saul Spiegel who was an excellent teacher. He'd written the style book, and he knew it by heart. He never had to open it. I would write a little one paragraph article: "The Wednesday study club will meet on Thursday this week instead of Tuesday as usual." Or something like that.

Risley: Uh, huh.

Jones: I'd send it up to him, and it would come back with red crayon all over it. He'd say, see section so and so, page so and so, paragraph so and so. He'd have it right down. So he'd say rewrite it and send it back. This was the way you learned. And, like I say, he was an excellent teacher.

Risley: So you learned by just working under him?

Jones: Yes, yes. I am convinced that there were no journalists or teachers who were superior to Saul in teaching you the day-to-day functioning of a newsroom.

Risley: Right.

Jones: And the responsibilities that go with being a journalist. One of the proudest things that I can recall was one day I had covered a bank robbery and written the story. Saul says, "Hey, that was a great story." It meant a lot.

Risley: That's great.

Jones: Some people hated Saul because he was so tough. He always said that you have six weeks. Either you make it or you don't. He said if you don't have newspapers in your blood, you are not going to get through those six weeks with me. That's how he weeded people out. And I did get through the six weeks.

Risley: OK, so let me make sure I understand. You had been a copy boy for about a year. And then you got a job as a cub reporter working under him? You basically had about, as you say, six weeks to prove yourself?

Jones: That's about it.

Risley: Yeah, good.

Jones: Of course, this was a time when people were being drafted for the Korean War in 1950 or so. In the following two years, I worked as a general reporter. I worked in the proof room for several months and as a sports writer for a period of time before I was drafted in October of [19]52.

Risley: And what did you do in the service?

Jones: Well, after basic training they sent me to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio to go to school. I got down there, and they discovered that I had newspaper experience. One of their public information specialists was being discharged, so I got his job. And my primary responsibility was covering the sports teams on the base. We were quite good by the way. We had baseball teams that beat some major league teams that would stop there on their way back from Arizona in the spring. I think we had four games with major league baseball teams. And we won two of them.

Risley: Wow.

Jones: We had Don Newcombe pitching for us. We had Bob Turley pitching for us and three or four other minor leaguers—in fact Double A, Triple A players**.** So we were pretty good. The football team wasn't bad either.

Risley: Your primary responsibility was to publicize the sports teams?

Jones: Pretty much, yes. I traveled with them. I had other responsibilities also. It went with public information.

Risley: OK.

Jones: But that was basically what I did.

Risley: And how long were you in the service?

Jones: Two years.

Risley: What happened after that?

Jones: Well, I came back. The *Tribune* and *Democrat* papers had merged in the meantime.

Risley: I am sorry to interrupt. But there had been two newspapers in Johnstown?

Jones: There were two, the *Tribune* and the *Democrat*. Both owned by the same people.

Risley: Was one of them morning and one afternoon?

Jones: The *Democrat* was the morning paper; the *Tribune* was the evening paper.

Risley: OK.

Jones: And they put them together just about the time I left for the service, in fact. So I came back, and, instead of nights, now I came back to a day time job.

Risley: So the merged paper was an afternoon paper?

Jones: At first we had morning and afternoon editions. We had four editions a day: two morning and two evening. Then after a time they decided to just have the morning edition.

Risley: But you worked days?

Jones: I worked days, sometimes nights, too.

Risley: Right. And what sort of things did you do?

Jones: One of the first things they gave me was the church beat. I had that for two years, I believe; also, the Catholic charities, Red Cross, all that stuff, Community Chest. I had those for a while. And after that I went into general news reporting.

Risley: Uh huh.

Jones: Until 1965, when the *Tribune* bought the weekly paper, the *Windber Era*. I think it was May of ’65 when they asked me to be editor of it, and I had that for five years.

Risley: OK.

Jones: I had a ball. I worked 70 hours a week.

Risley: Before we talk about the Windber paper. Were there any particularly memorable stories that you did? I would assume that the church beat was a pretty busy beat.

Jones: It was busy, but I don’t recall any really major stories that I did. I got to know all the priests, ministers and rabbis.

Risley: Sure.

Jones: During that period of time and even a little after, I was taken off that beat, the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese had a succession of bishops who died and a new one consecrated, and I covered all those. I think I saw three bishops consecrated, as well as an abbot at St. Vincent.

Risley: Wow.

Jones: I was fortunate. There was a young priest who took me in hand and explained everything. He explained everything that was happening. So I came to be, I’d say, pretty good in my knowledge of the Catholic religion, although I’ve always been a Protestant.

Risley: And certainly the Catholic Church is big in Johnstown.

Jones: Oh, yes. I had a lot of close friends who were Catholic priests.

Risley: Right.

Jones: I am probably getting ahead of myself, but one of my proudest moments was with Bishop McCormick when he was in Altoona. You recall when the Catholic Church had its convocations, their ecumenical conferences and there were two of them actually, because the one pope died and another one succeeded. At the first one, they had Protestant observers. It was a Methodist bishop who brought me back a medal of that first ecumenical council. So when they held the second one, McCormick had a news conference I stayed when everybody left, and I said, "Bishop Paulson from the Methodist church brought me back a medal from the first. Do you think you could bring me one back from the second session?" So he came back and held another press conference and he pulls out this little felt bag, took a medal out, and he said, "This was blessed for you by the Holy Father. No damn Methodist bishop can do that for you." So then he walked out with me and he says, "We need an editor for the Catholic Register." He said, "Would you consider taking it." "Well," I said, "bishop you know I am a Protestant." He says, "I know, I know you'd be fair." And that's a highlight.

Risley: That's a nice compliment. Well, tell me about interviewing, excuse me, editing the *Windber Era*.

Jones: We had a circulation just under 12,000. And in fact it was given free, folded right in the *Tribune-Democrat* . We also sold copies but not many. It went out into Richland Township, Windber central city and that whole area there.

Risley: Uh, huh.

Jones: We had a ball. I mean we kicked butt. This is where I did my first editorial writing. For instance, Windber had police cars, but they had no radio in them So we ridiculed them into buying a radio for their two police cars. And a number of things like that. There was a police hearing for two police officers in Richland Township, and it went on for several weeks. One of my writers and I covered each of the sessions. We covered it in such detail that the following week the lawyers would refer to the *Windber Era* because they hadn't gotten the court reporter's copy back yet. They took it as being accurate and that was quite a compliment to us both. But we had a lot of fun with it. Like I say, we kicked butt. I decided that for the sports page I made arrangements to go to Pittsburgh and interview Pirates baseball players, their wives and children because I figured that it would get more women interested in baseball if I wrote about their families. So this is what we did.

Risley: How about that.

Jones: And that was a pretty good feature. We enjoyed that.

Risley: I assume that with the weekly you did a little bit of everything.

Jones: Yeah. We covered meetings. I covered meetings three or four nights a week and the woman that worked for me covered the other nights.

Risley: Uh huh.

Jones: Before very long I had most of the *Tribune-Democrat* reporters sort of working for me too. If they went to a meeting and they'd write the story, there were always a lot of things that were left out for space. Then they'd do a second one for me with all these other little details that people in that area were interested in. So we did a lot of that sort of thing too. But it got to the point where we became too expensive. I was put back on the *Tribune-Democrat* staff in 1970.

Risley: Did the newspaper close?

Jones: It stayed open on a limited basis, and for a couple of years somebody else edited it.

Risley: OK.

Jones: And then it died. But we had a lot of fun with it.

Risley: That's great and so you came back to the *Tribune-Democrat*?

Jones: Oh yes, I did.

Risley: And what did you start doing then?

Jones: Mostly general news and that included investigative pieces. It included some police reporting. It included the federal court. I handled all the federal court cases in Pittsburgh. When the county reporter would be off on vacation, I'd fill in in Cambria or Somerset County courts. I'd cover that—and just general news.

Risley: Right.

Jones: Somewhere in there, I joined the investigative reporters and editors association and became interested in doing some investigative pieces, which I did.

Risley: Do you remember any of them?

Jones: One, I remember most decisively, I guess I'd say. There was an Army flyer pilot that flew a little Piper Cub or Lycoming or something. He disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and his brother wanted to find out about it. His brother did an awful lot of leg work that I was able to use. Found out that his brother had two complete sets of Army records—the official one that nobody got to see, and, then, the one that's public. They discovered that he had flown aircrafts over the nuclear bomb test in Nevada, discovered that both he and another pilot who had also flown over the test both disappeared about the same time. His body was found out in the California desert, Mojave Desert, somewhere in his car, very mysterious. The other pilot was found in the wreckage of a plane. Only it turned out it wasn't his body or his plane, but the Army claimed it was. That was also in another part of California. So in digging I discovered there was a sergeant by the name of Mansour who died mysteriously of some form of cancer at an air base in Utah, and he had two sets of records. And so it became very interesting. He had been down at Sandia base in New Mexico, involved in some very secret experiments and so forth. What was amazing was that two ranking members of Congress attended his funeral in Utah, neither of whom had known him, neither of whom was from his district. One was Tip O'Neal; the other was John Murtha. Never found out why they went. But there was something very mysterious there. A short time later I had a chance to meet with the undersecretary of the Army who came here to dedicate an Army reserve arsenal. I said, "Sir, could you tell me about the poison gas experiment?" He says, "We have none. We're doing nothing in poison gas." I say, "What about what you are doing down at Sandia?" He said, "If you want to know about that you have to talk to the secretary." And so I knew I was onto something. Never really had a chance to follow it up, but that was one story that I enjoyed working on over a period of time.

Risley: Yeah, fantastic.

Jones: There were just so many good stories that I enjoyed. That was the thing about newspapers. Every day was something different, every day was something exciting.

Risley: Right.

Jones: Even if you are covering the most mundane stories there was something there, you knew that. Like Saul Spiegel told me when I started: "Always remember no matter how small, every story is important to somebody." And that was sort of my philosophy all my life.

Risley: Well, that's a good philosophy to have.

Jones: He also taught us to write a story so that somebody with a sixth grade education could understand. No big words. If you have a good vocabulary, fine, but maybe your reader doesn't. He also said that if you used words that somebody has to go to the dictionary for, they'll read over it once. But when they come to the second

one they'll stop reading and go to something else. And I think that's true also. I think that we're producing better educated journalists than what we were perhaps. But I think they write over people's heads sometimes. That's one criticism I have of the J-schools now. The other is that it seems that everybody wants to be an analyst rather than a reporter. They want to inject their opinions into their articles. Hey, I was taught right off you don't do that. You write it straight as it happened. And you have an editorial page to do that.

Risley: Do you recall memorable characters or people who worked in the newsroom with you? You mentioned Saul Spiegel. Were there others?

Jones: Sid Weinshan. Sid was a little Dutchman. He was only about maybe 5-foot-3 or 4 and had a nice pot belly. Sid he had been around. Sid had started in Kansas City with the *Star*. And he had bounced around from Chicago to New York City to different places before he finally ended up in Johnstown. One of my favorite stories of Sid was when he was working for the Kansas City Star. There was an Indian uprising in the Dakotas, and they sent Sid up to cover it. Sid got a story. He got to the telegraph office, got his story sent in, rode out of town, cut the telegraph wire in three places, and it was three days before any of the others got their story in. He had an exclusive. Now this was old-time journalism. We don't do that stuff anymore. Well, not much anyway.

Risley: Was he a reporter at the paper?

Jones: Yes, he was a reporter. He was a quality writer, very independent type person. Unfortunately, he contracted terminal cancer and blew his head off. But Sid was something else. There were a few others but he was outstanding.

Risley: Right.

Jones: His life was almost like a fiction story, but it was real. He had seen a lot and had done a lot.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: He won a number of state awards for his writing. Of course, one thing about journalism and my career, I got to meet a lot of people I never met before. I think I've spoken with three or four presidents and many governors. Two of the governors, I was on a first name basis with.

Risley: Were these people who came through Johnstown?

Jones: Yes. I was in the White House once. I went to Harrisburg once a week for a while. Then it became once a month and then it became not at all. We just didn't have the staff to afford it, but I got to k now people down there as well.

Risley: What were some of the memorable people that you covered?

Jones: I remember Paul Newman very much. Paul was one of those celebrities who was just like the average steel worker. I mean when he was here to do *Slap Shot*, his evenings would be spent in a local bar shooting pool with a couple of steel workers or something like that. He would go to the War Memorial to watch hockey because he got pointers. It was a hockey picture. And he had really never done anything hockey wise. So he always carried a rifle case over his shoulder. Of course, at that time you were not allowed any alcohol in the War Memorial at all. He had that rifle case filled with cans of beer. He used one of the little press boxes to sit in there, and he was all by himself. I sat with him one night. In fact, drank with him. Yeah, I remember him very much. I have very fond memories of Bob Casey. Right after he was elected governor, he was speaker at St. Francis College I arranged to ride back down to the airport in the car with him. I am doing an interview in the dark. I had a little trouble reading my notes, but they were all there. Yeah, that was an experience because Bob would come into the office here every now and then. It was always, "Hi Bill, how's the family." That sort of thing.

Risley: How about local people who were memorable?

Jones: All the local people were memorable.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: Once I started doing a weekly column, I could do it on anything I wanted, from my grandchildren to area history. Just whatever I had written about, they accepted. I never had a problem. Once or twice something was questioned, and they let it go. I think I did somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred World War II veteran stories. Combat stories. They were memorable. I wished there would have been a way that I could have published them because they were all different. I covered every bit of the war from the Aleutians to South Pacific to Europe to Russia, Africa and the whole works. That was very memorable.

Risley: And when did you do those stories?

Jones: I guess I started probably in the late 80s. I started doing a weekly column, and I did it until 2008. Actually, continued it twelve years after I retired from the *Tribune Democrat* officially on a contract basis. I never missed a week, except one time an editor lost my column and put a little note saying I'd be back next week. That was the only column I missed in eighteen or twenty years. I think it was nineteen years.

Risley: Boy, that's quite a run.

Jones: If I was going on vacation, they were always written ahead.

Risley: This was a weekly column?

Jones: It was a weekly column.

Risley: And you did this in addition to your other duties?

Jones: Actually that was part of my duties, I guess.

Risley: What did you enjoy about being a columnist?

Jones: Freedom. I could express opinions, and I could tell any kind of a story I wanted. I could delve back into local history and do that which I was always interested in. I could go meet people. Johnstown has some of the finest people in the world. And a lot of them are people nobody ever hears from except their neighbors. They are quiet, they are not doing a lot. Almost everybody has a story if you can find a way into it. Some of them were immigrants or their parents had been immigrants. And some had troubles and problems when they first came here. Wonderful people.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: Oh, John Heinz was another memorable person that I got to meet and became pretty close to before he died. He was another who would come in and we'd talk.

Risley: So you didn't really have a philosophy with the column? It would just be about whatever interested you from week to week?

Jones: Pretty much, yeah. And sometimes I'd get down to Wednesday. It ran Sunday but it had to be in by Thursday afternoon. Sometimes I'd get to Wednesday. What am I going to write?

Risley: There's a lot of pressure being a columnist.

Jones: Somewhat, yeah. I don't know how these daily columnists do it. But it was a lot of fun. I did politics for a while. And then they put me into editorial writing.

Risley: Tell me about that. When did you start? When did you become an editorial writer?

Jones: I can't give you an exact date. It was somewhere around 1989 or '90. I think I did it for about six years. What amazed me was how many opinions I had. We had an editorial page editor, but he had other duties as well, so he wrote very few. I wrote virtually all the editorials for seven days a week. I had to have it written ahead for the weekend and the first of the next week. We ran anywhere from one to three editorials a day. In a course of a year it would be fair to say I wrote somewhere around 600 a year. And I'd come in the morning. I'd read through the Tribune, clip out things. If I had a chance I'd look through the Pittsburgh and Harrisburg

papers. I would clip out the things I thought that we could editorialize on. We had a meeting at 9 o'clock in the publisher's office. There were five of us. We would go in there, and I would present these different things hoping that somebody else would have something to suggest. We'd talk about it and we'd vote. Majority ruled even if the publisher was in the minority. I think she only pulled rank one time in six years.

Risley: Who was the publisher?

Jones: Pamela Mayer. I had an editor and a couple times he didn't agree. He was outvoted a couple of times. And he was very gracious. We discussed it a little bit. I'd make some notes, and I'd go back and start writing. I'd spend the day writing one, two or three articles. Maybe if I got them done, I'd start on the next day. I remember one time I went to a professional conference in Washington and met an editorial writer from Chicago who had just won a Pulitzer the year before. We were talking about it and he said, "How many editorials do you write a month?" I said, "I usually write on the average two a day." He said, "You know how long I worked on that one editorial that I got the Pulitzer for? Three weeks." Things are a little different here. I said, How many editorial writers do you have?" "Well, he says, "we have six full time and a couple others that fill in."

Risley: Did you try to editorialize mainly on local issues or did you also editorialize about state and national issues?

Jones: All. I'd say it was pretty even. Local editorials probably took precedence, but I did a lot on national [issues] too. And you develop contacts also. When Marcos left the Philippines, in fact is he was ousted, I developed contacts with some people. And I think I was the first to my knowledge, the first reporter in the country that knew where Marcos was going. I knew he was going to Hawaii. I knew when he got there. I told AP all about him. Well, how would you know in Johnstown? A couple hours later they had a bulletin Marcos was in Hawaii. You know contacts were very important. I would go out and have coffee with a cop. Talk about fishing, his family, anything at all. If anything broke in his municipality, I got a call.

Risley: Sure.

Jones: At three o'clock in the morning sometimes I'd get a call. They all knew that I'd respond. So I did get calls off hours and different things and I'd also get a lot of tips on things that they were working on. There was a murder case that actually was in Fayette County. I attended state police monthly meetings for eleven months before they ever made the arrest. I knew everything they were going to do. When it came time to make the arrest, I got a call at home. I was just eating supper, and the sergeant from Greensburg called and said we're going to pick him up. He says, "Where will you be later?" I said, "I'll be in the office writing the story." I left to come in right away. I said call me after you leave the magistrate's

office. So he called me, gave me the information on the bail and so forth. I put that in and I had the story finished that quickly. I had all the background because they had trusted me enough that I wasn't going to tell anybody else. That's the sort of trust you develop over a period of time.

Risley: Right. Did the *Tribune-Democrat* endorse political candidates?

Jones: They endorsed some, yes, primarily state candidates.

Risley: Is that something you all discussed at your editorial meetings?

Jones: Yeah, we did. We'd invite them in and question them at length. Then we'd sit down and decide who would get the endorsement and why. So, yeah we did that. It's very interesting.

Risley: Let me turn this over because we're at just about the end of this side.
[Tape turned over.]

Risley: Well, were there other particularly memorable stories that you worked on? Big stories, small stories, stories that just stood out in your mind?

Jones: One thing that people seem to get a kick out of is when I was a general [assignment] reporter we had the old fire alarm system here with the pull boxes on the poles. We had a bell in here and a chart saying where the bell box was that was pulled. So when that would go off, I'd check where the location was, look in the cross directory and find somebody close there, and I'd call them and say, "Is there a fire in your neighborhood?" "Oh yes, it's at so and so's house up there." "You see much smoke?" "Oh a lot of smoke." So the next thing I'd do is look up the people's name, and I'd call the house that's burning. You'd be surprised how many people in a burning house will stop and answer the phone and tell you all about it. I had one woman who says, "Yes, my house is on fire." She's choking and she says, "The fireman is telling me get out get out. I said, "Where did the fire start?" She said, "Oh, it started in the bed." She's telling me on and on about all these details. And she's coughing. One time I had a city fireman pick up the phone and tell me all about it.

Risley: That's funny.

Jones: Yeah and it's something that maybe the average reporter doesn't think about doing. I don't know why I did it, but I must have done that more than half a dozen times, maybe a dozen. And as far as I know, I didn't get anybody burned to death. And another thing was I used to tell the young reporters here: "If you are going out on a breaking news story—accident, fire, whatever it is—go with the idea that you have the right to be there. You are the people's eyes and ears. Never ask a cop if you can go in. That cop is already busy, and he doesn't' want to have to make a decision as to whether to allow you in or not." Maybe, the best illustration

was a passenger train derailment down at New Florence in the switching yard down there. And I went down, and I parked about one hundred yards from where I saw the cop was standing, a young cop. I went up to him and I said, "Did sergeant so and so get here yet from Pittsburgh?" "Oh yes, he says, "He's in there." He told me where to find him. Well, at the same time a young reporter from Indiana came up, and he identified himself. "Can I go in?" The cop says, "I don't know. I'll have to ask somebody." I went in, I found the sergeant, got his story, talked to three or four eyewitnesses, people who were on the train. I came back out and that Indiana reporter is still standing there waiting for somebody to tell him he could go in. You don't cause more grief for a policeman, whether it's a fire policeman or a regular officer, state cop, whatever it is. If you assume you a have a right to be there, go.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: When I would go to a fire, when it was under control but still burning, often a fire captain or chief or assistant chief would walk into the building. I'd walk right in with him. If I had said, Can I go with you, he'd have said no. But I just assumed that I had a right to be there, and I went in. And I ruined a lot of good clothes that way come to think of it. I don't feel a reporter has any special rights except as the spokesman for the public. The public has the right. The First Amendment is for the public. As long as you are doing your job for the public you have a right to be there. You have right to do this. If it's for your self personally you have no more rights than any other person. And I've always believed that very strongly.

Risley: I would guess the economy has been a big story here in Johnstown. Did you cover that much?

Jones: Not a lot. Jeff McCreddy covered most of industry and business news. I got caught up in the fringes of it, of course, because it affected everything. But no I didn't really do that much. A little bit on the closing of Bethlehem Steel, in fact, quite a bit, I guess.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: Really, it started right after the '77 flood. And business just kept getting worse. We had close to 25 percent unemployment at one time. We were the highest in the state. Of course that affects everything and everybody. Other than that, that was never really one of my beats.

Risley: Tell me about the flood in July. Did you cover that much?

Jones: Yeah, when the flood hit, I was with my family at our cottage in Bedford County right along the river. Of course that night I had taken my son to the movies, and when we came out it was raining like I had never seen it rain before. It was coming down in buckets. We went out and we didn't worry too much. We got up

a couple times during the night to look at the river because the river is only 120 feet from our door. It seemed all right. The next morning it was coming up in the lower part of the camp. So I went down and worked all morning helping people pull out these little campers and drag them up to higher ground and so forth. Around noon, I come back into the house to eat. I hadn't had breakfast or lunch so I started to eat and my wife said, "That water is going to come in here." [I said,] "No it will never get up here." She says, "Well, it's on the last step to the porch. Well, we just managed to get a few things out and get up to higher ground before we were flooded there. One of the last dumb things I did was to reach in the fuse box and pull the fuses while I was standing in water up to my waist. But you don't think. You do dumb things at times like that. It was Friday until I got back to Johnstown. Right away I started digging in on it. And my assignment primarily was the east end of town. The armory was the recovery headquarters. At one point the Governor [Milton] Shapp was quite irritated with the mayor of the city. I walked in and the lieutenant governor pulled me aside. He said, "You know, you almost had marshal law last night." I said why. He said the governor was very upset. He said he was going to suspend the mayor's office and declare marshal law. But he said Jack Murtha talked him out of it. I'd go there and then I'd go down in the flood area itself and start talking to people who would come back in looking at damage, and I'd write stories. I'd be in the field usually about 7 in the morning, and I'd be out in the field until about 9 o'clock. Then I'd come in and write the story for the next day. And usually with tears in my eyes, I'd walk into the darkroom to see what the photographers had gotten. And I'd see them crying. It was quit an experience.

Risley: Is that one of the biggest news stories that's happened in Johnstown since you'd been there?

Jones: I'd say one of them. Incidentally, I got a Pulitzer nomination but that's all the further it went on that. But that was nice.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: I think I could find the little postcard that said your name has been submitted. Didn't really expect to get anything.Yeah, that was a big story. Over the years, I received a number of awards. Not as many as I would have liked, of course, but nobody does. I did get the Walter Donaldson Award from the Pennsylvania Medical Society. I got the one in the state for weeklies for a series of nineteen articles on the Windbur Hospital, section by section, department by department.

Risley: Tell me about that.

Jones: I was still doing the *Era* then. I spent a lot of time at the hospital because I had friends there, and I usually had lunch in the doctors' lounge up there. So we hit on this idea that I'd do stories on each section of each department of the hospital [and] take pictures. I did all that. We ran it in the *Era* and the nineteen

installments, and got first prize in the Donaldson. Nice plaque and $100 bucks. That's the only [prize] money I ever got—and a trip to State College to get it.

Risley: How did the newspaper business change during your career?

Jones: A number of ways. It's changed to the point that the bottom line seems to be the determining factor. When I came into newspapers telling people the truth was the first important thing. And you did it without shading it or putting any personal opinion or anything in it. Just as it happened: who, what, when, where and why. Things that we were all taught. You had really dedicated people who didn't mind working overtime if they had to. We were a very tight-knit staff. We had both college graduates and non college graduates. I came out of high school and trained on the job. We went after news more. I think we were better. We gave more space to stories. Of course, it's kind of a point now where many papers, maybe most, consider an eight-inch story is two inches too long. I never felt that. They always said I had diarrhea of the fingertips when I was writing stories. The longest story I ever wrote was I think 128 column inches. That's a long story. My philosophy was that we were competing with TV. But we couldn't compete on an even basis with TV. They got the stories the night before, and they had it on at 11 o'clock. OK, people already knew what happened. So you've got to say again in the story it happened, but what they want are the details that TV can't give them. And never did give them. So I always felt it was important to do background on all the important things that people are curious about. For instance, here at the Tribune if there was a fire in this city or anywhere around the city, two of us would go out. One would cover the fire itself. One would do a human interest story with the neighbors. And now a fire, unless it's in a very major building, it's about four inches in the paper. We went in for a lot of detail. Of course, we had more space to work with than they have now. Advertising has fallen off and also the ratio I think has gone up with advertising to news. But that's been a major change I think. We had full staff. We had enough staff that you could do these things in the old days. Today, newspapers have very limited staff. They've been cut probably down to about 30 percent of what we used to have and that makes a big difference. I am not faulting the papers today. I think they are doing what they have to do. But they are not doing it quite as well as we used to, I think. Of course that's my opinion.

Risley: Sure. I guess you've seen a lot of changes in technology in terms of the newspaper business.

Jones: Oh, yeah. I started writing on an old black Royal typewriter. It was the best machine I've ever had. I still have it in fact. I bought it and took it home. You double-spaced everything so you could cross out and write in above it. Of course, I started with linotypes. Now everything is done on computers and I was here for the beginning of the computer age. We got into it you might say through the back door. At the time, we were experimenting. We bought some equipment that another paper had used, then replaced it with newer [equipment]. But it worked

up to where we are today. We are completely computerized here. It's just been a dramatic, magnificent change. We have an offset press, and in the old days we had a letter press. And that made a big difference. In fact, my *Windber Era* was my first paper run on the new press when they were experimenting with it. And it was also the first run in color on the new press, which was back in 1969, I believe. There are no more negatives and photographers use digital cameras now and process everything so it's all different. But what isn't different is the people here we are dealing with, and they still expect you to be like we were in the old days. The paper itself can't do that because they don't have the time or the people to do it.

Risley: What made you stay in Johnstown? Did you ever consider leaving?

Jones: Yeah. When I was in the Army I had some good contacts with *San Antonio Light*, and I had sort of an opportunity. I think I could have stayed there and worked on the sports staff. But I wanted to get back home. I had offers from Pittsburgh. They were on a recruiting campaign, both the *Press* and the *Post Gazette*—and the *McKeesport News*. They come into town here and talked to people. We lost about five reporters that went down to the Pittsburgh area and I thought about it. Over the years, I had a couple of other possibilities, so I could have gone to a bigger paper.

Risley: You must love it here.

Jones: I love Johnstown, I love it here. I like the people here. And I guess a big frog in a little pond philosophy kept me here too, because I would have probably been lost in a bigger city. Maybe not, I'll never know, and I don't care. I made my choice. Once you make a choice you stick with it.

Risley: Sure.

Jones: So yeah, I've never been sorry. I've never hated to go to work in the morning. Sometimes I hated to get up. But I never hated going to work. It's always been interesting. Like I said, I've covered celebrities, political figures, governors, presidents, senators everything Which I wouldn't have gotten to. I've gotten 380 feet underground in a coal mine. And I've gotten 5,000 feet in the air or more than that, in fact, Incidentally, I once did a series on learning to fly.

Risley: Did you learn to fly yourself?

Jones: It was a deal**.** I trained at flight training school here at the airport was trying to drum up some business, and I made an arrangement with them, free lessons in return for the articles. And they went over pretty big.

Risley: Yeah.

Jones: I got to solo six hours. And when the series was over, and I couldn't afford to keep it going myself, but it was a lot of fun. I just said to my son the other day I wonder if I could still land a plan safely.

Risley: Has this building changed much?

Jones: No. Well if I go back to 1949 when I started here, the newsroom was upstairs and so was the composing room on the third floor. Now, that's all business office up there and circulation. That aspect has changed. Otherwise, there hasn't been a great deal of change since they moved the newsroom to the second floor. They've moved desks around in little different configuration, but no it's fundamentally the same. We no longer post all the news bulletins in the window like we used to have to. People have television.

Risley: How did television change things for newspapers?

Jones: Television has put more emphasis on news programs. You had 15 minutes of news at noon and 15 minutes or every half hour at 6 and 11. And now they have an hour, well actually an hour and a half at 5 o'clock. So they put more emphasis on it, yeah.

Risley: Did it change the way that you all covered the news?

Jones: Not a whole lot. We were very aggressive to the point that we'd do almost anything to get a story except kill somebody. And I remember back when bank robberies were seldom heard of. A little bank over in Bedford County was robbed, and we had a full-time reporter in Bedford. He sent back what he could, so my buddy and I went over. We joined a State Police road block looking for the guy. We found out at the top of Pleasantville Mountain that they were pulling away the road blocks. They knew he had already gone home, I guess or whatever. So Bob and I decided to go on down the mountain and go over the Schellsburg and see what we could find out. We had a car radio and were telling the city editor, in fact it was the managing editor, where we are going. And he says, "Come back. You won't get anything. Berkey didn't get anything over there." And I kept saying, "Jim we can't hear you. You are breaking up. Would you repeat it?" We went into Schellsburg, went into the bank. "But we're not allowed to tell you anything," the one teller said. Bob kept asking questions and she kept repeating that phrase, but she answered his direct questions. Soon he had the whole story. This is how a reporter works. Bob was a good reporter, Bob Sefick.

Risley: Bob Sefick?

Jones: Sefick. He went up to the girl at the window and says, "We're from the *Tribune-Democrat*. Could you tell us what happened?" "We're not allowed to talk to you. FBI says we're not to talk to you." "Okay," he says, "all right." He said, "I am just trying to clear some things up. Could you tell me did they go to one window

or two?"She says, "Only one but I can't tell you anything." He says, "Well, was there one bandit or two?" "Oh there's only one," but she says, "I am not allowed to talk to you now." [He says, "Did he have a bag?" "Oh yeah," she says, "he brought a bag in. He bought groceries at a little store over there and dumped the groceries and brought the bag in for the money. But we can't tell you anything." We came out and he had the story. And we went and talked to the grocer who sold the bag, and he described the guy and so forth. Bob wrote the story saying that approximately $1,500 was stolen. I said, "Where did you get the $1,500." Well, he said, "My cousin works in a bank." She says, "They usually open in the morning with $1,500 in the drawer." He says, "This was ten minutes after opening time." It turned out he was only $60 off of the actual amount.

Risley: How about that?

Jones: But the editor kept trying to call us back, saying we couldn't get anything. Well, we went because this is what a reporter must do is, think of ways to get information that people don't want to give you. You'd be surprised how much you can get out of people.

Risley: What would you say were your strengths and also your weaknesses as a reporter?

Jones: I think the strengths were fairness, accuracy, and maybe aggressiveness. My weaknesses probably were vocabulary, which is the thing I think I missed the most by not going to college. I never really thought I had a lot of weaknesses. I mean, I hate to brag.

Risley: That's okay.

Jones: I just never thought of weaknesses you know.

Risley: All right.

Jones: The matter of fairness was very important to me. I remember one particular trial I covered in Pittsburgh in Federal court, involving some local people who were selling drugs. The first morning, I went over and tried to talk to these people. They said, "Get out of here. We're not talking to you." So I wrote the story. I tried to be fair to both sides and just report the testimony. The next morning I come in, and they would talk to me a little bit. The third morning they were waiting for me outside the courtroom. They wanted to talk to me, and I think this is a testimony to my fairness. I think you have to be trustworthy. The fact that I was able to sit in on State Police crime meetings for eleven months before they made an arrest says something I think. They trusted me, and I certainly would not violate that trust. There were times I would not tell my editor things I was doing or that I knew because I wasn't sure that he would preserve that trust. He would think, "Hey, this is a good story. Let's get it before somebody else does." Editors are good people,

but when I was a writer they were the enemy. I think a lot of reporters feel that way. But you do appreciate them. too.

Risley: Well, is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to add?

Jones: I think we've covered pretty much covered main points.

Risley: OK.

Jones: All I can say is I've enjoyed it immensely. I've always considered a journalist a professional person. I think maybe doctors and lawyers would not necessarily agree. But you should feel that you are a professional. You should feel that you have an obligation to people. When I did an interview for a column or for a feature, I would prefer to spend three hours in an interview because it takes an hour for the people to start to relax and feel comfortable with you. The second hour, they tell you the things they want to tell you. The third hour, they tell you the things they thought they'd never tell you. So I've spent anywhere from two and a half to three hours doing an interview. I'd have a lot of notes to draw on. Sefick always said you can judge how good a story is by how good the stuff is you left out of it. And I have to say that's true. That's true. You don't want to leave things out people should know or really learn. It takes a little shifting some times. I always did tend to write a little long.

Risley: Is there anything else?

Jones: I married my wife, the former Donna Jeanne Howard, on September 29, 1952, in Cumberland, Maryland. We have two children, Jennifer Jones Mitchell, who lives in Redondo Beach, California, and Tomas Daniel Jones, who lives in Conemaugh Township. We also have two grandchildren.

Risley: OK, good. Well, thank you. This has been great.

[End of interview]