

OH-3048, James Hicks, 6-17-2014, WY In Flight

JUNGE: So we're on. Let me do something preliminarily to our interview here. Today is the 17th of June 2014. My name is Mark Junge and I'm in the -- is it the Buffalo or John --

HICKS: Johnson County.

JUNGE: -- Johnson County Library here in Buffalo talking with Jim Hicks, who was the editor of the *Buffalo Bulletin*, for how many years, Jim?

HICKS: Well, about 35 years.

JUNGE: OK, and where and when were you born?

HICKS: I was born in Gillette, Wyoming, in 1935.

JUNGE: OK, so you're eight years older than I am. I know exactly how old you are. (laughter)

HICKS: (laughter) Yeah, I show the wear too.

JUNGE: No, you don't. No, you don't. OK, before we go into some of the other things, I'd really love to talk to you about Sagebrush Sven because John McBride told me, "You got to talk to him about Sagebrush Sven and the Bench Sitters." Tell me. Go ahead, in your best words, tell me about this Lowell Ferguson affair.

HICKS: OK, you know [00:01:00] they say as you get older, your memory changes. This is all pretty good. I have a file folder with me here with a lot of stuff on it and I

reviewed it a while back, so most of it is still fairly accurate, I think. The first thing I heard about it was -- of course, you know, in those days we published on Thursday. The newspaper came out on Thursday. Our final deadlines were really Wednesday along about ten o'clock in the morning. That was the absolute final deadline. We were letter press at that time. We printed in-house with the old hot type, but our --

JUNGE: Linotype?

HICKS: Yeah, linotype machines and all that stuff. It was kind of like Dante's Inferno down there. (laughs) But anyway, to get back to the story about Lowell Ferguson, our bookkeeper and part business manager at the office for many years at the newspaper -- we also had an office supply business that were all tied together, commercial printing as well -- she and [00:02:00] her husband had a home up near the airport, matter of fact, right below the one end of the airport. It must have been close to ten o'clock at night and she called me at home. I usually go to bed fairly early. I think I was already in bed when she called. I wasn't asleep yet, but... Her name was [Gladys Gunderman?]. Gladys called and said, "Jim," -- she understood news -- "there's a big Western Airlines plane that landed up here into the Buffalo Airport." Big news.

This is a pretty quiet town. I said, "What makes you think that, Gladys?" And she said, "Well, I can see the lights shining on the tail that has a big W on it," the Western Airlines W. I said, "Gladys, you must looking at a Winnebago." You know, I'm teasing her. She said, "No, Jim, it's true. It happened." So I said, "Well, OK." I'm not real anxious about staying up late tonight, but I pulled my clothes back on, grabbed my camera, and drove up to the airport. Well sure enough, at the end of the runway, was this [00:03:00] 737 sitting there. By the time I got there, the guy -- the fixed base operator there was a guy by the name of Dell Jenkins -- he had got his pickup and a step ladder, or a real ladder, to go out there and unload all the passengers off of the airplane. When they landed, they taxied onto a turnaround at the end of the runway. The runway was plenty good enough to handle that weight of that airplane, but that taxi weight under the edge of it that they turnaround on wasn't and I think the airplane started sinking into the pavement pretty quick. So they were stopped there. I don't know all of things that were going on in the cockpit or anything like that at that time, but they were obviously told to unload those passengers and they were doing that.

JUNGE: Now this is airport, the Buffalo Airport, was not designed for 737s.

HICKS: Oh no, uh-uh. The runway part obviously can handle them. It was a little short -- shorter than they like -- I think it was 4,900 feet at that time. Anyway, they [00:04:00] were getting all of the people off of there, and one of them I recognized. I knew he was from Buffalo. I did business with him a little bit. And he's laughing. He said, "Gee, I never dreamed that I'd be able to land right here in Buffalo." He said, "The only part is that I got to find a way to get to Sheridan to get my car I left over there."

JUNGE: This was Theo [Hirshfield?]?

HICKS: Yeah, Theo, right.

JUNGE: So this plane was bound for Sheridan?

HICKS: Oh, absolutely. They had -- it was a beautiful summer evening. I'm sure they were quite relaxed. They came in both runways and Sheridan and Buffalo are aligned exactly the same. They're both -- I think they're 310 or something like that. I used to fly too, but anyway. I could see how -- definitely a big error -- but they looked down, the lights came on, like they're supposed to at the airport, and they were landing. They thought they were landing in Sheridan. Matter of fact, even after they landed, they

were talking to the Sheridan tower -- it isn't a full control tower -- but they were talking to them about, "Well, we're having a [00:05:00] little problem out here turning around" or something like that. The guy says, "We can't see you. What runway did you come on?" It took a while to figure out that the airport was in Buffalo and they were talking to them in Sheridan.

JUNGE: Didn't they have any -- didn't the plane have communication with Buffalo Airport and have somebody say, "Look, I don't know what you're doing here, but you should..."?

HICKS: Well, I think, right away, at that time, it seemed like you got on [120-99?] or something like that, if I remember the frequency. That was the frequency that all these small airplanes used. It was almost like a CV frequency. I think they probably did call. They must have because they made contact some way because the fixed base operator who went down there with a stepladder and all he needed to get people off of the airplane. Shortly after that, I kind of hung around there for a little bit and the pilots came in. It was a couple of them, if I remember right. One of them was of course Ferguson, and I heard him say to Dell, he said, "Can I use your telephone? I need to call Denver." [00:06:00] So I knew he was calling his

bosses in Denver at the Western Airlines Regional Office or whatever it was. He went back in the office to call. I went back to the hallway and sat down and tried to eavesdrop on the conversation, and I got most of it. In the column you referred to about Sagebrush Sven, I couldn't resist, I took some liberties and wrote up what the conversation was. I do recall one thing I put in there which is probably a darn lie. I said at one point I could only hear one side of the conversation and he said, "Runway? Yeah," he said, "It's 4,900." No, he yelled out the door. He says, "How long is this runway here?" And they said 4,900. So he got back on the phone and said, "It's 4,900 feet." There was a silence and then he said, "No, not wide. Long." (laughter) But we had... After this was over, it was a Tuesday night. Excuse me, it was Wednesday. We were able to get the [00:07:00] picture of the airplane. In those days, we had to make an engraving of it and it was quite a thing to get fresh news. We did it. That Wednesday night after we got the paper out -- I always made it a habit once a week when I -- you got all of your deadlines down, it was time to kind of relax a little bit. I went across the alley to -- there was a body shop over there where they fixed cars and things. The two guys who worked in there, one was Byron Nelson and the other

guy's name was [Garis Grover?]. Garis was a guy who had a brilliant mind and just delightful sense of humor. I'd go over and drink a beer and we'd eat -- they usually had some smoked perch and we'd have a perch and a beer. Anyway, Garis said, "You know, this is great. This guy Ferguson put Buffalo on the map." I said, "You know, you're right. He really did." He said, "You know, we shouldn't let this go." He was the one who said it first. He said, [00:08:00] "You know, we ought to start a petition around town to save his job. The first thing in the morning, we'll get people to sign a petition to send to Western Airlines to save his job, because look what he's done for our community. Nobody knew about Buffalo until now."

JUNGE: Well, who did find out about it? The whole world?

HICKS: Some way or other, the Associated Press and the United Press International both picked this up and it went out of the wires. First put out on the wires about a three-paragraph story and that was it. You know at that time, everybody, all the newspapers used AP or UPI and it went out like that. The next morning -- for some reason -- it must have been a slow news week or people were hungry for some kind of bright, little cheerful thing -- it was crazy. I walked in -- I usually went down to the office a little bit early -- I walked in about five after seven in the

morning and opened the doors. We had two telephone lines in the newspaper at that time. They were both ringing. I thought, This is unusual. I [00:09:00] picked one up and it was a talk show from -- I can't remember, someplace in the east -- they guy wanted to -- how they got my name, I don't know. I guess in that story it referred to me some way. Because I think UPI -- I talked to one of them that evening. They wanted to know all about this. So I was talking to them for a while. And then I'd hang that up and I'd to answer the phone and it'd be somebody in San Francisco. (inaudible) I immediately started feeding this stuff that -- it hadn't really happened. But I said, "You know, they're starting a petition in Buffalo today to save this guy's job because the community on the map." There was a second story that went out, and that caught fire, and it continued to grow and get bigger and bigger. I believe right after that, Garis Grover again said, "You know what they really ought to do? We have Crazy Days coming up in a couple of weeks. We ought to rename it Lowell Ferguson Days." I passed that along to the Chamber of Commerce and they jumped on it. [00:10:00] So it was Lowell Ferguson -- everybody, instead of dressing up in their crazy costumes, and everybody tried to dress up like Lowell Ferguson, what they thought he would be.

JUNGE: (laughter) The picture I saw was a guy in a jumpsuit.

HICKS: That was Fritz Purcell. He ran, for many years, a jewelry store here. Fritz might have been in World War II. He had his old leather hat, his goggles, and he had a jumpsuit on. He looked the part. He got that picture -- that picture I think went out, somehow got on the wire. The thing just kept growing and growing. So then not to let a good opportunity ever pass by, the Chamber and everybody in the community said, "We're going to milk this cow as long it'll stand." The next thing they do is decided to have Lowell Ferguson Days, a more formal one the following year where they have a big celebration in the park and everything. They call Western Airlines and Western Airlines did not want him to come up here. They forbid him to. [00:11:00] So we obviously couldn't pass that opportunity up either. The wires were following this thing constantly. So we said we were going to look for anybody named Lowell Ferguson because if he couldn't come, we'd get one Lowell Ferguson here anyway. That went out. I think they had seven guys named Lowell Ferguson that wrote or called about coming there, and they ended up with three of them that actually made the trip. I think that they subsidized them a little bit. They told them they would pay for their food and shelter while they were here,

but they had to get there. But they did show up. Finally, I don't know if it was the following year -- they had it again that year -- but Lowell Ferguson could come. And at that-- in those-- about that time, there was a popular program on television called *What's My Line?*, and everybody watched. I mean, we all only had one channel but that a program that we all watched. So we put that on at the city park and the band shell and they had these Fergusons all -- had three little Fergusons -- [00:12:00] two others besides him. Each one got up and they all claimed to be the pilot. Then the people had to choose which one was the pilot.

(laughter) It worked really good. I mean, it was great.

JUNGE: Did they pick the right one?

HICKS: Oh no, I don't recall if they did or not. I do know that the whole sham went off with just great success.

JUNGE: And Lowell had a sense of humor about it?

HICKS: He did. He was just great about it. They treated him royally when he came back here. People were good. But it was a lot of fun. Anybody that's ever watched news over a period of time, every once in a while, there will be some incidental story that maybe isn't that important, but it catches the imagination of the readers and becomes -- and it grows and grows, and sometimes... And that one we put a lot of fertilizer on it to make it grow too. (laughter) It

was most successful and a lot of fun. I know that they demoted him and he had to go back and take some additional training and stuff, but I think he worked his way back [00:13:00] up into the pilot seat before he got done. So it's a story that actually kind of had a happy ending, I guess.

JUNGE: Well, then, your *Buffalo Bulletin* and the community, the Chamber, were partly responsible maybe for saving his job?

HICKS: I kind of think that's true. Now, I never did get that from him. I don't know that anybody asked that, but indirectly I had heard that Western Airlines got a tremendous amount of pressure as a result of this thing. They were not happy about all of this publicity. I'll guarantee you that their corporate -- at the corporate level, the last thing they wanted was to be known as the airline that landed in the wrong airport. (laughter) So that was not pleasing to them. I think also because they didn't get too nasty about it, it showed that they maybe had a little bit of sense of humor. I think they probably got a couple of billion dollars' worth of publicity, essentially positive, because it was a positive story.

JUNGE: Sure, sure.

HICKS: I don't think it hurt Western Airlines at all.

JUNGE: No, somebody in the head shed had a little sense and a little bit of [00:14:00] wisdom maybe.

HICKS: I believe that's well put.

JUNGE: What a story. So whatever happened after that? Did you just quit having Lowell Ferguson Days because the joke got old or what?

HICKS: I think that was really essentially what happened. I can't remember how many more years they did it. It was only a couple more after that. Once it was no longer a great story, I think they went back to Crazy Days.

JUNGE: He was only in Buffalo one time, besides his landing of course?

HICKS: Besides his landing, to my knowledge, my memory is he only came that one time. He was most gracious about it and was just a great guy, as I recall.

JUNGE: How did they get the plane off again?

HICKS: Well, they went out there and I don't know, as I remember, they had some kind of steel matting like you used to see in movies about World War II.

JUNGE: Creating air strips and stuff like that?

HICKS: Yeah, yeah. They had some of that. Somebody came up with it. I think they got the plane rolled up onto that matting where it was sitting, so that it [00:15:00] wouldn't continue to sink into the asphalt any deeper. And

then they sent another pilot up, of course, to fly it out. Of course, there were lots of stories. They said they took all of fuel off of it, hauled all of the seats out of it, and all this stuff. They didn't. They just -- I don't think they put any fuel in it because -- but they did take off. I went up there the day they took off. This guy took off empty because of course he had no passengers. He didn't use two-thirds of the runway. That thing was airborne and going fine.

JUNGE: So it wasn't proper in Western's mind to allow Lowell Ferguson to fly his plane again?

HICKS: No, that was another thing I put in the column was something about, "Do you want me to fly it on over to Sheridan?" They said, "No." "Well, how do I get to Sheridan?" They said, "Oh, take a bus." (laughter) I'm not sure whether he got to fly back. I don't think there was anybody. He might have been on that airplane when it took off, but I didn't see him. I think they made other [00:16:00] arrangements for him to fly back on probably another flight.

JUNGE: Did you, as a good reporter, did you get in and mix and mingle with the passengers and ask them what their opinions were?

HICKS: Oh, yeah, a little bit. I kind of asked people. That night, there wasn't anybody there that I saw that was alarmed or concerned. They were a little bit alarmed about having to climb down a stepladder to get off the airplane. That was some of the -- particularly the older ones who were kind of concerned about exiting that way. They didn't have those rubber chutes or slides that they now have. But it was adequate and they got down fine. There were no handrails. They had to come down the stepladder. I think some of them had to have a little assistance.

JUNGE: I forgot to ask you when this was. Do you remember?

HICKS: I believe it was 1983, I think. I got it here in this folder. I didn't think to look in exactly, but I believe that's when it was.

JUNGE: OK, OK. So guys like me are dredging this up again. We're keeping this whole story alive. (laughter)

HICKS: [00:17:00] Well, you know, it was great. It was a great thing for the community. There were a lot people after that, for years -- I ran into different ones. It always surprised me; they would say something about Buffalo, Wyoming, and they'd say, "Isn't that where that guy landed that airplane?" That was one of the comments I'd hear. It was pretty well-known. Like all things, it eventually fades into -- you kind of...

JUNGE: Your overall summarial [sic] statement would be it was good for the community.

HICKS: Absolutely. I liked-- Garis Grover is passed on now, but here's a guy who was an employee of a body shop who had the gift of imagination. There's a lot of us in the community that like to take credit for those ideas, but I know where they came from. The two real key ones that made it work. Now, he may not have known how to execute it to make it do, but he was the one that came up with the brilliance of the statements. I always gave him [00:18:00] credit for it. I said, "You're without a doubt smarter than the entire Chamber of Commerce and the newspaper and everybody else." I said, "Garis, you got what it takes."

JUNGE: Did you write about him in Sagebrush Sven?

HICKS: No, I never did, really. I didn't really -- I don't know why. I probably should have.

JUNGE: Given him credit?

HICKS: Yeah, I really should have. At the time --

JUNGE: Maybe he didn't want his name mentioned. (laughter)

HICKS: No, he was a fun-loving guy.

JUNGE: When did you become editor of *Buffalo Bulletin*?

HICKS: Nineteen sixty, actually. I moved back here. I'd grown up here, went to high school, and then I went away to college. I was going to become a doctor because I looked

around the community and I said, "Who drives big cars and has good-looking wives?" and I said, "The doctors! So I'm going to be a doctor." (laughter) I spent two and half years in pre-med and I -- my grades were OK and I was getting along good, but -- I was at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. I got a job in a hospital to [00:19:00] supplement my cost of my education. I was working in the hospital and after about six months there, it dawned on me. I really didn't like being around sick people that much. So I had to look for another career, and I transferred to Wyoming and decided to take journalism. I always liked to write and enjoyed that sort of thing, so.

JUNGE: Did you get your degree from UW?

HICKS: I did. I graduated at the University of Wyoming in 1957 and then I went to work in Cheyenne. I worked at the Cheyenne newspapers for a while, and then I worked in Casper. And then in 1960, I moved back to Buffalo. And my father had owned the newspaper, and I bought in at that time, and then another gentleman, who was the advertising director, gentlemen by the name of Jack Williams, bought in as well. We had minority stock and my dad sold out in about three or four years later. He wanted to get out so he sold it us.

JUNGE: What was his name?

HICKS: My dad?

JUNGE: Yeah.

HICKS: Frank Hicks was his name.

JUNGE: Is he still alive?

HICKS: [00:20:00] No, he's been dead since -- well -- '89, I think. He passed away.

JUNGE: Let's take a step further back. Did -- who owned it before he -- the paper -- before he did?

HICKS: Before he had it --

JUNGE: Or when was that he picked up the paper?

HICKS: He bought it in 19-- he started working there in 1956 for a man by the name of [Al Schlott?], who had-- as soon as my dad -- after World War II -- we were on the west coast, my dad ran a -- well, he was working, started out as just as an employee at an Army Air Corps supply depot called Cal-Aero and it was near Ontario, California. As soon as the war was over, then they closed that down. He had worked for the newspaper in Gillette, Wyoming, prior to going out there. We moved back to Buffalo and he got this job in Buffalo as the editor. The guy that owned it had business in Billings as well, so he moved to Billings. Basically, my dad bought it in about [00:21:00] 1956.

JUNGE: So he was in the business before '56, actually.

HICKS: Oh yeah. Right. He essentially been -- he started out as I don't know, a linotype operator in Gillette and then did some reporting. Oddly enough, one of the stories that he covered that just about killed him in fact was when a guy by the name of Hopkins parachuted onto the Devils Tower, and you probably are looking at that in your history.

JUNGE: I read about it in [T.A. Larson's?] book.

HICKS: I mean it's a fantastic story. My dad went down there when that happened and he was covering for the wire service. In those days, the transportation and everything, you got to remember, this was in, I believe it was '41 or something like that-- it was before we got involved in all of the World War II. He was down there using some little crank phone. I think there's one phone up there that the government had there at the tower. He was calling these reports in. They would [00:22:00] say, "Don't leave." This is another story that caught worldwide attention. They'd say, "Don't leave. Don't leave." He stayed there for, I think, four or five days and never did go to bed. He was just calling in these reports. They wanted something every couple of hours or so he was keeping everything. As a result, he actually had a nervous breakdown after that. He just kind of collapsed and that's

when we decided to move to California. The doctors, you know, I don't know how good the doctors were in those days, but they had told my mother he's got to get a whole new environment. They had a 1934 Chevrolet and we all -- my sister and I were just small then, but we all climbed in there with a trunk, and off to California. We did have some relatives out there. That's why we got out there. I didn't mean to get into my life story.

JUNGE: No, I love this. This is a great story. Who was the guy who landed on top of the tower?

HICKS: A guy by the name of Hopkins. I don't remember his first name. He was kind of a daredevil and had done [00:23:00] some parachuting. I think that if I remember right, that was a bet that was made in a bar or something started it out with. It grew from there. Oddly enough, there was guy by the name of -- I don't -- [Ginger Gurrell?] was his name. He was a brilliant guy that lived here. I think he had a Ph.D. in Physics and something else. His family was connected with the HF Bar Dude Ranch, which is a whole another story. Ginger was here at that time and he was an accomplished mountain climber. I think he and -- I'm trying to think of the other guy's name -- it may have been [Petso?].

JUNGE: Paul Petso?

HICKS: It might have been. The two of them were the first ones down there. They were going try to climb it and get the guy down. I think one thing led to another. There were some other climbers that probably did it. That whole story has been told pretty accurately in a couple of books. It's a fabulous story. It always amazed me at how many connections Buffalo had to something like that.

JUNGE: And your dad was [00:24:00] there for five days covering this event?

HICKS: Yeah.

JUNGE: As a reporter?

HICKS: Yeah.

JUNGE: He ran the linotype machine.

HICKS: Yeah, he started out as a linotype operator in this newspaper in Gillette, and then he got into reporting, and was just doing that.

JUNGE: Don't you have to be an artist to do the linotype machine?

HICKS: You got to be nuts. (laughter) There are 17,000 moving parts on a linotype at average size. Nobody knows about those machines. I always said that there are 17,000 things that could go wrong on Wednesday before deadline, and they usually did. (laughter)

JUNGE: Did you operate it?

HICKS: I could never -- the keyboards were nothing like a typewriter. They did have an attachment called a TTS or something that you could hook on that would make it -- convert it to like a typewriter board. I operated one of those a little bit, but you had to know the rest of the machine too. If you got what's called lead squirts, it was not good.

JUNGE: That's what I was going to ask you. Is this stuff that was used in the process was poisonous, wasn't it?

HICKS: Molten lead, yeah. I mean [00:25:00] we -- every linotype - we had four linotypes down there, it was in the basement of the building, and the ventilation was terrible. All four of them were spewing this toxic smoke. I think most of the people that worked there died of cancer one time or another, or else lung disease. I was, as a printer devil, I was -- from the time I was in junior high I was down there melting lead or doing something. I remember going home and your collar would be black, you know. (laughter) I always thought, you know -- I have a problem with my breathing today, asthma, and I think probably it's -- I like to blame it on that, and then being a volunteer fireman. We got our lungs singed one time pretty good with some ammonia.

JUNGE: You couldn't have workers comp or sue the company because you would have to sue yourself.

HICKS: Yeah, I think that's what it was. Nobody even thought about those things then. You know, we also didn't even worry about it. You're young, you bounce right back.

JUNGE: What's a printer's devil?

HICKS: That's the guy -- you never heard that term?

JUNGE: I have, but I don't know how.

HICKS: [00:26:00] It's the little -- it's the kid, or whoever else, does all of the sweeps around the machines and sweeps up all of the trims of this lead, all of the molten lead, and you get a little dirt stuffed with it. Then you put it in this big pot and you melt it down. It was called a [stereotype?] machine, I don't know why. Then you had to skin the [drops?] or the impurities off of the top, and then you added some chemicals to tone the lead back up. Then you poured in what they called pigs, they were just molds that would fit on the linotype and then feed down into the linotype as it used the lead. It was kind of like a [float?] system.

JUNGE: It would heat up as it felt --

HICKS: Right into the melting pot. Just went in fast enough to keep that pot up to certain level.

JUNGE: I'm curious about this now. So, the lead is melted.

HICKS: Yeah.

JUNGE: Where does the lead become actually --

HICKS: Typed?

JUNGE: Yeah, typed. Thank you.

HICKS: I'll explain how a linotype works. Every time you touch a key, a little brass, called a [mat?], fell down.

JUNGE: Mat?

HICKS: [00:27:00] They called it a mat. A little brass mat of that letter fell down. They were all in little chutes. They slid along a rail and they were all keyed. They would always fall into the proper slot if it was an A or a B or a cap or whatever it was. They'd have it in this big, long chute of things above a keyboard where it held all of those mats. As the operator touched those keys, those mats would fall in the order. Then, when it got up to a point where a line would justify, then you would lift the lever and it would carry that line over into the area of the machine where it would actually squirt lead against that. It would form that line of type and of course it was reversed because it had to be backwards. Now the good linotype operators, including my dad, could do this: he could read upside down and backwards as fast as he could read any other way. (laughter) It would drive people crazy. He could walk into your office and if you had the papers that

are faced the other way from him, he could read them as fast as you could. (laughter)

JUNGE: [00:28:00] Well now, what happens if you're typing along and you made a mistake, a typo?

HICKS: Well, then you proofed it, what they call proof press. Then you reset that line, you'd mark that up, and then you would go back and resend them. They would actually pull out, physically pull that line of type out, and put the corrected one in. Each line was a separate slug, little piece of metal.

JUNGE: You had to read -- you had to proofread before it went on paper.

HICKS: Well, by proofreading, you just put it in what looks like a little roller that rolled over the top of it.

JUNGE: Oh, a proof.

HICKS: You ran ink over the top of the type, laid a piece of paper, pulled this roller across the top, and you could see what was there.

JUNGE: That was like a proof -- what they called a proof press?

HICKS: Proof press. That's exactly what it was. You would make all those corrections. All that stuff went into a page that had to be justified so you could pick it up. There was no backing to it and it would go on to the press.

It was a very, very labor intensive. It took a pretty good sized crew to put out a -- [00:29:00] say a 14 or 16 page newspaper. It took four to six men, I guess, working really hard for the first three days of the week to actually -- had we not gone to the electronics and all the labor saving things, I doubt there would be any small newspapers because you wouldn't be able to do that that way now and compete. [Osher?] would close you down first.

(laughter) Another thing I didn't mention was we washed all that type off with rags with white gasoline. We had these little cans that had little plungers in them and you push them down and it would force gasoline up into the rag. Here was all these open flames and we were washing the type off with gasoline. (laughter) The big press that ran the paper had these sheets that were 36x48 inches and they would feed -- you fed them into the press -- they had to go under an open flame, a gas pipe with an open flame, and that was not to dry the ink but to {00:30:00} take the static electricity out of the paper. I don't know how that worked exactly, but it did. It went around the press and on through what we call an Omaha Folding Machine. It was kind of a glorified hay baler. Those things were nightmares to keep running, too. There was a great deal of

-- you had to be mechanically inclined to get involved in this at all.

JUNGE: You didn't work that machine, you say?

HICKS: I ran the press [lot?]. I did that and -- Wednesday night everybody that worked there was down to put the paper out. Once we went to press and we were all downstairs, you might have your pretty good clothes on, but they were going to be all covered in ink by the time you got done anyway. We actually ran that. It ran -- if everything was going right -- about 1,200 copies an hour. To give you an idea, most of these web presses will run 40,000 or 50,000 an hour. That newspaper run is about a [00:31:00] 10 minute run on a web [hub?]. In that time, we sit there and clank and churn and clatter and a big bed would slide back and forth, it was called a double [otmeely?] press. It would slide back and forth and each page was printed. You had to print the other side when you ran it through the second side, then it went into the Omaha Folder. If there were additional pages, they were pre-printed and they were fed in by another [personal feed?] thing. Everything was timed. Everybody had to be exactly timed together at the exact rhythm of that press to make it work. If anybody made a mistake, the whole thing jammed all the way back.

JUNGE: Did you -- what else did you have to do besides work press?

HICKS: Once the press schedule went through the folder and all of the papers came out of there, you stacked them, and then you -- and then we had to address them all to all of our subscribers that we had. They used to have what they call a wing mailer, which used a line of type with the name on it. It was a very crude sort of way to do it. Later, we got a stencil machine. [00:32:00] It was really like a stencil machine, where you cut a type into this -- ink will go through it. Those were on cards. They fed through this machine so you could sit there and print the addresses one at a time on these -- on the newspaper.

JUNGE: Is that what they call an addressograph machine?

HICKS: Exactly what it was: addressograph. We'd address them all and we had paper boys that would come in and sold papers on Wednesday night. If the paper was a dime, we'd sell to them for a nickel. They could make their profit off of that.

JUNGE: That's 50% of your profits! Oh no, you had advertising.

HICKS: Yeah, advertising. (inaudible) Mostly we wanted readership. The other reason that we did that was all those papers they sold, 90% of them were sold to people who had a

subscription and they were going to get it in the mail the next day, but they just couldn't wait. One thing I loved was, I also -- we took all of the bundles to the grocery stores and the drugstores and everything on Wednesday evening. I always wanted [00:33:00] that job as a publisher and editor because I'd carry them into the stores and these little old ladies would be there. If you were five minutes late, they'd be standing in line. Not just little old ladies. A lot of people were waiting for the newspaper. They would be mad as hell if you were late and you could get your fanny chewed pretty thoroughly. They didn't know that I was enjoying that because I knew that paper was that important to them.

JUNGE: Did you do -- on top of that did you do reporting?

HICKS: Oh, yeah.

JUNGE: You did?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. Listen, talk about a workaholic. We had an office supply store. Once the paper was out, the way you justify these people in the back shop, all these printers, you did commercial printing. In those days -- it's all changed now because those things are done with computers and printers and things -- at that time, almost everything anybody used, everything from their bills, the statements they sent out, whatever it was, the bank, all of the

paperwork, all had to be printed. It was printed there. We would-- [00:34:00] we had a bunch of small presses that we printed all that stuff on. That's how they kept busy. We also had an office supply store. As soon as the paper was out, then I was figuring the cost of jobs -- printing jobs for people -- also, my partner would do this too. We were also selling desks, chairs, you name it. We sold paper supplies. We sold toilet paper at one time, everything.

JUNGE: (laughter) Did you really?

HICKS: Oh, yeah.

JUNGE: No way! You didn't sell toilet paper!

HICKS: Yes, we did. We had bulk towels. We got into that.

We would sell towel machines for their bathrooms and things. We had bulk towels and the rolls. We were the only ones in the area that did that. My partner was an old dime store-- he came out of what they called dime store [hesteds?] or whatever. He had that marketing ability. We didn't miss any opportunities. I always love to tell a story. There was a guy by the name of Slim Smith that had a filling station. It was [00:35:00] not too modern. I remember the shop part still had a dirt floor. Slim was-- we'd sell him things once in a while. I went down there one time. He had ordered a case of toilet tissue and I

took it to him. About a month later, I was down there and Slim said, "You know, you didn't charge me. You forgot to charge that to me. I got my bill and it wasn't on there." I said, "Slim, I had no idea you were an honest man." He said, "Jim, I'm not, but when I beat you out of something, it's going to be more than a case of toilet tissue."

(laughter) He didn't say toilet tissue.

JUNGE: I think it starts with an A and ends with an E.

(laughter) That's funny. So, you worked the press, you were a printer's devil, you cleaned up the floors.

HICKS: The printer's devil job ended when I got beyond-- when I graduated. We usually hired a high school kid to run that press if we could. I didn't always run it. Once I got these other jobs, I seldom ran the press but I would if I had to.

JUNGE: [00:36:00] How did spend the majority of your time?

HICKS: Majority of my time, first three days of the week, I was editing and writing. I used to say that people-- we wrote volumes. We didn't have a wire. Every word that went into the weekly paper had to be written. We weren't a very big company so you had to crank out a lot. I wrote everything from the obituaries to the major news stories. I covered the council meetings and I always said you can tell the local editor in these small communities because it

was a guy walking around, looking very tired, and he had a camera hanging around his neck. (laughter) We would work long hours, you bet. We worked a lot of long hours. I usually would-- I wasn't very good at working after supper so I would usually be down there at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning lots of times, depending on what the week was doing. I could get more done between 3:00 and 8:00 then I could after the interruptions started.

JUNGE: Do you remember Kirk Knox?

HICKS: I sure do. I worked with Kirk.

JUNGE: Did you work with Kirk?

HICKS: Yeah, when I was in Cheyenne.

JUNGE: I [00:37:00] interviewed him about 25 years ago.

HICKS: Did you?

JUNGE: Yeah. I said, "What's the worst assignment?" He said, "City council." He used words that I can't even repeat. He said, "Most useless thing imaginable. Worthless."

HICKS: You know, I'll tell you a story about Kirk. He and I-- when I first got out of college, was working there. They ran those skeleton staff in those days, too, down there, not daily.

JUNGE: Was this the *Tribune* or the *Eagle*?

HICKS: This was the old-- this was the morning paper, the *Tribune*. Excuse me, the afternoon paper, the old *Tribune*.

We'd go to work at about seven in the morning. We were supposed to go down there and start out on our [beats?] and I covered the state government. He covered city and county, I think. Anyway, we would be there and a guy by the name of Stanley [Schuster?] was the wire editor and kind of the general editor. [Tracy McTracon?] owned those papers at that time. They got to worrying about whether or not Kirk was putting in all the time he should [00:38:00] per his salary. He wouldn't come to paper in the morning. He would go directly onto his beat and then come in and write his stuff in time for their deadline.

JUNGE: On this little Royal typewriter, right?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. We all had a little typewriter. He would come in and write his stuff. I can remember. Somebody at the higher level decided that they were going to make sure that we all put in our hours so they told Kirk that he had to check in. He had to come into the office first at 7:00 in the morning, whatever it was. I think that's when we started. That next morning he was there and I looked over and he had worn a suit -- Kirk always dressed well -- he wore a suit, and I looked over. I did a double take and looked. His pajamas were hanging out the bottom of his suit. I knew that as soon as he got done checking in he

was going back home to get another hour of sleep before he went on his beat. (laughter) Kirk was notoriously tight.

JUNGE: Do you have any stories about that?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. The first time I realized it he invited me over for tea or something or coffee at his house. I had another reporter. [00:39:00] He didn't work for the paper, but he worked for United Press International. We went over there one afternoon in the wintertime and he said, "Would you like some tea?" I said, "Sure." He goes over there and heated some water up. Above the sink, he had some little nails and he had these used tea bags on there. (laughter) He unwound on and he put it in there. We about died laughing. The other time he invited us to lunch. It wasn't on him but it was to go with him. Where did we go? We went to the hospital because for 26 cents you could have lunch or something. (laughter)

JUNGE: Did he pay?

HICKS: I don't recall that. I don't think-- we might have flipped for it or something.

JUNGE: I think it was Maury-- do you know Maury Brown? Maurice Brown? He was in Town and Country Supermarket Liquors. He's in oil up here.

HICKS: Yeah, I've heard the name.

JUNGE: Anyway, Maury used to give Kirk hell and joke about him behind his back and to his face and accuse him of wearing in his suit pockets -- because he always wore [00:40:00] a Herringbone sport jacket -- and accused Kirk of having plastic bags in his pockets so that whenever he went to any function, he could always put the hors d'oeuvres in there.

HICKS: I'm not too sure if that was a lie. (laughter)

JUNGE: I wouldn't doubt it.

HICKS: Yeah, Kirk was-- he was very careful. I recall that he had invested a lot of money in-- he had a lot of money in Union Pacific at one time, stock. I still remember this. I didn't understand much about stocks or anything at that time. I know he came to work one day. I'd thought we were going to have to call an ambulance for him because the Union Pacific stock-- something had happened-- it had taken a 20% or 30% hit. (laughter) Kirk was almost--

JUNGE: (laughter) [Apoplectic?]?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. He was practically in shock. (laughter) He was getting absolutely no sympathy.

JUNGE: Well, and you know, he was a ladies man. He loved to be a-- how much time do we got here? [0:41:00]

HICKS: It's fine. He dated a gal who was an accountant or something for a long time when I was down there. I don't

know whether they ever-- I don't think they ever got married or anything or whether they became a thing or not. They were very happy.

JUNGE: He played tennis. He was pretty good as I understand it. When he died, he left a lot of money to animal shelters in, I think, Scottsbluff.

HICKS: Did he?

JUNGE: Somewhere in Nebraska, Western Nebraska, and the Cheyenne Animal Shelter. He left, I don't know, the story was I think about one million dollars.

HICKS: I'm sure that he had his first nickel in that million. No doubt in my mind. It was his nature, he was just-- he squeaked when he walked. (laughter)

JUNGE: Was Doug [Reeves?] down there at the time?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. You bet.

JUNGE: He was probably--

HICKS: Great friend.

JUNGE: Was he?

HICKS: You bet. I really thought a lot of Doug.

JUNGE: Did you know Tracy?

HICKS: Yes, I did. He was there when I was working there.

JUNGE: What was he like?

HICKS: He was tough guy. He's all [00:42:00] business. I think he was-- you know, he was-- I didn't have a lot to do

with him. He didn't spend a lot of time. He was in and out of there a lot because [Bob?] was kind of running it then. Tracy was still alive. I had the name on the end of my tongue of the other guy that eventually ended up in Jackson.

JUNGE: Oh, yeah. I know who you mean.

HICKS: Fred McCabe. Fred was there. Fred was really probably more of the business side of it at that time. Fred was a tough guy to work for. He was not easy to work for. I liked him, but he was-- a lot of guys didn't.

JUNGE: Did he fund the *Jackson Hole Guide*?

HICKS: He married Elizabeth McCabe. I don't remember what her name was before that. Her family was primary stock holders in Frontier Airlines at one time. They owned the paper over there in Jackson. They spent a lot of money. It was a wonderful product. The only thing was, they were in competition with a guy by the name of Mike [Sled?], who was probably one of the most [00:43:00] accomplished newspaper men I ever met in my life. He was tough competition. So consequently, Jackson, Wyoming had the two best *Weeklys* in the United States. They won all of the awards. The two of those papers won national awards year after year after year. They were just beautiful products.

JUNGE: Why? Why Jackson?

HICKS: I don't know. I guess they wanted to live there.

That's where they wanted to be. There just happened to be all that talent. Of course, in those days you could-- a lot of these young reporters were really, really good ones, or photographers. They would practically pay to work there, just because it was Jackson. They could ski and do all the things that they wanted to do.

JUNGE: Let's go back to the-- boy, I would love to talk to you-- can I talk to you again sometime?

HICKS: Oh, sure.

JUNGE: You've got all these stories. You said ask you about Jack [Meldrum?]

HICKS: Yeah, Jack, one of my heroes. (laughter) Jack, his uncle, I think it was-- there's a book called *The [Caricature?]* his daughter wrote. You want to get a hold of that while you're here [00:44:00] if you can.

JUNGE: What is it called?

HICKS: It's called *The Caricature*. It's a little paperback. She wrote it. Not a great book, but it tells the history. It was either his uncle or his dad that was the [territorial?] governor here. Jack's mother, her husband died when Jack was very small, about one or two years old. She ran a dude ranch up here at that time. It's kind of-- I don't want to get this story confused. He was sent to

Nebraska to be raised by an aunt. He finally came back here and Jack was absolutely delightful guy. He was a hell of a pilot. He flew a [super club?]--- started out with a [J-83?] I think and then went into super club. He would-- the stories about his flying are [legend?] and number and when I was flying, of course, same time-- part of the time he was flying. He flew when he was well into his 80s, before he quit. He used to love to go fishing up on what they called Cloud Peak [00:45:00] Reservoir, and that's behind the Big Horns. In the wintertime, you're surrounded by these peaks. There's only one way in and one way out, and that's in over the dam, if you're flying in there. He would get his super club and would get a big rock off the prairie up there by the airport and put it in the super club. Hell, it'd be as [big of a route?] as a--

JUNGE: [Basket bow?]

HICKS: Just about. Not quite that big, probably just a soccer ball or somewhere. He would fly up there and he'd fly over there and he'd toss the rock out of the airplane. If it didn't go through the ice, then he knew it was safe to land there. He'd go back around and [fluffer?] in over the dam, slide in on the ice, and go fishing and catch a bunch of fish. (laughter)

JUNGE: That's an altitude of what? That must be close to
10,000 feet.

HICKS: Oh, yeah. It's high, at least 10.

HICKS: Cloud Peak Wilderness?

HICKS: Yeah, it's in the-- it's actually on the edge of the
wilderness. It was because it was a man made reservoir, so
they kind of went around that. There wasn't anything they
could do. They couldn't really put it into the wilderness
area [00:46:00] so it's a little thumb that sticks back
into the wilderness a long way.

JUNGE: Did he have skis or tires?

HICKS: He just landed with tires. Usually there was-- that
thing would blow clear usually of snow. It would just be--
if there was any snow on it, it'd be pretty thin skip. It
might have been drifts around the edges, but out in the
middle it was usually blown clear.

JUNGE: Did you say you flew?

HICKS: I, yeah-- I flew for several years. We had a couple
of airplanes. My partner and I both did. We shared the
ownership and flew. I used to fly the mental patients to
Evanston for the county just to get extra hours. The
sheriff was a good friend. His name was [Bo Chur?]. He
was a real character. Bo would drive them down there. I
said, "Well, if you'll-- whatever that cost to drive in the

car there and back that the county's paying, I'll fly them to that," which would cover my fuel. It gave me a chance to [build?] a few more hours. We had some kind of interesting trips.

JUNGE: Yeah, I was going to say. You must have a story about some of these patients and hauling them off to Evanston.

HICKS: [00:47:00] One, I recall, there was a guy by the name of Greene. He and his girlfriend had got in an argument and they were down in front of the old Buffalo bar. Right across the street was the Busy Bee Café. Busy Bee opened at about 5:00 in the morning. They were still-- they had closed the saloon at probably 2:00 or something. They had been in the car arguing since then. Right after the Busy Bee opened, she got out of the car. The argument got too hot or something. She got out of the car and started to go right across the street to the Busy Bee. He had a .22 pistol in there and he had it loaded with 22 shorts, which is just a little beyond a good pellet gun. He shot her in the fanny, which happened to be a pretty big target, too. He hit her five times.

JUNGE: Five times? (laughter)

HICKS: Yeah, he hit her five out of the six. It was a six shot. I don't know where the other one went. Maybe it didn't quite reach or something.

JUNGE: Probably hit (inaudible). (laughter)

HICKS: [Hollis?] was in there. Actually, that morning, I didn't happen to be there. [00:48:00] I usually ate breakfast there early in the morning, but I wasn't there that morning. The guys who were all the regulars were there and said she walked in the door and fell on the floor with a great moan. She was wearing-- she was a waitress and she wearing a white uniform, so a little bit of blood that was coming out of the five holes looked pretty impressive. They called the ambulance and it was amazing. Those little guys were still sitting at the counter eating their pancakes (laughter) like there was nothing wrong. The ambulance showed up. Greene-- I diverged because Greene was of course arrested. He was in jail for attempted murder. I remember they decided that anybody that would shoot somebody in the rear five times needed a sanity hearing. He was going to go down there and get checked out.

JUNGE: In other words, he didn't really intend to kill her. He just wanted to want to make her-- or else it was biggest part of target. (laughter)

HICKS: I don't know the motives. I do know that Bo called and said that we needed to take him down there. When I went up to the airport that morning he had him with him. I

said-- I kind of pulled Bo aside and [00:49:00] I said, "I'm a little bit concerned about having that guy." I didn't know anything about him. I said, "Anybody that would do what he did might not be too trustworthy. I'd like to see you cuff him under his leg." He's going to be sitting in the back seat with just a poor [airplane?], a little 172. I said that I'd feel more comfortable about it. Bo said, "Jim, you don't have to worry about him. He's a fine boy." (laughter) He said, "He just got a little crazy that night." I said, "Well, Bo, I'll take your word for it." So, he's sitting up front with me and we taxied down to the end of the runway, and I'm checking the [magnetos?] and getting ready to take off. Bo turned around and said, "Greene, if you even look cross eyed once, I'll stop your butt right through the fuselage and watch you fall all the way to ground." You know, that guy just sat there as quiet as can be all the way to Evanston. He never said a word. He was more terrified of Bo than he was of flying. (laughter)

JUNGE: Bo was the sheriff?

HICKS: Yeah. Bo Chur, what a great guy. At that time, the sheriff thing was Bo Chur and the Chief of Police was [Sundown Taft?]. I mean, I always thought it was just

[00:50:00] perfect. It couldn't have been any better.

Both of them were great guys.

JUNGE: Tell me a little bit about your flying experience.

Why did you start to fly anyway?

HICKS: Probably because my partner did. He was interested and he was [on it?] first. He said, "Let's get an airplane and learn how to fly." At that time, it was the early '60s, I think. There were a lot of guys flying around here. I think there 36 airplanes based up here all at one time. It wasn't that expensive. It was like buying another car. You didn't have all this insurance and stuff. There weren't as many regulations about it. We bought an old ragwing 170 to start with. We both took lessons from a guy by the name of Dale Wright.

JUNGE: Oh, yeah. From Gillette?

HICKS: Yeah. Dale taught us flying. I was always very cautious about it. My tendency was not my-- I've been told all of my life that I have the wrong kind of genes. I was always a risk taker. Flying, for some reason, [00:51:00] impressed me and I didn't take too many chances when I was flying. I had one-- a good friend did do that. He crashed and got killed.

JUNGE: What did you pay for that plane?

HICKS: You know, I don't recall. I think it was probably-- I'm making a guess. Not over \$3,000 or \$4,000, maybe \$3,000. Maybe.

JUNGE: Is there any way that you could use an airplane in the newspaper business?

HICKS: Well, we published a magazine for the Wyoming Peace Officers Association about that time. We did it for 20 some years. I justified a little with that. I did fly around with it. One time, we had a-- we started a newspaper in Gillette, a competitive paper, for a few years. We would-- they were poor excuses. We didn't deduct like-- no, it didn't cost that much either. Later, we traded up to a 172 (inaudible), a pretty good airplane. It wasn't that old. I don't remember [00:52:00] what we paid for that either. I do know that when finally sold it, we sold it probably more than we paid for.

JUNGE: This was something you just-- this was recreational.

HICKS: Yeah, primarily recreational. I would take some pictures out of it for the newspaper. It was handy that way, if there was something going on in the mountains or whatever. I used to have a lot of area photographs of the area, the town.

JUNGE: Where are they?

HICKS: You know, when I sold the paper in 1984, a lot of stuff disappeared. We sold all of the [morgue?] and the piles of things. I regret it now because there were a lot of things that just, unfortunately, disappeared.

JUNGE: Did they go down to the archives or did they just get sold to somebody who was interested?

HICKS: The newspaper? When we sold it, we sold it to a guy by the name of Ed [Scripps?], which was part of the Scripps family.

JUNGE: Oh, no, I meant the negatives and the morgue.

HICKS: We didn't do a very good job of keeping our negatives filed in those days.

JUNGE: The *Tribune* was the same way.

HICKS: Yeah, it was pretty much a mess. [00:53:00] The pictures in those early days, we had a thing called a Scanograver. We made plastic engravings of the picture on that. You'd mount it on a little block when you were printing letter press. You didn't-- the picture, usually-- we used a rapid print process, a little machine, and they would make a nice picture. It would immediately start to yellow within a few months. It would go. The pictures we usually just threw them away, because we knew they weren't going to stay very long.

JUNGE: The story is that [Francis Grammar?]--- did you know him?

HICKS: Oh, I sure did. You bet.

JUNGE: Do you have any stories about him?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. I used to-- my favorite was Francis was-- when Charles Starkweather pulled his thing, I was working at the *Tribune* then.

JUNGE: Kirk Knox reported on it. It went up to Douglas, right?

HICKS: Well, I don't know whether Kirk actually went to Douglas or not. I don't think he did. A guy by the name of Jack [Bacon?] up there, he was with the United Press International. I don't think Kirk or I, either one, didn't get to go. I don't [00:54:00] believe. Kirk might have sold that story later on. That would be a good one. When that happened, actually I was so green that I didn't even recognize how important this story was, but I know [McCrachen?] was running around there and was also-- I just said his name--

JUNGE: Bac--

HICKS: McCabe. They were running around there trying to figure out. They chartered an airplane. They called the airport and chartered an airplane to get up there to get this story. Francis was out taking some pictures somewhere

and he rode a bicycle at the time. They had to wait for him to ride his bicycle back down to the office before they could go. (laughter) They also had to get their attorney there for him to sign the releases to fly the airplane, so that they wouldn't be liable if it crashed. I always got a kick out of that, you know. Those guys were pretty careful with their money.

JUNGE: Francis, you know-- Francis liked to take pictures of young women and girls. He'd prop them up on a brick fence or some kind of-- [00:55:00] you know, had a little altitude. He had them pull their skirts back past their knees.

HICKS: A little risqué.

JUNGE: Risqué. I heard some woman at the archives thought that they were inappropriate for a collection, a historic collection. I think she trashed them. (laughter) That's the story, I don't know.

HICKS: I don't know. He had all kinds of photos. (laughter)

JUNGE: He was a walking (dark room?). Did you ever smell him?

HICKS: Yeah, I know.

JUNGE: He smelled like a bottle of (fixer?).

HICKS: I know. He spilled a lot of it on his clothes. I don't think those got changed all that often.

JUNGE: No, didn't he-- he lived for a while with Jack Welch across the street from-- what used to-- what was a restaurant, [Whipple House?], you know where the Y.W.C.A. building was, that big gray-- the Warren Mansion. Right across the street from that is where I think he lived for a while. Anyway, tell me about Sagebrush Sven and the Bench Sitters.

HICKS: Well, this started about 1960, when I came back to Buffalo. There was a girl-- young [00:56:00] woman that lived here that wanted to write a column, a humor column. I'm sorry, I can't-- I don't' recall her name. I think it was Sylvia or something like that. Anyway, she talked my father into letting her try this for a while. She named Sagebrush Sven. The name she-- she was supposed to be--

JUNGE: (inaudible) Sage?

HICKS: No, it was supposed to be a log cutter or something. I don't know what he was supposed to be. Anyway, he was supposed to be (sweet?). Anyway, so she wrote this column. You know, you go back and you read those, they were pretty lame. At the time, I guess, she had-- the story was, they had a dog called [Pee on Rug?] and you know that was "HA. HA. HA." You know, that kind of stuff. Anyway, she wanted to also syndicate it, so my dad helped her syndicate it. He made a big mistake. The papers that he got to take

the column-- he put those little contracts in the name of the newspaper instead of her name. [00:57:00] I think there was a half a dozen, or maybe more, maybe as many as 12, in Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming, that were running Sven. I guess there wasn't that much humor around I guess at the time because they bought that thing. Anyway, then she and her husband got in a row or something, and she just left one week, just disappeared. My dad said, "We got to deliver columns. You're going to write it." I said, "Really?" I started writing it. I found out right away that I couldn't write a general column that would fit in all of these papers, but I could do something local. As those contracts ran out, we just cancelled them. We didn't renew any of them. I would be able to localize the things. I began to just use the-- it was a place to dump all of the little things that around-- humorous things, that there was no place else for them in the newspaper. I could put them in there. I was around the community a lot more in those days. I would get all of that together. It got to be a pretty popular column. The Bench Sitters part of it was, at that time, there was a {00:58:00} bench on the bridge over Clear Creek and all of these old guys would sit there and would discuss what was going on in the county and the town and the world. They (laughter) were experts on

everything, you know. They were the ones who were speaking in the columns. Sven was among them. I never did-- we never did disclose really who was writing that. A lot of people really thought that one of these guys on the bridge was writing that column for many years. It was-- it did get to be pretty popular. It didn't run-- we sold the paper in 1984 -- I won't get into that reason -- and took it back in '88. The reason I sold it was that my partner wanted to retire. We had a great relationship. I owned the majority of the stock in the company. We had a great relationship all of those years. I said-- we had a buy sell agreement. I said, "You know, this is difficult to make sure it's fair." I felt, toward him, as if he was a brother. I really did. He felt that way [00:59:00] toward me too. So I said, "Let's just sell the thing. We know we're treating each other fair." We did. The people that bought it-- just didn't work out for me. They really wrecked it, to tell you the truth. Finally, it ended up the guy came back from California, this [Ed Scripps?], and he said, "I'm going to just completely trash this thing, milk it for all I can get out of it, and then just give it back to you." I said, "Well, Ed, there's a better answer than that." I said, "I never ever made a dime when I was mad. Why don't you just sell it back to me?" So we made a

deal. I-- my partner in the meantime had an illness and
he--

JUNGE: Who was that?

HICKS: His name was Jack Williams. It was like-- I don't
know. It was like a virus that got into his-- he had a
temperature, 105, for several days, 20 some days. Anyway,
it was like he'd had a stroke. He was no longer able to
really function very well. Their retirement depended on
his share of that payoff of that contract. Mary and I, my
wife and I, [01:00:00] talked about it. I said, "You know,
honor that contract." When I bought it back, it was one of
the things I did. I bought that liability too, and we paid
that off. I was so good about it. He would have done the
same thing for me. Anyway, that's where that ended up.

JUNGE: How long did he last?

HICKS: Oh, I think he lasted another 15 years or so probably.

JUNGE: So you paid--

HICKS: Oh, yeah. We paid him off.

JUNGE: Wrote him a check every year?

HICKS: Every--

JUNGE: Or every week for--

HICKS: Yeah, every month, whatever it was. It was fine,
because I had no problem. I knew exactly that if the shoe
had been on the other foot, how it would have worked. It

felt-- but I'm not hero. Don't get that-- it was just something that would have been-- I know what's right.

JUNGE: No, you've got a good heart.

HICKS: Well, he did too. He was that same guy. Anyway, went past that. It took a long time to get the paper-- the paper was really in trouble kind of. It was-- I thought once I'm back here, we're just going to say, "Hooray!" and it was like it was before. It doesn't work that way. Those four years of decline had to-- good four years to bring it back. [01:01:00] Those were tough years too. It was in the '80s. Business was down.

JUNGE: Why was-- was the business down? Was the advertising down? Was the subscription down?

HICKS: The subscriptions had fallen off some. The advertising had declined a great deal. That was about the time there were a lot of business closing. The box stores were getting ready to come in. It just wasn't the same retail community anymore. We went through those years. In '94, my son, my youngest son, had decided to get into the newspaper business. He had bought a newspaper in Newcastle, Wyoming. Also, during that period of time when I wasn't in the newspaper business, I got into newspaper brokerage business. I got in with a guy by the name of John [Crib?] from Montana. We had-- I sold newspapers for

15 or 20 years. Even after I got back into this thing, I did that too.

JUNGE: What's a brokerage?

HICKS: It's kind of like real estate, only the only thing we handled was print and media [01:02:00] businesses. I sold all over the western part of the United States. I sold, I don't know, dozens, over that period of time. It was a matter of going in and learning how to value them properly. It made a lot better businessman out me. (laughter) I had to learn how to read these profit loss statements.

JUNGE: What was the name of the Newcastle paper?

HICKS: It was the *Newcastle News Letter Journal*. I had it on the market and they had hired me to sell it. I was trying to sell it to two different people, and my son had graduated from Vanderbilt in pre-law. He was going to go into law school. He decided he would lie off for a year and he went to work for a company in Atlanta, forwarding company or something like that. He had found out-- he thought he always wanted to live in a big city in the south, until he lived in a big city in the south. (laughter) He said-- he called me one time. He said, "What's going on?" I said, "Well, I got the Newcastle paper for sale." He said, "I might be interested in that." I said, "Well, if you're interested in a newspaper, why don't

you talk about the *Buffalo Bulletin*." [01:03:00] He said, "I didn't say that I wanted to work for you." (laughter) He had worked for me during the summer a few times. He knew better than that. He was much smarter than his old man. Anyway, so he bought that paper. Later, he came up and bought this one. Since then, he got a couple of partners, and they own, I think the last time I counted, over 20 newspapers, all the way from the west coast to--

JUNGE: They have that many newspapers?

HICKS: Yeah, they do.

JUNGE: How do you-- how does he manage it from Buffalo, Wyoming?

HICKS: Well, the marvel of electronics. He knows exactly-- every day, he knows exactly what-- each one of them that he's responsible for, he's [billing?]- I can't believe all of the data that they get. He has to travel quite a little. That's the unfortunate part of it. He might have to be in Washington one day on the west coast. Then, he might have to be in Yankton, South Dakota the next day. He does that a little. He's got a young family.

JUNGE: Does he fly?

HICKS: He doesn't fly an airplane. He flies commercial when he has to go.

JUNGE: You don't care for him to fly?

HICKS: I wouldn't recommend it. It wouldn't-- [01:04:00]
he's a lot better off to fly commercial because of two reasons. He can sit on an airplane and do work. It takes it with him on his computer. I-- he and I were on our way to Jackson last year, and we were driving around, just came out of the Wind River Canyon, and he finally could get a signal for his cell phone. Again, he's over there doing something on his fancy cell phone. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm doing the payroll in [Weezer?], Oregon right now." I go, "What?" He said, "Yeah, I'm just doing the payroll." He's connected to the bank or something. (laughter) He does it. I don't understand all of that technology, but he does.

JUNGE: Does he like living here and working here?

HICKS: Oh, yeah. He wouldn't live any place else. It's a wonderful place to raise a family.

JUNGE: What's the population of this town?

HICKS: We're-- probably, the town itself, is probably about close to 5,000 now. The greater Buffalo area is probably 7,000, something like that. The whole is county is 9,000, I think something like that. It was a [01:05:00] town of 2,100 people when I was a kid.

JUNGE: John McBride told me that-- I know him from the YMCA. I work out with him all of the time.

HICKS: Great guy.

JUNGE: He is. I didn't like him at first, because I'm a Democrat and he was a Republican. He was conservative; I was liberal. We'd hammer each other for a while. Pretty soon, we started talking to each other instead of arguing with each other. (laughter) It finally developed into a-- I guess you would call it a casual friendship, because we don't really socialize. We just meet at the Y and talk, especially about sports, because that's harmless. It's irrelevant to friendships, in a way. Well, it's important to friendships but irrelevant to every else. Anyway, John said, "Make sure you get Jim to tell you about Sagebrush Sven." Give me example of the kind of stuff you covered and how you got the data or information.

HICKS: I mean, Sven. [01:06:00] There's just hundreds-- I figured up one time how many columns I had written since 1960. I've tried to quit that. I've tried to resign numerous times. My son always said, "Just one more year." Some weeks I have a pretty good story, some I don't. Last week was a no brainer. I heard a story and that's all I had to have. It was about a-- some friends of ours that used to live here and they moved away-- they're close to our age, a little younger, maybe eight or 10 years younger, but anyway, she had developed a bad kind of leukemia. They

lived in Florida and she's been in treatment for that for about a year. She's in Anderson, in Texas, in Houston,

JUNGE: Anderson Clinic?

HICKS: Mm-hmm. Anyway, they found out, the clinic, maybe she had-- they had done the bone marrow transplant and they looked like-- then they'd see a spot on her brain and they were pretty concerned. She was undergoing brain surgery. Their [01:07:00] first grandchild to graduate from high school was graduating from [Cody?] High School. She had really looked forward to being there for that girl graduating. She's an outstanding young lady. She couldn't do it of course because of her health things. This was going to be the day after she had her brain surgery. It was kind of a dismal time. They got it rigged up so that they could watch the graduation over the Internet with a TV thing, a big computer screen--

JUNGE: Like FaceTime or something?

HICKS: Yeah, in some way, it was about that. In Houston-- the TV stations in Houston got this. It was a great graduation story. They could kind of-- something off-beat, so they could do it. They had made arrangements with the hospital to come in and film. They also did something that neither Doug nor Sharon Thompson -- that's who they are, their names -- knew. That granddaughter had decided that

she was going to be there with her grandmother. She didn't tell anybody but her folks. She didn't tell anybody else. She made all of the arrangements herself. She had flown back-- anyway, they're [01:08:00] watching the graduation and they go through all of the little corny speeches and stuff. They finally get to the part where each name is called and they walk across the stage and they get their diploma. Her, being T, Thompson, she's towards the end. They called her name and there's a rhythm to it. The rhythm is broken. She didn't come across the stage so they call her name again. I almost cried when I heard this because it moved me so much. Just then, the door of her hospital room swung open and in walks Taylor with her gown and her cap and her diploma. She went over and hugged her grandma. Isn't that a beautiful story? That's the kind of thing-- when I can get that in the column-- man, that's great. I was able to write it the way it happened with the tempo you tell that story. I've had people say that they were moved by it. Sometimes, it's something that's funny. There are crazy things like the guy out north of town, his brother wanted him-- [01:09:00] he had a steer that they couldn't do anything with. He said, "You got to help me in the morning. We're going to shoot this thing and butcher it." They go up at daylight and they saw it and there was

ridge right behind the place. They shot it. They didn't realize it was on the other side of the fence. They shot their neighbor's bull. (laughter) Those kind of little bright stories, there's a million of them.

JUNGE: Where do you get this stuff?

HICKS: Well, you just hear about it, you know.

JUNGE: I mean, how do circulate to get this stuff?

HICKS: Not as well as I used to. I don't get around as much as I used to. I keep my-- you-- it's like being a reporter. You never get over it. I cannot go to a kind of [commission?] meeting without seeing four or five stories, you know. It's none of business, but once in a while, I'll tell the gal that reports on the county -- very skilled, she really does a good job. She's a good writer -- once in a while, I'll say-- I'll write her an e-mail that says, "Here's three stories that I would work on if I were in your shoes." (laughter) The world is full of news, there's no doubt about it. You just [01:10:00] get in the habit of-- if you've ever that, you can't get out of it. I go to the commission meetings, and I found out that I was-- the first month or two, I would go as a commissioner. I would sit there with a legal pad, writing notes like I was going to write a story about the meeting. I could not stop myself. Finally, I got cured of that. I quit doing that.

I thought, "What am I going to do with all of these notes?"
We're recording the meetings for crying out loud.

(laughter) Old habits are hard to break.

JUNGE: Aren't they, though? You're a natural born story
teller.

HICKS: Thank you. There are others that I'd love to tell
you, but I probably shouldn't. (laughter)

JUNGE: No, what we'll do is, we'll do another tape on those.
We'll just-- it'll be-- we'll have this thing in the place
where you have to sign for it. (laughter)

HICKS: There are things that went on in the community. It's
like any other community. There are some things that went
on here that {01:11:00} you couldn't tell. You know, I
didn't-- I don't think I was ever an alcoholic, but I sure
as hell didn't pass up very many drinks when I was younger.
Sometimes that got me in trouble.

JUNGE: You know, there's various levels of-- what do you call
it? Not honesty, but frankness. I mean, there are some
things you can tell in a paper and make it funny and
likeable by most people, and there are some things that are
maybe on the verge of being critical of somebody, right?
Other things, you just simply can't tell.

HICKS: I will say this. I think it's 60 years that I've
written that column, or more. I don't think there's been

over maybe two or three times when I actually had to say that I did something that was not in good taste. It was certainly by accident. I maybe had a racial [overture?] or tone to it or something like that. I didn't--

JUNGE: It just slipped out, you mean?

HICKS: Yeah, I mean, it's just things that, [01:12:00] when I read it later, I went like, "Oh, that [wasn't?] right." I've had people criticize me. It hasn't been over-- you can count them on one hand. I'm not bragging, but I'm just saying that I've been very lucky. You know, being in the community long enough, you know who can laugh at themselves and who can't. There were lots of wonderful stories, but they were about people who didn't have the ability for self depreciating humor, or ability to laugh at themselves. You knew better than to pick on them. You didn't want to ever pick on anybody. It wasn't worth it.

JUNGE: Did anybody ever edit your stuff?

HICKS: My wife -- I'm a terrible speller -- she's a great proof reader. She would get most of the errors out. If it was left to me and Microsoft spell check, (laughter) we'd be in a lot of trouble.

JUNGE: I write-- I'm going to take a bicycle trip this summer. We're going to from-- I'm going to from Anchorage to White Horse. These trips I've taken around the country

on my bike, using oxygen, are for personal pleasure, but also on [01:13:00] behalf of people who have COPD like me.

HICKS: Good for you.

JUNGE: I write a weekly article, journal article, to the newspaper, and [Reid Eckert?] down there publishes on a Monday, which is the slowest day. In fact, it's almost not worth going out on Monday morning to get your paper because it's paper thin. (laughter) There's nothing in it. Anyway, that's when people read. I have a lot of people say, "I really enjoy those articles." There were some times, because of my fatigue from bicycling, I would get a little bit crusty I guess you'd say, little bit critical, a little bit ornery. I whined. My wife would read it and she'd say, "Mark, you can't say this." She edited my stuff, but not because I couldn't spell. I could spell. I could spell-- I'm a good speller. I can construct a sentence, a grammatically correct sentence. Content wise, she'd say, "Look, you sound like you're complaining. People are going to be asking you why you are [01:14:00] doing this in the first place if you have to suffer." (laughter)

HICKS: Well, I admire you if you're doing that sort of thing, particularly if you suffer with COPD. That's not funny. What percentage of function do you have?

JUNGE: Probably less than 50%.

HICKS: Really? That's really amazing then.

JUNGE: Well, I think exercise helps. On this trip, I'm interviewing people.

HICKS: You look like you're in good shape.

JUNGE: Thanks, Jim. Thanks. What time do you have to get out of here?

HICKS: What time is it? You know, I left my watch.

JUNGE: Three thirty-eight.

HICKS: Yeah, I need to go.

JUNGE: OK, so can we can sit down and talk some more sometime?

HICKS: Oh, sure. I'd be happy to. You know, nobody likes to show off more than I do. (laughter)

JUNGE: I don't think you show off.

HICKS: I guess, I feel-- I've been deviled for years about writing a column about-- I mean a little book about Sven. I've started that project half a dozen times. You know, Bill [Smithon?] -- I don't know if you know Bill -- really encouraged me. He said, "Here's how you do it, Jim. It's not much work." I start to do it and [01:15:00] I have a tendency-- I'll write 20 or 30 pages, I'll look at it, and say this is not good enough. (laughter)

JUNGE: You know what, don't. I think you should go beyond that, beyond Sagebrush Sven. I have to say, I just read a couple of them. I only had time to read a couple of them. I appreciate them. McBride, John McBride, says people love it. They love it, that's what he told me.

HICKS: Well, there's been a period of time where I got so busy that I was writing a little bit of local news and then I'd [steal when we're off the Internet?], maybe modify it to fit. There isn't a joke that hasn't been told in one form or another. I mean, there are very few new ones--

JUNGE: Variations of--

HICKS: Yeah, they're just variations; same themes. I heard that this way. I guess in messing with it all my life, I can recognize it. Sometimes I'll get the first three lines of a new story. I'll go, "I know where it's going."
(laughter)

JUNGE: Here's my [01:16:00] suggestion: you could go beyond that and really make a contribution. I'm not saying it wouldn't be fun reading. I think it would be fun reading. That's what I think Bill is talking about. I think knowing about linotype process, how the newspaper process has changed, the stories you've covered, and things that have happened, you'd make a fantastic book.

HICKS: I think about some of the people who worked for us who (crushed?) the old printers. It got to be towards the end of the linotype era. There's nobody learning that. Why would you learn a skill that's going to be dead? The only ones that were left around were old guys that were Section 8s, I called them. That's what you were when you got discharged to the Army for insanity. They were either Section 8s or alcoholics. We went through those-- we had a hell of time finding enough people who could run a linotype towards the end.

JUNGE: Did you remember anybody in particular that was kind of--

HICKS: One guy worked for us for a long time. It a fellow by the name of [Jerry Browning?] and Jerry was [01:17:00] a good guy, a really good guy, but he had a terrible alcohol problem. Jerry would usually show up for work. He was a [solid?] mess. The drinking took its toll. He got diabetes and then they cut off his foot off. He went a little longer and they cut it off below the knee. He kept on drinking and soon it was above the knee. He got to where he couldn't do much. He had worked for us for a long-- Jack and I kept him on the payroll, and he would sit on a stool downstairs. By then, we had switched away from the linotypes, but he knew a lot about how layout and

design should be, so he'd sit on a stool down there, and he'd tell-- we had these, mostly women who worked for us. He would tell them how the hell it was supposed to look. He would tell them-- that was his job. There's one really quick story that I'll tell you about Jerry. He came-- he was down there, and a guy came in the office one day and he was all dressed up. He had a fancy suit and his hair all slicked back and everything. He walked in there and it was pretty unusual in our community for somebody to show up like that. He flipped open [01:18:00] his bill folds and he was an IRS investigator, Internal Revenue Service. He announced that's who he was. He said, "Do you have an employee by the name of Jerry Browning?" He used his full name. I said, "Yeah." He said, "I need to talk to him. Is he here?" I said, "Yeah, he's downstairs." He said, "Well, can I talk to him now?" I said, "Yeah." Well, I thought, I'm not just going to let him go there. I'm going to along with him to make sure that something doesn't happen here that shouldn't happen. I went down there with him. He said to Jerry, "You have not filed a return for three years. Do you know that's illegal?" Jerry looked at him and said, "Yeah." I guess I spoke up and said, "The withholding comes out of his check. He's probably not getting money that should be coming back to him." The guy

went on and got a little more harsh with Jerry. Jerry finally looked at him -- this is the honest to God truth -- he said, "You stupid son of a bitch. What are you going to do with a one-legged old man, put him in jail? Get your ass out of here." You know, that guy turned and walked out. I never saw him again. (laughter) [01:19:00] I died laughing. I thought, "Oh, Jerry. Bless your heart. You did what everybody else wants to do."

JUNGE: Was there-- is there one character that, like the town drunk-- you know, I think that these characters were like whipping posts but they're also a source of wonderful information for writers.

HICKS: No, I never did pick on the town drunk. I always claimed that was my job. (laughter)

JUNGE: Was there one guy that was like, with coveralls and kind of a jovial guy that just told--

HICKS: I'll tell you. There's some of these (vast?) ranchers were great-- they had-- some of them had the most awesome sense of humor. Of course, I've always felt that somebody should-- I don't think I have the skills-- be able to write what I call a Western humor. It's different than any place else. It's self depreciating to a great extent. It's so dry sometimes that you had to really think about what they said in order to realize how funny it was. I wish I could

replicate it, but to be around those guys who [01:20:00] could do that-- they would stick a barb in you and you didn't know it was in there until the next day about 3:00 in the afternoon. It was like, "God, I've been had."
(laughter) It was a skill.

JUNGE: I'm starting to get mad. I think-- you know, I remember what that guy said. I have to tell you a story about [Clyde Ice?]. Did you know him?

HICKS: I knew who he was. I didn't know him.

JUNGE: I interviewed him about 25 years ago, believe it or not. He was 102. I've told this story on tape so many times that the transcriber here somewhere down the road, if anybody ever listens to this, they're going to say, "Oh my God, here we go again." Clyde, I asked him how he got into flying, or why. He said he was herding cattle. He was on a hillside, lying down under a tree watching, looking at the clouds, and he said, "I just [hooked those cows and the clouds?] and I wonder what it would be like to fly, if I could fly one of those cows." I'm going, "That's funny?" It is funny. It is funny. I said, "Clyde, how did you-- [01:21:00] what was your first flight? How did you learn how to fly?" He said, "Well, there was a barnstormer that came to town." This guy flew within about a decade of the Wright brothers' first flight. He was flying in the teens.

HICKS: I think Jack Meldrum knew him.

JUNGE: Did he? He said, "There was this barnstormer came to town and he needed some help, so I went to work for him." He said there was a line of people out there one day. He said, "This guy was a coffee hound. He liked to go into town and have his coffee." The people wanted their rides. This one guy was insistent. He was going. Clyde says, "OK. Get in the plane." He knew enough about it, I guess, to take them down to the end of the runway and then back. He did this a couple of times. This guy was getting irate. He says, "I paid for a ride, an airplane ride." Clyde goes-- he pulled back on the throttle, he went over the fence, 10 miles past where he was, and he circled the town and came back. I don't know why he didn't land where he took off. [01:22:00] I said, "How did you land?" He said, "I looked down there and there was a stubble field down there. I could figure I could land there as well as anywhere else." He said he just got down low enough, level enough with the ground, going over the stubble, and turned the key off. (laughter) He said years later, that guy came up said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "Sure, I remember you." He said, "You gave me my first airplane ride." Clyde said, "I didn't have the heart to tell him that it was my first airplane right too." (laughter)

HICKS: That's right. I don't know how Meldrum learned how to fly. Maybe he taught himself. I'll tell you what; he was skilled pilot in mountains and stuff. He was also-- stories are legend-- if you get a chance to get that book, read it. It's filled with stories about him.

JUNGE: What's the name of the book?

HICKS: It's called *The Caricature*. You can get it at the museum over here. [01:23:00] You could probably even rent it here. (laughter) Louise

JUNGE: Who--

HICKS: Louise Meldrum is his daughter.

JUNGE: Is she the one who wrote it?

HICKS: Some of it-- I wrote a couple of things for her. There are stories in that. I wrote about him that she didn't use because it was a little to rank for her.

JUNGE: I remember going through T.A. Larson-- T.A. Larson had a graduate student going through Francis [E. Warren's?] letter books. You know what letter press was? I don't know how they made the copy exactly, but he had a secretary who made copies of all these letters. We were going through looking through for a particular topic. I kept coming across Meldrum. Meldrum. Meldrum. Was that-- was he-- didn't he say Judge Meldrum?

HICKS: That would probably have been his uncle. There was a Judge Meldrum. He may been the one that was the territorial governor. It's in the book. It's tells all of the relationships in that book. Listen, I got to go.

JUNGE: Jim, thank you so much.

HICKS: You bet.

JUNGE: Don't go --

HICKS: Whoa, oh my gosh.

JUNGE: -- with the microphone, you'll pull everything with you. (laughter)

HICKS: I would.

JUNGE: I'll talk to you again someday, maybe?

HICKS: Sure. You bet. I enjoyed it. I love telling these stories. You have a safe trip.

JUNGE: Thank you.

HICKS: Good luck.

END OF AUDIO FILE

JUNGE: Oh. (laughs) All right, Jim, I didn't want to turn it off. Yeah, I'm a little surprised too, because when I read the papers and I read the articles about this whole affair, I thought this was kind of fun.

HICKS: It was.

JUNGE: And he was invited back [for a little?] Ferguson days, and I thought, you know, he probably doesn't mind talking about this at all. But his friends said that he's sort of withdrawn from their friendship lately a little bit and they haven't seen him at coffee or meetings for a while. And maybe he's sick; maybe he just didn't want to talk about it. So I gave up after making I don't know how many phone calls to the people also that you suggested, which I appreciate.

HICKS: Yeah, you bet. Well, I think that's as good -- as close a connection as you're ever going to get to him. And something's changed, because he was pretty cooperative after it happened. I know it was a tough time for him, but I think he also realized maybe that the interest the community showed, you know, maybe with tongue in cheek and a little humor, but -- may have made his position with Western Airlines a little bit better than it might have been otherwise.

JUNGE: Yeah, that's what I was thinking. Yeah.

HICKS: I don't know exactly whether they would have fired him, but I think there was a good possibility. And the way that whole thing evolved was kind of humorous. I mean --

JUNGE: Wait a second, let me make sure you're on.

END OF AUDIO FILE