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Interview with  
Cecil E. Shuford  
November 8, 1974

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Interviewer: William Rainbolt  
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Oral History Collection

Cecil E. Shuford

Interviewer: Bill Rainbolt

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Mr. Rainbolt: This is Bill Rainbolt interviewing Mr. Cecil E. Shuford for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 8, 1974, in Denton, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Shuford to get his recollections about the Journalism Department of North Texas State, about the university itself, and about his own writing activities.

Why don't we start by you giving us just a short biographical sketch of yourself--where you are from, your education, when you came to North Texas, and so forth.

Mr. Shuford: Well, I was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1907, February 21. Most of my grade school schooling was there, and I went to high school there. I graduated from high school in 1924 and from the University of Arkansas in 1928. I worked on the old Fayetteville Democrat the last, oh, about a year and a half while I was still in school, as a reporter, a general assignments reporter. I suppose I had about eighteen months experience, working very much the way you worked on the Record-Chronicle.

There was not a journalism major at the university at that time, but I took all the journalism I could. I was an English major. During my senior year, I looked on the bulletin board and saw one of these posters for graduate scholarships and fellowships at Northwestern University. So I applied and got it and went to Northwestern, got my master's in nine months, and graduated in the summer of 1929.

While there Baker Brownell of the journalism faculty, who was professor of contemporary thought, took an interest in me. Through him, I got a sort of a scholarship to the MacDowell Colony, Peterboro, New Hampshire. That's named for the late Edward MacDowell, and Mrs. MacDowell, his widow, was still alive.

I went there in the summer of 1929 and again in the summer of '30. I met a number of fairly well-known people--Thornton Wilder, Edwin Arlington Robinson, who went there every summer, and a lot of other writers, musicians, artists, and sculptors who were there.

I worked at what was then the Alabama Polytechnic Institute at Auburn, Alabama, the year of 1929-30. I

went back to the colony that summer and had some questions about my health, so the colony sent me out to Arizona the next winter. I worked, trying to write, then, and by that time the Depression was in full swing. I spent a year and a winter in Washington, D. C., came back to Fayetteville, my hometown, in the middle of the Depression when there were no jobs (chuckle), as you know, during the Great Bust.

All this bad luck, in a way, was one of the best things that ever happened to me because for two or three years I had a chance to try to write. I was at the home of my parents. I made a garden. I wrote . . . while I was at the colony, I had heard Dan Reed, who was an actor and a playwright. As a matter of fact, he had two plays on Broadway the following winter. I heard him read Spoon River Anthology, as dramatic monologues, one night, and it made a great impression on me. So when I was back home in the middle of the Depression, I was trying to do a little freelancing, doing some newspaper features, which I was able to sell.

I ran across a lot of local history about outlaws and became interested in outlaws and realized for the first time how very close I was to the heart of the old outlaw country . . . Fort Smith was where Judge Parker, the hanging

judge, ruled, a federal judge, and he had jurisdiction over the old Oklahoma Territory and all the outlaws who hung out there. There was a book written by a Fort Smith newspaperman called, I believe, The Hanging Judge . . . anyway, the subtitle was He Hanged Eighty-Eight Men. I don't think that's quite historically right, but it's pretty close to the truth.

I read that and then started reading biographies of outlaws. I found that some of the James and Youngers had been involved in a small battle near the area with the Confederates. You know, they were with the Confederate troops.

I also knew . . . I also had a personal link with the territory. My mother ran off to get married in the Oklahoma Territory because she couldn't get her father's consent, so she and my father eloped and went over and were married in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. I was very fascinated by all of this. They came back and my father worked at an Indian trading post just inside Oklahoma. That was my father's first job after they were married.

Anyway, I wrote about fifty outlaw poems furiously in the style of Spoon River in about two weeks, I suppose as furious a regurgitation as I've ever had in writing. I

put this in book form and through a friend got an agent in New York who circulated it. Imagine circulating a book of poetry in the middle of the Depression (laughter)! They went all around . . . I got interesting letters. Scribner's turned down the book but asked to print, I believe, nine of the poems and asked me to write a prose introduction. This was my first national publication. Those appeared in November, 1933, under the group title "Flowering Noose," which was the introduction, and a little line drawing. I got \$100 in the middle of the Depression, and this was quite a bit of money for me then and, also, no greater fame could I (laughter) afford at the moment.

I went on and wrote . . . I got a job reading papers, to fill out my little income, for a university professor in the English Department at the University of Arkansas--McCleary, Oscar McCleary. He had a bad case of asthma, and in the middle of that spring . . . I think it was in the spring of 1933, he had a nervous breakdown, and Dean Jones had me take over his English classes, and then Jones let me stay on as part-time instructor. So for two years, the next two years, I taught English classes there.

Rainbolt: I understand you had quite an experience with the freshman class of football players.

Shuford: Yes. I had three sections of freshman English one year. I had practically the whole freshman football team in there, and, as I probably told Bowman, I had all the guards and tackles in the low section and the backfield in the middle section and none in the high section (laughter). I had some bright New York Jews in the high section. That's the way I learned to teach, I think. I think if you can handle them, why, you can handle . . . I got hoarse some days yelling at them about their English. I would stand over them . . . I remember yelling in the ear of . . . I had a guard and a tackle, and I got the guard through, but the tackle was too dumb to make it (laughter).

Well, anyway, then I wrote an article about what happened to my college generation in the Depression and submitted it to Scribner's the last year there, the last spring, I guess, I was teaching. I knew, and Dean Jones knew, that either I had to go on and do advanced work in English, because I was not teaching in my field, really, or else get back into journalism. So I got a job at Trinity University for the magnificent salary of \$150 a month for nine months.

Rainbolt: Now this was the Trinity in Waxahachie, right?



Shuford: This was the Trinity in Waxahachie. They were paying checks in good, cash money, and some little church schools were not (chuckle). They were paying . . . they were feeding their teachers and getting \_\_\_\_\_.

That summer, also . . . no, well, I went down to Trinity, and sometime that summer or early fall I got a letter from Scribner's saying they wanted me to make some slight revisions in my article if it was all right with me, and if I would agree to those slight revisions, they would print the article.

So . . . now wait a minute, I'm skipping something. Back up. They did print the article, and it appeared . . . is it August, 1937, when that came out?

Rainbolt: I believe that's when . . .

Shuford: Yes, the following August because I revised the thing the winter I went to Trinity, which was '36-'37.

But I've over . . . jumped an acceptance. Scribner's had accepted a long political poem of mine, "Now, Because in November." It was a sympathetic satire of politics, and it came out in November, 1936, just the month of the election. Roosevelt was running. By this time Scribner's was on slick paper, and colored, and so I had FDR wrapped up in the flag and colored drawings through the poem. This was wonderful. I got \$100 for that poem.

Well, that brings me up to the winter before I came to North Texas. While I was at Trinity, I taught . . . oh, how many classes? It seemed to be three classes English and one class . . . or three classes of journalism and one class of English and sponsored the school paper and did the school publicity. I know it was . . . I'm afraid I'm not accurate on that, but it was quite a job because Dr. Wear, the new president, was formally inaugurated that year, and they wanted lots of publicity. I had to deliver, and did pretty well . . . got a lot of publicity, particularly in the Dallas papers.

I met a man, Mitchell Wells, professor of English there, and became good friends with him. He came to North Texas before the year was out. Up here, they were looking for a publicity man, and he said a good word for me. Dr. McConnell, in the summer of '37, when I thought I was going back to Trinity, got in touch with me and wanted to know if I was interested in coming to North Texas. I had already, of course, signed a contract with Trinity. I had gotten married late in June. Catherine and I had gone to New Orleans for a honeymoon, and back in the Ozarks. I didn't have a summer job . . . we spent all our savings, practically.

We came to North Texas. Dr. and Mrs. McConnell had us over to their home for breakfast. I was nervous, and it was hot. I thought I'd never felt such heat because I wasn't used to Texas heat. He offered me a job. We went out . . . they had the Browns and the Rideouts on the track team. Do you know who they were?

Rainbolt: This was Elmer and Delmer Brown?

Shuford: Elmer and Delmer and Wayne and Blaine Rideout--the most famous runners in Texas for years, I suppose. He just casually said, "Do you think you could get their names in the paper?" Well, (laughter) I knew that wasn't going to be any problem (laughter). We got their names in the papers a lot.

So I had to call . . . and Dr. Wear said he wouldn't release me, and I thought that was that. The next morning, he called me back and said, well, he didn't want to stand in my way. This was an opportunity.

I came here that fall and set up my publicity office in or at one desk in the basement of the old Manual Arts Building. Down there we had an office for the School of Business, two business classrooms, a men's restroom, the Print Shop, the Chat. The Print Shop occupied at least a third of the space. They offered me a desk in the Daily . . . it was the Chat then, the Campus Chat, and

it was not a daily, it was a weekly, of course. I didn't think I wanted the desk in with students . . . I didn't think I would get much publicity done, so they moved me across the hall and gave me a desk in a room where J. D. Hall had a big paper cutter, and I wrote publicity with that paper cutter thumping down (chuckle). Now what else? That brings me up to North Texas.

Rainbolt: Dr. McConnell . . . did he have any other ideas about the Journalism Department at this time?

Shuford: Dr. McConnell was a fine, fine man. He was a gentleman. For a college administrator, he was a gentleman (chuckle). He never . . . if he had any suggestions, they were always made indirectly and politely.

No, he had no idea of a journalism department, I'm sure, at this time. I was hired primarily as a publicity man. That's all they were interested in at the moment. That was as far as they were seeking. Like most administrations or administrators, they pile job on job on a man, and they had J. D. Hall running the Print Shop, sponsoring both publications, printing the Yucca . . . he printed the Yucca right there in his shop. He did the first . . . I think the Yucca was the first college

annual in Texas to use color. And in his spare time he would track down a little newspaper publicity.

They had had some journalism taught off and on by various people, I think some newspaper people downtown, a class or so, but that's about what it amounted to. I don't know too much about what had happened before I came.

No, my job was to get the name of North Texas into newspapers of the state, and particularly in the Dallas News. So it's rather a bit of nice irony that when I retired I was the cover boy (laughter) for the Dallas News' Sunday magazine (laughter).

Rainbolt: I wonder if they knew there was a connection there?

Shuford: No, I'm sure they didn't (chuckle). Of course, I had two journalism classes, and the first fall, I taught two journalism classes, an English class, did the publicity, sponsored the Chat.

Rainbolt: What were your feelings about journalism at this time?

Shuford: Well, do you mean the department in the future?

Rainbolt: Yes, and the field itself in the university.

Shuford: Well, I knew I wanted to make it grow. I didn't know how fast you could make it grow. But I started increasing the offerings . . . I can't give you specifics. You would have to go back to the catalogues and look them

up to really find out. I was publicity chairman for five years, up until, let's see, '37 to '42, when the war broke out. During that time, I think we got the offerings up to twenty-four hours in journalism, and I think they were probably just teaching six hours when I came, though they might have offered more previously. I'm not sure about that.

Rainbolt: I believe when you came there were just two basic introductory courses, and when you went into the service there were eight.

Shuford: Yes, I think that's right. So that's getting up close, you see . . . thirty hours is enough for a major in any field, and that was pretty much standard, though it may have been less, and, of course, it's been more in other departments.

Rainbolt: And Dr. McConnell went right along with this . . .

Shuford: Oh, yes, I had no problem there. I put in a course . . . we had a man come here on a sweet potato project. He was going to keep Texas wealthy by making sweet potato flour. He brought his own publicity man with him for his project, sort of called "chemurgy," but they had to give him something to do besides advertise for Gilbert Wilson, so we gave him a class of agricultural

journalism to teach. We had a course in agricultural journalism on that. Otherwise, it was the standard courses. I put in, I believe, four. I believe I had my creative writing, feature writing, copyreading, headline writing. I don't remember what else . . . and agricultural journalism . . . oh, and he taught . . . I believe he taught a course in advertising. I hope I'm remembering this . . . I know he taught a course in advertising because he had some advertising background. I think those were probably the two courses that he taught. If I'm wrong on the agricultural journalism . . . I may be wrong.

Rainbolt: What was the paper like in this time?

Shuford: The paper had always been a good paper by the standards of that time. It had been a constant winner in the . . . North Texas was then a member of the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association. That was the teachers colleges and smaller colleges. It was a good paper for the standards and won prizes. It was North Texas State Teachers College then, of course. It dominated TIPA just the way North Texas tended to dominate the conference . . . let's see, what was it?

Rainbolt: The Southwest?

Shuford: No, no, it was . . . I'm not sure. Boy, I need Jim Rogers' history to check my memory. I remember the Lone Star Conference, and whether that came . . . at any rate, North Texas and East Texas were the two big football powers, for example.

Rainbolt: Was this something like the Gulf Coast?

Shuford: No, no, it was before the Gulf Coast. Maybe the Lone Star.

But the makeup was vertical, of course, in those days, not many big headlines. It ran up and down. We began to experiment with more modern makeup and did a lot in those five years. We entered Associated Collegiate Press competition and began to win awards. By the time . . . well, I think the first Pacemaker we won came just while I was in the service, right after . . . I don't know if it was the first year after I left or not.

The paper was changed radically, and I like to think that what I did helped bring that change about. We had good student editors. The paper, of course, didn't have the freedom it has now in reporting, but the reporting improved, writing improved, makeup improved. We cleaned up the page and made it more horizontal. It probably looked old-fashioned by today's standards now, but the whole thing was changed.



Rainbolt: Did you use a lot of photography?

Shuford: Yes, more photography. I used lots of photography in publicity. I had no photographer, no staff photographer, but there was a fine professional photographer who freelanced and who was available to me. In fact, we got a lot of publicity in the Sunday rotogravure sections, whole pages about North Texas. We used beauty queens and bathing beauties, everything.

Rainbolt: In what way didn't the paper have the freedom that it has now?

Shuford: Well, you weren't free . . . for instance, the Daily reporters now can attend board meetings, as you know. Of course, that didn't come until a few years ago, actually, until the open meetings law, you see. The paper was not free to criticize administrative policy. At least, if it did it had to do so very tactfully. When I came here, the chairman of the Publications Board was W. N. Masters, the head of the Chemistry Department, and he ran publications with a pretty iron hand. He always appointed a chemistry major as business manager of publications--that was a plum, a political plum, you see (chuckle). Dean Clark, who was a fine old lady, was Dean of Women, and through her influence, the Chat couldn't even have national cigarette advertising. Of

course, that was probably a good thing--she kept down cancer among the coeds (laughter)--but still, we didn't have the say . . . we wanted national advertising, and we couldn't run it.

Rainbolt: What kind of student input was there into the paper?

Shuford: There were student columnists but . . . I've sort of forgotten. I don't know whether we had a letters to the editor column or not. I rather doubt it.

Rainbolt: I remember that you started the letters to the editor after you came back and after the department was formed . . .

Shuford: I think so, yes.

Rainbolt: . . . and after the paper became a semiweekly and so forth. Well, then you went into the service.

Shuford: Yes, I went into the service in the summer of '42. I was an Air Force preflight instructor most of the time, an aircraft identification officer. I trained at Miami Beach.

Incidentally, I saw Thornton Wilder there. Yes, that was a funny thing. I was in the Class of 42-G, and I'm proud to say that my platoon . . . we won the drill contest, too, by the way. This has nothing to do with the history of North Texas (laughter). But I was in what was called OTS--I went to Miami Beach--that's Officer's

Training School, and OCS was Officers Candidate School. They were adjacent. OTS were people directly commissioned for certain specific jobs. A major came here and recruited us from the faculty, a number of us, and we went down there. We knew we were going to teach probably, unless we shifted jobs. Well, we thought we could teach, and after we got into the service, we found we could because we heard some of the worst teaching I've ever heard from people who weren't professional teachers in some of the classes. But Officers Candidate School were men from . . . noncommissioned people who were up for commissions. I didn't see him, but one of my friends in my outfit said he saw Clark Gable come-- he was in OCS--dragging off the drill field one afternoon. Near the end of the period of training, they sent some of us over to take over and drill some new commissioned recruits. I had a platoon. I called it to attention and then fell in at the rear of the platoon, and I thought, "That looks like Thornton Wilder." And sure enough, it was.

Rainbolt: In your platoon?

Shuford: No, it wasn't mine. I mean, that was just for the afternoon. But I did see him later and talked to him. He was there evidently for intelligence, to be an intelligence officer. I don't know whatever happened to him.

Well, before I got out, Dude McCloud had become . . . when I left, Virginia Paty, who is now Virginia Paty Ellison, was my secretary. Before I got through my five years, I had a fulltime secretary instead of just a student secretary. \_\_\_\_\_, she graduated. She took over my job. There weren't many people left but women and 4-F's on the campus before the war was over. It was not like Vietnam. It was really a major outfit. She left to go to Columbia . . . she got a scholarship and went to Columbia and got her master's at Columbia. I don't know how she did it because nobody had ever heard of North Texas at Columbia before, and they would laugh when she said she was from North Texas. She won two grants while she was there, and one of them . . . she worked for the Baltimore Sun after graduating, and on a scholarship and a joint operation she went overseas and did some reporting for them.

Well, then they had another girl, and then Dude McCloud came in. There was a story about her in the Record-Chronicle the other day. She'd been a high school teacher. She got an award and it was on the front page.

Well, she worked out a deal with Dean B. B. Harris to set up a journalism major. He wrote me, and

all they had to do was to add, by this time, I think, one course or so. Anyway, with the history of journalism, they had thirty hours of journalism.

Oh, incidentally, it was some of Paty's editors who won the first Pacemaker for the Chat back there during the war years.

So when I came back, we announced . . . in September of '45 we announced the journalism major. Dude stayed as publicity director. She had her office in an old barracks, a surplus barracks, that had been built east of the Manual Arts Building, upstairs, and there were classrooms in that building. Bob Stanley worked for her in the news service and was one of her student editors, I think. Maybe he was still editor under me. I sat up in the office . . . I now had a real office in the basement of the Manual Arts Building.

Rainbolt: Away from the paper cutter?

Shuford: Yes, I got away from the paper cutter. I had actually a room. Well, things were so crowded . . . veterans were coming back, the enrollment was going up, inflation was beginning . . . that I taught some of my classes in my office, some of my small classes. Somebody reminded me . . . I'd sit up in the window and teach my class. Our first journalism major graduated, I think, the following

August. She was a converted English major. Things boomed from then on. I mean, enrollments started going up, prices went up. It was quite a time. Veterans were coming back . . .

Rainbolt: What about during the war? What kind of contact did you have with the school?

Shuford: I had practically no contact. I came back to the campus once, just for a visit, when I had a little leave. I was in uniform, and Dr. McConnell had me . . . something was going on over at Marquis Hall, and I was over there in uniform. But that was the only chance I had. Of course, I'd kept in correspondence with Paty to see how things were going and so on.

Rainbolt: Did you have any input into forming the department?

Shuford: No, no, I was pretty busy in the service. I just okayed what they . . . really, I didn't know they were thinking about it until the summer before I came back. In fact, I didn't even think I was going to get out of the service that soon.

Again, this is personal, but it's sort of interesting. Well, on the night of May 11th, Tom was born just shortly before midnight. You probably don't know how you got out of the service then. You had to have what they

called fifty points to be eligible . . . up for discharge first. That counted your service, prior service, the number of children you had, and other factors like that. Well, Tom's birth, about twenty or thirty minutes before the deadline, gave me fifteen more points, and made me eligible for a discharge (laughter. That was all I needed! If he'd been born an hour later, I wouldn't have been out for another six months (laughter). In fact, Bob Marquis stayed in and went over to England as a historical officer. He didn't get out till some time the next winter, I think.

Rainbolt: Dr. Marquis, is that who it is?

Shuford: Yes. That was quite a time. We got the Journalism Building by a freak thing. The Journalism Building doesn't look like much these days, but when it was built everybody thought it was something. It was completed, if I remember correctly, in the spring of '48. I don't remember exactly when construction was started, but in the year or so before then, all building money was tied by some sort of legal complication through a suit that had been filed by Texas Tech. I don't know the details. The only buildings they could construct, as I remember, were buildings

like dormitories which were revenue producing, no classroom buildings or anything. So I had a little . . . somewhere in my mind I had a bright idea. I went to the college business manager down here and said, "How'd you like to build another building?" He looked up, you know, "Are you crazy?" And I said, "Look, if you build a journalism building and put the Print Shop in it, the Print Shop produces revenue." That's all I said, but he took off from there, and we got the Journalism Building.

Rainbolt: Is that right?

Shuford: That's right. He worked it.

Rainbolt: And that was a \$200,000 building at that time.

Shuford: Yes, at that time, and it was really, except for the University of Texas, the best journalism building in the state. I mean, they didn't have journalism buildings at that time (laughter). So we moved over and started to grow.

Now, thank goodness, they're going to burst out of that, and if all goes well, we'll go into a new classroom building which, again, with luck may begin in two years. That's to be where the Manual Arts Building . . . is it being torn down?

Rainbolt: Yes, I believe it's torn down.



Shuford: It's already torn down. I forgot to look across the street.

Rainbolt: The cornerstone is all that's left.

Shuford: Well, that's history.

Rainbolt: Well, you say the program got started in a boom in the early years, '47 and '48 and so forth. What was the response on campus to the Journalism Department?

Shuford: I don't know. We were so busy growing. Of course, I suppose . . . well, I know that in general the administration was pleased with the growth and the recognition that it brought the University. Publications, of course, won award after award and there, of course, are always people who are jealous of a department that gets too much publicity or they think gets too much publicity or too much attention. Not that we got very much money (chuckle). It seemed to me we always operated on a shoestring. But we got enough. We added faculty as we needed it. I don't remember . . . in other words, there was never any real administrative opposition to the Journalism Department. We had no great crises. We just . . . we were part of an operation that advertised the University, and I think they recognized this.

Of course, if you go into student publications we had problems because with the returning veterans we had

a new type of student. They had ideas. They were older. They were more critical sometimes. Now you began to get the matter of freedom of the press. Not that you didn't always . . . I'm sure even in the early days there were . . . students have always been students, and they've always rebelled against authority at times. But I never had any major problems with that sort of thing.

Sandy McCullar, who is now public relations man in Dallas, was perhaps my most revolutionary editor and my worst speller. Sandy, I was very fond of. He carried a little pocket dictionary around and learned . . . by the time he got through four years, he learned how to spell all of the difficult words and would still misspell the easy ones he'd take for granted. He'd look up all of the difficult ones. But Sandy was really fine. But he would want to write a critical column, an editorial, and usually it was a column. He would wait until I would get home for dinner, and then he'd call me up and say, "Look, I've got to send this to the backshop. Let me read it to you." He'd read it as fast as he could so I wouldn't spot anything.

Rainbolt: (Chuckle) So you wouldn't have it in your hand.

Shuford: Yes, that's right, so I couldn't take time . . .

Rainbolt: Well, this whole kind of atmosphere on campus with the, like you say, more mature student looking more critically around, do you think this was reflected in the newspaper?

Shuford: Oh, yes, I think so, and it's a healthy thing. But there were times when they . . . I can't give any specifics . . . there were times when they got things in the paper that left, well, say, Dr. Matthews, unhappy. But we never had any editors fired. We sometimes got some calls about, "Well, this wasn't right" or "Why did you run this?" That sort of thing.

Rainbolt: That's the newspaper business.

Shuford: Yes, that's the newspaper business.

Rainbolt: Sure. Well, you mentioned Dr. Matthews. Now he became president in 1951, I believe. What was his administration like for the newspaper?

Shuford: Well, I say for the newspaper--and I wouldn't single out the newspaper--I would say that Dr. Matthews was, in my point of view and the point of view of the department and the newspaper, and as far as I can see for the University as a whole, was paternalistic. In other words, he was the "big daddy," and what he said went. But on the whole, life was a lot easier under Matthews--I'm saying this as a department head--than it has been since we had more academic freedom, more student publications freedom. We

knew what the ground rules were, and if you played in those ground rules, you didn't have any problems. The administration was streamlined and simplified from our level. Now it's all committee work, and everything takes five times as long to get done there. You had a minimum number of reports. You had to send in your budget estimate. You always asked for more money than you knew you'd get, hoping you could get as much as you could get by on.

Rainbolt: Toward the later years of Dr. Matthews' administration, did that begin to change a little bit?

Shuford: Oh, yes. I've never been a faculty politician, and I suppose one reason is the fact that I've been in journalism and I don't believe journalists should be politicians. I think they should be free from any clique, see. So I never play politics. I've never been a member of the AAUP because that's their labor union. I'm not a labor union man. See, I felt I should stay free of cliques of any kind, particularly when I was publicity director. I just carried over. Nobody has any strings on you. But, yes, I think the fact . . . for that reason I did not pick up as much gossip and backstage talk as a lot of faculty members. Well, they live on it, you know.

And I know that there were elements very unhappy with some things Dr. Matthews did. They thought he was autocratic or didn't do this or didn't do that or should have done that, you know. But personally, I didn't have any contacts of that sort.

I like Dr. Matthews. He is a very interesting man. He's a good politician, or was for his time. Now doubtless those that know the inside of Texas politics felt that at the time that he stepped out he should have, I'm sure. Those who know . . . maybe the University administration had grown more complex than it was when he first became president. I suspect that's true.

Rainbolt: By the mid-sixties, anyway, under Kamerick.

Shuford: Yes, things had changed. I don't . . . if I had been in the publicity office or news service, I would know more about those things than I did just as a department head, or if I had played campus politics maybe I would have known or thought I knew more about it. I didn't want to know too much about those things.

Rainbolt: Well, how was life under Dr. Kamerick?

Shuford: Well, Dr. Kamerick, of course, brought a breath of fresh air to the students and to the more liberal faculty members who sympathized with him and with whom he sympathized. He had some journalistic experience. Now I've

forgotten what it was. But he really knew something about journalism and therefore was very sympathetic toward the Journalism Department and did several things for us. In fact, he came over to . . . I remember we had a meeting of the Shuford Society. He dropped by, dropped in on us, and was very friendly. So we had no complaints about Dr. Kamerick.

Rainbolt: What kind of things did he do for the department?

Shuford: You know, I can't remember anything specific.

Rainbolt: You mean it was just kind of his general attitude?

Shuford: Attitude, yes. I think he understood publicity better. You know, administrators are like politicians. They're suspicious of newspaper people. Not all politicians, of course, are as secret as Nixon, but they tend to think, well, they should tell the minimum, and sometimes they try to cover up things and make it worse for themselves with newspaper people who think they smell dead rats. But just from what I understand, Kamerick was a fine man and a good president in many ways, but he knew nothing about Texas politics. I think he got into trouble with people down in Austin, didn't know how to handle them. That's just gossip. That and the fact that his wife didn't like Texas. That would cause him to leave, as I understand it.

Rainbolt: But the department didn't experience any kind of difficulty.

Shuford: No.

Rainbolt: Still a great deal of freedom?

Shuford: Yes, and maybe we had a little more freedom under Kamerick, particularly in publications. They could say what they wanted to.

Rainbolt: You mean the students in their columns?

Shuford: Yes, yes, I think so. Of course, I can't give you the exact years that we began to get to the point to where a number of court rulings indicated that technically, legally, the university can't control student publications the way they had been doing for years. There had been a number of court decisions affecting student publications. Administrations are still trying to do it. I have mixed feelings about this because I've been on both sides of the fence. I think that what a professional newspaperman knows he can do . . . he still must live with himself and use some judgement and tact in handling situations, where a half-trained student doesn't know how to do that sort of thing. You have to know when to pull your punches because in the long run you've got to survive and you've got to live with people. Not that you want to cover anything up. If you've got to

open up another situation, you've got to open it up. There are times when you wouldn't pull your punches when you know there's some justification. You know that. You've had enough experience.

Rainbolt: (Chuckle) Yes, with phone calls and things like that. It was still Dr. Kamerick's administration in 1968-- he was still there--when this controversy with the AAUP and the National Association of Students and another group, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, I believe, had circulated some materials advocating that the newspaper would be taken away from the department and be completely student-controlled and all of this. What about that? What was the whole situation?

Shuford: Well, it was . . . of course, I personally was bitterly opposed to anything like that because we had built the training programs for our students, journalism students, from the start. They had been closely tied in with publication work, particularly on the Chat and Daily. We used it as a laboratory for training students, sending them out, and making them report under supervision. We started out when I first came here . . . I started out by making my reporters report for the Chat. But it wasn't under a very controlled laboratory



situation. They simply had to report for the Chat, and they had to turn in their string. But that grew eventually into a controlled laboratory situation where an instructor sat and had a chance at their copy so we could make them re-write, revise, clean up errors before it ever got to the editors. By the time this came along, we had a semi-professional laboratory with a faculty member sitting in, as you know. You know how it works.

Well, we felt that as a result our reporting students got far better training than most reporting students in most departments and schools of journalism. In the smaller schools and departments, very frequently they were not subject to that kind of supervision and critique. In the larger ones, like the University of Texas, they had so many students that most of what they wrote never got into print, so it was not any sort of approximation of a professional experience. We wanted this to be a stepping stone to professional experience.

We'd also, by this time, got the editing labs in so that they were working from the other end of the thing. If you turn a student newspaper of that kind into a political plum with an editor who picked his own editors, you are not going to have quality students, necessarily, working with other students.

Also, I think, in the long run you're going to not have any . . . you're going to have far less freedom for your student editors and reporters than you ever had, even in the most controlled situations we had in the early days. Because you're going to find that the people of various cliques want to control the paper, want to increase the volume of news for certain interests. It would destroy freedom of the press as far as I'm concerned on campus in one way. They still want to do it. Student government here would like to control the newspaper and would like to make it a propaganda organ for student government. What do they call it now? What is it? SAU?

Rainbolt: SGA?

Shuford: SGA? Student Government Association. They change the name so often.

Rainbolt: How serious a threat was this?

Shuford: Well, it was pretty serious. There was a meeting. I believe it was in the Business Administration auditorium. I took some student editors with me, and faculty members. I made a pretty serious presentation as to what was wrong with this. It didn't happen. I don't know whether my talk had anything to do with it or not. But I think that the real control, the final decision, the buck, had to

stop at the president's office. I think the administration realized that it would damage the journalism program and that it would make a problem with the faculty-administrative relationship much more than it was.

It did have, I think, in general, a beneficial effect in that I think it probably opened up the Daily to freer student comments on the editorial page. The Daily made . . . of course, student editors don't always . . . I mean, they get it in for cliques that bother them. You know, the cranks come in and bother you. All right, the cranks are sometimes pretty powerful politically. So they go in, they don't know what they want, so they start fighting against the Daily. You've got hard-nosed campus politics going on all the time like that, more or less.

Well, what they did, I think they let guest columnists for various interests, you know, have columns. The Letters to the Editor column was increased. There were more student and faculty comments and input that was critical that got into the Daily as a result of all of this, and that may have dampened down some of this.

Of course, it didn't satisfy some of the extremists at all. Even since those days, I have sat through long

Publication Committee hearings where somebody was complaining that the Daily was, you know, against the blacks. The Daily was against this group or that group. The Daily hated Student Government. We had to listen to them and let them air their complaints. Some of them are just really . . . some of them are really sort of pathetic. They really want publicity. They want attention and that's their way of getting it.

Rainbolt: What did you say at your speech at that meeting?

Shuford: Pretty much what I said to you--that it would wreck the training program, as far as we were concerned, in journalism, and that it would open up the Daily to political control of one kind or another. There would be no continuity. There would be no professionalism. The paper would decline. People would be in spots that didn't know their jobs as well as the students. That was the idea.

Rainbolt: What was their response?

Shuford: Well, as far as the groups that were there were concerned, you couldn't tell. They already had their minds made up, I think, pretty much.

Rainbolt: What about from the students?

Shuford: Well, I think there was a varied response from students. I'm talking about students there. It may have even been

that one or two journalism students were sympathetic to this sort of thing, but they were journalism students who wanted to be politicians. Again, I don't think that goes together.

Rainbolt: But the Journalism Department itself was thinking along your lines.

Shuford: Oh, yes. That's right. Yes, I think so.

Rainbolt: So you withstood that challenge.

Shuford: Yes, that's right.

Rainbolt: But it did have some beneficial effects.

Shuford: Yes, that's right.

Rainbolt: Well, what about after Dr. Kamerick. We had John Carter one year as an acting president, you remember.

Shuford: Yes, of course, I don't remember . . . I'm sure . . . I don't remember anything in relation to journalism and the paper at all. That was just for one year.

But under Nolen, of course, we have opened up . . . I would say that since he came we finally have opened up communications with the president's office as far as the journalism curriculum, programs, publications, publicity. He is a man who . . . since he has worked in development and that sort of thing . . . is very conscious of public relations. He knows that public relations not only is publicity

outside--contact with outside groups--it's also faculty and student relations. I'm sure he's done some things . . . or his administration has done some things that haven't always been popular. But in general his attitude and his approach has been an open administration as far as he can make it. I wouldn't be a college president for anything. In fact, I wouldn't be a dean or a vice-president because whatever decision you make, you're going to make somebody unhappy.

But watching these people operate, they came in, I'm sure, thinking they were going to take over and save poor little North Texas. I don't think any of them really knew . . . well, of course, some people they brought in had been at North Texas. But I don't think "Jitter" or Ferre or some of those big names really knew what kind of school North Texas was or realized how big it was or how many facets it had. I think they have educated themselves in their jobs. I think they've done a good job in that respect. I think they're making adjustments all the time. They're going to keep North Texas on the level it's always been, that is, a comparative level, and maybe if we're lucky pull it up even better. Of course, they've had lots of problems. Money, as you know. Competition from the junior colleges in the

area is a major factor. They're worried about enrollment declining in a lot of schools. Leveling . . . tending to level off here for various reasons. Economic situation is bad. If they keep it going, they're going to have problems. They really have opened up. They hit a thing and I think that "Jitter" Nolen's a good president.

Rainbolt: And he has been for the department?

Shuford: Oh, yes. Well, one thing that has helped us is that two of his top men are journalism faculty (laughter). Roy Busby, who is very shrewd in a lot of ways about public relations and to whom the department owes a lot, I think. I've known Roy . . . he was my student. He worked in the News Service for Jim Rogers. I wanted him to stay as an assistant. He took off for a job in Dallas. He didn't come back till he took over, as I remember, in the News Service. And that was probably better from his point of view. He got outside, new experience. But he helped, made suggestions, specific suggestions, that have helped us in a lot of ways. I think it was his suggestion, for instance, that started the slash sessions on Friday afternoons. Of course, I think it's a marvelous thing for faculty and students, both. Sometimes they're dragged out too much, but it's

an institution that I hope doesn't decline. Then, of course, Jim Rogers, who is a computer mind, has been involved in all of this. Now he's going to help, I think. I mean, he understands the Journalism Department and publication problems. So when this new building is built, he's going to have a finger in that in seeing what can be done and help in planning it. Reg Westmoreland and I went over at his invitation last spring to talk this whole matter over and what our needs were and where we could go.

Rainbolt: Well, would you say that from McConnell on through Nolen and with these people in the administration, overall the Journalism Department is . . . how has it fared?

Shuford: I have no complaints about any president that I've ever worked under. I have liked every one of them in a different way. I mean, I felt in the long run they were my friends. I knew they couldn't do more for me what I would ask every year, but I tried to go after them in a way that would show my needs to them in a way that they would understand and maybe understand that my needs . . . what was good for the Journalism Department was good for the university (chuckle). What's good for General Motors is good for the country. But it was true because we're so tied in with publicity and public relations that, after



all, if you have a weak Journalism Department and few graduates badly trained, what impression do you have of North Texas in newspapers over the Southwest? If you have a strong Journalism Department and send out graduates who can hold their own and hold jobs, what impression does a newspaper have of North Texas? And who sits on the copy desk when a story comes through about North Texas is sympathetic or unsympathetic?

Rainbolt: Maybe this is why J. Harris out at Lubbock said that when he really wants to hire someone, he wants two reporters or one Shuford-trained man.

Shufford: (Laughter) Well, I hope that's right.

Rainbolt: Maybe that's indicative of things. Well, let's talk a little bit about the department itself.

Shuford: Well, let me just add one thing. You know, they did a lot for me last spring and summer and had all these parties. I had to write some thank-you letters. A lot of them haven't been written yet, but this summer I got around to writing some of the administrators. I wrote a nice long letter to "Jitter" and a nice one to Ferre. I very tactfully pointed out, you know, "I hope you go on doing even more for the Journalism Department than you did when I was there. I know that you understand that it's to the benefit of the University that you do so."

I pointed out this thing about our graduates being hired over the state. So I think they . . . in any rate, I saw both of them at a luncheon here. They both came around and said something nice, so maybe I did a little good as a parting shot (chuckle).

Rainbolt: Okay, now in James Bowman's thesis, in part of it, he mentioned that when Mr. Stanley came to the department in 1960 that there seemed to be kind of a whole change as far as the Chat and the approach of the newspaper in its makeup and in its tone and everything. Kind of a whole change from the '50's and even from the '40's. I was wondering if you had the same kind of impression?

Shuford: Well, Bob Stanley was, I guess, one of the best students I ever had. He's a good newspaperman wasted on the Baptist Church (laughter). Or he was a good newspaperman. I don't know whether he still is or not, whether they ruined him or not. That's a joke. But he was assistant city editor of the Times Herald and would have been city editor if he hadn't come here. I think he was a precisionist. People say I was a precisionist, but Bob was really one. He was a professional. He drove his students and worked with them as hard as I

ever did or maybe harder. I don't know. So he wanted in every way to make the writing better and the make-up better. I think he did help modernize the paper.

Rainbolt: Did you have any input into this? I mean, was this . . . in other words, was this a really conscious effort, or did it just kind of evolve?

Shuford: No, I think it just sort of happened. I mean, we were . . . of course, what we have always done . . . when we joined Associated Collegiate Press way back there. We've been members ever since. I think Bob . . . Bob may have edited . . . I'm not sure if Bob edited one of the Pacemakers. I thought he did. So he was aware of a need for quality in the paper. We began to study scorebooks more carefully and bring the attention of the student editors and hold a standard. I think maybe it was all of . . . it wasn't just Bob, but he had a primary role in carrying the thing out, so we could go back and see what . . . "What did we do bad last year? What was good?" And we tried to correct these things. Under him as a drillmaster, things began to happen, you see. He had ideas about make-up and modernizing the paper. So he was the one that worked with it and with the students so closely. Things happened.

Rainbolt: Also, I remember reading about Grady Milsap along about this time or a few years earlier. Do you remember him?

Shuford: Yes, oh, I remember Grady.

Rainbolt: Would you briefly describe him? I thought he was really interesting.

Shuford: Grady was, I guess, about my height but heavy-set.

Rainbolt: You're about 5'10"?

Shuford: Well, I used to be nearly 5'10". I'm about 5'9". But 5'9" to 5'10". Grady might even have been a little taller. He was heavy-set. He moved slowly. But he had a terrific mind. He was a World War II veteran. He'd been injured. I never did know what. But he had to go back to the McKinney Veteran's Hospital for treatment. But he read. He was a voracious reader. He bought books. He never married. All he was interested in was reading, learning, using his mind. He went through the department, got a degree in journalism, and had planned just to be a country editor--get him a little newspaper. But he had to be near McKinney, so I think he talked to me. J. D. Hall, I think, gave him a chance to stay in the Print Shop. I think maybe he had been working in there. He just decided that that would be his life. He took

that Print Shop job. He would be close to McKinney . . . when he had medical problems, he'd go over there. He bought books. His room . . . I'm not sure where it was. It was about two blocks from the Journalism Building. They say his room was just overflowing with books when he died. He died of cancer.

Rainbolt: I understand he was as hard on the editors sometimes as the instructors.

Shuford: Or worse. Grady knew what was in most of us. I think I told Jim Bowman that I was proud of the one time I found that Grady had made a mistake (laughter). He was that good. But he wouldn't . . . he was a linotype operator. The Chat or the Daily . . . I don't guess it was the Daily. The Chat would sent back copy, and maybe it was after hours at night or maybe it was in the afternoon when he'd look at it. I've been in there. He walked in, threw a piece of copy down, and said, "Sixteen errors in this. I'm not going to set it till it's correct."

Rainbolt: I understand that after he passed away that someone come across a dictionary in the office, one of the dictionaries, and it had written in in pencil, "In memory of . . .

Shuford: Grady Milsap (laughter). But I wrote a column about him in the paper after he died.

Rainbolt: In the Chat?

Shuford: Yes. I might be able to find it. I don't know.

Rainbolt: Well, I have a few general questions on journalism. Just in general, I wonder what you would tell a class in public affairs reporting today about the role of journalism. Maybe now it's supposed to be called mass media, mass communications, or something. What would you tell a class of eighteen and nineteen-year-olds?

Shuford: What did I tell them?

Rainbolt: No, what would you tell them now?

Shuford: (Chuckle) Well, I've been telling them up until this summer.

Rainbolt: All right, what did you tell them up until this summer?

Shuford: In public affairs reporting? Well, what I would tell any reporting class, I guess. In the first place, learn how to gather your facts. Learn really what facts are, which is an art in itself. Finding out what the truth is is very difficult. Second, write clearly and simply so anybody can understand what you're talking about. Bring out the things that are most significant to the most people, that are important to people. In order to do that, you've got to understand how government operates, how a community is constructed, who has power in a community, what they represent, so that you can balance

one thing here against another thing here and, again, keep it in perspective. Learn as much as you can about everything because a reporter never knows what kind of story he's going to cover from day to day or hour to hour or minute to minute. He may think it's politics, but he may get sent out on a fine arts assignment in an emergency. So everything he learns is grist for his mill. That's true of writers other than reporters. The more he knows, the better reporter he can be. In fact, I've said this to my public affairs classes. By the time you know all you really should know to do a good job in public affairs reporting, you should be equipped to hold down a \$50,000 a year managerial position in business or politics or public relations, but you won't have it (chuckle). Is that true?

Rainbolt: I think that would be true, yes. Well, what about your feelings on the media's role in Watergate for the last two years?

Shuford: Well, I don't think we would have ever had the truth if it hadn't been for the media. I'll put it this way. We never would have even started getting at the truth if it hadn't been for the newspaper media.

Rainbolt: Do you think the whole thing was good for the country and the media's role in it?

Shuford: Well, if you've got a cancer, it's got to come out. In the long run it . . . we may not cure anything, but we scared a helluva lot of people (chuckle). Don't you think so?

Rainbolt: I do, and do you think that the media's role . . . here I mean the press and broadcasting, whatever. Can the media withstand quite a bit of criticism that it's gotten within the past couple of years?

Shuford: Well, I think the media is not above the reproach itself for that matter. I think the media has abused its power sometimes. I think it sometimes has crucified innocent people. I know that reporters can go too far and hound people who should be let alone and that sort of thing. So I don't think . . . even though I've been in journalism, I think that sometimes not all the things journalists do are good. But I think without a reasonably aggressive and honest press who have the right goals, I don't think the public can ever be protected because I think the government tends to operate in secrecy. Politicians tend to do what's best for politicians and not always what's best for the country. They've got to be reminded of their duties. Only the press will remind them. I think we can lose our very freedoms if we don't have any free press.



Rainbolt: Do you believe in the adversary role of journalism and government?

Shuford: Well, adversary? They have to be adversary, but at the same time they should be constructive adversaries in a way. I've been in public elections, too, and I think that if the press is just concerned with tearing down it may destroy things that might in the long run be constructive. I think it's got to be tolerant at times and sympathetic at times. But always critical. But intelligently critical. Up to a certain point this is fine. Beyond a certain point sometimes it's so destructive that something good can't even get started. You've got to have a diversity of opinions. In a democracy you've got to try to let them sort themselves and the cream rise to the top. It takes a press and a government and lots of forces to sort of help this work. It's not an easy process. Certainly, I'm not wise enough to know how it should operate, but in the long run I've analyzed enough to know that that process has got to be preserved or we won't survive. We'll have a different kind of government.

Rainbolt: Do you feel that the journalism students today and in the past couple of years are accepting this view?

Shuford: I think so. I have no complaint about the journalism students I have had because those that have survived our

"boot camp" over there have been intelligent. Now they have been diverse in their opinions. Lord help us, I teach editorial writing, and we start out, say, with fifteen or twenty students. Some of them are as conservative as you could wish, and some of them are as liberal as you had dare wish. A lot of them are in between. Part of the process that went on in my classes was to let these opinions be heard and clash and argue and hope this is an educational process by the time they're through. By the time they're through, not a one has changed his basic philosophy, but each one has honed up his mind a good bit and maybe has become a little more tolerant of the opinions of some of the others. It's very interesting.

Rainbolt: I was wondering if the students today, after everything that happened in the 1960's, might be different than the ones in the 1950's and the '40's after the war?

Shuford: Well, each generation has its own coloration, but . . . in other words, what is liberal in 1920 is different from what liberalism is in 1930 and what it is in '40 and '50 and '60 and so on. But the same patterns are there. I mean, all right, so we've got a campus radical. He's a campus radical. What he's after and the way he talks is not quite the same language as it is ten years later. But

he's still my campus radical. I've heard him before (chuckle). My campus conservative, I've heard him before. No, I think human nature doesn't change much.

The process of training journalists is basically the same as it was when I started out. Maybe I know a little bit more about students than I did when I started out, but otherwise . . . and this is just a truism. It's commonplace that the campus liberal or radical frequently grows up and becomes conservative twenty years later.

Rainbolt: That makes me think of what Bowman wrote in his thesis about . . . he described his students in the 1950's, and then the department, too, was kind of with an air of pseudocynicism. He mentioned one in particular, a Miss Whiteside, I believe, who had a sign above her desk that said, "People are no damn good," and she later became a nun.

Shuford: Yes, that's right (chuckle).

Rainbolt: I thought that was really funny. Well, on kind of another subject and getting into talking about your writing, what about teaching creative writing in journalism departments? Is that more English-oriented, or exactly what is creative writing in journalism?

Shuford: Well, I think that creative writing is neither English or journalism. Creative writing is a process in itself.

English teachers teach creative writing. The danger with the English teacher teaching creative writing is that he tends to make it too close to scholarship and be burdened by the heritage of the past. The danger of the journalist teaching creative writing is that he doesn't escape fact writing. Some very fine newspapermen . . . I mean, they'd write imaginatively, but they never escaped the business that they were reporters. Now a creative writer is both a reporter . . . he has to be a good reporter, a good researcher and a good reporter. But he's something else. He's neither one.

The good creative writing teacher is one who really, from my point of view, understands what the creative process is and how it operates. It does not operate by formula. It may use formulas, but it escapes formula if it's really creative. So when I teach creative writing, that's where I start--to try to get the student to understand what the process will be with him. You know, some students come into creative writing, "Give us a set of rules on how to write a short story, how to write a poem."

There is no set of rules. The real artist is one who knows most of the rules but breaks most of them intelligently. He creates his own form. He gives us

something new, or he gives us a different treatment of something old. There is nothing new, in a way. The same old themes are going to be written about. People don't change. I mean, you're going to write about love and death and hate and combat and all these things. That's obvious. You're going to write about people. The process is that you've got to . . . the important thing is that you've got to understand people. You've got somehow to bring them to life on paper. You've got to make somebody read what you put on paper, catch fire, and have a new experience that's important to him, that is, his experience. My experience as a writer has to go through this process and reach him somehow. What he has isn't quite the same as what I had, but I've got to unlock that thing for him.

So it is a very technical and complicated process. What happens within the writer is not so much a matter of reason and logic . . . you've got to use reason and logic to understand what you're doing, but you've got to wait for something to happen and catch it when it happens and get it down on paper and know what is important that you get down. There's a little mystery in all this. Well, if you can get kids to understand themselves a little

better and understand what they're looking in that kind of writing in themselves and in others, then they're on the road.

I got this scholarship at the MacDowell Colony. I went up there. I was just twenty-two. I had just gotten through writing this thesis on H. L. Mencken. I'd done a lot of research and writing. I'd written words and notebooks and courses and so forth. I'd been dabbling with poetry since I was in high school, but I didn't know what I wanted to do creatively, really. I went up there. I imagine I was a little nervous because I thought, well, you know, I've got to do something while I'm here. One of the older writers there said, "Don't worry about what you do here. What happens to you here may be much more important four or five years from now than it is right now." I think this is true. That's exactly what happened to me.

A writer has got to have some resources, and he has to have some experiences that are significant to him before he has anything worth saying. That's why most young writers don't have much of anything to say. They're developing their techniques and their skills, but they haven't lived enough, they haven't been hurt enough, they

haven't been happy enough or sad enough as yet. But you've gotten a lot of bad writing out of you, too, before you sort of begin to find what you can do that's good. I wrote two very bad novels in those years, which, thank God, nobody would print but which had enough in them so that publishers would write me letters about them and say, you know, "Try us again sometime." I've never written a novel since. I haven't had time.

Rainbolt: Is it a matter of time or trouble?

Shuford: Well, you know I \_\_\_\_\_. I had no job. I wrote poetry and I wrote articles. Then I got into teaching. Then I got married. Then I got to North Texas. You don't write novels in your spare time. At least I don't think . . .

Rainbolt: What were your two novels about?

Shuford: Oh, I don't want to talk about them.

Rainbolt: Okay.

Shuford: They were imitative, and they were bad (chuckle).

Rainbolt: First novels.

Shuford: And a lot of my early poetry was imitative. That's all right but eventually you still keep those influences as long as you write, I think. You probably keep the same scenes and say them over and over again. You just take

one poem and you rewrite it. That isn't quite true, but you do have the same themes. They'll recur. As I say, there are influences in my poetry. I can see poems that have been influenced by Frost, some early ones maybe by Robinson--I don't think I've ever published any of those--Sandburg, Whitman, whom I admired when I was very young, back in high school and college. But still, I want to say just this. Some of these later poems are my own voice, you see.

Rainbolt: But exactly how do you think these people, Robinson and Whitman especially, Frost, had influences in these earlier poems? Exactly in what way? Do you mean by their themes or how?

Shuford: Well, yes, themes, style. In other words, I would never have probably written "Now, Because in November." It's a long, loose, flowing poem. It's not the same thing as Whitman at all. But still, I probably would have never . . . I would have been restricted by the idea of poetry in more conventional forms if I hadn't read Whitman. Then later, of course, some of the moderns of my time when I was growing up . . . images . . .

Rainbolt: Did you ever talk with Robinson at MacDowell?

Shuford: No, I was twenty-one years old, and Robinson was a giant in American poetry. Oh, I sat at the table with him and



you know, ate supper with him. I don't know whether I actually played with him. He played a game called "cowboy pool." I learned it up there. It's a combination of pool and billiards game. You use three balls and make billiard shots and pool shots, too. I won't say that I played with him, but at any rate we learned to play "cowboy pool" because he liked "cowboy pool."

Rainbolt: Well, about your themes, I think you mentioned it to Bowman on American pageantry and death and so forth. Can you talk a little about that--what you consider your themes?

Shuford: Well, I think as far as a person that influenced me in terms of theme as much as anybody else was not a poet at all. It's Ernest Hemingway whose Farewell to Arms I discovered . . . in fact, I discovered Hemingway the first summer, I think, when I was at MacDowell Colony. Farewell to Arms was coming out in serial form in Scribner's. I started it then and I discovered poetry in Thomas Wolfe when I was at Alabama Polytechnic. I read Look Homeward Angel for the first time.

Now in terms of attitude and my feeling about America and toward life and death in general, they

influenced me a great deal, I think. I had the feeling that Hemingway had experienced some of the major crises of a man's life and that he had reduced and simplified his values so that they were honest. And I had the feeling that all a man could do was the best he could do that he had to be as brave as he could. Bravery in the long run was not going to solve . . . I mean everything. A brave man's going to be broken just like a coward. Life breaks everyone in the long run. We know that. Everyone has his crises, his tragedies. He has to live over them. If he doesn't, he's destroyed. One of the few values worth saving out of the world . . . that is frequently a world of chaos is love. If people lose that and if they lose courage, then they have lost everything and will be nothing. Then it's a world of hollow men. Some of the Eliot's poems are right. But I think that if a man is that honest with himself, then he has the primary virtues and the primary values, and it's hard to destroy him. Those are the themes that have affected a lot of my writing.

When I was at Northwestern, Baker Brownell, the one that got me the MacDowell scholarship . . . or shortly afterwards . . . he published a book called Earth is Enough. The point was that there are fine things on this

earth and in this life if we take the trouble to find them. You have to fight for your happiness in a way. You have to be strong to have happiness. You can't be weak. We're all weak, too. That's another thing. In other words, with Hemingway and so forth. So in every one of my poems, that's one of the things I say.

There's still a lot here. There's still a lot here worth saving. We've always had crises. We've always had disaster. We've always had wars and destruction. But human nature survives it somehow and sometimes survives it fairly easily. That's what we've got to hang on to or there's not any point.

Rainbolt: Have you been saying these kinds of things in your later poems, too?

Shuford: Yes, yes. That maybe ultimately the universe is unknown. I don't know. It may be . . . I had a philosophy teacher at the University of Arkansas, W. B. Mahan. He said you can be a metaphysical pessimist but a personal optimist. You can be happy even if you think the universe is against you, even if you think the universe is a void, black and terrifying, and it is sometimes black and terrifying. You won't admit it.

Rainbolt: Do you think maybe these kinds of things you want to say, or these themes, can best be said through poetry?

Shuford: Well, at least I can say them best through poetry, yes.

Rainbolt: Well, what about this term you've used that you can apply to writers and poets or to journalists, too: "precision of expression?" Can you expand a little on that? Exactly what do you mean?

Shuford: Well, every writer knows that he has to hunt for the exact words, and he has to . . . well, the longer I write, the more my first draft looks like a battlefield, words crossed out and lines crossed or, you know, this sort of thing. What comes out first is frequently soporific, too wordy. It's the weak or obvious word. It's not that you want the strange word, the exotic word. That isn't it. Then you've got writing that is too highly ornamented or too self-conscious. That's why a good journalist who really has a feeling or creative ability is the best writer. Hemingway was a journalist. He has a lean, hard style. He had the ability to take everyday words and use them so that they suddenly came to life and sparkled again and gleamed. He had the sense of repetitious rhythm and prose that gave it a quality that's almost like poetry. So it's the word that's just a little askew so that suddenly the mind hits a . . . you know, it's like it reflects a different meaning like a jewel.

Rainbolt: This is all a part of creativity?

Shuford: Yes, I'd say it's a big thing. You can't be creative unless you are creative with language because you can have the most wonderful general ideas, the highest ideals, the noblest thoughts, and if you express them in commonplace ways, all you've written is truism or flat, commonplace preaching. Nobody wants to be preached at or to. There's nothing duller to read than a book of sermons. I'm sure they're filled with noble sentiments, the highest expressions of thought. But what's the reality? What's the honest thing? What's the fresh thing? When words are used in a different revealing light, somehow through the words you go to the idea a new way.

Rainbolt: And so you put so many words together, and the whole picture is there, right? Or the whole idea that you want to say?

Shuford: In actual writing, you put down what comes out (chuckle). Then you see what it looks like. Then you cross out and you revise. You tighten up. You throw away. You add sometimes. You have to find out where to stop the poem as well as where to start it.

Rainbolt: How do you think your later poems are different from your first, besides when you said your first were, of

course, imitative and so forth? How do you think you've changed in your poetry?

Shuford: Well, I'm still changing and I don't know. I'm trying to be a tighter writer all the time. Maybe that's a sign of old age. I don't know. When you're young, the water flows freely and lots of words just gush out. Then you try to ride the back of the whale. Wolfe . . . have you ever read Story of the Novel?

Rainbolt: No, sir. I haven't.

Shuford: You should read that. If you can, you ought to read the excerpt in "The Creative Process." It tells how he would write and write and write. Nobody ever wrote the way Wolfe did--nobody. I think it's true. The words just pressed down, nearly destroyed him. A few of us write that way, but still when we're young we tend to write that way more than when we get older, I think. When you get older you can control it a little bit better, but you still . . . if I can write better and shorter poems, I'd be pleased.

Rainbolt: As long as the right words . . .

Shuford: Yes, that's right.

Rainbolt: What about these poems that you'll receive rewards for tomorrow night? What are your feelings about them?

Shuford: Well, they're quite different. There are four. I'm going to receive rewards for four. One of them was written in the last three or four years. One of them was written quite a few years ago. One of them is . . . I can't think what they are. Well, one of them was written about six or seven years ago. One for which I will not receive a reward but got second place, I wrote this summer. They're all different. One of them is pretty metrical. It was experimental, but a lot of my stuff is . . . I don't use much rhyme. I do have a rough meter in a lot of them, but it's a pretty modern meter. It's not, you know, the old type of beat-beat-beat. But one of them is metrical and rhymes with an internal rhyme in the style of one that I won a prize some years ago. This was written some years ago. But it still says something that I still like to say. One of them is quite ragged, free verse. One of them is--this is always pleasing--fairly recent, was entered in the competition not long ago, oh, maybe a couple of years ago. I don't think it even placed. It was judged by a man who is a very good poet and whom I respect. This was judged by another very good poet whom I respect and who gave it first place. Now this pleases.

I mean, you know, a poem is sort of like a child. You hate for it to be slighted. But the point is, I think, that if a poem is good, it may be good to one very perceptive person, but not good to another. It creates a poem here for this person because it touches something that has touched this reader. Here it doesn't touch anything for this reader. It's outside his experience, and it contradicts his experience or something like that. So he dismisses it. He doesn't see what's there. All right, this one sees what's there. You can't write for everybody.

Rainbolt: So it becomes a . . .

Shuford: The judge who turned this poem down for me has liked some of my poems in the past and given them awards. So you never know.

Rainbolt: It's a personal thing, isn't it?

Shuford: Yes, it is a personal thing. Poetry is a very personal thing. Two or three years ago--I don't remember just when--I won a Poetry Society of Texas award with a poem called "The Owl." Richard Eberhart, who is a pretty well-known poet, you know, president of Poetry Society of America and so forth . . . he's written a lot of books. He was the judge, gave it first place. He judged a contest this year. I entered a poem and I



didn't even place (laughter). And you don't know. I mean, sometimes you think, "Well, he ought to like this." He didn't like it at all. So you don't know people. What you try to do in your poetry, though, is write something that will touch as many people as you can. If you touch only one, it's probably not a good poem. But you don't have to touch everybody.

Rainbolt: You said that when you were younger in Arkansas and in the territory, you began to get a feeling for that area and for the Americana and so forth like that. Has this been a pretty consistent theme?

Shuford: Yes, I think that . . . well, I know this, that nobody can write outside of himself or what he is. You usually write best about what's a part of you or has been pretty close to you. You never escape your roots. You either write about it because you love it, or you write about it because you hate it. A lot of writers have made reputations by going away from their home country and writing bitter and cynical poems or novels or stories about it. I have tended to write about my country because I love it.

Rainbolt: I was trying to look at the name of the poem that you wrote in your family cemetery in North Carolina, at your family gravesite. I just wanted to say that this is the

kind of thing that . . . this experience that you have, it's personal. It's something that you know, and it's something that you have a deep feeling for that you can translate. Is it this kind of idea that you talk about?

Shuford: Yes.

Rainbolt: Do you think you will continue writing poetry?

Shuford: Well, I wrote eleven poems this summer.

Rainbolt: How do you write them? Do you just sit down with a pen and paper?

Shuford: I didn't write a thing . . . we were in Colorado about August, about the tenth of August. We were busy. We took some trips and saw our friends up there, bought a trailer and so forth. I didn't get started writing until for about a month, in September. Also, I had to get . . . I had not gotten my contest judges, all of them, for the Poetry Society of Texas. I had to have them before the first of October. I got all of those lined out, and then finally I got around to . . . I think my wife just said it's time you write some poetry. When she gave me a chance, why, I had to sit down. Some summers up there, I used to get up early and she'd sleep late. I'd just go in the next room and sit with a pen and write. This summer I wrote several poems just right out on the deck. I sat in a chair looking at the mountains. I had a pad and pencil in hand. I put my cap on to keep the sun out of my eyes and grew a poem.

Rainbolt: How did your ideas come to you? How do they evolve?

Shuford: Well, they just evolve. I mean, something's got to be down there, and, of course, if there's nothing down there, nothing happens. If nothing's going to happen, you're not going to write a poem that day, but you'd better sit and see. Sometimes you just have to pull a phrase out of somewhere. Well, some of the poems I wrote this summer, Catherine said, "I think you should write a poem about so-in-so." That's a poem, and I did several just at her suggestion. One was something that had happened while we were gone. Some were sort of landscape poems that I'd tied together and worked through. I haven't had time to go back and read them since I've been home. I've got eleven. I had three more ideas down. I don't know whether I'll get to those now or not. They may be lost. You know, you lose ideas.

Rainbolt: You write out your ideas in a journal or something?

Shuford: I have a list of some things I've thought of for writing poems about.

Rainbolt: What do you plan to do with these particular poems, try to get them published?

Shuford: Well, yes.

Rainbolt: Put them, maybe, in another book?

Shuford: Well, most of the poems in that book have already been published. In the first place, there's no great market

for poetry, so if you want to bring out a book, you've got to wait until you've published enough so it looks, you know, as if these poems have had some recognition already. Here are your acknowledgements. So you try to win some prizes with them or submit them to magazines and get them published in magazines. I'm going to send some of them to a friend of mine who is editor of a magazine who wants some. He's been asking me for some since last spring. I've just been too busy. But I would like to crack some of the more difficult markets. I probably can't. That's pretty hard to do.

Rainbolt: Which market?

Shuford: Oh, well, not many magazines, you know, general magazines or literary magazines publish much poetry. They are very hard to make. But some of the best poetry in magazines appears, I think, in the Atlantic, in Esquire, and The New Yorker. They're very difficult to make. I may die and never have a poem in any of them. I haven't had time to send out much in recent years, in many years. But I can try some of the more difficult markets. I know I can probably get some in some little magazines. Then I may try to get one more book together at least. I don't know.

Rainbolt: What other activities are you involved in now that you're retired? You have lots of free time.

Shuford: Well, I don't have lots of free time. I haven't had any . . . much free time since I've retired. I haven't been retired that long to find out. Catherine and I have been busy cleaning up the debris that . . . we've both been working and going through closets, throwing away things, sorting out. If we ever get that stuff sorted out and start again to take care of our place again . . . I still have a good many duties with, of course, the Poetry Society of Texas. I am contest director. I sent out the news releases on the prizes every year. I have to get the judges. There's a lot of correspondence. That has taken a lot of my time this summer. That's one reason I didn't have more time to write. I thought about giving that up, but they say they want me to do it another year. That keeps me in contact with some people.

Rainbolt: Have you been busy in the society for several years now?

Shuford: Oh, yes, a number of years. I've been doing that for them for quite a few years.

Rainbolt: How big a group is this?

Shuford: I don't remember how many members they have.

Rainbolt: I mean, do they have . . . is it kind of the same group year in and year out?

Shuford: Oh, no. It changes. They have several hundred members all over the state. I really don't know what the membership is. It may be a thousand, I don't know.

Rainbolt: Do you plan to do any kind of work with the University?

Shuford: No, I don't think so. I could have still drawn my retirement and taught a class of creative writing. I thought very seriously about doing that. As a matter of fact, they put it down on the fall schedule. If I taught it, I couldn't draw my Social Security in the fall. So I'd be teaching for just about half-pay. Then it ties me here almost all fall. We want to trot around a little bit now and then, get the house cleaned up, take some trips. So I just decided I was . . . at least for the present, I'm not going to do anything.

Rainbolt: Well, that's what retirement is for.

Shuford: Well, I haven't got to do very much yet that I wanted to. Except that I've had a lot of fun. We've had a lot of fun this summer. We went up to Collegiate Peaks about a hundred miles from our cabin twice and camped in a trailer and took a side trip. We got to stay up there and watch the aspen turn. They were beautiful. I thought I'd seen color in the Ozarks, but this is really gaudy, really lovely.

Rainbolt: Well, do you have any just free lance comments that you want to make about anything at all--journalism, poetry, or the university?

Shuford: Well, I just feel like I've been a very lucky man in many ways. I grew up . . . when I was young, I made a lot of mistakes. I learned something from them. Ever since then my life's been pretty good to me. I've never worried too much about anything except liking my job, liking my family. I've been very lucky in my marriage. I have three children that haven't disappointed me so far (laughter). Something may happen next year, next week, or next month that will be a disaster. I don't know. I think it's a pretty good world, and I'm lucky to have been here. I've known a lot of fine people. I've enjoyed my students. I've tried to give them something. I'm sure I haven't given them as much as I should have.

Rainbolt: Would you agree with Roy Busby? He said that Mr. Shuford just scared a lot of people into being good journalists?

Shuford: Well, some of them say so at any rate. I'm a phoney there because (laughter) that is, you know . . . that's stage stuff, stage business. I guess I haven't had any acting experience or never many speech courses, but I did act in two plays one summer. In fact, that's how I met Catherine.

Her aunt and uncle were professional actors. In the middle of the Depression they were in Chautauqua. For years they went all over the country. He acted. He did Rip Van Winkle more times than Joseph Jefferson. They were pretty good actors, really. They put on a couple of plays there in Fayetteville during the Depression, worked with local people. I had small parts in both of them. I learned a little bit about acting that way. Then, of course, I met Catherine because she came up to visit her aunt. I learned . . . I had a French teacher--I've told this story a lot of times--who was the nicest fellow and the biggest bully I ever knew. He'd drill the heck out of us. I took four years of French, and I guess it was mainly because I liked Mr. Kessler. He was a short man but sort of round but very light on his feet. Sort of like a dancing master. He'd drill us. He'd been in France. His pronunciation was wonderful. But if we made a mistake, he would jump half-way across the room and yell in our ears. We learned French. I learned pronunciation at any rate.