**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Jean Gordon**

Interview Conducted by

Kurt Anderson

September 5, 2014

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Jean Gordon is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on September 5, 2014.

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**About Jean Gordon…**

Ms. Jean Gordon, nee Miller, was born on April 12, 1938 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the second of Paul and Louise Miller’s four surviving children, and their only daughter. At the time of her birth, her father was serving as the Associated Press bureau chief in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her oldest brother, Ranne J. Miller, was born in New York City on December 12, 1934; her two younger brothers, Paul T. Miller and Kenper W. Miller, were born in Washington, D.C. on March 6, 1945, and July 23, 1946, respectively. Because of the age differences between Jean and Paul and Kenper, Jean’s family (throughout her early years) almost seemed to her like two separate families. As a young girl, Jean often cared for her younger brothers if her parents were attending one of the many social functions that required their presence, and all four siblings remain close to this day.

The Miller family transferred twice from 1938 to 1942. Following the outbreak of World War II, Miller served for a year as executive assistant to Associated Press general manager, Kent Cooper, in New York City. After Cooper promoted Miller to Associated Press Chief of Bureau in Washington, D.C. (a position he retained for the duration of the war) Jean relocated with her family to the nation’s capital. It was there that her two younger brothers were born, and there also that the family enjoyed what Jean later described as a very “informal” lifestyle. While her father’s position exposed him to many of the most important men in the country at that time (men such as Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, and leading military figures such as General George C. Marshall and Admiral Ernest J. King) Jean would nevertheless recall her years in Washington as being “comfortable” ones filled with many close family friends. There Jean attended a private school at Holton Arms in Washington, D.C., and a public school at Horace Mann Elementary School in Washington, D.C.

Paul Miller left the Associated Press in 1947 to accept a position with the Gannett Newspapers as executive assistant to the company’s founder, Frank E. Gannett. Miller soon moved his family again, this time to the company’s headquarters at Rochester, New York. It was a move that Jean, despite being only nine years old at the time, remembers as one that suddenly elevated the Millers into prosperous economic circumstances that her new friends in Rochester could not match (a large, expensive home, live-in help, and her parents’ frequent social obligations) and all of which resulted in a “formal” existence much different from the one she had come to appreciate in Washington. While growing up in Rochester, Jean attended Pittsford Central School in Pittsford, New York, and Columbia School for Girls in Rochester.

Following her graduation from Columbia, Jean continued her education. She attended Pine Manor Junior College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and spent a semester in Switzerland at the University of Geneva. She then returned home to Rochester where she lived with her parents and taught preschool for one year. Jean later studied at Ohio State University (OSU) in Columbus, Ohio, and worked for two-and-a-half years in the OSU Law Library.

From Columbus, she moved to New York City. There Jean soon found employment with an interior decorating firm as both receptionist and switchboard operator. While living in the city, she also worked for a book publishing company.

From New York City, Jean moved to Golden, Colorado, just outside of Denver, to start a family. One year after her marriage in 1967 to Robert M. Gordon, Jr., their first child, a son, was born. Jean and Bob named him Paul Miller Gordon in honor of her father. Three years later Jean gave birth to the couple’s daughter, Pamela Jean Gordon. Throughout her years in Golden as wife and mother, Jean frequently volunteered her time to a number of the town’s civic organizations. Jean resides today in Evergreen, Colorado, and remains actively involved in the life of her community.

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| **Jean Gordon**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Kurt Anderson  September 5, 2014  Evergreen, Colorado | C:\Users\nykolai\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.Word\IMG_0711.jpg |

**Anderson** *Ms. Gordon, before we start talking about your father, I’d like to discuss your early life a bit so that we have some context. Could you please tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?*

**Gordon** I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was in 1938 and my father worked for the Associated Press in Philadelphia. So he’d take the train from Wayne, Pennsylvania into Philadelphia to go to work, and we lived [in Wayne] four years. I have an older brother who remembers more about it than I do, and my brother and I went back to see the two houses where we lived. [It] was [several] years ago that we went back just to reminisce. I think that’s about it. I was quite young so I don’t really remember Philadelphia.

**Anderson** *What about your siblings, where they were born and where was your father, excuse me, your family living at the time?*

**Gordon** My parents, they lived in New York City when my older brother was born and his name is Ranne Johnson Miller and his maternal grandmother’s maiden name was [Clara] Ranne. Johnson comes from my mother’s maiden name. She was Louise Johnson and Ranne was born December 12th, 1934 in New York City and then my two younger brothers were born in Washington DC and let’s see what else would you like to know about them? Would you want their birthdates or would you just like to know their names?

**Anderson** *One thing I would be interested in is how did the order of your births influence your relationship with your brothers, or did it?*

**Gordon** The order of the births made it so that we had two families because my younger brothers were seven and eight years younger than I am and there was a span of [eleven] years between my older brother and my youngest brother. So it was like two families. I helped take care of my younger brothers if my parents were going out to dinner. Lots of times I would fix the dinner and make sure they went to bed.

**Anderson** *That’s an interesting fact. That leads right into the next question. Did the age differences make a difference in how the older and younger sibling saw things?*

**Gordon** Not really because I—I’m closer to my brothers now than I was back then. They went away—my two younger brothers went away to a prep school where, well it’s hard to explain, but there was a Trinity School in New York City and then Trinity Pawling School was started after Trinity school was andmy mother knew about Trinity School when we lived in New York City. She [visited] Trinity Pawling School and liked it, [so] my two younger brothers went there to school.

**Anderson** *How interesting.*

**Gordon** Yes.

**Anderson** *Do you think your younger brothers had a different experience [from] your father’s career than you and your older brother did just because of this timing?*

**Gordon** Definitely. We were more in on the action when Dad was the Chief of Bureau of the Associated Press in Washington. A lot of people came to our house and we got to know [friends of my parents] very well. We lived in a great neighborhood and actually my older brother was responsible for neighborhood parades like the Fourth of July Parade. All [of] the bikes would be decorated and there’d be a parade in Spring Valley which is a suburb of Washington. [In 1947] we moved to Rochester, New York. We moved out in the country and my mother had to drive us to a friend’s house and bring the friend back or that friend's mother would drive. So it was not the same thing. We really preferred Washington to living in Pittsford, New York outside of Rochester. We had a big house and it was on twenty-four acres. They bought twenty-four acres and the house had not been lived in for three years.

**Anderson** *Ms. Gordon when were some of your strongest memories from those homes, from those places?*

**Gordon** I thought it was much more informal when we lived in Washington. We got to know a lot of people and [I] felt very comfortable there. It seemed more formal when we moved to Rochester and we were in a big house and my mother had help. She had to have live in help because my two younger brothers were only one and two years old. [My mother] had to go with my father to dinners, etc…. So we did have the help and most of my friends didn’t have a big house with help, so it was just not as comfortable as Washington. [In Washington] we had neighbors [who] had homes similar to our homes and we became good friends with them. There was a doctor [who] lived next door in Washington who sewed up my leg one night because I rode my scooter into my garage and I ripped open my knee on my father’s bumper. Dr. Caulfield came over and sewed up my knee right there. I didn’t have any medication. I just had to deal with it. I was nine when we moved [to Rochester in 1947].

**Anderson** *How interesting! Could you briefly chart your family’s moves both while you were growing up and then later just so we [have] a sense of where your parents were when?*

**Gordon** I remember the move from Washington to Rochester. [I went to Pine Manor Junior College in Boston when I was eighteen. When I was twenty years old] I went to the University of Geneva in Switzerland. [Then I returned] home and I taught preschool for one year in Rochester. Then I left home and went to Columbus, Ohio where my grandparents (my mother’s parents) lived. I worked at Ohio State University in the law library for two and a half years. I lived with [my grandparents] for a year and then I [found] an apartment near Ohio State. My mother was a graduate of Ohio State. That was meaningful living in Columbus because my parents met in Columbus and that was Dad’s first job with the Associated Press [A.P.].

[The A.P. Bureau] was in the same building as the *Ohio State* *Journal* and my mother worked for the *Journal*. [Mother] wrote an advice [column] to the lovelorn [and] Anne Sessions was her pen name, I guess you call it. She had taken over for a friend who was getting married. It was right after she had graduated from Ohio State and she didn’t know she was going to [have] that kind of a job, but she had a good friend who needed somebody to take over [her] job. So she became Anne Sessions and my father asked her out on a date.

They were married during the Depression so they had what you call an open [church] wedding where [relatives and friends] can come to the church and they didn’t have to spend money on wedding invitations, etc. My grandparents were members of the Broad Street Presbyterian Church. They had relatives, a lot of relatives. They came and I’m sure friends also came to the wedding, but my mother didn’t have bridesmaids like they did at a lot of wedding because of finances. I have a picture of her with her wedding dress on [and] she [wore] a pretty dress. My dad gave my mother a wedding band. It was a small band with diamonds [and] I have it. She didn’t have an engagement ring. [Dad] had just started [working for] the Associated Press and I know they had an apartment on Broad Street which was the main street in Columbus. They had one of those Murphy beds that goes up into the wall.

**Anderson** *Well, getting back to when you were younger then…*

**Gordon** Yeah…

**Anderson** *What was an average day like in your house?*

**Gordon** When we lived in Washington, we had help, but there were neighbors who had help, so we all felt equal. In Rochester the neighbors didn’t have help. We had a butler named Jesse and he lived on the third floor. There was a butler next door because we had a U.S. senator living next door and that butler was also a chauffeur and [he] drove Senator Maybank (from South Carolina) to work every day and we shared the driveway with the Maybanks. Anyway these two men were friends and what was I going to say about that? Well, I shouldn’t talk too much about them, but they were both characters and I do have stories about them. I would say that we went to school on the school bus, we went to Horace Mann Public School and we had a pretty normal life.

Dad came home for dinner and if my parents were going out then [Dad] would come home and change his clothes and my mother would go with him and they’d go out to a party or to various functions, because Washington is [a party town]. They went to Embassies to parties and I think because of Dad’s position that he was often asked to go. I think he thought it was partly his job to do it. He loved his work and he’d bring home newspapers and after dinner they’d sit together and read newspapers, and that went on in Washington and Rochester. I remember that very well.

We said grace at dinner because my father’s father was a minister. Not just because of that, but that was a habit and we went to church together on Sunday to a Methodist Church. Dad was very strict about us going to church. Being a minister’s son I think that made him feel that it was the right thing to do for our family whether we wanted to go or not, we went to church. So, I’d say we had a pretty normal family life.

**Anderson** *Where did you go to school?*

**Gordon** In Washington we lived in a townhouse in downtown Washington. I did go to a private school and I remember [that] Dad used to walk me to kindergarten at Holton Arms in Washington. We lived there a few years and [then] we moved to Spring Valley where there [were] a lot of senators. There was one senator, Lister Hill, [who lived] across the street.

You wanted to know where I went to school. I went to Horace Mann School when we moved to Spring Valley because it was the closest school and we would take the bus. I went to Pittsford Central School when we moved to Pittsford, New York. Then when I was in high school I went to a girl’s school in Rochester and it was called Columbia School. I think that was my mother’s influence because she went to a girl’s school in Columbus, Ohio, called Columbus School for Girls. She was the one who promoted private schools. My older brother went away to school and my two younger brothers went away. Actually my son ended up going to Trinity-Pawling School where my younger brothers went to school. That’s very unusual if you live in Colorado to go East to a Prep school. I’m very proud of Paul.

I graduated from Columbia School and I went to Pine Manor which is a junior college in Boston. It’s now a four-year college. Then I went to the University of Geneva in Switzerland for one semester, and that was really to improve [my] French. I just took courses to improve my French, and I did hang around with a couple of German girls and we spoke English quite a bit. (Laughs) We all did learn French; they were there to learn French also.

**Anderson** *What influence did your parents have on these decisions to go to these different colleges?*

**Gordon** I think that they were fine with everything I did. I don’t think there was any problem. My mother was happy I was going to Ohio State because she had gone there and her sister, [Jean], was [also] a graduate also of Ohio State.

**Anderson** *What did you do right after college?*

**Gordon** After college I was a preschool teacher. That was in Rochester and then I moved to Columbus, Ohio, right after that.

**Anderson**  *Could you give me a brief synopsis of what you’ve done since?*

**Gordon** I went to New York City. I had a boyfriend in New York City, so I left Columbus and I worked in New York City for an interior decorating firm [Thedlow’s], and that was a receptionist type job. Then I moved to Denver, and I didn’t move here until I was married, and I never worked again. I had a son a year after I was married and three years after Paul was born, my daughter Pamela was born. [On] the street in Golden, where we lived, most of the mothers stayed home back then. [I stayed home and] I did volunteer work, but I never had a paying job. My last job [was in New York City].

**Anderson** *Now I’d like to talk a little bit more about your father and your mother as well to fill in some of the gaps we have in the archival record. First, I’m wondering what your earliest memory of your father was?*

**Gordon** He walked me to school [when I was in kindergarten].

**Anderson** *I’m wondering what your earliest memory of your mother was?*

**Gordon** She was a good mother and a good wife and she liked to cook. She didn’t like to shop that much and I think it was because her father lost money during the Depression and she was very careful about spending money. We always kidded her even when she was older about that, that she was frugal. So that’s what I remember most about her.

**Anderson** *You’re father was raised in an apparently stable family with traditional Christian values. How much did he believe that his upbringing contributed to his success as an adult?*

**Gordon** I think that he thought that everybody who wanted to be successful should have religion and be a good person and not lie or cheat or anything like that. I think that was the way he felt.

**Anderson** *How much do you believe that it did?*

**Gordon** I think that definitely he did because he was honest and up front about everything. I think it helped him a lot.

**Anderson** *What stories did he tell you about his time growing up?*

**Gordon** He, well he would lie because he said he walked through the snow a couple of miles to go to school and we know that it doesn’t snow in Oklahoma! [He] also said he was one-eighth Chippewa and, according to one of my aunts, there was an Indian in their ancestry, but it’s hard to trace the Indian ancestry and we’ve never done that. Anyway he used to make a joke out of it. It bothered my mother if he said he was one-eighth Chippewa and she would say "Oh no, you’re not, Paul!" [I researched] the Cree Indians, because apparently we do have a Cree Indian ancestor, but I haven’t done enough research. I know that my older brother said that my father and my grandfather went to Michigan and they brought back a gift that an Indian boy gave to my older brother. Ranne, my older brother thinks that there really was a Chippewa Indian ancestor, but I know that Cree Indians live in Michigan and Canada. There are Cree Indian reservations, so we’ve just talked about it, and I’d like to find out more [about our ancestors].

**Anderson** *You’re father seems to always have known that he wanted to become a journalist? Do you know if that’s true? In other words, did he ever talk about doing anything else professionally with his life?*

**Gordon** No, he always, I think from the start, when he worked on a newspaper as a student that was what he always wanted to do.

**Anderson** *Your father’s papers indicate that the Depression was a rough time for his family financially. How much of an influence do you think the Depression had on his financial ambitions?*

**Gordon** Well, in Washington, I know we had to eat everything on our plates because it was during the war. I really don’t know about the Depression or how much of an effect it had on him. I just know that my mother was affected because her parents were doing very well and my grandfather had money in real estate and real estate wasn’t [of] any [value] during the Depression, so they just had to change their lifestyle completely.

With my father he talked about how they ate so much chicken when he was growing up because it was cheap and they had a big family. There were six children and a minister’s family is not well to do. They struggled and so he never wanted chicken after that. After he grew up and was married, he avoided eating chicken. I think Dad felt he grew up during the Depression, but I think that a minister’s family always struggles. My mother’s [family] really changed their lifestyle and my dad’s lifestyle was pretty much the same all [of] the time that he was growing up. He never talked about the Depression really.

**Anderson** *You already mentioned how your parents met during his first job with the A.P. in Columbus. Did they ever tell you stories about their early years together?*

**Gordon** Not that much, really. My mother did have a baby who died in New York City, in a hospital there. The baby was normal, but there was some illness that went around and other babies in the nursery also died. They used to keep babies in the hospital longer then and that was her first child. I remember that, but I don’t remember them talking that much about the first few years they were married. They did move around a lot and [my older brother attended twelve schools]. I had a more stable life because I was born in Philadelphia and we lived on Long Island and we lived in New York City and then Washington and then Rochester. When my father was with the Associated Press they [also] lived in Kansas City and Salt Lake City. So they moved around quite a bit. I do remember them talking about all the moves. I think it was exciting, but it was also hard on the family.

**Anderson** *What did you know about your father’s job when you were growing up?*

**Gordon** I just knew that he loved, he loved being a reporter and so that was it for him and then he enjoyed meeting people and writing stories and making sure that the spelling was right and the punctuation was right. He was very much a perfectionist and he would have us write letters. I remember in Pittsford, New York, he would have my older brother and [me] write letters to relatives and he would check them. If we had mistakes he would correct them, and we would have to rewrite the letters. So that part was good. I think it made me a perfectionist because I tend to read and see if there are mistakes. I think I picked that up from him.

**Anderson** *How would you describe what you thought he did at work?*

**Gordon** How would I describe what he did at work? I don’t…

**Anderson** *What you thought at the time when you were young, what you thought he did at work.*

**Gordon** I think he would go out and get news stories in Washington, and meet famous people. He told us that he had breakfast with President Roosevelt one day and that the Scottie, President Roosevelt’s Scottie, was under the table and so he was excited about having breakfast with the President. My two younger brothers were too young then, but my older brother and I were very impressed. Then when President Roosevelt died, it was on the radio, we didn’t have [a] T.V. [yet]. I do remember hearing that and how sad it was, for everybody.

**Anderson** *How much travel did his work involve when you were little?*

**Gordon** When I was little I don’t think he traveled that much. When I was nine, we moved to Rochester and they had Gannett company airplanes and he would go and visit newspapers that were part of the Gannett chain, so he did a lot of traveling. He often would take his golf clubs on the plane and then if they were interested in buying a newspaper, often the owner of the newspaper played golf and they’d go out and play golf, and sometimes they’d make a deal on the golf course.

**Anderson** *What activities was your mother involved with when you were growing up?*

**Gordon** She really was busy just being a wife and mother and running the house. She didn’t even belong to a bridge group until all of us were grown. I don’t think she really had that many social activities. She did belong to a woman’s club in Rochester. It was called the Chatterbox Club and I know that she gave a talk there about the Associated Press, and I wish I had a copy [of her speech]. I was not living there, but she talked about the A.P. and she said it’s not the A&P, but it’s the Associated Press. Because, when we lived in Washington we went to the A&P store, we did our shopping there.

I could go back a little bit about during the war when we lived in Washington. I do remember that women liked to buy nylon stockings. We went to a store when they put nylon stockings on a counter [and women fought over the stockings during the war. There never was that much talk about the Depression, except that I think that my grandparents avoided talking about it because it was a rough time for them.

**Anderson** *You’ve already mentioned that she was an editor when your parents first met, did she ever go back to that work at all?*

**Gordon** No, she never did.

**Anderson** *As you mentioned before you had the opportunity to move a lot. Do you think your mother enjoyed the variety?*

**Gordon** I think it was hard to go to new places with children, with a family. It wasn’t like in the army, if you joined the army, I think there, it’s a closer relationship with other people that are in the army, so it’s harder if you go to a strange city and you have to go to strange schools and I think it’s a big adjustment. I think it’s different.

**Anderson** *Which place do you think she liked best?*

**Gordon** Washington.

**Anderson** *From 1941 to 1945 your father was one of several privileged Washington correspondents included in a series of confidential briefings held by General George Marshall and Admiral Ernest King. Are you aware of what his opinions were of General Marshall and Admiral King both personally and professionally?*

**Gordon** No, I am not aware of that. But I do think he called General Marshall, "George." I think they were on a first name basis.

**Anderson** *Your father never served as a war correspondent, obviously that did not adversely affect his later career in journalism, but do you think he regretted not having done so on a personal level?*

**Gordon** Would you repeat that.

**Anderson** *Sure. Your father never served as a war correspondent overseas and, it did not affect his later journalism career. He rose very rapidly both in the Associated Press and in Gannett, but do you think he regretted not having done so on a personal level?*

**Gordon** No, he never said that he regretted it.

**Anderson** *Your father’s papers indicate that he and Kent Cooper had a very close working relationship until around 1947 when he moved to Gannett*. *Do you have any idea if that affected their relationship or friendship?*

**Gordon** They were good friends, and I would say the rest of Mr. and Mrs. Coopers’ lives, my parents were their friends. I was a friend of Mrs. Cooper’s when I lived and worked in New York City and she was a widow. We did see each other and so it was almost like they were part of her family. It was a very good relationship.

**Anderson** *Did your father talk about his relationship with Kent Cooper?*

**Gordon** He always looked up to him and I [know that my parents] thought a lot of him, like he was a mentor.

**Anderson** *Do you ever remember meeting Mr. Cooper when you were young?*

**Gordon** Yes, I met him in Washington.

**Anderson** *So that would have been before your father moved to Gannett…*

**Gordon** Yes.

**Anderson** *…To begin working for…While your father joined Gannett Company Incorporated as executive assistant to Frank Gannett and was almost immediately perceived as the heir apparent to Gannett himself, your father’s papers contain virtually no documentary evidence of professional jealousy on the part of any of Miller’s colleagues. Was your father actually hired specifically to succeed Gannett?*

**Gordon** Yes, he was.

**Anderson** *And were his colleagues really as welcoming and magnanimous as the collection seems to indicate?*

**Gordon** I think that he felt uncomfortable with them because, I think that there was one man [who] thought he was going to replace Frank Gannett when Frank Gannett passed away.

**Anderson** *Do you remember any of your father’s coworkers from this time or whether your parents talked about any of them?*

**Gordon** Yes, I do remember several of them and they came to our house. I just think the first year or so—I think it took them awhile to accept my father and then he finally was accepted and well liked and played golf with them and everything was fine after about a year.

**Anderson** *Who were some of your parents’ close friends during this time?*

**Gordon** He played golf and met a lot of other people in Rochester just playing golf. I would say that he kept in touch with Frank Gannett for a number of years. Frank Gannett was living in Rochester. One of the other founders of the Gannett Company also lived in Rochester, they kept in touch with him and his wife also. They knew presidents of a lot of big companies like Kodak and there were other big companies in Rochester and Dad was asked to be on the board of some of the companies.

They had a Paul Miller Day and President Nixon used to come to Paul Miller Day, and that was when they would play golf in Rochester and sometimes they'd play in Washington or other clubs and I have pictures that were taken with Pres—Nixon. [He] was a friend of Dad’s from the time he was a congressman. They knew each other, they’d met each other in Washington when we lived there and so the friendship developed. As I recall, the Nixons lived in Spring Valley [for] quite a while too, and that is where we lived in Washington. So he did play a lot of golf with Nixon and he was very upset because of what happened with President Nixon. He thought he was a good man and so I think it was hard on him, but most of Dad’s friends were honest so that was good.

**Anderson** *Were your parents close with people from the neighborhood that weren’t necessarily part of his professional circle?*

**Gordon** Yes, we knew the people [who] lived across the street very well. My parents sold off some of their property because they had twenty-for acres in 1947, but then they gradually sold it off and houses were built in the area there. So, they got to know all of the neighbors and they’d get together and have parties at each other's homes. So it was a lot nicer after we had neighbors, because we didn’t have neighbors for quite a while. When we were growing up we didn’t have close neighbors except the Cooleys, who lived across the street. He was a doctor in Rochester and we knew that family.

So yeah, we used to walk up to Clover Street and get the bus up there, the school bus. It went on a big circuit into the country and there were farmers’ children that would ride the bus, and I remember one boy saying "you live in such a big house, how come you have that big house?" And I don’t remember what I said, I was just kind of surprised what he would say, but that was elementary school where a lot of children are very honest with each other. It was just a different way of life in Washington.

I did go to Boston, you know I told you before about going to Boston, to college for two years and then I was back in Rochester teaching preschool for a year. So, I moved [to Rochester] when I was nine, so I really only lived there for nine whole years. I think that the formative years were there but also in Washington. I have a lot of good memories.

**Anderson** *Based on his papers, your father’s responsibilities at Gannett seemed to have much more to do with public relations*—*that is with Gannett’s publishing empire ,Rochester Civic affairs, New York State politics, etc.* —*than with the actual mechanics with publishing, reporting, and editorializing. Is this a fair appraisal of his new responsibilities at Gannett or is it merely a reflection of the letters and clippings that survive in the collection?*

**Gordon** Yes, I think he was very involved in civic affairs and went to luncheons and dinners. I remember that when we moved there he went to a lot of dinners because there were fundraisers for Israel. Israel wanted to become a country, a nation, and there were a lot of Jewish people and Dad would be invited to these fundraisers and he did try to help with that cause. Then Israel, they finally raised enough money to become a country or a nation. I think Dad probably helped with that.

**Anderson** *Well, I realize that you might not have a sense of the details of your father’s work once he moved to Gannett. How do you remember his day to day schedule changing with this new position, vis-à-vis from the Associated Press to Gannett.*

**Gordon** The fact that he seemed busier and was on the Gannett plane a lot going around to the other newspapers. He was very busy. He was the editor of the evening paper, the *Rochester Times* *Union*, but he was considered the publisher of both newspapers: the morning newspaper, the *Democrat and Chronicle*, and then the *Times Union*. So he was very involved with the local newspapers in addition to checking on the other newspapers and making sure they were doing a good job.

**Anderson** *Which man would your father have said had a more significant impact on his life: Kent Cooper or Frank Gannett?*

**Gordon** That’s hard to say, Frank Gannett was in his seventies when we moved to Rochester. I think he respected him, he respected Frank Gannett, and it’s hard to say. We remained friends with Mrs. Gannet after Mr. Gannett died and she even had a party for me, a big party, at her house right before I was married in 1967. We had moved there in 1947, so we kept up the friendship with the family, and I think that he respected both of the men equally. They were both good men and I think he had a lot of respect for Frank Gannett.

**Anderson** *From the time your father became president of Gannett Company Incorporated in 1957 until Allen Neuharth took over in [1979], your father oversaw a vigorous expansion program. In general, do you think his principal motivations for such an expansion were journalistic or were they entrepreneurial?*

**Gordon** I think they were journalistic and entrepreneurial also. Because he had friends who were in the newspaper business and men who owned chains that he would see at American Newspapers Publishers meetings and other meetings, and the Associated Press board [meetings]. I think it was a competitive thing, but I think he really enjoyed it, also. He did want success for the Gannett Company and, so the Gannett Company did grow quite a bit while my father was president.

**Anderson** *You would have been headed to college when your father started as chief at Gannett. How much did you hear about your father’s work while you were away?*

**Gordon** When I was at Pine Manor Junior College, it’s now Pine Manor College in Boston, I found out that my father had been named president of the Associated Press board, and he was already president of the Gannett Company. His picture was on the cover of *Time Magazine* while I was in Boston, because of the fact that he had those two well-known positions. It gave his background in an article. Of course, it was in a lot of newspapers when he became president of the Associated Press board. It was, of course, because he was the first former A.P. employee to become president of the board and that was the main topic when they put it in the newspapers and on the news, on the radio and TV.

**Anderson** *Do you have any sense of how things changed for him in these new positions?*

**Gordon** I just think he got busier and busier all the time. I think his release was playing golf (laughs) when he could. I think he loved the newspaper business first, so that was paramount and as I said before he and my mother would read newspapers at night, so it wasn’t just during the day that he was busy with the newspaper business.

**Anderson** *Your father knew every president from Franklin Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter. Three Republicans and five Democrats and he was particularly close to Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson, particularly Nixon. Although he was a lifelong Republican and conservative, in what ways did his political philosophy differ from the hyper-partisanship of our own time, or did it?*

**Gordon** I don’t think it really differed that much. I think he was, kind of like President Reagan if he was to say who was his favorite president was I think he really thought a lot like President Reagan thought.

**Anderson** *So his…*

**Gordon** Reaganomics…

**Anderson** *…conservative and Republican views—did they affect his feelings about or friendships with President Johnson and President Kennedy for example, or President Truman?*

**Gordon** No. As far as I know they didn’t talk about who was who and who was the Democrat and who was the Republican. I don’t think that. I think he tried to be bi, is the word bi-partisan?

**Anderson** *Yes.*

**Gordon** Because I think you feel more relaxed if you don’t talk about how you feel about it. I think being a good reporter is really to interview somebody and get what you can out of that person and not give your views so much.

**Anderson** *So he didn’t let his personal political philosophy interfere with his reporting or journalism…*

**Gordon** No I don’t think he showed that he was biased, if he was, if he thought that—if he was biased I don’t think he let people know that. Famous people didn’t know it.

**Anderson** *What stories do you remember hearing from him about some of the presidents that he worked with, or interviewed, or knew?*

**Gordon** Well he and my mother went on the Gannett plane to see LBJ in Texas. They went to the ranch and LBJ had a big Cadillac convertible and he drove them around. He drove them all over the ranch on these bumpy roads. So my mother especially remembered that. Dad thought it was great that Johnson wanted to show his property, and because Dad was from Oklahoma and Johnson was from Texas, I think they got along, even though their politics weren’t the same. They got along real well.

**Anderson** *Your father’s editorials show that he was a lifelong fiscal conservative, but he also served as president of the Associated Press and Gannett during one of the most tumultuous periods of social change in the history of the United States. What were his views of the cultural revolution with respect to racial equality, and there’s others: women’s rights, the Vietnam war, campus protests and the sexual revolution?*

**Gordon** It’s hard to say. I can’t really tell you how he felt. I just don’t know.

**Anderson** *Was he appalled at the social changes that were occurring during the ’60s and the ’70s*? *Did he share those feelings?*

**Gordon** He never, no, he never really complained about, and I—no I don’t remember him being upset about it at all. When you talked about the cultural revolution, are you talking about China?

**Anderson** *No, the cultural revolution in the United States. The civil rights movement in the ’60s and ’70s, the women’s rights, the women’s rights movement, the Vietnam war, campus protests against the war and then the sexual revolution that occurred during the ’60s and the ’70s.*

**Gordon** I can’t really reply to that. I just don’t know.

**Anderson** *Do you have any sense that his personal views may have been different than the ones that some of the Gannett papers may have espoused?*

**Gordon** I know that there was an uprising in Rochester with the blacks. They thought my dad was biased. It was partly because of what some of the other people who worked for the Rochester Newspapers were writing in articles. So there was a problem at that point. But there were uprisings in other cities around the United States at the same time. I know that Dad was not against equality for everyone and he, when he was growing up, he had a very good friend who was an Indian in high school, because they lived on an Indian reservation in Oklahoma. So he went to school with Indians and remained—stayed in touch with the one man who was a good friend in high school. So, there wasn’t, I think he believed in racial equality just partly because of that background and because of his father being a minister. He certainly wasn’t a racist, let’s put it that way.

You know how I told you that he would kid about being one-eighth Chippewa. I think my mother (laughs), back then it wasn’t as socially acceptable and nowadays you know you say you’re part Indian if you are. I’ve told people, I’m a member of the DAR, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and so I told people at one of the meetings that I thought I was part Cree Indian and two other women spoke up. One is Cherokee, she’s part Cherokee, the other one, I can’t remember what her background is, but it’s something that when my mother was growing up, you—there was more racism and you didn’t say, “I’m part Indian.” That was a big joke and fun for Dad because he would say that he was one-eighth Chippewa and Mother would say, "Oh no, you’re not." So that’s the differences (laughs) and my mother grew up in Columbus, Ohio and lived there all of her life and you know, in Oklahoma there are a lot of Indians too and in Ohio that’s not the case. You just didn’t see Indians so much. So the cultural revolution, I think, is something that—we all accepted it and that’s all I can say about it.

**Anderson** *Allen Neuharth, titled his autobiography, Confessions of an S.O.B.; and from your father’s papers it seems that they might have had a somewhat conflicted relationship. What were your father's feelings with respect to Al Neuharth in 1963 when your father first hired him?*

**Gordon** I think that Dad thought Al was a good worker and they had a good relationship. I don’t remember, I know that Al was divorced when he was living in Rochester and I know my parent’s liked his wife and they were upset about that. I think he was very different than my father was and, but he did—Al Neuharth started *USA Today* and Dad was proud of the fact that it did become a successful newspaper. It struggled for a few years; they were in the red for a while, but that was Al Neuharth’s big achievement. Socially, after he was divorced, my parents didn’t really see Al Neuharth that much. It was always a business relationship. It wasn’t as social as some of the other friendships and relationships.

**Anderson** *How did your father feel about Al Neuharth after the latter became Gannet CEO in 1973?*

**Gordon** I think that [Dad] approved of just about everything that he did. Yes, I think that Dad was pleased with everything. [However, there were Gannett employees who did not like Neuharth.]

**Anderson** *Your father retired in 1979, what do you remember about his decision at that time?*

**Gordon** When he became chairman of the board, and I’ve forgotten what year that was, is when he became in charge of acquisitions and more newspapers were bought. He did have a stroke soon after he retired and they were living in Florida and started living in Florida half of the year, sometimes more than half of the year. Then they’d go to Rochester for the summer. I think they were pleased with Al Neuharth, the way he ran the company.

**Anderson** *What were your parent's plans for retirement?*

**Gordon** I think that they thought about maybe living in just one place, but they did keep two homes. They kept their home in Pittsford and they had bought a home in Palm Beach, Florida in the 1960s. They rented it out part of the time because they weren’t down there very much. I mean for a number of years they rented it out and then started going there more often. So that was their lifestyle.

**Anderson** *Were there particular things that they wanted to do during their retirement?*

**Gordon** Dad liked to play golf and even after he had a stroke, he did continue to play golf.

**Anderson** *I read that. What did your mother do in the years following your father’s death? Did she move? Was she involved in different activities?*

**Gordon** She actually played a lot of bridge after her children left home and she loved gardening, and she continued to do gardening and play bridge after my father passed away.

**Anderson** *How do you think your parents would want to be remembered as a couple and individually?*

**Gordon** I think they were very good for each other, businesswise—with his business—and also socially, they were good. They—I think they knew how to deal with people and I think they were successful.

**Anderson** *What do you think is your father’s greatest legacy?*

**Gordon** I think that his greatest legacy might be that you should do the right thing and that you should not have—that there should not be biased reporting, which is not true anymore. There is a lot of biased reporting because people seem to look for that. I think they like, they like to hear different viewpoints, let’s put it that way. It’s different than it used to be, but I think that printing the news and giving all the facts is something that we don’t [do]. It’s not as good reporting nowadays as it used to be. You have to do a lot of in-depth reading to get the whole story. I think he just loved being a reporter and that was his legacy was trying to be a good reporter.

**Anderson** *He certainly was.*

**Gordon** Yes.

**Anderson** *Is there anything that we haven’t talked about that you would like to discuss?*

**Gordon** No, I can’t think of anything right now.

**Anderson** *Well, Ms. Gordon, I thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and feelings with us and we’re going to conclude the interview at this time.*

**Gordon** Okay.

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*