Roger Hamilton
Narrator

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Interviewer

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MG: This is July 9, 1985. I am Martin Grindeland and this is an interview for the Oral History Project with Roger Hamilton. Roger served as publisher of the *Becker County Record* in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota from 1947 to 1961. He was the director of development and public relations at Moorhead State University from 1962 to 1972. He developed the department of mass communications in 1968, and served as chairperson until his retirement in 1981. His students as well as his children are active communication practitioners throughout the Upper Midwest.

You were born in 1915 in Detroit Lakes.

RH: Yes.

MG: What are some of your earliest memories of life in Detroit Lakes?

RH: Well, it was a quiet little town that was very attractive, really. And I...I think one of the things that I remember now about the community itself were the seasons. They were very distinct and very enjoyable. I don't enjoy winter very much anymore, but as a youngster I really looked forward to it. And it was a small town about, I suppose at that time, roughly three thousand people. We lived in an old home uptown. It was a large home. And right across the street from us there was a...for a while there was a livery stable. So there were a lot of horses and wagons at that particular time. Although my grandfather was one of the first to get an automobile in the community and that was a big event, I can tell you.

Hmmm, one of our little occupations used to be to...hmmm...in the wintertime, to hook our sleds to the back of the drays that brought the ice out of Detroit Lake. Then they'd cut the ice down at the foot of Washington Avenue.

MG: Mmmm.

RH: Which is the main street. And then they'd load it onto these drays. And the horses would pull it up the hill, and we'd hook on behind them, have them pull us up, and then we would slide then back down. Hmmm, it was a town where they had band concerts on one night of the week. And when we lived near there my mother would pop popcorn and we'd go out and sell it for a

nickel a bag, make a few dimes. And hmmm...it was a nice place to grow up. I've always remembered it and always will.

MG: In preparing for this interview I talked with several people, and without exception, they said that you were always a good and decent person and that you were always very modest. Were these values instilled in you as a child by your parents and family?

RH: Well, I'm not sure that these people are exactly right, but...[Chuckles]

MG: [Laughs]

RH: I suppose it had something to do with my mother and father. And also, I think, teachers were very important. We were very fortunate, I think, when I was young to have some excellent teachers in the Detroit Lakes system. And at that time...I don't know why this occurred, but a number of them that came there to teach came from schools like Carleton, and St. Olaf, and also, of course, from the training institutions like St. Cloud and Moorhead State colleges. And I think that we were extremely fortunate in the kinds of teachers that we had as youngsters. Not that they were any better than they are today.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But anyway, they did have a big impact on me.

MG: What were some of your earliest memories of your early education?

RH: Well...

MG: What were the...?

RH: Spelldowns, I guess.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: Are some of the things [chuckles] that I think about.

MG: Right.

RH: I guess they still have them today, but...that was a kind of a big thing then when the spelling was important. Hmmm. And I can remember, of course, a teacher that we had in junior high school and they called her...her name was Angeline McNellis, but they called her Angie. Not to her face, but...[Chuckles]

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: And she was a great disciplinarian. She was a very good teacher and she was in charge of the assembly hall as they called it then. And if she didn't think that you were behaving correctly, the way she wanted you to, she gave you a long division problem. And it was *really* a long division problem, because she would have you working on that for a long time, and if you didn't get it right you went back and you worked at it some more. She was...I had...they were good teachers.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: And of course that's where I developed my interest in journalism, really. Because I had a teacher in high school, Kathleen Dowling, who...she didn't have any background in journalism herself or in newspaper work, but she was made advisor to what passed for a newspaper in those days in high school. And we didn't have any journalism courses or anything. And she was very good and got me interested.

MG: After high school you went to Oberlin College and you majored in English literature, and worked on the student newspaper and you were editor of the student newspaper. Hmmm...was that good preparation for your work as a journalist? Your education at Oberlin?

RH: I think it was. Because again, there wasn't any journalism department there, and we were more or less left to our own as far as for what we could do. We did have an advisor but we seldom saw him. And we had to put out two newspapers a week. We put out a paper on Tuesday and one on Friday. And we had two managing editors and an editor in chief, so one managing editor was in charge of Tuesday paper and one on the Friday paper. And then the editor in chief was responsible overall. And it was a...it was hard work, because you were working with a volunteer staff. No one was paid very much. I think that as a managing editor, and subsequently as an editor, I got tuition. Hmmm, which in those days really wasn't very much. I think it was about two hundred and twenty-five dollars a semester there. Hmmm...college costs were quite different than what they are today.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But of course, two hundred and twenty-five dollars in those days was a lot of money, too, because of what you could buy.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But it was good preparation. And you not only had to, you know, have some ability to write...And you were often criticized, which was another good, helpful thing, I think, because it was the kind of a community that *was* critical. And...but you also had to organize, and you had to, you know, recruit and try to train people to work. So overall I would say, yes, it was excellent preparation.

MG: After you graduated you went back to Detroit Lakes and you went to work for the *Detroit Lakes Tribune* and served as assistant editor. Could you describe that experience and...?

RH: Well, after I graduated...I graduated in 1937, and I did try to find work in the East, in Cleveland, because...hmmm...when I was at Oberlin I did work as a stringer for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *The Associated Press*. But 1937 was not a real good year to find work anywhere. And hmmm...subsequently, an opening occurred in Detroit Lakes with the *Detroit Lakes Tribune*, and I was offered the position. And so I came home and took it, and it was...I think I started at something like less than twenty dollars a week. But when I think after I worked there...see, I worked there until 1941. I think I got up to twenty-five dollars a week at the...

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: We did used to get a fairly large Christmas bonus. Well, I would say large, you know, fifty or a hundred dollars. But I lived at home at the time, and hmmm...I saved. I never felt it was a hardship. And again, it was...good training because there was just the editor, his name was Wes Meyer. He and I worked together. There was just the two of us, and we did all the writing for the newspaper. Well no, excuse me, there was a sports...somebody that handled sports, and there was a girl who did what we called society news in those days. But she was the one that called people around town and asked them who was coming, and what their social events were.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: And who entertained whom and the rest of that stuff, which was a big item in the newspaper, a big part of the paper. And of course we had the core...we called them the country correspondents. And these were people in the townships and communities in the Detroit Lakes area that sent in little items once a week, usually about themselves. But sometimes they would have an item of more significance.

MG: What was the mood like in the Detroit Lakes area prior to World War II?

RH: Comfortable, I guess you would say. Hmmm...not too concerned. We listened to...we listened to Hitler's speeches but we didn't always...couldn't understand German. [Chuckles] Ah, but you could understand raving and the kinds of oratory that he engaged in. I think there was concern. But hmmm...we weren't a part of the coastal area of the country.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: And I think we felt kind of isolated from...from the sort of hysteria that subsequently occurred on some of the coasts. I think that the...there wasn't a whole lot of...of concern about war.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm. During World War II you served as a...in field artillery and later as a navigator in the Army Air Corps. How did this military experience influence your development as a journalist?

RH: Oh, I suppose it just...you know, shipping away kind of broadened me. I...I'm not sure that broadened is the correct term to use as far as military experience is concerned, but I did a lot of traveling. And I had to adjust to some rather difficult situations and people. I guess that would be the main part of it. When I went into service in the field artillery at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, that was supposed to be...You know, that was in the days when you signed up for a year and then you got your year over with and you were supposed to come home. Well, in the summer of 1941 Congress extended that to eighteen months.

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: And that brought a lot of unhappiness to many of the people, particularly in places like Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Hmmm, and then, of course, on December 7th of that year after Pearl Harbor, well, everything changed. And when I realized then that it was going to be a long time, I decided I wanted to try to get into the Air Force. And because I had a college education I had an opportunity that some others didn't, because at that time what they called cadets had to have a college degree. Hmmm, later on it was changed.

MG: You also did some writing then.

RH: Yes, ah, that was very brief. Hmmm. When I was in the field artillery and they discovered that I had some journalistic background they asked me to put out a weekly mimeographed newsletter, which I did all by myself. Because I wrote it, and I got the news, and I typed the stencils, and ran it off, stapled it, and distributed it. And hmmm...it wasn't much in terms of news. But the interesting thing about it was that the second of those newsletters that I put out was dated December 7, 1941. And of course that never got distributed because that was the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

MG: What do you recall about that day other than that?

RH: Well, it was a day that you don't forget. Hmmm. As in my own particular case, I was working on this newsletter, and the word came that...over the radio. And then I was recalled to...back to the battery. And hmmm...we were...they organized a number of what they called special units. They took a unit, a field artillery unit, an infantry unit, a headquarters company, and they put them into a task force. And I was assigned to a group that went to Texas City, Texas. And our mission was to guard the causeway that connects Galveston, which is an island, to the Texas mainland. There was a feeling that if the Japanese could attack Pearl Harbor just the way they did that perhaps they could attack coastal cities in the United States. And so they sent units, another unit from our camp went to New Orleans. And we were assigned down there for about a month or more.

Hmmm...I guess the thing that I remember the most is that when we were in camp, at Camp Claiborne, there are four military camps within the radius of a few miles of Alexandria, Louisiana. And the economy of the whole community changed. They converted garages into beer parlors. And they had to stagger the leaves for the soldiers from the various camps because if they all went to town at the same time it would have been really rough. [Chuckles] And so

people kind of resented having the soldiers around. Hmmm, even though I don't really think that we created a whole lot of problems. Hmmm. But after Pearl Harbor, and then I remember this in particular, we were sent to Texas City, Texas. And we went through towns in Texas where people got up in the middle of the night to watch our convoy go through.

MG: Mmmm.

RH: And they cheered us. [Laughing] And we weren't prepared for that!

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: It was different.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But it was that way all over the country, I'm sure.

MG: During this period, you also met your wife Dorothy in Tennessee. Following the war you brought her back to the Red River Valley. What were her first impressions of this part of the country?

RH: Well, we came back with our infant son in January 1946.

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: And that's when the Soo Line had a passenger train that ran from Minneapolis to Winnipeg, and went through Detroit Lakes about two o'clock in the morning. And the snow was about six feet deep.

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: And it was about twenty below zero when my parents met us at the depot. And it chilled her.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But she survived.

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: [Chuckles]

MG: After the war you went back to the *Tribune*. Hmmm. And later you bought the *Becker County Record* in 1947. Were you apprehensive about this venture?

RH: Well, I didn't buy it.

MG: Okay.

RH: It was in a partnership.

MG: Right.

RH: With B.L. Benshoof (we call him Jack Benshoof) and I. In fact, well, he and I were co-publishers of it.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: Were partners and co-publishers. And hmmm...one of the reasons that...of course, we both had an interest in, is because the *Record* was founded by my grandfather in 1872. And he sold it to Jack's father and a partner in something like 1912, I think. That might not be exactly right, but it's close. And so I felt that I was getting a newspaper back that had been in the family. And of course Jack's father had been the editor of the paper, and so he had kind of the same feeling about it. We didn't have any money, but we bought it, and spent the rest of the years trying to pay for it.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm. How...how would you describe the community newspaper business at that time as compared to the present time?

RH: Well, it was a manufacturing operation I would call it, primarily. We were more engaged during the week in actually putting the newspaper physically together probably than we were in the writing the news, getting the news, and so forth. Because it was an arduous and a long process. We were dealing with hot metal, dealing with heavy lead forms, hmmm, the printing press, and of course the folder. Hmmm, each week we would put the paper together from lines of type and then set the headlines in and the rest of it. You'd print the paper and then you'd tear it down and you'd re-melt the metal and you'd go back again. So you were really engaged in a manufacturing process that was very time consuming. Ah, not that we didn't have a pretty good product, and often a very good product. But we really had to devote *more* attention to the...actually, the manufacture of the product than we did to the content of it.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: I would say that was one of the main differences. There was another thing about the community paper that I think was significant at that time. The laws in Minnesota made it mandatory that if you were going to be a legal paper...and to be a legal paper was important because that meant then that you could carry all the legal notices like the City Council proceedings, and the tax lists, and the various notices that attorneys publish. But to be a legal newspaper in Minnesota you actually had to print it in the community. In other words, your press and your operation had to be in that community. So that made it mandatory that you have all the equipment for it right there. And that meant that you had a large investment in the physical plant.

Subsequently, that law was changed. That was after we got out of the business, so...and that's when you had the development of what they call central plants today. A number of newspapers go buy together, and they buy or they put up a central printing plant in a central location that they all have access to. And then, of course, the offset printing came in at the same time or shortly before that. So they were freed from a *lot* of the arduous work that was involved in putting the paper together. And I think that that not only helped them to survive financially, but I think it improved the product of the paper.

MG: What were some of the big stories covered by the *Becker County Record* during that period from 1947 to 1961?

RH: Well, of course, the one that I remember, and one I have used occasionally in classes that I have taught at Moorhead State, it was a bad example of what not to do. [Chuckles]

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: Was the time a young man was released from the Fergus Falls State Hospital. They had begun a program where they let some of the patients go back home on weekends and be with their families. And this young man came back to Detroit Lakes. And the first night that he was there was just fine. But the second day, something went wrong and he butchered his wife. It was about at the time that we had gotten some new camera equipment, and we were...the engraving process had changed to where you could use what we call plastic plates rather than steel engravings. And so it was easier to use photographs. And we kind of went all out on this thing, and we took some rather...pictures that normally would not appear in that community newspaper. Bloodstained walls and odds and ends like that.

Hmmm, the paper created quite a sensation. The phones started ringing as soon as it came out. And hmmm...there were those who said, "Well, thank God we've got a paper that dares to put something in there besides country correspondence." And there were others who were outraged by the fact that we had dared to treat a newspaper...or treat a story in that bizarre way. And that years later I could...had to tend to agree with the people who criticized this, because actually we were perpetuating something that perhaps is not exactly true. That, you know, a mental patient is something...someone to be...

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: ...afraid of and confined and...So I wasn't ever proud of what we did, but it was something I have never forgotten.

MG: What would be an example of a story that you would be most proud of in terms of story?

RH: Well, I think the series that we did after Sputnik. Now I'm...I'm at a loss to remember exactly when Sputnik was. [Chuckles] But anyway, I suppose...I've forgotten exactly...Anyway, after the Russians put up Sputnik, my partner, who was a...who did a lot of the editorials came

out with a series about the educational system in the community. And he did a very good job. Sputnik was a thing that stimulated him. He said, "If the Russians can do this and we can't, there is something wrong." And he tended to pick on the educational system. He didn't condemn it, but he said, "Let's take a look at what we're doing." And it was a series and it was very well done. And it stimulated the whole community. It made a lot of people angry. It made a lot of the school teachers and administrators of the school angry that we were doing this. But in the long run I think it contributed something, because at least it got people talking about an educational system that they had more or less ignored, I think. You know, it's very easy to ignore education. People in this country have done it for years. They...they support it, I don't mean that. But they know very little about what goes on. And so I think I was very proud of that, of what we did.

MG: In 1962 you accepted a position as director of development and public relations at Moorhead State University. Was this a difficult transition to make from that of a journalist to a public relations practitioner?

RH: In a way it was. Hmmm, I had never done...I've done, of course, written a lot of news stories, and that part of it was easy enough. But adjusting to a state agency where you were...often had to clear what you were writing with a number of people was one of the hardest things I had to do. I was working for the president, John Neumaier, but lots of times stories would come up about somebody in a particular department or something that was going on at the university (or college it was in those days). Hmmm...and it would often be necessary to clear this with three or four different people before I finally got the thing ready to go out. And that annoyed me. And it was...that was part of it that I...I never adjusted to. I don't think I ever adjusted to that in very good shape but...learned to live with.

MG: What were some of your responsibilities in this position?

RH: Well, they kind of grew as things went on, because it was a new position here. I did begin by handling news releases and I was advisor to the student newspaper which in those days was called the *Western Mistic*. Hmmm, MSTC with an "I" and Moorhead State Teachers College was the name before it was Moorhead State College. And hmmm, I had the...a lot my responsibilities was also handling correspondence for the president. I wrote a lot of his letters and I outlined some of his speeches. I didn't write his speeches, I shouldn't say that, because I didn't. But I would often do research for him on those speeches. And John Neumaier was an excellent speaker, and he was a person who could amuse a crowd of people, but also get a point across in a very good way.

And we had a very close relationship, working relationship, as far as that was concerned. And we both had similar ideas about where we wanted this college to go. And so it was a mutual understanding. And he worked very hard in the years that he was here to get support for Moorhead State from the Legislature and also to get it more broadly known as far as the educational world was concerned. And that was probably the major task that I was involved with. Later on, of course, there were other things were added, we got a print shop that was put in and I was put in charge of that. And hmmm...we started putting out a quarterly magazine, and I had responsibility for the college catalog, and a lot of other things came out later.

MG: During this period the institution changed from Moorhead State College to Moorhead State University. What were some of the other notable changes that took places during the decade from 1962 to 1972?

RH: Well, one of the major changes was probably—as far as this college was concerned—was the physical plant. And the 1960s was a time when we were putting up buildings every year almost. And Moorhead State was one of the...was the first to put up an arts, a center for the arts, was the first one of the state colleges in Minnesota. So there was a lot of building that was going on. But the more significant changes that were taking place were in the academic programs. And that's where John Neumaier and of course Roland Dille later on were very strong in building up the academic program of this particular institution.

[Recording interruption]

MG: This is Side Two of an oral history interview with Roger Hamilton.

This period was also known as a time of social unrest on many college campuses. How did the events of the so-called "turbulent sixties" impact upon MSU?

RH: Well...I think they had a fairly enormous impact. We had a...they affected the newspaper. They tended to affect, I think, some of the academic programs. And I guess, in a way, they kind of awakened the conscience of a good many people. Hmmm...I suppose one of the things, one of the major impacts in this community, was the bringing of the black students into the college. It wasn't something that was particularly looked upon with a lot of favor by many people in the community. But it was something that John Neumaier absolutely insisted upon doing. He felt a great responsibility. [Coughs] And I think that that in itself had a beneficial influence later.

Ah...I do suppose there are still people who are uncomfortable about race relations, but I believe that as far as this community is concerned, it helped in the long run for people to be a little bit more compassionate and understanding. And there was a lot of misunderstanding about race. There still is, and I don't think any of us are immune from that kind of thing. But the fact that John Neumaier and others made a special effort to try to do something in this particular area was very important. And I suppose in the long run it might have had something to do with the fact that he subsequently resigned. But there were other factors, too. Hmmm, because it was a difficult time, and this is a conservative community, or was. I don't know how I'd characterize it today. Probably hasn't changed a whole lot, but I think people are more understanding. And I think that he helped contribute to that understanding. The students, as far as classes were concerned, I would have to describe it as one of the most exciting times to be a teacher that I can ever remember. Hmmm, I had a mixture in classes. But you never had a dull class. You *always* had somebody questioning, hmmm, irritating somebody else in the class...

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: However, a couple of times when in a class I was teaching called Mass Media in Society, in which the quarterback of the football team was one of them and he was also a fraternity member. And then there were two very radical left wing young men who deliberately baited him, and there were times when it became extremely tense. And I remember one time one of the students after class came up to me and said, "What would you have done if they'd started to fist fight?"

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: And I said, "I guess I'd walk out of the room!" [Chuckles]

MG: [Laughs]

RH: [Laughing] What else can you do?

MG: In 1969, the new president of MSU, Dr. Roland Dille shut down the student newspaper. What was the story behind this incident, as you remember it?

RH: Yeah. A lot of people have different memories of this but, hmmm...the newspaper...didn't...felt it was controlled by a radical group on campus. And that was kind of the fate of the newspaper from time to time. A particular group would get control of it. Like when I came here, the non-fraternity members kind of ran the paper. And they wouldn't let anybody that was affiliated with a fraternity get near it. And you know, subsequently, those things change. Well anyway, at this particular time, hmmm...the paper was controlled by...by a radical group. They were...I use the term radical uncomfortably because, hmmm...I'd probably use a better term than that. I wouldn't want to use left wing, so I'll use radical, because they were radical in terms of some of the others in this...in the college.

And they began...it started innocently enough, I think. One of them had been to the 1968 Chicago Convention, the Democratic Convention. And he came back and he wrote a story for the newspaper that was really quite good. Hmmm. *But* he used all the language that the police and the students in Chicago used, which, in other words, he was telling the story just exactly as it was (or at least as how he remembered it) because how are you going to describe something like that if you don't use the language that they were using? But that was not greeted with a whole lot of enthusiasm on the campus of Moorhead State College.

And things went from bad to worse, particularly when Humphrey was the candidate for president and...and he more or less...hmmm...I don't know how to say this exactly except that his view on the Vietnam War changed slightly or differently. In other words, he was not as much opposed as he had been originally, and students that were radical looked upon this as a great sellout. And they put out a copy of the newspaper in which they described him in very vulgar terms. Ah...and there were other things that happened.

The president at that time was put in a very uncomfortable position. There really wasn't a whole lot that...that he could do. *But* it subsequently was determined that a president was also legally the publisher of the college newspaper. Well, here he was in the position where he was supposed

to be publisher of a newspaper, but didn't have anything to say about what went into it. So when they finally came out with the...an edition that was actually libelous, or at least verged on that, he seized it, or he said, "No, we're not going to distribute it." And that was the end of it for a while. Then they went off campus, or subsequently went off campus, and tried to put out a paper. And that didn't last very long, but...

MG: How did the new student newspaper, *The Advocate*, evolve then from that?

RH: Well, for a long time the administration and then subsequently the faculty senate tried to get the mass communications department to assume responsibility for the paper. And we were willing to do it provided, you know, that we were given some additional assistance. And I'm talking about faculty assistance. Hmmm, most of us came from a background where we didn't want to run the student newspaper. We would help them, but we didn't want [unclear] because you either have what you call a laboratory newspaper or you don't. And a laboratory newspaper is one that you use as far as classroom is concerned, and you...and the instructor or whoever is also the managing editor or the publisher, and he tells them what to do. Hmmm, we weren't particularly prepared to do that, because we didn't have anybody that we could assign to it. It's a big job.

The faculty senate subsequently passed a resolution saying that the mass communications department should take over the student newspaper. And we flatly refused and said, "No, we can't possibly do that." We had, you know, part time faculty, we had people like myself that were...had split responsibilities. We didn't have the faculty to handle it. And then finally we got a new dean here, and he called some of us in one time and he said, "Now, we have got to...the mass communications department has got to take some responsibility for this." So after a long negotiating and so forth we worked out an arrangement where we assumed some responsibility but not all. In other words, we...we had something to say about who was...we didn't call him advisor, we called him publisher of the paper. We thought, that isn't going to free the president of this legal responsibility, but at least we put it up there and call him a publisher.

And the student senate at that time came up with some money, and so we worked out this formula for handling it. And we got rid of any border publications and the whole bit. And we said this is...that it's going to be run under these circumstances. I got on the phone and I just called a couple of our good mass com students, and this was in the summertime, and asked them if they would be willing to serve as editor. And we started out with coeditors. And also I drafted a young man from the business department to be the business manager. And we just put together a staff and then we had an advisor who was also the news editor for the college and worked in my department.

And they decided among other things they wanted to change the name, and they changed it to *Advocate* and so on. And we got through the first year just fine. And they did...there was a change in the editors, but I think one of the things that helped it get off on a good start was the fact we had a good business manager, and we had two editors who were not only good students and good writers, but they were able to attract a high caliber of people to the paper. And of

course that's the whole secret of putting on a college paper, getting the right people in there. So...I don't know how it's doing today, but that's how it got its start. [Chuckles]

MG: Right. In 1968 you established the department of mass communications, and you served as chair of this department until your retirement in 1981. What inspired you to develop a new department?

RH: Well, I didn't actually develop the new department. I was a part of a group that included, oh, four or five different faculty members who put together an initial program for it. And I was really more of a consultant to that group than I was an official part of it. Hmmm...subsequently, they came in with a huge budget of something approaching sixty or seventy thousand dollars, which was, in those days, it was kind of like the budget for the whole college. Well, no. Well, not exactly, but it was a *lot* and a great...and of course the college could not come up with that kind of funds to fund the department.

Well, subsequently a couple of those people just resigned. And here we were there...the college was left with the department, and there was nobody there to initiate the...get it going. And they called me and asked me if I would, you know, serve as temporary chairman of it. And I agreed. And we changed the program slightly, not a whole lot, to begin with. Hmmm...and subsequently, because we all...well, those of us who were engaged in it initially came from a community newspaper background, the program more or less developed along those lines of needs and of the community paper. And I guess that was one of its strengths, subsequently, because so many of the graduates are involved in community newspaper operations. Oh, then of course other departments were...or other phases of it were added later, like the broadcasting, and advertising, public relations.

MG: Who were some of the first teachers in the department and what were some of the first courses to be offered?

RH: Well, the first teacher really probably was Howard Binford who today publishes *Howard Binford's Guide* in the community here. And hmmm...then he taught the news writing courses. Hmmm...then we also taught a photography course and Tom Ohm[sp?] was the teacher for that before Al Carter came. And Marv Bossart has been involved with the department as a part time teacher from the very beginning. Hmmm. Melva Moline was involved with it; she was a secretary to the department at that time, but she was also an advisor. And she taught one of the courses that was under my name to begin with because I didn't have enough time to teach it and she taught it. And she got interested in teaching. Hmmm...I don't want to leave anybody out here.

But...hmmm...those were the...Howard Binford was one of the earliest teachers. And he had a very interesting approach to teaching. He actually made the students do assignments in the way they would do them for a community paper. I mean he wasn't always in the classroom. He had a copy editing class, for example, and he'd have the kids get up about four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning and come to class.

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: That wasn't always greeted with a whole lot of enthusiasm, but it was...[chuckles] And on election day or...he had the students put out an election issue that was probably more complete in its summaries and the tabulations that it contained than the local newspaper had had.

MG: Oh.

RH: In fact, it got recognition from the Minnesota Newspaper Association and others for...hmmm...And he had them working all night. And he would take them to press conferences, and had assignments in the community where they were involved in. He was a very good teacher.

MG: How did the four concentrations of advertising, broadcast journalism, print journalism, and public relations evolve?

RH: Oh, it began primarily, of course, with print journalism. And hmmm...then again, because of the background of the faculty members, I think, we subsequently added the other sequences. Howard had a background in advertising and public relations. Melva Moline has a split background, I guess you would say. She worked for a community newspaper in Lisbon, North Dakota and also for the *Red River Scene* in Moorhead. But she was also in broadcast news for Channel Four here, for some time, and of course had worked for...since had worked for WDAY.

So there was, you know, a mixture here that lent itself to that kind of development. And I suppose one of the other things that also did was the fact that from the beginning we did require photography in this department. I remember some of the people from the university came up here one time and they said, "Well, you're going to regret that." And you know it...*but* I don't think that we ever did. I think that photography was a strong part of the program. And of course it's a...it's the kind of a course that lends itself to all of the sequences that we were talking about.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm. Why didn't they think there should be an emphasis on both verbal and visual communications?

RH: Well, they thought visual communications...but actually teaching photography itself they thought would be too big a job.

MG: Mmmm.

RH: Because you'd have too many students. And of course we did have to limit the classes. And that got to be a problem.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: Because we simply could not accept all the students who wanted to take photography. And we had to limit it to the majors. Hmmm. That was not greeted with a lot of excitement on the campus either.

MG: Who have been some of your most memorable students?

RH: Oh, I'd hate to start naming them because you know...The one that immediately comes to mind, of course, is the one that's received so much recognition right...recently, and that's Kathy Mok in...with the *Fargo Forum*.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But there are many others and...I'm not good at names.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: But...

MG: How was Kathy Mok as a student? How do you remember her as?

RH: Oh, very good. You know, she was...of course, she was an older student, too.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: And she had a broader...she brought a broader experience to the classroom than some of the others. Because she'd been in the Navy, and the...her father was the managing editor of the *Fargo Forum*, and now editor of a newspaper in Iowa, and so she had a background. But there were many good students. And many of them, they're doing an excellent job today. I think of John Stone who is editor of the newspaper at...[chuckles] Glenwood, Minnesota, *Pope County Tribune*. Hmmm. Roger Bailey who is editor of the newspaper up in Rolla, North Dakota. And of course there are many more that are in other fields than...there are many of them over at the *Fargo Forum* and many of them now working for the broadcasting groups here.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: As well as in public relations and advertising. So I shouldn't have named anybody to begin with but...[Chuckles]

MG: [Chuckles] Two of your children, Doug and Dennis, have chosen to follow your footsteps working as journalists in the communications industry. Was this something that you and Dorothy actively encouraged?

RH: No. I never did. I mean...hmmm...but we didn't discourage them either.

MG: Mmmm-hmmm.

RH: I don't know. I've never...I...they're in broadcasting, which I never was in broadcasting. And I'm not sure that I would be able to handle any of that, but...hmmm...no, I suppose some of it...because of my background, I suppose there was some interest. But we didn't encourage it.

MG: How has the role of a journalist changed from your early days at the *Becker County Record* to that experienced by your sons today?

RH: Oh, I think there have been a lot of changes in the way in which...not only in the way in which news is written, but also of course in the way it's processed today. I don't think that I ever envisioned the time when the broadcast news would be so extensively available, you know, live from so many different places, not only in the community but all over the world. But also I think the content of news. You know, when I was writing the news, and particularly say, obituaries. Hmmm...nobody ever died of cancer, for example. Cancer was *not* something you talked about. Cancer was something that...I don't know what...how people were supposed to feel about it. But if you...you never said in the obituary, for example, that somebody died of cancer. You always said they died after a long illness, and some...and everybody assumed, well, the poor guy had cancer.

Hmmm...but there are many, many things like that, that hmmm...I was never involved in what's called a classical obituary but there were some obituaries that are...are outstanding examples of what you'd call extremely florid writing, where they'd referred to the death as the grim reaper and many things of that kind. Ah...on the other hand, I suppose, while reporting today is a lot more honest and certainly more vivid in some of the...hmmm...it's...it touches on subjects that we never dared to engage in. You know, the topics in the newspaper today that touch on matters of personal hygiene, and sex lives, and food and nutrition, and all of those things were topics that were more or less ignored by the kind of newspaper reporting that I was familiar with.

MG: Looking into the future, what changes do you anticipate regarding the role of mass communications in our society?

RH: Yeah, it's hard to say. Hmmm...I have always been one of those people that have said that the mass communications is one of the major influences in our society. And I think we've had excellent examples of that in many of the things that have happened recently, certainly in all these hostage crises, and many of the others where the mass media is looked upon as a conduit for getting somebody's ideas or some of their protests across to the general public. Everybody tries to use the mass media today. And I suppose one of the challenges of the future is going to be what are they going to do about this? Or are they going to do anything about it? Hmmm, you know, is...if we have another hostage crisis, and I'm sure we will, but that's just one thing.

Hmmm...what does the mass media...what responsibility does it have in something like that? Does it make itself available to every person who has a grievance to air their grievances and to use any means that they have at hand to get attention? It started in the 1960s, really, the...a lot of the young people, you know...well, I don't...shouldn't say it started in the 1960s, because it is an old ploy that's been going on for a long time. But in order to get some attention you have to do

something that is going to get the attention of the press. And after you've got the attention of the press, use it. That's one of the things that I see anyway as being a real problem.

MG: Looking back over your life if you were to relive it, what might you do differently and what would you keep the same?

RH: Mmmm...I...I guess from this juncture I'm not sure I would do too much that's different! [Laughs]

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: I can't think of a...I guess there was one...I suppose every newspaper person or journalist always has the dream that he's going to write the great novel. And I came back from the War after almost five years and thought, well, I've got an idea. And I started it...but I've never finished it!

MG: [Chuckles]

RH: [Chuckles] So I guess that's my regret.

MG: One regret. How would you like to be remembered?

RH: Oh, I don't know. I don't have any...I've never thought about it too much, I guess. Somebody who cared about what he was doing. [Chuckles]

MG: And what final bit of advice do you have for future journalists?

RH: Well...one of my last assignments here was to teach a course in what I called Responsibility of the Press. And I think that it is a topic that *really* is of major importance today. I think that the media has such an influence, that the people who have something to do with it have really got to be responsible, intelligent, compassionate people who not only care about their profession, and the quality and integrity in their work, but also about society. They've got to care about society.

MG: Well, thank you very much. This has been an interview for the Oral History Project with Roger Hamilton. I'm Martin Grindeland.

RH: Okay. Well....

[End of Interview]

Transcription by Marilyn Olson-Treml
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