# Oral History Interview with W. Kim Heron

May 22, 2013
Wayne State University Kresge Library
Detroit Newspaper Strike Oral History Project

**W. Kim Heron, Interviewee**

W. Kim Heron is a former writer and copy editor for the Detroit Free Press, a former managing editor, acting editor and editor for the Metro Times. Mr. Heron was born in Harrisburg Ontario, and moved with his family to Detroit at the age of eleven. Mr. Heron graduated from Cass Tech, and went on to receive a Bachelors of Science degree from Michigan State University in journalism. He worked for a time for the Lansing State Journal, was the treasurer of the union for a time, then moved back to Detroit in 1979 to work for the Detroit Free Press, and worked in several positions during his tenure. He was working as a copy editor when the Detroit Newspaper Strike began. He helped produced, edit and write for the Detroit Sunday Journal for several years during the strike, and attended University of Michigan and received his Masters of Library Information Science degree. He had two children, has a great passion for Jazz, and hosted a radio show about Jazz on Sunday nights, Destination Out with Kim Heron for seventeen years on WDET-FM Detroit Public Radio on 101.9. Mr. Heron currently resides in Detroit and is a writer for the Kresge Foundation.

**Jessica Hesselgrave, Interviewer**

Jessica Hesselgrave is an Adult Services Librarian at Salem South Lyon District Library. She received her Bachelors of Science in Literature, Language and Writing from Eastern Michigan University in 2004, and completed a Masters of Library Information Science from Wayne State University in 2013. At the time of this interview she was completing requirements for an Archival Administration Certification from Wayne State University, with a projected completion date of December 2013.

**Interview Location and Other Notes**

This interview was conducted at Kresge Library at Wayne State University. It was held on Wednesday May 22, 2013 at 7:15pm in a conference room on the third floor. The original scheduled date for this interview was Monday, April 15, 2013 at 6:30pm but was rescheduled due to unforeseen complications on the behalf of the interviewee. The interview was recorded on a _____, borrowed from the Walter P. Reuther Library. There was a brief interruption close to the end of the interview from an announcement by the library about closing times. The taped was stopped shortly after the tone announcing the message was heard, and it was restarted a few seconds later when the announcement was complete.

**Hesselgrave:** This is Jessica Hesselgrave, talking with W. Kim Heron, former writer for the Detroit Free Press, and former editor of the Metro Times, about the Detroit Newspaper Strike. Currently Mr. Heron is a writer for the Kresge Foundation, as well as a jazz aficionado. Welcome.

**Heron:** Thank you. Welcome.

**Hesselgrave:** Please tell me a bit about your background, personally and professionally.

**Heron:** Personally. Um, I, um, grew up in uh the small town of Harrisburg, Ontario, until I was eleven, and my family moved to Detroit. I guess I was in Detroit, what, finished elementary school, went to junior high and high school, graduated from Cass Tech, went to Michigan State for four years, um, and uh, got a degree in journalism, and I went to work for the, as an intern then as an employee writer for the Lansing State, um, the State Journal. And um, the uh, and actually I was involved with the union, I was actually the union Treasurer then, um, then uh came to Detroit in '79, worked for the Free Press, and that, bounced around and did a bunch of different things at the Free Press, I was a General Assignment Writer, then I was in the Music, in the, um, Entertainment Department, for about four years, then I did uh general assignment for a while in the Oakland Bureau, then City Hall Bureau, and actually I was a Copy Editor for the last, what, six years when I was there, when the, I guess it was the point whenever the JOA was, for a bunch of reasons I went to work for, at the copy desk for a short rotation, and found that I really enjoyed it so I was actually still there when, uh, when the strike started, in '95. And um, that probably brings you up to the strike. (Laughs)

**Hesselgrave:** (Laughs) And, uh, what unions were or are you affiliated with?

**Heron:** I was with the, uh, Newspaper Guild.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay.

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** And, what are your overall feelings of unions?

**Heron:** Well I think they are really embattled. Uh, I mean I think they are in a really, really bad, a really bad position right now. Um, I think they're, you know, they're necessary. I think in some, I think in some cases they, you know, um dug their heels in on some of the wrong issues, and that's something they are being vilified for now, for instance not protecting, employee protection is getting to the point – You know I was watching a documentary about, uh, Michelle Rhee last night and this is one of those things that people say is because of the unions you can't fire incompetence, and I don't know, I can't say that was a problem in our guild, particularly, but, it does happen, in other places. So I think it's one of the things that, there are a lot of things that the unions did that kind of created the problems for them, but I hope that we can kind of come through, through this, through the narrows, and there is still, not only still a role, but a larger role, for unions, but I also see this also that one of the problems is that the work places have changed so much, you don't have those kind of large, for instance, in what's left of what we call journalism there are very few places where you have that kind of, uh, cohesiveness and camaraderie to create a strike, I mean how can you strike against Huffington Post, most of them don't even know each other, so –

**Hesselgrave:** Right.

**Heron:** So I'm supportive of unions, and they did, pretty incredible things, you know, for, um, for us, and I worry about their future.

**Hesselgrave:** How long have you been involved with unions? Has it just been since, you said that you were the Treasurer?

**Heron:** Just, uh, I was a member, and the Treasurer in Lansing. Just because it was a small group and nobody, you know, and somebody said "Hey – why don't you be the (laughs) we want you to be the Treasurer". I was not a very good Treasurer, the books were a mess, and I used to have dreams of going to jail. (Laughs) Not from malfeasance, just for, just cause the books were a mess, and I had to send reports.

**Hesselgrave:** Uh-huh (laughs)

**Heron:** So that was then, my only, uh, that was the end of my union office holding.

**Hesselgrave:** Gotcha. And how long were you a writer for the Detroit Free Press before the strike? You said you went to the editorial desk –

**Heron:** So I went there in '79, and then, uh, about ten, it was about '89 – See, the JOA came, actually happened in '89, right? So it was before the JOA, cause actually part of the thinking was I wanted to have another skill to put on my resume, it was part of why, why I did it. It must have been about '88 I guess, about there or so because it was a year before the JOA, but actually if the JOA wouldn't have went through I might as much have stayed.

**Hesselgrave:** Gotcha. And were there any warnings or previous knowledge of when the strike was going to take place?

**Heron:** Um, you know every contract cycle, you know, so I was there in, uh, in I guess in '80, we had a, um, I'm fuzzy on – One of the other unions went out and the Guild went out in support, so we were on strike for a couple days in, in uh, in '80. And then at least one of the previous – You know it got kind of down to the wire on negotiating at least one of the previous ones and I remember it being so, we were so concerned that we actually went in and erased our, erased some of our computer, we were erasing tons of the notes that probably would not have been useful to anyone else, but uh, stuff so to make it difficult for them to pick up and work with, without us, so – Every cycle, you know it looked like oh this might be the one where we end up on, on, on strike and then this one it became a little more ominous and we saw the guards moving in and, and uh, you know and you can kind of see in the days, I guess even longer than, I guess there was a fair amount of – I guess it was six or seven months I guess cause I remember being approached at one point, well actually I remember being approached at one point by a, by a group who kind of wanted to break away from the Guild and wanted to know if I wanted to be, you know, involved with that and I didn't want, you know, any part, any part in that. So, yeah, I remember it was kind of shocking when it actually came down, but, it was not a total surprise.

**Hesselgrave:** So when was the Joint Operating Agreement first mentioned, or first brought in, that was in 1989?

**Heron:** Well, I think '89 was when it, I think it went in to effect, maybe in '89.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay.

**Heron:** Not not not great on remembering, the days they were, they was just incredibly prolonged period when it was being, uh, when it was being discussed, and uh, let's see so it had to have been, let's see so I was, as I recall I was, it was when I was in the City County Bureau,

and uh, out of the main office and I heard that this, you know, meeting was being held, and there was this announcement being made back at the, at the main office. I think it had to be more around '85, '86, something like that. And then there was a really long, prolonged period of uh, you know, is it going to happen, was uh, it was, you know, did the unions support it, and uh finally all the way up to the Supreme, up to the Supreme Court. I can tell you a funny story about that – The uh, the um –

**Hesselgrave:** Yes, please. (Laughs)

**Heron:** So Coleman Young, who was the Mayor, was one of the people who was opposed very much to the Joint Operating Agreement, one of the people that was officially – I can't remember what the, what the, what the title, the word was, one of the people who abjectly filed briefs I guess, you know in opposition, to, uh, I think, uh, when the Justice Department, was, was considering it. And we heard that the Justice Department, I guess the group that, the the administrative part of it that had, um, advised against the JOA and then these went against that recommendation and, and went against that recommendation and was for it, and it, then finally, it ended up at the Supreme Court. But um, we got word that the administrative review process was over and the administrative review process was at the determination that it should *not* go forward, so I went out to to track down the Mayor, and he was at some event, and um, and of course the Free Press had been, you know, had said they were going to close if they didn't get it, and a lot of us thought that they were, um, bluffing, and others, others weren't so sure, and uh, I remember going to the Mayor and no one else was, the other reporters had left and I said "You know we got this, you know, word that this had happened, and what's your reaction?" and he looks at me and he says "You know what this means?" And I said "That's what I'm asking you." And he said "It means your FREE!" (laughs) That was Coleman Young for you.

**Hesselgrave:** (laughs) Um-hm… I remember seeing, I remember seeing a lot of things on the news and my Grandfather was, um, a newspaper man, in fact he worked for the Free Press, he retired in the early '70s, so I remember that being a huge thing, you know, the newspaper strike was massive at my grandparent's house.

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** And you know he was very supportive of the strikers, so I remember seeing like everything on TV, and you know, they had signs in their yard and everything. So it was pretty interesting when this came up I was like "Oh, I know a little bit about this."

**Heron:** Yeah. No no it dragged on for a long time and it was very divisive, lot of people you know left, went for other jobs just during that, and I knew people who would – There was one, some people thought that you would get vengeance – The Free Press was officially the failing paper and shit and had declared itself the failing paper because somebody had to be the failure to appeal, to ask for the JOA. Some people thought that the News was the safer paper to be with and there were couples where both, where both couples, where both parties of the couple worked at the Free Press and, um, at least one of them would be moved to the News, um – At that time I was married, at that time my wife at the time was at the Free Press, but I think she hadn't left, I'm trying to remember the, the timing's always kind of a blur after a certain point so I'm trying to think if, um, the JOA was already under discussion when she went to work for Wayne State. It may very well have been. It certainly, you know gave some solidity to things to not have both of us out at the time at the Free Press for the whole process, so we were, uh – No, she was at the, um, she was at the, at the Free Press at the beginning of the JOA discussion, yeah. And there were other reasons why she wanted to leave, just because of job satisfaction, what she wanted

kind of out of, out of life, but uh, certainly the JOA did not make it more, did not make you want to stay, something like that.

**Hesselgrave:** Um, can you describe the working atmosphere when the strike happened?

**Heron:** It was kind of an interesting period at the Free Press, in some ways, because they were, on the one hand, locally, within the immediate paper, were trying to, to, um to do things, to make it a better working environment. There had been a team, a big team building exercise, uh, I want to say that they wanted to take everyone away for the day, to kind of break down some barriers, and say you know, What are some steps we can do to improve communication? There was, actually it had started at Knight-Ridder, the Knight-Ridder level, a big effort that was about to give away on diversity training, and I had gone to, um, meet, and two other people, had gone to Miami for training and to kind of work with another group of people to, to kind of run these sessions where you kind of look at videotaped lessons and talk about them, and talk about some of the issues in the workplace around diversity. And, um, so on the one hand you had that going on, and on the other hand you had this, this strike, a possibility of a strike looming which, it must have been some long time, I didn't think about it, I wasn't, wasn't aware of it, it had to have been months and months after we were talking about – We had these two things being (unintelligible word), we had these two things going on, and if the labor situation you know, went to hell with uh, a strike, it was going to wash away anything you did in any other area.

**Hesselgrave:** It sounds like a very interesting work environment (laughs).

**Heron:** Yeah. And so and and work satisfaction at the Free Press varied a lot from department to department, so I worked on the, the uh, the News Copy Desk, for a guy named Alex Cruden, who was pretty, he was he was a good boss, he was maybe one of the two best bosses I've ever

had in my life. And, I remember we went to a meeting over, this had to be some, probably a couple years before the strike probably. We had a meeting over, um, at the um, at the Guild office, with Don Comer, and um, and and he, he was kind of probing to find dissatisfaction, and we kept talking about how much we liked our boss, and he said, I remember he said something like "Alex! Alex! This Alex guy could be gone tomorrow! And you could work for that lady who yells and screams!", you know. And we all knew who he was talking about, cause she was really not a nice person (laughs). So it varied, like I said it varied, it varied a lot, some working conditions you know. We were probably, um, yeah I guess one thing with the union was – Well, something about downside was that people would often would would find that, you know, here's my idea of what I should be doing professionally would conflict with really working to rule. And we got, so we were pretty much, routinely, working around, you know working hours that should have been overtime, on the other hand I figured out that I could also come in late if I didn't yell for overtime, I could also come in late, you know. So we were pretty, um, not really good for the work to rule aspect of things, but it was a pretty, hap-, um, pretty, good working group. And the weird thing is when the strike happened we would kind of look around and see that the, whether people stayed, or whether people stayed, um, on strike or crossed, really varied a lot by, um, work groups. So, for instance the sports writers, wow, almost all, almost all scabbed, an incredible number of them scabbed. On the other hand, our copy desk was almost, uh, very few of, uh, very few of us scabbed. I don't know if that, if we were happier, sports editors had a very high camaraderie, except the camaraderie didn't work it was anti-union camaraderie. We were pretty happy and had camaraderie and it was pro-union camaraderie.

**Hesselgrave:** That makes a huge difference.

**Heron:** And probably the miserable departments probably split down the middle. We never did a, we never actually collected data, it was just kind of a general observation.

**Hesselgrave:** So the Detroit Sunday Journal was the newspaper that was produced and sold by the Strikers?

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** What was your role in the Detroit Sunday Journal?

**Heron:** Well before the Detroit Sunday Journal there was a thing called the Detroit Journal, which the really interesting thing was that it was an online publication. And I think, and actually we were online, uh, before, um, before the dailies themselves were online. And a lot of that was uh, one of the big movers was a guy, um, quite interestingly enough, Gary Graff, who had been a music writer at the, um at the Free Press, and I had just bought, we had just bought our first, uh, computer that we had, our first MAC that we could use on the Internet, because my son had goaded us, and I had probably looked at web pages and things like that and we never really used it a whole lot. So before, pretty soon after the strike, I'm going to say probably by August, if not during July, we had a, an internet presence that we were updating regularly with the news stories before, you know you could, all we needed was access to some computers and the, and uh, and the internet and we worked out of the, I think Guild office for quite a while. I can't remember what um – I think we worked out of the Guild office until the, the daily, until the weekly paper was going, and moved back, had moved downtown. Um, so that, so that kind of – So let's see I was involved with that and we kind of the structure kind of mirrored, uh, people kind of mirrored what they were doing before so Gary was a music writer, I was one of the, you know I did mostly copy editing, and a little, a little music writing, and I guess I did a little coverage, a little

general coverage of the strike of course, and um, and then after the, I think it was probably, I want to say it was around Thanksgiving of that year that the, that we got the funding from, from, from the Guild higher ups and the Detroit Sunday Journal began. And I was, you know, writing and copy editing for that too and then during – Uh, I think Robin Mather had been the managing editor, and when she left town, a couple people approached me with being the managing editor. So I was the managing editor of that from, uh, the sssss, probably the late spring, early summer, of '96 through uh, the, through the fall. And then after that I kind of, uh, just kind of went back into editing and um, writing and helping, helping out other ways.

**Hesselgrave:** Who took over as managing editor after that?

**Heron:** I want to say it was Tom Schram, but I'm not sure.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay.

**Heron:** Might have been Tom.

**Comment [J1]:** Further research confirmed that Tom Schram took over as editor at that time.

**Hesselgrave:** Were you involved in distribution of the Sunday Journal, or any other publications? Or were you just, like, behind the scenes?

**Heron:** I didn't do any, I didn't, um, I did everything, you know, from make, kind of making up the pages to, there was one one crazy thing where the air conditioning went out and we had temporary air conditioning units and I was, running around up on the roof and doing something with these, it was plugged into something, but – I didn't do distribution. I did climb on the roof at least once.

**Hesselgrave:** (Laughs) Upon conducting the research for this interview I came across several quotes and interviews that mentioned that, um, many felt that the Detroit Sunday Journal would

have been a more effective tool for gaining support of the strike if it would have been started, or produced earlier. What are your thoughts on that?

**Heron:** I think so.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah.

**Heron:** Because I think there, there was a period, there was a pretty – I think one of the things that was really bad for the strike was the, by my understanding of of, of the Joint Operating Agreement was that the papers were not supposed to put out a paper together, they were supposed to keep two separate papers, and um, right away they kind of threw in their lots together and produced joint issues, for some number of weeks after the, the um, after the strike began.

**Hesselgrave:** Right.

**Heron:** And, but, what I was I saying, but there was not something, even though they shouldn't do it, there was really nothing in the, to really enforce that strongly. So they kind of did it and I think that it was probably something just (unintelligible word). They said oh, but, I guess we'll stop doing it, but by that time it had really served its function. So let's them say Oh, we have published continuously. And I think had there been an alternative paper, um, right away, it really would have meant something. It also gave people, you know there a lot of people felt that, um, it really gave them a, kind of the purpose, you know they could pursue their, their craft if they really wanted to do, they really rather would be writing than just walking the, uh, on the picket side, I really think it would have been, I think it would have, uh, it really would have had much more of a chance to be successful externally because we were telling one, you, you didn't want to turn to blackmail per se, but they were actually always on the phone saying, you know, please

don't advertise in the daily papers, and had there been a that other vehicle, um, some, they probably could have picked up a lot more advertising at the beginning of people that wanted to be in, in something. So I think both externally, as far as getting the message out, when the interest in the strike was the highest, and also kind of binding a lot of the journalists, who, um, who might who otherwise faded away, I think it would have been very effective had it started sooner.

**Hesselgrave:** What kind of response did you receive from the general public about the Detroit Sunday Journal?

**Heron:** We had, we had, we had good, uh yeah, uh people had, people got, I'm trying to think what experience, but yeah people were, were excited about it.

**Hesselgrave:** Um-hm. Good. What do you think was successful about the newspaper strike in general?

**Heron:** (Laughs)

**Hesselgrave:** (Laughs) Is that a tough question?

**Heron:** It's a tough question. I, I mean, uh, um, you know there are still people that, that I run into that say that, you know it made, they thought, that there was some lessons to be learned from seeing all those people stand up, um, and um, incidentally you saw that, you also saw that a lot of people in the, in the, in the community, you know come out there was really nothing like when you saw, you know people like Maryann Mahaffey, Ernie Goodman and some of the other people who were um, you know, who got arrested on behalf of the strikers after we, after the RICO cloud was over everything, and um, and they couldn't um, you know, stop the – You're

risking serious consequences if you protested and blocked ingress or egress. Um, so I mean, but I guess what I think what was most successful was symbolism, you know, and of course a symbol is something you can read one way or another.

**Hesselgrave:** Right. What do you think was unsuccessful about the strike? What could have been done differently?

**Heron:** Mmmmm. I felt that there was a real um, attitude from uh, a lot of people in the union that basically was like you know grow up, this is the way we do strikes, and there's just a big cultural divide where you had people who were not particularly, had not been through a strike, maybe hadn't seen through a strike, and you're probably finding you know a lot of people who uh, were gung-ho came from union families, and they'd say you know my dad, I saw my dad do this, or I saw my grandpa do this. Um, so uh so there's an assumption like, you know, stop asking all these questions, you're on strike, you're supposed to, you know, just go go along with it. And there's also I thought some disorganization as to you know, here's my situation x, y, and z, what do I do, and I know some people who got really pissed, and they would there was like confusion as to whether you could apply for unemployment, and people would you know, go down and spend hours in line and find out it was for all for naught and then you'd feel like and then people would go no you should be doing it and you'd feel like an idiot for not going down and spending, and spending the time, you know. Um, and um, so that was uh, I I I thought that the, communication from the top of the union could have been, really could have been better. And we really could have had more assumption, that, you know, (unintelligible words), maybe people you'd actually have to coddle who were gonna, become scabs anyway, on the other hand I thought there were a lot of people who, you know, were sincere in wanting their support that

felt that they were a little bit, kind of taken for granted, they were just kind of shut up and fall in line.

**Hesselgrave:** What kind of effect did the strike have on your professional relationships?

**Heron:** Well there's a few I haven't talked, you know, there's a few people I haven't spoken to since, you know. Um, and, you know there are a few friendships that you know were just totally, you know, just totally, you know totally just, de- de- destroyed.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah.

**Heron:** Um, um, I think – And it, it's you know, it's not, I never went back, so I mean it really was uh, kind of a, a fork in the road, for me. I actually thought I was getting out of journalism, and uh, I went back and got the degree in Library Science, and it, um, so I started that, and I just found that you know that the whole, I still I still had a family and was still working and even though I got a very nice scholarship from, from you know U of M, uh, it was still really hard to, to, to commute that far and, so I found myself kind of taking – Had I had time I would have taken a very different class load configuration, would have had a different concen, you know concentration, actually might have learned programming in that programming class. Um, and I ended up back, kind of back in the newspapers and just kind of went along and finished enough credits to get the, uh, to get the degree, but, um, because of the strike, both my um, old friend, my best friend, Larry Gabriel and I, um, so my best friend is Larry Gabriel – we had actually gone to college together and worked on at least one paper in college together – and he had been at Metro Times and had come over to the Free Press around, um probably around '90, or so, something like that. And uh, when the strike happened, Larry wasn't particularly involved in the, the uh, strike act- , the Sunday Journal or any of that stuff and he went back to the Metro

Times as managing editor and then became editor right about the time that I got called back to the Free Press, and I had kind of to decide which way to uh, to, which way to go and ended, and ended up not going back to the Free Press probably because it was (Coughs), cause I would have been going back so early, and I was sort of dreading what kind of, actually the potentially toxic environment I was going to be in and plus this was a chance to do something different with an old buddy. So, that was uh, so it was a a big, big shift for me.

**Hesselgrave:** Um-hm. I think that he was interviewed for this project too actually.

**Heron:** He was what?

**Hesselgrave:** I think he was interviewed for this project too.

**Heron:** Oh yeah?

**Hesselgrave:** Yes. Do you still have contact with a lot of the fellow strikers? You mentioned before –

**Heron:** I do, there's a – Actually it's funny I work, uh, so I got the, the um – Can I say one thing about the profession – so one thing I found really interesting was um, the um, you know the way journalism, newspapers you know are structured, is basically your political rights were virtually surrendered, you know, and you weren't supposed to have a bumper sticker, you know, because you were objective, even though you know the owners and muckymucks got to have all sorts of opinions, which is called the editorial page, and they could throw their opinion around with kind of, under your back, so to speak. And uh, so suddenly being liberated and actually being able to have, to have some kind of a political presence when we started the strike, I think a lot of people found kind of liberating, you know, and there's a certain, a maybe, prob- maybe,

maybe in the back of my mind is why I didn't go back, why I actually kind of relished having that kind of normal right to express myself politically. You know, and I think one of the, I think a lot of people experienced that. Um. So uh, your question. You know I was, um, so at the Kresge, I was uh, I applied for this job at Kresge and it and um, it kind of dragged on and on and on whether I was going to get hired, and they finally called me and they said, um, and um, and by the way, uh, you know actually we, we, hired, we actually hired somebody else too, I mean they made two hires rather than one, and they said that it's Joe Swickard, and um, and Joe was a fellow, a fellow striker, who I all had respect for you know through the strike and certainly had it not been somebody I, I get along pretty much with everybody, you know, but the fact that it was Joe and that we had both, we'd both been on the same side during that, uh, really helped with the the re-bonding at, uh, at Kresge. We had actually started at the Free Press in '79 at virtually the same, virtually the same time. So yeah, it is kind of a, a big thing, um, um to, you know, you run into people when you kind of have that cam- camaraderie of having gone through that, that common experience.

**Hesselgrave:** Right. And do you –

**Heron:** And of course, the flip side of people you kind of – (shrugs)

**Hesselgrave:** (Laughs) Um-hm. So do you, do you have any contact with anybody who went back? Before the end of the strike? You mentioned earlier that there were quite a few friendships, and professional relationships that ended with it.

**Heron:** No, I mean there are certainly management, no, um, you know management didn't really have a, have a say so, um, um, but of the people that uh, that uh, that scabbed, the ones that were,

frankly I can't really say who, but there were maybe, you know, probably maybe three close, I think that I would actually call real friendships that that that really kind of ended through that.

**Hesselgrave:** What effect did the strike have on your personal life?

**Heron:** I was pretty, it was a pretty – It was uh, it was just so consuming, you know. Like, uh, and I can't say, I can't say that um, it, it didn't help my, help, didn't help, help our marriage, probably because it was so it was so consu- , we were just so, distracted, I think for the, for that period. I wouldn't say it was the, you know, the the the reason, but it certainly didn't, certainly didn't help, you know. It was kind of a big deal and we would kind of put other things, "Can't deal with this, we're on strike, I'm out of here", you know? "I'm mentally not dealing with this stuff", you know. So, um, that was the, how – I'm trying to think what how else I would say, would I say it effected – It probably strained my relationship with with my family when my mother went back to reading the paper because she said she couldn't stand not having the newspaper anymore. I thought that was, uh, that was um – And then then we were financially we were set, we were set back for, you know, for quite a few years, through that.

**Hesselgrave:** Right.

**Heron:** So. It was a, it was a blow. Not a moral blow. And then you go and there were a lot of people, other people who took really big hits, you know. And we're talking, you know, well scabs you know, I mean, I was not one of these people who would condemn anybody who um, who crossed the line. I knew some people had major medical issues, you know, or they were they were a stone's throw away from retirement and afraid of what that, you know, uncertainty, and um, um, so it wasn't like I didn't I couldn't cut people some slack, and on the other hand you had people making incredible sacrifices to stay on strike, and you couldn't very well honor that

and shrug your shoulders and say "Oh whatever" with somebody who said they went back because the job offered them so much creative freedom, you know.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay. Yeah. Did you read The Broken Table?

**Heron:** No, I got too depressed. I, I, I, I hardly got started on it, I got as far as, I (laughs), I got as far as the point where Knight-Ridder's stock went down when they won all the Pulitzer Prizes, and that was really, I, think that was in the introduction, something like that.

**Hesselgrave:** I think that it was in the introduction –

**Heron:** It was really just at the beginning and I got depressed and I thought I can't deal with this. I was going to go back and read it but I thought well I don't want to read it before I did this because I didn't want to regurgitate it.

**Hesselgrave:** Right. Well, um – Yeah it was interesting because I was reading about it and, so they said some stories about, you know, some people and their experiences with the strike and losing their houses and families –

**Heron:** Exactly.

**Hesselgrave:** And everything, so it was a huge, huge thing and people did take huge hits.

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** And you have children, correct?

**Heron:** I have two, yeah, two. And you know the one thing it was you also found people who would really respect it and come, and you know help you, you know – My kids we went to a, they were at a um, a Quaker school, and you know, they were sup, people there were very

supportive so they worked out something so I could do some work for the school for a video project in lieu of, you know, tuition one year, they, you know, they cut, you know, cut, made a big cut in the in the amount, and I knew another guy who knew a musician, that he, he was not friends with just knew him in passing, sent him a hundred bucks one day, you know. You'd see the UAW come out to the picket lines then at Christmas and they would hand out a bonus from their, from their coffers, so you saw that stuff and it was really, it was pretty moving.

**Hesselgrave:** It was like a little support, you know, a nice support system.

**Heron:** Yeah it was, it really was. When you saw people you know come out for each other and you know during the strike and you know when everyone's strapped and doing what, you know what they could. Look out for one another a little. I have a friend who uh, he's working on this proj, this endless project, actually out at the Reuther, out at the, uh, out at the, out at the uh… Reuther, a labor history project. I guess that's the one thing that happened that was weird and I really became much more aware of, and I really saw the strike in terms of a continuity and a struggle and um, and actually learned a lot more about the labor you know the labor movement and thought, thought a lot about it, and uh actually I was reading Hobsbawm's Leftist History of the World at the same time, which was like a great reading for, to put it in the big picture. There was this friend who uh was, who was uh, bringing this labor history, um, kind of, a labor history project kind of building tours and products for um, for people to to kind of – We did some bus tours to try to turn into an audio tape working out, working out of the Reuther, and um – Gosh you know it never really got finished and various reiterations of it have actually never gotten finished, this is like nearly twenty years later, and I still, when Ron calls me and wants me to listen to his latest um, um, idea and it's – Still he'll get a little bit of funding and he'll work a little bit and he's working on at least trying to turn it into something, um, um, with some people

**Comment [J2]:** Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Capital* and *The Age of Empire* are sometimes referred to as his trilogy of the 19th Century.

in southwest Detroit, I guess some labor auto heritage tour group. But I still give him time you know cause Ron came through and he said "I know you need a job and you can, I have this opportunity and you can come and work for me", so I still, you know, try to do what I can for Ron because he came through for me at that point.

**Hesselgrave:** Did you make a lot of connections because of the strike then?

**Heron:** Um I guess there was a kind of the – There was some people involved in the labor history um, sss- you know study, and uh so I did I did make some, I wouldn't say a lot of connections but I did make some, I did make some connections. And like I got um, involved in the, in the internet, you know pretty, with that the internet paper pretty early on, which was really what I was thinking I was going to pursue when I went back to library science, and it and I did some of that when I came back to to to Metro Times but it didn't really come to focus in, of what I did but like I said I guess it was it was a big detour.

**Hesselgrave:** Um-hm. Is there a single event that you view as a turning point in the strike? The moment that it was clear what the result was going to be?

**Heron:** Um, I guess I don't know when there was a turning point that was like this was, it was, um – You know once we were all fired, that was pretty early on, it was not clear that they were ever going to, you know, um, crack. Just with the the the business pressures, um, and it always seemed more of a just kind of keeping – I think maybe it was in that early (unintelligible words) keeping people motivated and hopefully we would win in the courts. Um, early through the administrative process and um, and the courts – But I think pretty early on after you had, you know, you saw that you weren't going to stop them from um, distributing the paper or you couldn't permanently you know really cut into the point where they would stop and you realized

how much money they had to to spend to to prove their point. I remember there was one night when we had um – I guess could see, I guess a symbolic turning point for me that people that people had realized that there was one night when we had uh, sss- we had a really good, you know a large number of picketers at the Riverfront plant – I never actually picketed at Sterling Heights, I lived near downtown, and um, and I remember that was the time they brought in a, uh, a helicopter to move the papers, and I remember saying, you know, you know, it was, you knew it was about more of the symbolism of not having the paper interrupted, or not having – It wasn't so much about the number of papers that they were actually moving with helicopters – But I remember, um, it was Daymon Hartley, uh, who was really one of the, I think really was one of the more pestiferous and hardcore strikers, um, and Daymon said "Look! Look! That's raw capitalist power!" (Both laugh) And they they got the papers out, you know, and so I think it was that we were actually going to win in any conventional, you know, sense was was prob probably gone by the time I by the time I saw the helicop, saw the helicopter –

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah, cause it kind of symbolizes that 'no we have a lot of money and we – (both talking at same time)

**Heron:** Yeah, and we'll keep spending, we don't care, we don't care, we've got two newspapers and we're going to run one of them into the ground and still have a newspaper and you won't. Except the Sunday Journal, you know. "Pat on the head kid, 'that's nice'". You know, but uh yeah, so that might have been a, might have been a turning point. And there's a, I remember there was another turning point was when we realized how long it would drag out even before it was a big, um – (There was a) rally downtown and I think it was Richard Trumka, was, was was there and he was giving a very fiery speech and he said "We showed them in the" – and I can't remember what exactly – "The three-month strike so-and-so, and we showed them in the

six-month strike so-and-so, and we showed them in the nine-month, we showed them in the seven year" and the applauding, the applauding started getting shorter and shorter as he got into the years, you know.

**Hesselgrave:** Did you experience any threats or violence directed toward you during, as a result of the strike?

**Heron:** There was, there was um, um, there was there was always that, often and I know and I know it was nearly not as often as people who went to Sterling Heights but there was that potential that, you know that you were going to get clubbed by the cops to get you out of the way, or you were going to get caught between you know two, two uh two you know, the real gung-ho people and the and the cops. And I remember um, I actually remember one time we were at the distribution point in southwest Detroit, and the cops seemed not to understand kind of the lay of the land where we were, so they they're pushing us back towards this fence and they were saying you know "Go all the way back to the grass", and there were people were at the back against the fence were like "There is no grass", you know, and we were hoping that they were not going to keep, you know beating us – I remember one time there was me and Larry Gabriel and I think Steve Advokat were someplace on like Seven Mile on the Westside, passing out the Sunday Journal and I think we were selling we were selling Sun Sunday I can't remember if we were just selling Sunday Journals or it might have even been early before the Sunday Journal, probably before the Sunday Journal, and we were picketing some of these people who were trying to sell the papers at a at a at a stand, you know, or something like that, and somebody got out of the car and was like, you know, I remember it was threating an altercation, you know and I remember Larry was the one who was hey, we're being reasonable,

and Larry was like "What, do you want a piece of this?" you know and Larry got in their face and nothing, nothing came of it. But uh, those were –

**Hesselgrave:** The major ones?

**Heron:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** How much were you involved in demonstrations or picketing?

**Heron:** Quite a, quite, I was at I was at – Like I said never at Sterling Heights, but um, um the downtown plant quite a quite a few Saturday nights, and um, you some of the mass rallies and for a for a long time I I and one of the things that I guess that drove people a little nuts is that they couldn't quite figure out what, how much, what to count as strike time, as picket time, you know, so and there was understandably from some of the other, uh, units there was an idea that you know just sitting around writing and being a reporter shouldn't count as all of your um, you know time for the cause. So, uh, I remember there was a period where we had to still do so many hours of actually sss, picket duty, and um, I would go around the the Free Press, and sometimes it would be me and a one other person and sometimes I'd go and be the only person like circling the (laughs) walking around the the Free Press, which seemed like the most pure, like totally symbolic gesture, until later I heard that some of the scabs were kind of upset they didn't have like vans to drive them to their parking, even though they could see it was just a short walk, or some some of the hearing some of the building that some of the scabs were kind of upset, they were kind of worried by this big guy with dreadlocks who lurks, who lurks around the building at night was the way it was explained to me, at which I said "Oh yes, great! I'm scaring somebody - wonderful!" (Both laugh)

**Hesselgrave:** Doing your part.

**Heron:** Doing my part.

**Hesselgrave:** What are your overall feelings of the strike? Like with your experiences, and the, the outcome? Can you just, wrap up how you feel?

**Heron:** You know, personally I I it was it was I remember at one point when it was happening I was kind of wishing I it would I had I had been younger because I was probably forty when uh, when the strike happened, and uh, wishing I had been younger and not had a family and had that kind of you know, looming over my over, you know, over my head. But it was it was it was kind it was kind of exciting. It was a growth experience, you know. I remember sitting, I remember one time uh, picketing at it was, I think it was on Joy Road or something it was by the Southfield Expressway, there was a distribution center, and the Trotsk- young Trotskyites had like knocked over um, the generator – And so they had brought the um, the the the the those flood lights down and the generator can't quite remember what but there were some large flood lights still going and the generator was spewing all this smoke which was really gassing us –

**Hesselgrave:** Wow.

**Heron:** And oh no, that the light was coming from the helicopter, they they had a helicopter watching us, that was circling around, so you had like the light coming down from this helicopter – It was either the cops helicopter or the or the company's helicopter, but any – but whosever helicopter it was, the lights coming off of the helicopter kind of changing angles and you've got all this smoke and it looked like something like 'Disco from Hell', you know, and I'm thinking about a particular column that one of the scabs had written about, um, disparagingly about, um, an avocado cutter – She, it was Susan Ager who wrote a piece about a guy who was uh, really showed dedication to his job, which didn't pay that well, seeing how many avocado slices, how

many slices he could get out of an avocado at some restaurant, and then there was this part in there that he was happy that he was able to put, to do his job as good as he could for what he was, he could as other people were out striking, who were much better paid to begin with, you know, and I remember thinking "How can you write about the avocado cutter, when you're missing this?" you know? (Both laugh) So. It was exciting and and and you still find you know I run into people that still, you know it still means something to them, you know, that that that we did it, you know and that, that people took a stand for something. And I was not, I was not one of these people who was gung-ho to say "Well I can stand anything", but I did manage to stand through what got thrown at me during that period.

**Hesselgrave:** How do you think the strike effected the reputation of the newspapers?

**Heron:** Oh I think it was I think it was bad, you know. I think the uh, the, the, with what newspapers were up against, I thought it was a crazy to – One of the reasons it was just crazy to do it because, uh, every just, so much attention was being paid all the time I was at the Free Press to, um, I mean I mean even more so after the JOA, to "What can we do to have people read us and love us?" and they were running these meetings 'Can you turn African-Americans', seriously it said African-Americans are sometimes, tend to be sometimes readers of the paper rather than you know, a three day a week or a five day a week readers, "What can we do to", you know, "to make us more indispensable?", then you do something like that and say "Yeah, it's our, workers are dispensable" and you readers, you know are, we just trust you'll, you know, suffer through with a truly inferior product, for a long time. So, I don't know if the, uh, the the numbers, um, you know, support me, but I have to think that that must have been a big blow to the papers in this town because people get out of the habit, you know, it was, it was strictly at that point kind of on the the the verge of uh going online, you know, and the internet, and you

break people's habit and they realize 'I can get up Monday morning and get along without the newspaper' and it's hard to get them back. Some of them I don't think we got them back, some of them don't come back as regulars. I think it definitely hurt and it hurt their reputation with a lot of people. You know like I said if you're a, if you're not old enough to have been you know conscious of what happened in '95 through what, 2000 and what, you know, but you know you – It's hard not to be cynical, about it. I used to be real I used to think about about how much time they spent talking about the great heroes of people who stand up for things, you know, and hearing them say "Let's go squash some people ourselves".

**Hesselgrave:** I don't know if, I don't know, I don't think my grandparents ever like got a subscription after everything was settled.

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** I don't remember seeing, you know, I mean I was thirteen in '95, but I don't remember seeing the newspapers around their house after that. So.

**Heron:** Right. And I think that there were two groups, I think that there were two groups, there were people that never forgave them, and there were people that found that they didn't care that much in the first place.

**Hesselgrave:** Um-hm. What kind of lasting effect do you think the Detroit Newspaper Strike has had on the newspaper business in general – cause it was a pretty publicized strike throughout the country.

**Heron:** Oh I think I think it was a pretty, um, a pretty good, um, um, signal that you should not, you should not do this. You know I guess I guess it was the last big newspaper strike, wasn't it?

**Hesselgrave:** Yup.

**Heron:** Yeah, I would say, I'm sure there was nothing in it that would encourage you to, to, to try that. And uh, you know, we were saying thinking if they could do it in Detroit they could do it anywhere, and uh, proof in the pudding that they could, do it anywhere. Are much more bold emboldened to try it anywhere.

**Hesselgrave:** Um, when did you start working at the Metro Times?

**Heron:** In, uh, ninety, in May of '97.

**Hesselgrave:** Was there any hostility aimed at you for taking that position?

**Heron:** At the Metro Times?

**Hesselgrave:** Um-hm.

**Heron:** No they were the, no. Not at that. I never ran into any hostility, hostility there. They were, you know maybe not so, maybe not sufficiently pro-strike, but certainly they were not, were certainly not anti-, anti-strike at all.

**Hesselgrave:** What about with, um, people who were still on strike?

**Heron:** Did I have hostility with people who were still on strike?

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah, did anybody, were you still supportive of the strike after you went to the Metro Times?

**Heron:** Oh yeah. In fact I got I got in trouble for uh, um, cause I was um, because I was uh, kind of sneaking out and, after I would I go and after I would work a shift, work all day at Metro

Times and after on Friday nights I would go and then help put out the Sunday Journal. And uh, my, I guess the publisher was there, had a, there was a, he was the editorial director for the chain, and he, um, he found out about it and said "You're not supposed to be doing that" and I probably still snuck out and – I didn't do anything that had my byline on it, but I, I would still kind of sneak around and do stuff on the sly, help out.

**Hesselgrave:** How did your experiences with the strike affect your job with the Metro Times?

**Heron:** Um, well the experience of being the managing editor actually was helpful. Um, hmm. And, kind of getting out of, um, just kind of being, you know the cog in the machine and um the experience of working at the Sunday Journal, kind of doing everything and seeing more and more how a paper comes together actually was uh, was was was quite useful. Um, I'm trying to think other ways that it – Um, that's probably the only way that it really effected the the the job at the Metro Times. We were not, you know the paper was not partisan in, uh, writing about the, in writing about the strike. But, you know we were significantly supportive and go back and visit the subject.

**Hesselgrave:** Did you have to, did you find yourself having to be consciously objective when you were writing about it when you worked for the Metro Times? About the strike?

**Heron:** I tried not to write about it myself, you know, and would would would edit stuff, actually had one awf-, truly, truly awful experience where a, um, something like the the worst screw up I'd ever been involved with at a newspaper – So anyway we had a reporter that had gone to a conference at U or M and Tony Ridder was there, and there were a bunch of strikers yelling "Tony Go Home, Tony Go Home, Tony Go Home" and she called me up and she said this panel has all of this is going on, and uh, this panelist said you know that there's the in the future there

will be no, there'll be no unions, or we can pretty much write off unions for the future, and wrote a story that Tony Ridder had said that, and she hadn't understood that Tony Ridder was the guy sitting next to the guy speaking who said that, and she assumed cause everyone is yelling "Tony Go Home, Tony" while this guy was speaking that this must be Tony. So that was like the the the one one of the larger amounts of egg I've had to to to deal with, and I had there was somebody somebody at the, there was one person at the Free Press who just never forgave me for that – obviously we had done that to, to embarrass them, twist the truth, you know. No it was a screw up.

**Hesselgrave:** When did you become managing editor at the Metro Times?

**Heron:** I was Managing Editor when I when I went there.

**Hesselgrave:** Oh, okay.

**Heron:** In '97. And then I was Acting Editor for a while, in 2001… and then again in probably 2003, 2004 I was Acting Editor again… when another editor left and then in 2007 I became Editor.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay. Were you still with the Newspaper Guild when you were at Metro Times?

**Heron:** No.

**Hesselgrave:** Were you union affiliated?

**Heron:** No.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay. You are currently a writer with the Kresge Foundation. What made you get out of the newspaper business?

**Heron:** Oh it was a declining, it was the con, constantly declining resources. So we started to, we had probably mmm, roughly a dozen, you know, full or nearly full-time people in Editorial at Metro Times when I started, and there were four when I left. And I just couldn't deal with it anymore. That was that was that was really – Then the Kresge was a great opportunity, even if, even if that uh, wouldn't have been that bad it still would have been a good change after all of these years. And then I feel, I felt bad about leaving in a lot of ways, cause – But I went from went from not replacing people when they left to actually firing people because they needed to shrink the staff.

**Hesselgrave:** Right. And were you guys still trying to keep up with production even though the staff was dwindling?

**Heron:** The paper size went down some but not as much as the staff, not nearly, not nearly as much as the staff – we just got we just got more inventive about how to get something out of less, and of course you need you use more freelancers to a certain extent to fill the gaps, somehow to fill the gap but it's it's just kind of a, declining and uh, it was kind of a depressing process, you know. Particularly when it got into you know firing people. So the summer before, um, it was, last summer, I was um, pretty sure that I was going to have to fire somebody, or I was going to be fired, and was totally surprised when I was told I was told that I had to fire two people instead.

**Hesselgrave:** Oh wow.

**Heron:** You know that was serious and I was like I can't keep doing this.

**Hesselgrave:** It's like okay, when's the, when's the point where it, where it's not going to be enough anymore.

**Heron:** Yeah, yeah. That was it. And it was probably typical, you know kind of, you have you stay on longer than, than you should, you know. And, and think you're going to plateau and we were working on a redesign and some other things. So maybe it's going to plateau, but it wasn't plateauing. At least while I was there. Hopefully it, hopefully it will.

**Hesselgrave:** So you mentioned earlier that, um, you could tell people or there were some people who were involved in the strike that came from 'Union Families'. Were you, did you come from a 'Union Family'?

**Heron:** Not , well, my father was – As I was growing up my father sold insurance and then after I was in college he went back into the plants late so he was, so he was involved –

It wasn't a big part of growing up. But I know, he did uh, he did pass by the time, uh, by the time the strike but he had, you know, the UAW had been really good for, for our family. Insurance was not a good career for him anymore and um, he had to take care of my mom and um, so that was that that was part of it. And I had uncles who were involved in the car producing unions, they were involved with unions in Canada but it was not an intimate part of my growing up, I knew my uncles so-and-so were, you know, in he was he was he was in the union –

**Hesselgrave:** It wasn't like a huge part of –

**Heron:** It was not a huge part – We didn't sit around talking about it – We didn't sing 'Joe Hill' at family dinners. (Both laugh)

**Hesselgrave:** Actually I was going to ask did your love of music play any role in your part of the strike? Did you write any songs, or anything like that?

**Heron:** Nope. It probably it probably appeared very obliquely in a rather surrealist poem… there was a reference to the RICO suit in a poem, that was otherwise, it was too abstract to count as any contribution to Labor Literature.

**Hesselgrave:** Tell me a little bit about your passion for Jazz music. Do you still host a radio program?

**Heron:** No, I did that through – That was kind of interesting that had always been my hobby and then I, actually actually I considered it was pin money to buy more records, and suddenly it was helping suppo- it was X-part of the rent every, every every month. Um, no I got no I just always liked music as a kid and never, you know, learned to play an instrument when I should have, and, you know, and played around at music, and um, I'm trying to think if I ever played any music in any way that was related to the strike, probably, probably not. Probably not. But it was um, but it was some of – But writing about it since, since college, and um, and had a lot of respect I guess even from the politics of Jazz, movements particularly in the sixties, when there were very political, overtones for a lot of a lot of the music. So to me that kind of the the music you know I would not say I would not play um, song for Che Guevara by Liberation Music Orchestra and dedicate it to the strike, I I couldn't do that, go across that line, but I was certainly aware of that, you know, that that thrust within the music.

**Hesselgrave:** How long did you host the program for?

**Heron:** It was a long time. It was probably, I think it was probably about fifteen years, seventeen years, something like that. I did did that every Sunday night.

**Hesselgrave:** I was doing research and I was like 'Oooh!' then was like 'oh, I don't think it's still on'.

**Heron:** No, no, no.

**Hesselgrave:** Cause I was going to listen to them. So, is there anything else you would like to add about the strike? About your experiences in the newspaper business? Or anything?

**Heron:** No, it was just that you saw, you saw a lot of about people, and I'm not saying so much you saw in a, not to dwell on the people who became scabs for whatever reason, but you really just saw a lot of commitment from people, they did really, um, believe that it was important to stand together in that way. And, um, you took, um, a you know a great a great lesson from them, you know, and I don't – It was it was kind of interesting and something I will mention is that one of the surp, one of the surprises is that we we found that the people on the copy desk I worked with ended up being very strong on the strike, we didn't lose very many, um, very many people and we thought that was part of it , we're a unit that really worked together, just the the organization of the work, I think that was part of what bound people, and we also worked for a really good boss who encouraged, you know a lot of encouraged us as as a unit. One of the interesting things was the people who had the, um, none of the stars stuck with the union, you know, with um, I don't think, with the the exception of Susan Watson, and I certainly have even more respect for Susan because of that, but if you go through, you know the stars, you know Mitch Albom certainly, in any particular, you know when he comes up you'll find he's I think you'll have a hard time finding a striker, no matter how sympa- who can give a sympathetic version of the way he um has stayed aloof and kind of ran his own agenda then became very much an apologist when he scabbed, um, um, but you go down the line, like all the columnists, you know, none of them, with the exception of uh, Watson, I think, uh, um, stayed with the union. You know it was it was kind of interesting. You know, but kind of like I think people felt like, I wasn't one of the stars so I can't say, but that 'The paper kind of made me a star and I

can't be that without them', and all who write were were probably very disappointed when Neal Shine came back to kind of put his stamp of, kind of the the the avuncular voice of a certain old stable Detroit on the on the strike papers, a lot of people were very, were very disappointed by that. I always figured he was on for saying that "The paper did so much for me personally that I will have to help them crush the strike, end the strikers".

**Hesselgrave:** I have read a lot about some people's feelings about Mitch Albom, especially with the strike. So.

**Heron:** Yeah. And I don't – He's a real craftsman in a lot of ways, but um, he didn't I think it was much that you could say that he showed much, um, you know, um, much working class consciousness or sympathy even. um, during during the strike. Well I don't don't know if we ever would have gotten Mitch but had the for instance the strike paper you know started in July rather than um in November you know, could we have captured some of those, some some of the stars who had written for the paper and got them to have written for the strike paper, and gotten knitted to the fabric of the strike? I don't know.

**Hesselgrave:** Especially with, you know you mentioned that it was a good way for writer's to keep up their craft, and they felt like they were –

**Heron:** Yeah, um-hm.

**Hesselgrave:** That they'd still be able to do what they loved, and their job, and it would have been interesting to see if that would have started earlier what would have happened.

**Heron:** Yeah, yeah, I really wonder.

(chime heard over loud speaker) *pause in recording for announcement*

**Hesselgrave:** Um, I think I asked everything, if you had anything else you wanted to add – Oh I did want to ask, you mentioned that – (Speaking at same time)

**Heron:** I did play music with the strike.

**Hesselgrave:** You did. Okay.

**Heron:** I got, I did – And this goes into the you know kind of the people coming out of the the support you got but no that's not true. M.L. Liebler, I don't know if you know him, he is on the English faculty and he is kind of I would say he is kind of the Godfather of Detroit the Detroit poetry scene except there's nothing that has that kind of an ominous thing, and he's more like the old friendly uncle more than a, a Marlon Brando, but he um, actually organized and he he works and he's very pro-union, he has an an anthology of labor writing, Labor Literature, and is involved in there's a big Labor Literature Conference every, um, every Fall, and he's um, he's part of that. But I did perform a couple things with his Magic Poetry band, I think that's what he was calling it back then, that were explicitly um, um, you know, events that it was partly in support of the strike, and I remember I gave him a little strike plug for it, I remember I told people that if Martians land in their backyard they should not give their story to the Free Press or the News. (Both laugh) Yeah and actually, and actually there was a whole I'm thinking of actually there was it's all it's all coming back to me now that and there was this whole other circle that I did not know very well, uh, some of the people the people were involved in the Readers United movement and uh Grace Boggs, I can't say I know Grace really well, but uh, Jeannie Wylie-Kellerman and her husband Bill and people and some of those people too, so I guess there was a whole group kind of, a group you either got to know, a bunch you either got to

**Comment [J3]:** Michael Lynn Liebler, Senior Lecturer at Wayne State University. Research areas include: Labor literature; Vietnam-era literature; contemporary poetry; performance poetry; work and criticism of Thomas Merton

know or got to know better, through that experience but yeah I even did um, did did play music with M.L. Liebler for the first time through that.

**Hesselgrave:** Um, do you think that there's one particular lesson that you took away from your involvement in the strike? Either for your professional or personal life?

**Heron:** Um, you know that it will be hard, but you should try to do the right thing, you know. Um, you know, and also to um, to you know have some idea of where you kind of you know fit into things in in kind of some kind of sweep of of of history, you know. I read you know cause I really did change my somewhat my idea of journalism not just because of the strike, but I think journalism tends to be, cause when I went through it was, it was really taught as um, writing the event, you know you're very much event oriented, and they um, they used to say that uh you know you're writing the first draft of history, but I think very often um, journalism education doesn't really give you enough doesn't really emphasize that you have to at least know a little bit of history before you come in and um, and contribute to it. And that you know that the events are always in some kind of events that are always all the events are in some some in some kind of historical, um, continuum. So I think that um, I think kind of really kind of sunk in during during the strike. And I can't remember why I started reading Hobsbawm's History of the, of the 19th and 20th Centuries then, but um, but it just really kind of reinforced an idea of of seeing um, uh certain of a sweep of history, and seeing where you fit in, and as a journalist seeing where the facts and the things you're writing about fit in.

**Comment [J4]:** Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Capital* and *The Age of Empire* are sometimes referred to as his trilogy of the long 19th Century (Hobsbawm invented the idea of the 'long' 19th Century, which ran from 1789 to 1914, French Revolution to outbreak of World War I). *The Age of Extremes* is informally called his history of the short 20th Century (Hobsbawm is credited with the idea of the 'short' 20th Century - World War I to the fall of the Soviet Union).

**Hesselgrave:** And is there anything else you want to add about your experiences?

**Heron:** No, I guess that um, probably in the morning I'll go 'Oh I didn't tell her' - it'll it'll keep – (Both talking at once)

**Hesselgrave:** Right, it'll keep coming back.

**Heron:** Coming back, but I think that that's good. And it's kind of funny in the way that you know for me that the way those kind of things I remember I was interviewed, I interviewed with, Rhomberg, Chris Rhomberg and I was embarrassed cause Chris Rhomberg would ask you know "Now what did you think when the second court opinion came down revolving, involving the involving the second session" and I said "Chris, I don't remember that, at all", you know, and what kind of stays with you are these kind of the broad, you know, the broad –

**Hesselgrave:** Like the real personal –

**Heron:** Yeah. Yeah. The real personal.

**Hesselgrave:** More than like the big decisions, it was more like the part that you played.

**Heron:** Yeah. I had one friend that was about to a longtime friend was about to, who was about, about to scab, and um we had been friends forever and it was the only time I had ever yelled at him, you know, and I was basically saying you know "This is like nuts, you were my, you're the guy who, the rebel, why – I'm pats – I'm the corporate, I'm the corporate patsy, why, you know you can't do that! Come on!" And he ended up not doing, not not because of that but I'm really really glad that I said that cause I would have – So yeah it was a pretty emotional time.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah. Yeah we were watching, um, in class we watched videos of, especially the Sterling Heights Plant and that was crazy, and it was really intense over there.

**Heron:** Yeah it was I remember one um, one woman who quit, and actually she ended she got a new job and never went back and she she was interviewed and I I remember the way she put it was "The day my the company tries to kill me is when I stop working for them."

**Hesselgrave:** Yes. Pretty insane.

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** Okay. I think that is all for now. If you have anything else you would like to add though feel free to email me, contact me.

**Heron:** Yeah, yeah I will. You know my one big regret, my real regrets that came with the strike was when uh we were just so disorganized that there came a time when the um, when the, when no one wanted to pay the server bill for the um, Sunday Journal, and at that point memory was not cheap so it wasn't like you know today you just could've put well it all would have fit on one zip drive, you know, but they didn't have zip drives then so the point was that all that stuff got lost. But I may have some individual prints of it, but probably probably someone's got the full run of the Sunday Journal though I bet.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah, that's over at the Reuther.

**Heron:** Yeah.

**Hesselgrave:** I was looking at that. I liked it.

**Heron:** Did you?

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah. I was trying to remember if my grandparents had that or not but they are both gone now, so – I wonder if my mom would know, she might. She – I mean I talked to her about this and she said "Oh, your grandfather!" He was very, you know, pro-union and supportive of the strikers, so.

**Heron:** Yeah. You'd see people come out on picket lines you know with you and um people would drive up from Toledo and far points and you know to, to chime in you know. It was hard to, it was hard to not honor that, you know? Especially when you thought they were right.

**Hesselgrave:** (Laughs) Right. Okay. Well, thank you very much.

**Heron:** Well thank you. This was great. And how many strikers are you going to get, do you think?

**Hesselgrave:** Um, I don't know, cause there was, I think at least – I can't remember how many people in my class, it was a pretty full class. So there were probably about twenty plus people in my class, and everybody was assigned somebody, and they're doing this for three years, so like six semesters, so they're trying to get quite a few of them.

**Heron:** So every, so everybody does one? Or, and twenty in a class, times six semesters,

**Hesselgrave:** Approximately, so yeah.

**Heron:** Wow. Six times twenty that will be a hundred and twenty – that's great.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah, yeah. So it should be a really great project once they put it together.

**Heron:** Wow. Wonderful.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah. Very interesting.

**Heron:** Well they didn't do anything this fun when I was in library school.

**Hesselgrave:** I know, I was very excited to take this class, I thought it was great, so.

**Heron:** Plus nowadays that everything is digitized eventually we'll be able to probably do a computerized transcription of these. Wow.

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah, there's some software that will, it slows it down, and there is some software that you can get with recorders that will print out a transcript.

**Heron:** Really?

**Hesselgrave:** Yeah. It's not cheap. You know but it's, I forgot what it's called, like Dragon, I think, and it'll help print out a transcript, or it'll you know produce a transcript for –

**Heron:** Wow. Of course of course you're not in a big rush, so as the software gets better and better and memory gets better and better, so, eventually you'll be able to – Wonderful.

**Hesselgrave:** (Laughs) Right. And this is Jessica Hesselgrave, talking to W. Kim Heron, May 22nd, 2013.

*End of interview*