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The Changing News Paradigm of South Mississippi's Sun Herald as Seen Through the Eyes of its Journalists: 1968-2018

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THE CHANGING NEWS PARADIGM OF SOUTH MISSISSIPPI'S SUN HERALD
AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF ITS JOURNALISTS: 1968-2018

by

Judy Day Isbell

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Communication
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

From the earliest days of the American democracy, one of the key tenets of the new government was rule by an informed electorate. This notion of rule of the people, by the people, for the people was established in the first article of the United States Constitution when the houses of Congress were carefully designed, and the idea of a knowledgeable constituency was emphasized in the first amendment when among such basic freedoms as speech, religion and assembly was freedom of the press.

Newspapers in America have changed significantly since the writing of that constitution, but most particularly in the last five decades through concentrated ownership, economic pressures, and encroaching media competition, spurring an imperative question of whether these changes have been for the betterment of the profession and its function in a democratic society. Under the current corporate business model in journalism, content has continued to change in a desperate bid to seek larger audiences and boost plummeting media stock values. Based on this behavior, many scholars claim that business interests are completely overwhelming the public interest.

Looking at modern industry research, it's easy to overlook the community level impact of media behavior within the national data. By selecting and evaluating a community newspaper that mirrors the industry trends in ownership and operation, parallels can be drawn between the community newspaper and the industry while also closely assessing the impact of changes in the newsgathering process, the journalists who seek out and write the news and ultimately the news product itself.

This study provides a rare look into the perspectives of current and former journalists from one south Mississippi newsroom from 1986 to 2018, a time when some

of the most accelerated changes have occurred in their industry. Following 34 interviews with reporters, photographers, editors, and publishers from the current and past days of *The Sun Herald* newspaper in Biloxi, Mississippi, this project unveils the learned opinions and observations of journalists regarding their profession. Clearly identifying the mistaken goals of modern news enterprises, this set of journalists calls for a return to responsible reporting over corporate profits.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the many journalists (both past and present) of *The Sun Herald* newspaper in Biloxi, Mississippi, for sharing their closely held observations and beliefs about the state of their profession in general and their newspaper in particular. Acknowledging that it is a time of unprecedented change in journalism, their honest feedback from the front lines of modern media has made this research unique.

The author would also like to thank the dissertation director, Dr. David R. Davies and the other committee members, Dr. Christopher Campbell, Dr. Fei Xue, Dr. Cheryl Jenkins, and Dr. Vanessa Murphree for their guidance, advice, support, and patience throughout this prolonged study. I would also like to recognize two former members of my committee, Dr. Kim LeDuff, who moved on to another academic setting during my dissertation work, and my long-time professor, mentor, and friend, Dr. Gene Wiggins, who passed away during my research for this project. I cannot recall my journalism career and studies without recalling the constant encouragement and good humor of Dr. Wiggins.

DEDICATION

The author would like to dedicate this work to Tim Isbell, a husband who endured numerous research excursions to various libraries, tapped his considerable resources to locate and encourage the participation of old newspaper colleagues in this research, and gave selflessly of his time and endured the frequent absences that were necessary to complete this dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AP</i>	Associated Press
<i>KR</i>	Knight-Ridder
<i>KRT</i>	Knight-Ridder/Tribune
<i>MNI</i>	McClatchy Company stock ticker on New York Stock Exchange
<i>USM</i>	The University of Southern Mississippi
<i>Y2K</i>	Year 2000

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

American newspapers faced unprecedented change at the turn of the 21st century. Not only was there concern about “Y2K,” and any potential technological disturbances to operations, but there were also very real and growing threats to the journalism that supports the American democracy. Among these were concentrated ownership, economic pressures, and encroaching media competition from other media, especially new media or online sources.

This study of *The Sun Herald* newspaper’s history and operation from 1968 to 2018 unveils insights into the ground-level function of a print news enterprise during a period of tremendous industry change. Through the voices of its journalists, both present and past, comes the view from the front lines of journalism in one community, offering a parallel to the industry trends.

While much has been written about the major shifts in the newspaper industry and its effects on newspapers and journalists, this study’s ground-level view of changing journalism contrasts with most studies in the literature, which tend to focus on the industry more so than individual newspapers. Surveys by scholars and think tanks like the Pew Research Center have been very useful in identifying the overarching issues in the changing face of modern journalism. By interviewing many of the significant voices of *The Sun Herald* – both past and present – we gain an unvarnished perspective on the changes in this one newsroom over the time period of 1968-2018. This time span is particularly important to the study of journalism in the late 20th century as it represents a time when newspaper ownership became more and more concentrated industry-wide, including at *The Sun Herald*.

Founded by George Washington Wilkes in October 1884, *The Daily Herald* was first purchased by the State-Record Company of Columbia, South Carolina in 1968, marking the newspaper's first time to operate outside of family hands.¹ The State-Record Company operated *The Daily Herald* and *The South Mississippi Sun* until both newspapers merged into *The Sun Herald* in 1985. In 1986, the combined newspaper operation was purchased by the Knight-Ridder Company.² It was at the time of this acquisition that the clock was begun on this study as this marked the first time that the newspaper passed into large newspaper chain ownership. *The Sun Herald* was chosen for this detailed study as representative of its industry for several reasons:

- *The Sun Herald's* consolidating ownership seemed to make major shifts at the peak periods in industry consolidation, in the years 1968 (first sale from Wilkes family-owned to small media corporation, State-Record Company), 1986 (second sale from State-Record to the much larger Knight-Ridder Company) and 2006 (the forced sale of Knight-Ridder papers to the McClatchy Company).
- The newspaper's circulation area covers most of southern Mississippi.
- The newspaper's local leadership was well known to the author and willing to share internal, historical documents and access to past issues of the newspaper as well as access to past and present staff.

¹ *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi, Miss.), 10 July 1968, 1.

² *The Sun Herald* (Biloxi, Miss.), 25 October 1986, 1.

Research Questions

1. How has news content changed after the rise of the internet?
2. How has the work of journalists changed after the rise of the internet?
3. What have been the major changes to print journalism under corporate ownership?
4. What have been the effects of these changes on print journalism content?
5. How has *The Sun Herald* reflected the national trends in the newspaper industry?

Rationale

Interviews with former and present journalists of the newspaper provide deeper insight into the changes in the newsroom environment and how those changes may have ultimately affected the news product. Some current journalists with *The Sun Herald* have worked at that particular newspaper for more than 30 years, providing a unique perspective of an individual newsroom over the entire course of the study timeframe.

Using a standard set of questions (see Appendix A) designed to elicit information on their role and tenure at the newspaper as well as their individual perspectives on the operation of the newsroom at the outset and conclusion of their career there, patterns of similar responses were established.

These 2015 interviews were contrasted with a 2007 survey conducted by the author with journalists nationwide contacted through state press associations. Much of the same information was collected from both sets of individuals, i.e., length of service in journalism, role in the newsroom, opinions regarding issues facing journalism, and

opinions regarding influence of ownership on newsgathering process and the news end product.

More extensive interviews were conducted with key leaders of the newspaper during the 1986 to 2018 timeframe, including former general manager and publisher Roland Weeks, former executive editor Mike Tonos, and retired executive editor Stan Tiner.

Using *The Sun Herald* as a case study of modern changes in newsroom operation will add ground-level insights into changes in day-to-day journalism to the existing body of knowledge in mass communications regarding journalists' work lives and how the changing industry has influenced journalists and the content they produce.

With 34 interviews conducted (see Appendix B for a list of persons interviewed), the database of responses provides a unique insight into the operation of the newspaper and the culture of its newsroom.

A study of journalists' work lives in a single newsroom over the last five decades can connect over-arching industry trends to specific effects in the life of a community. While numerous studies have been conducted on the larger themes of the rise of the internet and the decline of newspapers and their economic underpinnings, fewer studies have focused on specific newsrooms as case studies.

The ability to view significant community news events through the lens of multiple journalists, both inside and outside of the newsroom covering that event, provides an additional layer of understanding of not only the event itself but the coverage of it.

The time period chosen for this study reflects a tumultuous decline in the American newspaper industry. Since 2004, the Pew Research Center under its Project for Excellence in Journalism has conducted surveys regarding the State of the Media in regard to audience and economic indicators.³ Interestingly, in Pew’s first report on the State of the Media, the authors from the Project for Excellence in Journalism predicted today’s journalism landscape: “If the internet is profitable, but not as profitable as old media, the result may be fewer resources for gathering news, spread over more outlets.”

According to the Pew 2004 State of the Media report, newspaper circulation began dropping at the rate of one percent each year from 1990 to 2002.⁴ Taking the circulation data from that initial report and comparing it to the most recent Pew report, you find newspaper circulation has plummeted from a high of 62,635,000 in 1990 to 33,971,695 in 2017, a drop of almost 47 percent.⁵

In the 2018 State of the Media report by the Pew Center for People and the Press,⁶ the authors noted declines in newspaper circulation of around 3 percent from 2013 to 2014 based upon an analysis of Association for Audited Media (AAM) data. This circulation decline was noted across all newspaper categories – from top-tier newspapers with circulations of 500,000 or more as well as smaller circulation papers.

³ Pew Research Center. (2018). *State of the News Media*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/>

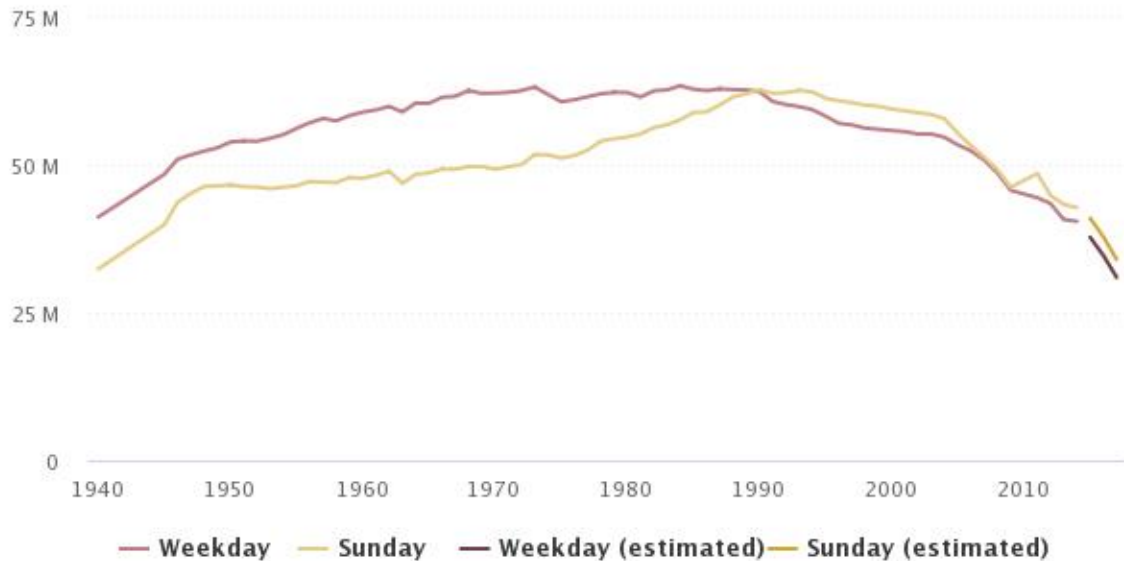
⁴ Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2017, February 23). *Previous State of the News Media reports*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2017/05/State-of-the-News-Media-Report-2004-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2018, June 13). *Newspapers Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/>

⁶Pew Research Center. (2018). *State of the Media 2018*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center. pp. 24.

Total estimated circulation of U.S. daily newspapers

Total circulation of U.S. daily newspapers



Note: To determine totals for 2015 onward, researchers analyzed the year-over-year change in total weekday and Sunday circulation using AAM data and applied these percent changes to the previous year's total. Only those daily U.S. newspapers that report to AAM are included. Affiliated publications are not included in the analysis. Weekday circulation only includes those publications reporting a Monday-Friday average. For each year, the comparison is for all newspapers meeting these criteria for the three-month period ending Dec. 31 of the given year. Comparisons are between the three-month averages for the period ending Dec. 31 of the given year and the same period of the previous year.
 Source: Editor & Publisher (through 2014); estimation based on Pew Research Center analysis of Alliance for Audited Media data (2015-2017).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

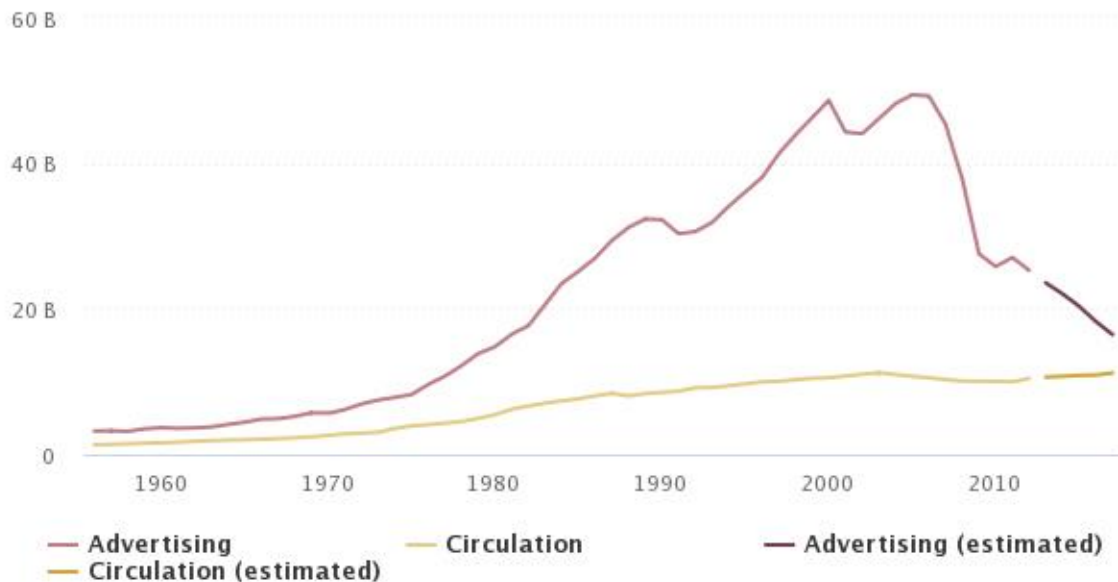
Figure 1. Pew Research Center, Total estimated daily circulation of U.S. daily newspapers. Source: Editor & Publisher and Alliance for Audited Media.

The interesting point in the graph of newspaper circulation from 2002 to 2014 was the 200 percent spike in circulation from 2012 to 2013. Pew Research Center notes that specific rules changes by the Association for Audited Media complicated the circulation picture for newspapers in 2014. Pew researchers adjusted the raw data to allow for realistic comparisons.

The same Pew report⁷ showed that print newspaper advertising revenues were down 5 percent in 2014 over 2013 while digital advertising for online newspaper editions was up by only 3 percent in the same time period – therefore, the push to a digital product by the newspaper industry doesn’t seem to be paying off in ad revenues.

Estimated advertising and circulation revenue of the newspaper industry

Total revenue of U.S. newspapers (in U.S. dollars)



Source: News Media Alliance, formerly Newspaper Association of America (through 2012); Pew Research Center analysis of year-end SEC filings of publicly traded newspaper companies (2013-2017).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2. Pew Research Center’s Estimated advertising and circulation revenue of the newspaper industry, 1956-2017. Source: News Media Alliance, formerly Newspaper Association of America (through 2012); Pew Research Center analysis of year-end SEC filings of publicly traded newspaper companies (2013-2017)

The primary area of interest for current journalists is the push by management to move into the digital delivery of news while the majority of news revenues remain tied to the print editions of their newspapers. For example, in the Pew Research Center’s State of

⁷ Ibid.

the News Media report for 2018, revised on June 19, 2018, while daily circulation of print newspapers was recorded at 30,948,419 for weekdays and 33,971,695 for Sundays in 2017, digital-only, average monthly news unique visits were recorded at 21,711,285 in 2017.⁸ Considering that the newspaper data included complete issues of a print publication and the digital data included single, unique website visits, measurements are not parallel in structure but do measure how news consumers access the various products.

Literature Review

Scholars who have studied the changes in journalism and its effects on American democracy have approached their work from many different perspectives and areas of focus. Looking at some of the more influential of these schools of thought, we will review the effects on news workers, media concentration, cultural sociology, and civil sphere theory, and media competition.

Effects on News Workers

Perhaps the leader in a group of scholars studying effects on news workers is German-born communications historian Dr. Hanno Hardt. He early pointed out the impending decline of journalistic efficacy when its role as an essential check on the operations of a democratic society would descend into nothing more than a pursuit of pure profit. In his writings, Hardt viewed the “making of the American press” as a collective process of interaction between reporters and their sources more so than a traditional recollection of newspaper industrial giants and the enterprises they bought and

⁸ Pew Research Center. (2018). *State of the News Media*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/>

sold.⁹ Hardt emphasized a cultural history of journalism in which the process of communication includes the experience of journalists as participants in the labor process and in the journalists' relationships with their readers. Taking this bottom-up view of journalism rather than the traditional top-down perspective, Hardt was able to use that working-class perception as a lens through which to more clearly understand the interaction between readers and reporters.

“The decline of journalistic authority in the United States remains a serious social and cultural issue that is too often dismissed as the erosion of an elitist notion whose public credibility vanished long ago,” Hardt said.¹⁰

In 1990, Hardt published a seminal paper on the interrelationship between news workers and technology in his publication *Newsworkers, Technology, and Journalism History*, showing that a labor perspective was missing from mainstream journalism history and that the embrace of technology was primarily for the benefit of the newspapers' business aspirations rather than its journalistic ones.¹¹ This emphasis on streamlining business processes rather than improving journalistic practice could be argued as the primary downfall of modern journalism, curtailing its functionality as the vital Fourth Estate in a democratic society.

Pointing to some of the side effects of a new media environment, a colleague of Hardt, Dr. Bonnie Brennen, has noted that plunging circulations, reduced readership and limited employment opportunities bring into question the relevance of traditional media

⁹ Hanno Hardt, “Newsworkers, Technology, and Journalism History.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990) 346-365.

¹⁰ Hanno Hardt, *Newsworkers, Technology, and Journalism History*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

in a postmodern society. Some side effects seem to be an increase in celebrity and lifestyle news as opposed to governmental and investigative journalism.¹² Again, industry trends point to efforts to increase efficiency and profits through shifts in coverage and content.

Focused on the changing definition of American journalists in a digital age, Wendy Weinhold wrote at the outset of the 2008 economic recession that “media conglomeration and economic constraints force the continued decline of community newspapers” and that it is these newspapers that represent the majority of American newspapers and in turn, serve as journalistic training grounds for young journalists. Weinhold’s study was one of the few to focus on a smaller newspaper as a case study juxtaposed against basic principles of journalism as described by Kovach and Rosenstiel.¹³ Such principles include: (1) Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth; (2) Its first loyalty is to its citizens; (3) Its essence is a discipline of verification; (4) Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover; (5) It must serve as an independent monitor of power; (6) It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; (7) It must strive to keep the significant interesting and relevant; (8) It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional; (9) Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience; and (10) Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.¹⁴ In short, Weinhold found a disconnect between these ideals

¹² Bonnie Brennen, “The future of journalism.” *Journalism* 10 (2009) 300-302.

¹³ Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: what newspeople should know and the public should expect*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001).

¹⁴ Walter Dean, *The Elements of Journalism*, accessed September 25, 2016, <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/elements-journalism/>.

taught to journalists and the real world of economic imperatives that often taken precedence.¹⁵

Interviewing and shadowing reporters and editors at *The Southern Illinoisan* in Carbondale, Illinois, Weinhold discovered several departures from traditional journalism practice. First, she found reporters discouraged by the business pressures placed on their role of watchdog. In shadowing one reporter, she found that one reporter was “concerned about the life and work conditions of the citizens she writes for but not that interested in maintaining an autonomous stance from the government officials who dominate her day-to-day work.”

The editor she interviewed and shadowed through budget meetings readily admitted that his work was focused primarily on the business side of the newspaper, that his job “really has nothing to do with journalism or anything like that.”¹⁶

Scott Reinardy has argued that dwindling resources devoted to newsrooms have also created poor morale and an exodus of journalistic talent from newspapers.¹⁷ Reinardy also surmised that female journalists were most likely to abandon the profession due to higher levels of exhaustion and lower levels of professional efficacy.¹⁸ A combination of traditional stressors for working women – work/family balance, lower earning potential than men for similar work – are compounded by the increasing stress

¹⁵ Wendy M. Weinhold, Newspaper Negotiations: The Crossroads of community newspaper journalists' values and labor. *Journalism Practice*, Vol 2, No 3 (October 2008) 476-486.

¹⁶ Weinhold, p. 483.

¹⁷ Scott Reinardy, “Depleted Resources Causing Burnout for Layoff Survivors.” *Newspaper Research Journal* (2013) 6-21.

¹⁸ Scott Reinardy, “Female Journalists More Likely to Leave Newspapers.” *Newspaper Research Journal* (2009) 42-57.

for working journalists: job insecurity, low pay overall, increased workloads and poor working conditions.

Lori Bergen and David Weaver published a 1988 report that examined 70 newspaper journalists regarding their job satisfaction in relation to the size of their organization.¹⁹ This analysis showed that the strongest predictors of job satisfaction were the journalist's perception of how good a job of informing the public his or her organization was doing.

David Weaver took a closer look at the work lives of journalists in his 2007 book, *The American journalist in the 21st century: U.S. news people at the dawn of a new millennium*. In his 2002 survey of U.S. journalists, Weaver took into account more diverse journalistic endeavors than was done in previous studies in 1971, 1982, 1983, and 1992.²⁰ The first three surveys of journalists concluded that the world surrounding journalists “had changed much more than they have.” Unfortunately, Weaver noted in his 2007 book that the previous surveys had only focused on journalists working in traditional news media – to the exclusion of emerging media outlets. This oversight was corrected in the 2002 survey with separate samples of online and minority journalists since those segments are minimally represented in traditional media outlets.

While Weaver noted a level of stability in terms of the number of women and minorities employed in mainstream journalism, several factors limited advancement for those journalists, the overwhelming reason being that an overall shrinking journalistic

¹⁹ Lori A. Bergen, and David Weaver. 1988. “Job satisfaction of Daily Newspaper Journalists and Organization Size.” *Newspaper Research Journal* 1-13.

²⁰ David H. Weaver, Randall A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit. 2007. *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U. S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

workforce also shrank the number of more desirable jobs to which younger journalists could aspire. The fatalism with which the brighter young journalists viewed this trend increased their exodus from the profession. This was particularly frustrating for the pool of young, more highly educated journalists in 2002. Over the 30-year span between the studies Weaver evaluated, the percentage of U.S. journalists who majored in mass communication and journalism doubled in that time period with 89 percent having earned a baccalaureate degree. This degree of higher education raised the old stereotype of journalists as “elitists” out of touch with the majority of Americans.

While Weaver’s 2002 survey of journalists indicated more stability and job satisfaction in America’s newsrooms than in the 1992 survey, it is important to note that the 2002 survey predated some of the largest newspaper layoffs in American history by such newspaper corporations as Gannett, Knight-Ridder, McClatchy, The Tribune Company, the Wall Street Journal and other media corporations both large and small.²¹

Cultural Sociology and the Civil Sphere Theory

Maria Luengo, writing in *Journalism Studies* in 2014, acknowledged a “crisis in journalism” since 2008.²² While all media industries felt the impact of web-based infiltration of media markets, newspapers have suffered the largest share of negative outcomes because of drastic declines in advertising revenues and lost readership to the internet.

²¹ Felicity Barringer, “Weak Ad Revenue is Causing Dow Jones to Plan More Job Cuts.” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2002: C7.

²² Maria Luengo, Constructing the Crisis of Journalism: Towards a cultural understanding of the economic collapse of newspapers during the digital revolution. *Journalism Studies*, (2014) 576-585.

Through the prisms of cultural sociology and civil sphere theory, Luengo notes “journalistic autonomy is endangered in just the same way as a civil domain is continuously endangered by the intrusions of markets, state power, and other spheres of power in society.”

More significant than business losses have been the concerns surrounding the dangers to society at large, said Jeffrey Alexander of the Yale Center for Cultural Sociology. Much of the recent literature devoted to the technical and economic aspects of the journalism crisis are inspired by concerns far beyond the monetary and technological considerations, but for the American democracy itself.²³ Recent changes in journalism threaten “essential elements of independent journalism that the news business has sustained and strengthened throughout the twentieth century.”²⁴

Media Concentration

In his 1962 book, *American Journalism, a history: 1690-1960*, Frank Luther Mott had just begun evaluation of an impending shift in newspaper ownership.²⁵ At the time he published his history of journalism, Mott noted that there were only three newspaper groups with a truly national scope: Hearst, Scripps-Howard, and Newhouse. Mott also noted that only 30 percent of daily newspapers in America were owned by groups in 1960. Alfred Lee had reported only 12-15 percent of daily newspapers in America were owned by chains in 1900.²⁶

²³ J. C. Alexander, *The Societalization of Social Problems: A Civil Sphere Approach to Financial Crisis, Church Pedophilia, and Media Phone Hacking*. Madrid: Instituto Juan March (2013).

²⁴ Maria Luengo, Constructing the Crisis of Journalism: Towards a cultural understanding of the economic collapse of newspapers during the digital revolution. *Journalism Studies*, (2014) 576-585.

²⁵ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism, a History: 1690-1960* Third Edition. New York: The Macmillan Company (1962).

²⁶ Alfred McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America; the Evolution of a Social Instrument*. New York: The Macmillan Company (1947).

While chain or group ownership clearly doubled in the first 60 years of the 20th century, the acceleration throughout the remainder of the century was overwhelming by comparison. For instance, in 2011, only six large companies controlled 90 percent of all news content delivered to Americans.²⁷ GE, News Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, and CBS are the six corporations in which 232 media executives controlled the information diet for 277 million Americans. From this type of data is drawn the understandable concern of too few voices controlling too much news content in America.

There is little doubt that the trend toward corporate journalism has been fed by several factors. As far back as the origins of the penny press in the 1830s, interest in newspapers as a profit-making venture was sparked, and pursued by men like Horace Greeley, William Randolph Hearst, J. E. Scripps, Adolph S. Ochs, and Joseph Pulitzer. To their credit, men like Pulitzer bought struggling papers like his *New York World* in 1883 and took a paper that was losing \$40,000 a year into one that four months later had doubled its circulation.²⁸ Again, this would be much easier to do in the economy at the turn of the 20th century than the one that existed at the turn of the 21st century with the advent of a more competitive media landscape.

The impact of media conglomerates began to be truly felt in the latter half of the 20th century. Ben Bagdikian, one of the leading scholars in media concentration and its impact on the essential functions of journalism in a democracy, posits in his book, *The New Media Monopoly* that media ownership began to exercise power to further promote

²⁷ Ashley Lutz, *Business Insider*. June 14, 2012. Accessed October 16, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>.

²⁸ William David Sloan, and James D. Startt. *The Media in America: A History*. Northport, AL Vision Press (1996).

profit-taking from their media enterprises rather than concern themselves with issues of democracy or fairness.²⁹ As an example, Bagdikian noted that in 1969 when the Supreme Court ruled that the Fairness Doctrine was constitutional, “the majority of newspapers editorialized in favor of the Fairness Doctrine.” But by 1984 when more newspapers had become part of large media conglomerates that included broadcast stations, newspapers reversed course with fully 84 percent of newspaper editorials arguing that the Fairness Doctrine should no longer be required.

“Diversity of opinion had begun to shrink,” Bagdikian wrote. “And rights of reply disappeared from the U.S. airwaves.”

Robert W. McChesney, another key scholar in the area of media concentration, noted that large corporate media interests had one overriding concern – profits over media responsibility in a capitalistic rather than a democratic society. In the 1999 edition of his book, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*, McChesney prescribes structural reform for American media.³⁰ “The core problem with the U.S. media system relates to how it is owned, its profit motivation, and its reliance upon advertising,” McChesney wrote. “Corporate media power must be confronted directly and reduced.”

In a more recent publication, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*, McChesney points out the two-pronged problem of modern

²⁹ Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press (2004).

³⁰ Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. New York City: The New Press (1999).

media. The first problem deals with its content, and the second, larger problem deals with the structure that that generates that content.³¹

The method by which society organizes its media becomes of “paramount importance,” said McChesney. The problem with this, he writes, is that “The United States has not satisfactorily addressed the problem of the media in recent generations. As a result, the media system has been set up to serve the interests of those who make policies behind closed doors – large profit-driven media corporations – while the broad and vital interests of the population have been largely neglected.

This makes the current U.S. media system an anti-democratic force, a political problem requiring a political solution, he said.

While the Fairness Doctrine dealt with the fair representation of opposing viewpoints in news, the concept of objective reporting applies across all media. A key tenet of ethical journalism practice is the acquisition of “both sides” of a story.

A continuing trend noted by media scholars in the last quarter of the 20th century was the reduction of diverse voices in the media landscape. William D. Sloan noted in his book, *The Media in America*, that beyond the consolidation of newspaper owners through purchases by large conglomerates, there was media consolidation, the trend of closing newspapers in the same city. “Whereas 117 cities had competing dailies in 1945,” Sloan wrote. “Only 34 had them in 1990,” a 71 percent decrease in 45 years.³²

³¹ Robert W. McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press (2004).

³² William David Sloan and James D. Startt. *The Media in America: A History*. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1996).

This statistic becomes more understandable when taken in the context of changing law and circumstances affecting the newspaper industry. A perfect storm of obstacles faced print journalism at the turn of the 21st century. In addition to the established trend of media consolidation, there was the rising cost of raw materials required to run a newspaper – ink, and newsprint as well as energy costs associated with running large printing equipment. Approaching the turn of the 21st century, newspapers saw a sudden surge in newsprint costs. In 1995, the *American Journalism Review* noted the tightening newsprint market put a squeeze on newspapers. “The largest increase in newsprint prices in 50 years is forcing newsrooms across the country to find creative ways to cut both costs and the amount of paper they use,” wrote Kelly Heyboer, an editorial assistant with *American Journalism Review*.³³ At that point in 1995, newsprint costs had risen an average of 30 to 35 percent, year over year. Added to these economic pressures is the tremendous competition of digital content on the internet, generally served up by news aggregator sites like Google News, Topix, AOL News, Bing News, Yahoo, MSNBC, Huffington Post, and others.

Because newspapers have been slow to recognize the difficulty of monetizing their content for online consumption, they have established an expectation by news consumers to get all the content they want for free. *The Sun Herald*, like many other newspapers, has attempted to reposition itself as a “multimedia news source” rather than simply a newspaper. In late 2012, *The Sun Herald* began to gradually implement a paywall for its local content. This meant that the newspaper continued to allow people

³³ Kelly Heyboer, “Coping with the Tightening Newsprint Squeeze.” *American Journalism Review* 11, 3 (1995) 10-11.

free access to news content on the newspaper's website for the first several news stories before users would encounter a screen that required them to subscribe to the digital edition of the newspaper before they could continue. This involved creating an account with the newspaper, paying a monthly or annual fee and then creating a login by which to access the newspaper's digital content. By allowing visitors to their website to access the first few stories for free each month, they hoped to entice readers to pay for access when their number of free reads expire. The jury is still out on how this will succeed long term.

Media Competition

The proliferation of media channels and outlets in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has raised numerous issues for journalists within those systems. Chief among these new dilemmas is the lowering of ethical standards in the digital domain and the creeping influence of this into the print product.

Writing in *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, Chris Roberts considers ethics to be a moving target even within single news organizations through their various news channels.³⁴ One prime example from *The New York Times*' ethics columnist was the instance of the *Times* insisting that letters to the editor for the print edition be signed by the writer, but online posts were allowed to remain anonymous. This inconsistency, according to the *Times* ethics columnist Randy Cohen, is "less a planned policy than a clash" between print and web traditions.³⁵ Yet

³⁴ Chris Roberts, "Fit to post but not fit to print: channel consistency and virtue ethics for legacy print journalism organizations." *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics* (2013) 33-41.

³⁵ Randy Cohen. Be good: How to navigate the ethics of everything. (2012) *New York: Chronicle*.

Cohen questions how much of the “web tradition” should be embraced by news organizations at the expense of print journalistic principles.

Indeed, journalists are finding that not only have there been differing yardsticks for what is acceptable to post to online editions of their news products, but some have noticed that the lower bar for online posting seems to creep into the decision-making process for content slated for the print publication.³⁶

In an effort to replace some of the volumes of news generation lost in newsroom layoffs and reductions by attrition, more and more news content is produced by stringers contracted by the newspaper on a pay-by-story or pay-by-photograph basis or content is submitted by individuals in the surrounding community for gratis.³⁷ An understandable concern with this arrangement is that many of these substitute “reporters” may never have had any formal journalism training and may not be aware of the simplest journalistic ethical considerations.

Now in the early decades of the 21st century, newspapers are struggling for basic survival in an age of immediate, personalized journalism delivered into the palm of the consumer’s hand. In a 2015 Pew Research Center for People and the Press report,³⁸ Americans overwhelmingly continue to think of television as their primary source for national and international news with 66 percent saying they get most of their news from television and only 43 percent saying they get their news mostly from the internet and

³⁶ Chris Roberts. “Fit to post but not fit to print: Channel consistency and virtue ethics for legacy print journalism organizations.” *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics* 33-41, (2013).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Andrew Kohut, Carol Doherty, Michael Dimock, and Scott Keeter. *Ideological News Sources: Who Watches and Why, Americans Spending More Time Following the News*. White Paper, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2010).

only 31 percent admitted to getting their news from newspapers. (A total of more than 100 percent is due to participants naming more than one source for news.)

Of the internet news users, about half (51 percent) said they went to a website that offered links to stories from many news organizations (Google, Yahoo) and 43 percent went directly to a favored news site (CNN, MSNBC, FOX). Online news consumers also specified that they prefer to get news from sources that do not have a political point of view as opposed to those that do have some political ax to grind.

In a September 12, 2010 report, the Pew Center noted that while Americans are spending more time following news through the internet and mobile digital sources, the ideology of the consumer has begun to play an ever-larger role in their choice of news sources.³⁹

According to the 2010 Pew report, audiences that identify themselves as supporters of the Tea Party movement and NRA (National Rifle Association) make up disproportionately large segments of the Rush Limbaugh Radio Show and Fox News opinion programming audiences. Conversely, supporters of gay rights make up large shares of *The New York Times* readership, the Colbert Report viewership, and NPR listenership.

An interesting aspect of the 2010 survey was that liberal Democrats and young people both indicated a decline in their “enjoyment” of keeping up with the news. Democrats and young people cited partisanship in the news as the reason for their lessened enjoyment in following the news. Among other key findings in the 2010 survey was that newspaper readership is extremely low (8 percent) among young people under

³⁹ Ibid.

the age of 30 while the general public (26 percent) acknowledge reading a print newspaper. More and more people (from 48 percent in 2006 to 57 percent in 2010) acknowledge that they get news “from time to time” as opposed to at “regular times,” classifying more news consumers as “grazers” rather than in-depth readers.⁴⁰

People are resorting more to search engines to ferret out news of interest to them. In 2008, 19 percent of those surveyed were using news aggregators in search engines but by 2010, fully 33 percent admitted to turning to search engines.

Overall, the Pew 2010 survey seemed to indicate that more Americans are transitioning from traditional media platforms to digital ones, with 39 percent indicating they used traditional media only, 9 percent indicating they used digital platforms only, and 36 percent indicating they used both traditional and digital platforms simultaneously. The remaining 17 percent said they viewed no news through either platform.

The Pew Research Center 2015 study of news environments in Denver, Colorado; Macon, Georgia; and Sioux City, Iowa showed that while the target communities varied widely in population, education, ethnicity, and technology adoption, they all agreed on the value of local news in their lives.⁴¹ Nine out of every ten people interviewed said they follow local news closely, and five of that ten said they follow the local news very closely.

Leo Bogart was documenting the decline of newspaper readership in 1984 with a study that showed 77 percent of Americans reading newspapers in 1971 and only 67 percent reading papers in 1982.⁴² According to subsequent Pew research, the trend not

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Pew Research Center. (2015). *Local News in a Digital Age*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

⁴² Bogart, Leo. 1984. “The Public’s Use and Perception of Newspapers.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 709-719.

only continued but accelerated into the close of the 20th century eventually reporting only 40 percent of those surveyed in 2010 acknowledging they read a daily newspaper.⁴³

A 2008 study by Tien-Tsung Lee and Lu Wei⁴⁴ showed that decreasing newspaper readership particularly among 17- to 24-year-olds is associated with decreased political participation, although not in decreased overall political knowledge. Compared to other media, Lee and Wei report that “newspaper readers tend to obtain and retain more political information and can better discriminate among issues in comparison with television viewers.” In contrast, they note that television viewers are “more likely to make voting decisions based on candidate images and personal qualities portrayed in television.”

Recent research questions regarding the evolving nature of modern journalism have dealt primarily with quality issues of the end product provided to the consumer. Jane Singer’s study of British journalists and the professional gatekeeping role that distinguishes them from civilian journalists reveals that journalists see user-generated content as useful on websites but detrimental to the quality of the professionally printed product.⁴⁵

Other scholars have focused on the impact of declining newspaper readership on political participation in a democracy.⁴⁶ Lee and Wei asked one primary research

⁴³ Andrew Kohut, Carroll Doherty, Michael Dimock, and Scott Keeter. *Ideological News Sources: Who Watches and Why, Americans Spending More Time Following the News*. White Paper, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2010).

⁴⁴ Tien-Tsung Lee, and Lu Wei. “How Newspaper Readership Affects Political Participation.” *Newspaper Research Journal*, 8-23 (2008).

⁴⁵ Jane B. Singer, “Quality Control: Perceived effects of user-generated content on newsroom norms, values and routines.” *Journalism Practice* 127-142 (2010).

⁴⁶ Tien-Tsung Lee, and Lu Wei. “How Newspaper Readership Affects Political Participation.” *Newspaper Research Journal*, 8-23 (2008).

question: does the use of new media contribute to declining newspaper readership in young Americans? They discovered overall that declining newspaper readership in young Americans contributes to reduced political participation but not impaired political knowledge.

Even Ted Turner himself, the king of media capitalism in the latter half of the 20th century, admits that the American media landscape has turned toward oligopoly.⁴⁷

“The loss of independent operators hurts both the media business and its citizen-customers,” Turner said in a 2004 article in *Washington Monthly* magazine. “When the ownership of these firms passes to people under pressure to show quick financial results in order to justify the purchase, the corporate emphasis instantly shifts from taking risks to taking profits. When that happens, quality suffers, localism suffers and democracy itself suffers.”

While Turner was speaking of media in general, his comments certainly apply in particularly harsh terms to the news media which has the greater role of educating and informing the populace rather than simply entertaining it. With media monopolies running news organizations, sometimes the line between informing and entertaining gets blurred where company interests are involved. One case in point is the purchase of ABC and its news division by Disney. A “Good Morning America” broadcast was soon on location at Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida not long after Disney acquired the network. Howard Kurtz, media reporter for *The Washington Post* and author of the book,

⁴⁷ Ted Turner, My Beef with Big Media: How government protects big media and shuts out upstarts like me. *Washington Monthly*, July/August (2004). Accessed December 30, 2015. <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0407.turner.html>.

Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time was critical of the overwhelmingly promotional patter of the on-air talent of *Good Morning America*:⁴⁸

Joan Lunden - "Disney World rocks around the clock. . . . The attention to detail in this place is really astounding."

Charlie Gibson - "Probably the greatest man-made vacation center that has ever been built."

Joan Lunden - "Just another example of going all out to impress even the most hard-to-please visitors."

The obligatory interview with Disney CEO Michael Eisner did make Charlie Gibson uncomfortable. "I asked Charlie Gibson about it," Kurtz said, "and he was candid enough to say 'I'd be lying to you if I didn't say there were some people who weren't comfortable about it.'"⁴⁹

A growing discomfort with corporate interference in the process of gathering and reporting news is evident throughout the news industry. A December 1999 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press measured public attitudes toward the news media and how it performed its function in society. Andrew Kohut, founding director of the Pew Research Center reported the findings as worrisome for the media.⁵⁰ "This same survey found that many people worry that the press may be a lap dog, rather than a watchdog when bosses' interests are involved," said Kohut. The survey showed that few Americans were aware that the majority of the nation's media outlets were concentrated into so few hands.

⁴⁸ Howard Kurtz, *Hot air: all talk, all the time*. New York: Times Books (1996).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Andrew Kohut, "Food for Public Distrust." *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April: 18 (2000).

“Only 37 percent of respondents in a Pew nationwide survey conducted last December knew that General Electric-owned broadcast outlets,” Kohut said.⁵¹ Strangely enough, 60 percent were aware that Disney owned ABC. As part of this survey, respondents identified what they considered to be the top problems with America’s media at that time, with a parenthetical notation of how many surveyed saw the itemized issue as a major problem:

- Too focused on misdeeds of public figures (59%)
- Sensationalism (49%)
- Protecting owners’ business interests (42%)
- Inaccurate reporting (41%)
- Overly critical reporting (35%)
- Protecting advertisers’ interests (35%)

The study of *The Sun Herald* newsroom over the 50-year time span of 1968-2018 will offer a localized look into how these larger industry trends impact one newsroom and its journalists. These in-depth interviews with former and current journalists of *The Sun Herald* illuminate the very real fallout from the vast changes taking place not only in the journalists’ lives but in the journalism they practice for their readership.

Database and Methods/Sources Consulted

Primary sources for this project include interviews with current and former journalists of *The Sun Herald* as well as the previous iterations of that publication prior to the 1985 merger of *The Daily Herald* and *The South Mississippi Sun*. In addition to the first-hand recollections from these individuals, the project includes the oral history of

⁵¹ Kohut, “Food for Public Distrust.”

former editor emeritus, Eugene P. Wilkes, son of the newspaper's founder, George Washington Wilkes.

Previously unpublished documents from the archives of *The Sun Herald* were also included in the project, including newsroom records, fact sheets, biographies, and limited histories.

Published papers such as the centennial edition of the newspaper published in October 1984 were used.

A 2007 survey by the author of 88 national journalists regarding the changing state of American newspapers was consulted.

Outline

Chapter 1 lays out the introduction, rationale, literature review, database and methods/sources consulted in the research, as well as an outline of chapters for the dissertation.

Chapter 2 is titled "Government's Growing Concerns Regarding the Newspaper Industry." The material in this chapter covers United States tax structure and its effects on print journalism, an overview of government efforts to address the industry upheaval, i.e., the Celler hearings and the Newspaper Preservation Act as well as Joint Operating Agreements, the Telecommunications Act and the Fairness Doctrine.

Chapter 3 is titled "*The Sun Herald* newspaper: 1884-2018." In this section of the dissertation, a brief synopsis of the origins of *The Sun Herald* is presented as a basis for the proposal that this south Mississippi newspaper is representative of the wider industry. Included is a more in-depth examination of the recent fluctuations within the newspaper as ownership continued to change. With 84 years spent in the Wilkes family and 50 years

since its first sale to a corporation, the newspaper operated under family ownership almost twice as long as it has existed outside of it. Yet the changes that have occurred in the last 28 years of the newspaper's life have perhaps represented the most dramatic changes in its operation and its mission as a news entity.

Chapter 4 is titled "The Declining Newspaper Industry." It considers factors that have caused the newspaper industry to decline such as increased operating costs, corporatization and the push for more profits as well as the rise of the internet in addition to the decline of readership and advertising.

Chapter 5 is titled "What the Journalists of *The Sun Herald* See in the Future of their Profession." This chapter explores the acceleration of competitive pressure on newspapers in general and the *Sun Herald* in particular with the advent of online news. Interviews with editors and writers with the *Sun Herald* will help to capture the thought processes of newspaper management as they considered entering the realm of cyberspace. Other source material such as trade publications, industry news, Pew Research studies, and scholarly articles will help to further clarify this crossroads in journalism. Examining the shifting interest into more celebrity and "social" news rather than traditional hard news, interviews with long-time journalists who have covered both will be vital.

Chapter 6 is titled "Conclusion." This chapter will house the lessons learned from the cumulative research of the previous chapters, summarizing the research questions and their responses.

Appendices include questions posed and verbatim responses of all interviews for this project in alphabetical order:

1. Tim Boone, Business Reporter, 2000-2004
2. Riva Brown, General Assignment Reporter, 1989-1995
3. Karen Bryant, Copy Editor, 1990-1995
4. Joey Bunch, Casino Reporter, 2001-2002
5. Ben Castle, Copy Editor, 1999-2009
6. Jimmy Creed, Sports Writer, 1989-1992
7. Ruth Ingram Cummins, Staff Writer, 1983-1986
8. Gina Dykeman, Copy Editor, 1995-1998
9. Ken Fink, General Assignment Reporter, 1989-2000
10. John Fitzhugh, Staff Photographer, 1987-current
11. Sharon Fitzhugh, Digital Projects Editor, 1981-current
12. Ruby Grace, Newsroom Staff Assistant, 1989-2009
13. Paul Hampton, Politics Editor, 1989-current
14. Jimmy Hannaford, Jackson County Bureau Reporter/Photographer, 1989-2006
15. Kate Magandy Holzhauser, Digital Editor, 1985-1987, 1992-current
16. Tim Isbell, Staff Photographer, 1984-current
17. Alice Jackson, General Assignment Reporter, 1977-1984, 1992-1999
18. Willie Jefferson, Copy Editor, 1996-2001
19. James Jones, Sports Editor, 1992-current
20. Cliff Kirkland, Sports Editor, 1975-1989
21. Tammy Leytham, Jackson County Editor, 2012-2014

22. Sue Ann London, Staff Typist, 2001-2003
23. Barb Lowell, Features Editor, 2001-2004
24. Rudy Nowak, Senior Graphic Artist, 1998-2014
25. David Purdy, Staff Photographer, 1985-2008
26. Terri Queen, Copy Editor, 1985-2005
27. Sherry Rankin, Copy Editor, 1990-2001
28. Eugene Stockstill, Reporter, 1996-2001
29. Lea Ivey Stone, Copy Editor, 1981-1985
30. Stan Tiner, Executive Editor, 2000-2015
31. Mike Tonos, Managing and Executive Editor, 1973-1976, 1986-2000
32. Amy Tyler Mair, General Assignment Reporter, 1995-1997
33. Roland Weeks, General Manager, 1986-2000

CHAPTER II – GOVERNMENT’S GROWING CONCERNS REGARDING THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

By the 1960s, the newspaper industry faced familiar but accelerating pressure from rising costs (newsprint, ink, labor), shifting readership, and rapid technological change.⁵²

Other factors that contributed to the pressure on print journalism as an industry included a punitive tax structure for family-owned newspapers and new generations in newspapering families unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of keeping the family business going.

Tax Structure Works Against Newspapers

In addition to dwindling family members to take on the work of the newspaper business, a restrictive tax structure encouraged family members to sell and corporations to buy newspapers.⁵³ An estate tax that ranged from 55 percent to 70 percent of the fair market value of the newspaper was levied at the time that the new generation took control of the business. This tax structure forced children to sell the family newspaper to be able to meet this tax burden. At the same time, corporations were rewarded for snapping up the family newspapers by the same tax structure which enabled them to spend earnings on the news properties, avoiding taxes on those earnings while at the same time adding new properties on their books to be depreciated.⁵⁴ Steven Helle observed in a 1984 case study for the DePaul Law Review that Illinois’ independent daily newspapers had seen

⁵² Davies, David R. (2006). *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965*. Westport, Connecticut. Praeger. P. 111.

⁵³ Fedler, Pennington (2003). Employee-Owned Dailies: The Triumph of Economic Self-Interest over Journalistic Ideals. *The International Journal on Media Management*. Pp 262-274.

⁵⁴ Internal Revenue Code Sections 531-537.

quite a shift in ownership due to estate taxes.⁵⁵ “Current law thus places independent newspaper owners in a double bind: it encourages chains to buy by allowing accumulation of profits for that purpose as a reasonable business need,” wrote Helle. “And it encourages independents to sell by not deeming accumulation of profits to pay estate taxes a reasonable business need.”

In 1984, Helle remarked that only 20 of Illinois’ 83 daily newspapers were not affiliated with any other daily newspaper. At that same time, he noted that 70 of California’s 110 newspapers were group owned, and only five independent newspapers remained in Florida out of their total of 47 daily newspapers. Further, Helle also discovered that competing dailies had experienced a precipitous drop in the 20th Century. American cities having more than one newspaper went from 502 (38.7% of total newspapers) in 1923 to 35 (2.2% of total newspapers) in 1980.

⁵⁵ Helle, Steven. “The Impact of Estate Taxes on Independent Daily Newspapers: An Illinois Case Study,” DePaul Law Review, De Paul University, Vol. 33, Issue 2, Article 3, Winter 1984.

DECLINE IN MULTIPLE NEWSPAPER CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1923-1980			
Year	Total Cities with Newspapers	Cities Having More than One Paper	
		Number	% of Total
1923	1297	502	38.7
1933	1426	243	17.0
1943	1416	137	19.7
1948	1392	109	7.8
1953	1453	91	6.3
1958	1447	70	4.8
1963	1476	51	3.5
1968	1493	43	2.9
1973	1519	37	2.4
1978	1536	35	2.3
1980	1539	35	2.2

Table 1 *Steven Helle's Decline in Multiple Newspaper Cities in the United States, 1923-1980*. Source: "The Impact of Estate Taxes on Independent Daily Newspapers: An Illinois Case Study," *DePaul Law Review, De Paul University, Vol. 33, Issue 2, Article 3, Winter 1984*.

Internal Revenue Codes 531-537 laid down the no-win scenario for newspaper families wanting to continue operating the family newspaper within the family. While it established that independent newspapers were subject to heavy tax burdens on not only the profits of the business but on its market value. In Section 537, the Internal Revenue Code allows tax incentives for corporate media owners to write off the expense of purchasing additional newspapers.⁵⁶

In his book, *-30-: The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper*, Charles Madigan claims that the methods by which the Internal Revenue Service evaluated estate taxes on independently-owned newspapers are one of the three key developments that

⁵⁶ United States Internal Revenue Code Sections 531-537.

brought down “the Great American Newspaper.”⁵⁷ Citing the introduction of electronically set type and the application of new labor negotiating techniques as well as the revised tax incentives, Madigan posits that the three in combination turned the economic tide against independently-owned newspapers.

The Celler Hearings

The ever-strengthening trend of fewer readers for American newspapers eventually caught the attention of government representatives concerned with the future of a free press and its importance to a democratic society.

In early 1963, United States Representative Emanuel Celler (D-NY), chairman of the House Antitrust Subcommittee, began hearings into the issue of ownership concentration in the newspaper industry. Calling newspaper publishers to Washington, D.C., to testify regarding the concentration of newspaper ownership, the hearings were discontinued twice and never officially called to a close.⁵⁸

At the time of the four-day hearings in March 1963, there were two primary factors working against a successful conclusion to the congressional meetings: the publishers invited to participate were suspicious of the federal government’s true intention in calling the hearings and the subcommittee’s chairman was becoming increasingly involved in the proposed Civil Rights Act that would be eventually passed in 1964.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Madigan, C. M. (2007). -30-: *The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper*. Chucago: Ivan R. Dee. p 12.

⁵⁸ Stuart C. Babington, “Newspaper Monopolies Under a Microscope: The Celler Hearings of 1963,” *American Journalism* 28:2 (2011): 112-136.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Mysteriously, the four days of talks were not officially recorded by the federal government – no official record exists. Stuart Babington writes in his article for *American Journalism* that newspaper publishers missed a prime opportunity with the Celler hearings to obtain government support of their industry. It would be another seven years before Mo Udall, Congressional Representative from Arizona, introduced the Newspaper Preservation Act which would be eventually passed and allow joint operating agreements among competing newspapers, exempting newspapers from certain provisions of antitrust laws.⁶⁰

Stitching together such records as existed around the Celler hearings, Babington was able to pull together an idea of what transpired at the hearings. Media scholar Robert McChesney also studied the Celler hearings and particularly the publisher's participation and attitude toward them. McChesney argues that newspaper executives would often resist any interference with the growing commercialization of their industry.⁶¹

“First, they made sure coverage of these debates was either nonexistent or distorted to suit the interest of the oppressive owners,” McChesney said. “This made it considerably more difficult for the public to participate in media policy debates, as they often had little information about what was going on. Second, the First Amendment was used as a bludgeon to prevent the adoption of government policies that might interfere with their commercial prerogatives. Third, industry self-regulation, as opposed to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ McChesney, Robert W., *The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 63.

government regulation or reorganization, was offered as the appropriate solution to concentrated private control of communication.”⁶²

In his conclusion, Babington found that Congressman Celler was sufficiently distracted by work on the urgent issue of pending civil rights legislation that it consumed his energies for the whole of 1963. Therefore, first and foremost, the newspaper ownership hearings were completely overshadowed by the urgent need for the civil rights act as it was announced by President Kennedy as his top legislative priority. As Celler was a vocal Democrat who supported his president’s initiatives, the civil rights legislation would eventually consume the bulk of Celler’s time.⁶³

The mystery of no published transcript of the four days of hearings was also relatively easily explained. The congressional procedure allows committee chairmen to decide whether transcripts from proceedings should be published.⁶⁴ It was the opinion of officials at government libraries and archives that while the transcripts were likely maintained, they may never have been sent to the Government Printing Office as they were viewed as incomplete. Because the hearings ended abruptly and were never officially concluded, the thought may have been that the hearings would be reconvened and concluded, therefore the transcripts were not yet completed and could be sent to the Government Printing Office once they were.

So, the first official government inquiry into the growing issue of media consolidation was averted. The next attempt to come to the aid of print journalism was

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Stuart C. Babington (2011) Newspaper Monopolies under the Microscope: The Celler Hearings of 1963, *American Journalism*, 28:2, 113-137.

⁶⁴ U.S House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, “Rules of Procedures,” http://judiciary.house.gov/hearings/printers/111th/Rules_of_Procedure_111.pdf.

seven years later when the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970 was passed in the 91st Congress. Introduced and championed by Rep. Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.), its purpose was to preserve faltering newspapers by authorizing the formation of joint operating agreements between competing newspapers in the same market area.

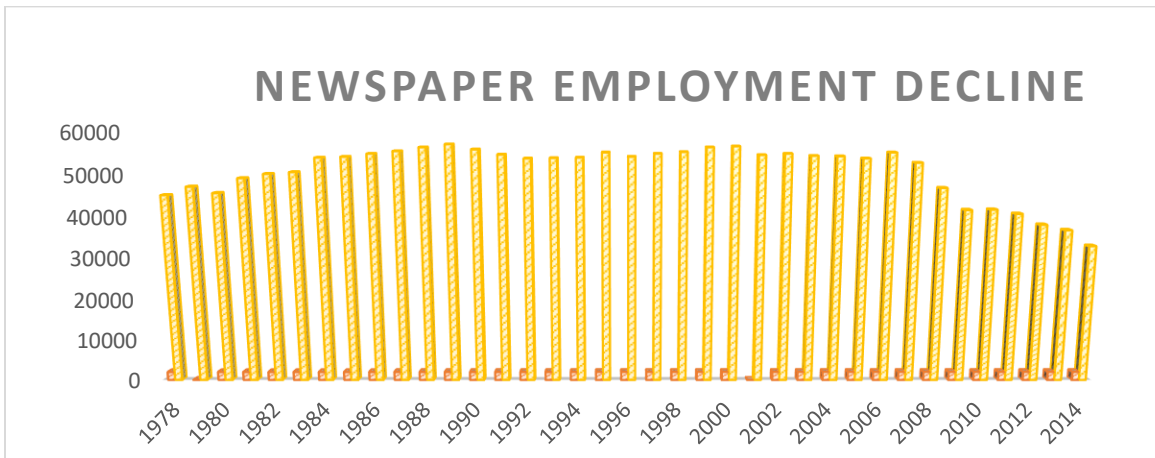


Figure 3. Newspaper Employment Decline from the Pew Research Center, 2016 State of the Media Report.

Newspaper Preservation Act

In the latter half of the 20th Century, corporate media’s demand for additional newspaper properties drove up the value of those properties. This inflated assessment on those family-held newspapers created an impossible financial scenario for family members wishing to leave their newspaper to their heirs. Already high state and federal estate tax rates on inflated property values created an untenable position for the heads of family-owned newspapers. As the current generation neared retirement, passing on the business to the next generation became prohibitively expensive. While tax law pressured newspaper families to sell, it also encouraged newspaper groups to buy the family-held

papers by allowing the newspaper groups to avoid paying capital gains taxes and permitting depreciation of those properties.⁶⁵

Representative Morris K. Udall, Democrat of Arizona, led a fierce legislative fight for independent newspapers in the 1970s and early 1980s in Congress.⁶⁶ Udall understood that local ownership was critical to the long-term health of a free press. As a columnist for the Apache County Independent News during his youth, Udall developed an appreciation for a free and independent press.⁶⁷ Later, during his Congressional career, Udall found himself drawn into an antitrust case concerning Tucson's *Arizona Daily Star* and the *Tucson Citizen*. When the newspapers were ordered to end a joint operating agreement in 1969, Udall joined a legislative effort that would culminate in the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970.⁶⁸

While well-intentioned by its authors, the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970, didn't accomplish the ends Udall had intended. While the Act would have prevented the kind of sanctions that were imposed against the two Tucson newspapers, a side effect of the exemptions granted jointly operating newspapers was to allow those newspapers to engage in monopolistic practices of setting joint advertising and circulation rates as well as revenue distribution.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Sloan, William David and James D. Startt. 1996. *The Media in America: A History*, 3rd ed., Northport, AL: Vision Press, 565.

⁶⁶ Babington, Stuart. 2013. "I'm going to introduce them again and again' Morris Udall's Attempts to Protect Independent Newspapers, 1975-1982." *Journalism History*, 243.

⁶⁷ "Morris K. Udall—A Lifetime of Service to Arizona and the United States," The University of Arizona Library, <http://www.library.arizona.edu/exhibits/udall/mochrono.html>, 1, accessed January 17, 2016.

⁶⁸ Babington, Stuart. 2013. "I'm going to introduce them again and again' Morris Udall's Attempts to Protect Independent Newspapers, 1975-1982." *Journalism History*, 245.

⁶⁹ Barwis, Gail Lund. 1980. "The Newspaper Preservation Act: A Retrospective Analysis." *Newspaper Research Journal*, 27.

Joint Operating Agreements (JOAs)

Essentially, the Newspaper Preservation Act was designed to allow Joint Operating Agreements between newspapers in the same market – with one generally stronger than the other. By cooperating with one another (through the antitrust exemptions provided by Congress), the hope was that papers that might have otherwise succumbed to competition and economic pressure would survive to allow more editorial voices in the market.

“It didn’t work, though,” said Rick Edmonds, media business analyst for the Poynter Institute, a non-profit school for journalism in St. Petersburg, Florida. “Most often the second paper grew so weak that it was losing money for its owners and dragging down the JOA ‘agency’ as well.”⁷⁰

The usual outcome for the joint operating agreement newspapers is that the weaker of the two publications eventually shuttered, turning the competitive market into a monopolistic one. The big newspaper groups seemed to realize the benefit of the Newspaper Preservation Act as they strongly supported it. Richard E. Berlin, president, and chief executive of the Hearst Corporation, wrote a letter to President Richard Nixon on July 15, 1969, explaining that he and several highly placed media executives expected the administration’s support of the Newspaper Preservation Act. In his August 7, 1969, reply to Berlin, Nixon thanked Berlin for expressing his views on “the pending newspaper legislation,” and indicated that he’d directed Attorney General John Mitchell to look into the “questions you have brought up as well as those implied by the

⁷⁰ Edmonds, Rick. 2009. Newspaper JOAs reach End of the Line. January 13. Accessed January 17, 2016. <http://www.poynter.org/2009/newspaper-joas-reach-end-of-the-line/93576/>.

arrangements described in your letter.” Shortly after the exchange of letters, Berlin met with Nixon at the White House, resulting in a September 23, 1969, brief from Nixon to his senior assistants, Bob Halderman and Peter Flanigan, explaining that Nixon had talked to the attorney general and that the administration had changed its position and no longer would oppose the Newspaper Preservation Act.⁷¹

Yet the stated purpose of the Newspaper Preservation Act was not achieved, therefore, additional legislative measures were pursued. In 1975, Udall introduced the Competition Review Act, describing it as “a long overdue and necessary alternative to the Clayton and Sherman Antitrust Acts, both of which have been shown unable to keep pace with the kind of corporate growth that has brought such high levels of concentration to the energy, steel, pharmaceuticals, autos, and a whole list of key industries.”⁷² In April 1977, Udall added newspapers, book publishers and the broadcast industry to the list of key industries he would study under the new act. Udall particularly wished to study group ownership in the newspaper industry. An earlier attempt to study newspaper group ownership in 1963 by Representative Emanuel Celler’s House Antitrust Subcommittee failed to strengthen independent newspapers thanks to resistance from the large newspaper groups. Udall sought to head off this kind of opposition by getting many of the newspaper chiefs on board before his Competition Review Act was introduced on the floor.⁷³

⁷¹ Burnham, David. 2015. *Above the Law: Secret Deals, Political Fixes and Other Misadventures of the U.S. Department of Justice*. New York, NY: Open Road Media.

⁷² Babington, Stuart. 2013. “I’m going to introduce them again and again’ Morris Udall’s Attempts to Protect Independent Newspapers, 1975-1982.” *Journalism History*, 246.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Therefore, on the same day that Udall introduced his Competition Review Act on the floor of the house, he also announced the legislation to the National Press Club with principals of Knight-Ridder, Scripps-Howard, Cox and Booth newspaper groups sitting at his table.⁷⁴ At this time, Udall summarized the emergency facing the country in terms of a free press, a sentiment that could as easily apply today as it did in 1977:

“Today, what the titans of the chains want is profit – not power – just money. I fear that the quest for profits and higher dividends for their growing list of stockholders will transcend their responsibility to maintain an independent and dedicated influence in the community. As the diversity of the American newspaper is lost – so is the diversity of America. We can ill afford that loss.”⁷⁵

Executives within the newspaper groups fired off editorials in their own publications and in *Editor & Publisher* accusing Udall of a lack of knowledge about the newspaper industry, again citing the current tax codes for forcing family owners to sell to newspaper groups.⁷⁶

In House Resolution 9484, Udall sought a more effective means of supporting independent voices in the press and proposed revising the Internal Revenue Code to promote the survival of locally owned independent newspapers by establishing tax-exempt trusts for paying estate taxes on such papers and by postponing the payment of

⁷⁴ Ibid, 246.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 246.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 247.

estate taxes on such papers.⁷⁷ Udall's resolution died in the House Ways and Means Committee in October 1977.⁷⁸

Ironically, Udall's very description of the quest for profit over public service by the chain's stockholders would come to play a significant role in the history of *The Sun Herald* in 2006. On the heels of winning journalism's most prestigious prize – the Pulitzer – the newspaper learned that it had been sold, along with the rest of the Knight-Ridder stable of newspapers, to the McClatchy Company.⁷⁹

Telecommunications Act of 1996

The current economic storm for newspapers can be said to have truly begun with the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 when media consolidation was accelerated with looser ownership rules.⁸⁰ These consolidated media corporations were answerable to their shareholders more than to their readership. As more business majors pushed aside journalists to take the reins at newspapers across the country, decision-making was based on bottom-line considerations rather than news judgment.⁸¹ Newsrooms shrank to grow profit margins.

Hanlong Fu, David J. Atkin and Yi Mou from the University of Connecticut argue that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 is “arguably the single most important piece of

⁷⁷ Congress, Library of. 1977. Bill Summary and Status, 95th Congress, (1977-1978). October 6. Accessed January 17, 2016. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d095:45:./temp/~bdph:@@L&summ2=m&>.

⁷⁸ Congress, Library of. 1977. Bill Summary & Status, 95th Congress (1977-1978) H.R. 9484. October 6. Accessed January 18, 2016. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d095:45:./temp/~bdHRL0::>.

⁷⁹ Levingston, Steven, and Terence O'Hara. 2006. “Family-owned Chain to Buy Knight, Plans to Sell Off 12 Dailies.” *The Washington Post*, March 14: D-01.

⁸⁰ Blevins, Jeffrey Lane. 2007. “The Political Economy of U.S. Broadcast Ownership Regulation and Free Speech after the Telecommunications Act of 1996.” *Democratic Communique* 1-22.

⁸¹ Pew Research Center. 2008. *The Changing Newsroom: What is Being Gained and What is Being Lost in America's Daily Newspapers?* Nonpartisan Think Center Report, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

legislation since the Communications Act of 1934” and that it “affects the telecommunications industry, consumers and ultimately the balance of political power.”⁸²

Ushering in unprecedented acquisitions and mergers in the telecommunication industry, the act that was supposed to turn local telecommunications businesses from natural monopolies into a more open and competitive environment actually resulted in a small group of media conglomerates dominating markets previously separated by regulations that were swept away by the act.⁸³

Media scholar Robert McChesney identified these adverse effects to the market as the predictable tendency of the current media and telecommunications world toward “ever-greater corporate concentration, media conglomeration, and hyper-commercialism.”⁸⁴

Fall of the Fairness Doctrine

In August 1987, the New York Times reported the fall of the FCC’s Fairness Doctrine under the belief that the Fairness Doctrine “unconstitutionally restricts the free-speech rights of broadcast journalists.”⁸⁵ The Fairness Doctrine was initially laid out in the 1949 FCC document, “In the Matter of Editorializing by broadcast Licensees.” The FCC states “The Commission has consistently held that broadcast station licensees should strive for fairness in airing controversial public issues.”⁸⁶

⁸² Fu, H., Atkin, D.J., & Mou, Y. “The Impact of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 in the Broadband Age.” *Advances in Communications* 8 (2011) 117-136.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ McChesney, R. W., *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. (New York City: The New Press, 1999), 77.

⁸⁵ Hershey, Jr., R. D. (1987, August 5). *F.C.C. Votes Down Fairness Doctrine in a 4-0 Decision*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://nyti.ms/29n8PCF>

⁸⁶ Federal Communications Commission, *Fifteenth Annual Report: Federal Communications Commission*, 1950, p. 33.

The choice of programming by individual radio operators “must be exercised in a manner consistent with the basic policy of Congress that radio be maintained as a medium of free speech for the general public as a whole rather than as an outlet for the purely personal or private interests of the licensee.” In that vein, the FCC dictated that the public should have the expectation to hear not only public issues of interest to their community but to also hear opposing viewpoints on those issues of “interest and importance.” This is what eventually became known in the industry as the “Equal Time” rule in an effort to acknowledge the “paramount right of the public to hear a reasonably balanced presentation of all responsible viewpoints on particular issues.”⁸⁷

Writing for MinnPost in 2017, Eric Black places the beginning of the end for the Fairness Doctrine around the advent of cable television in the 1980s. Prior to that time, the Fairness Doctrine was needed to regulate content on public airwaves.⁸⁸

“This led to the early decades of TV news being dominated by the old-fashioned, so-called ‘objectivity’ model personified by Walter Cronkite,” Black wrote. “The contemporary model of Fox and MSNBC catering to a conservative or liberal audience would have violated the doctrine.”

The point on which the case turned prior to cable television was that there were limited licenses for the public airwaves and it was the FCC’s job to see that those licenses were used “fairly” for all. “Cable TV blew the limits off that number, and now the internet has further reduced any limits on how many voices can be heard,” Black said.

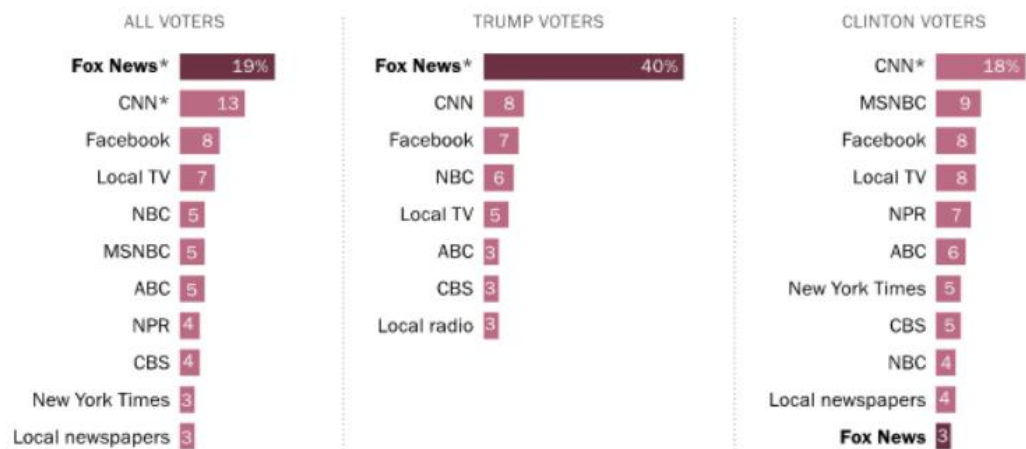
⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Black, E. (2017, April 23). *Does the demise of the Fairness Doctrine explain the 2016 election?* Retrieved from MINNPOST: <https://www.minnpost.com/eric-black-ink/2017/04/does-demise-fairness-doctrine-explain-2016-election/>

The end result has been that after the fall of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, Fox, MSNBC and talk radio have prospered with programming that caters to “a left- or right-oriented audience that apparently likes to have its biases confirmed and reinforced.”⁸⁹ In fact, a study by the Pew Research Center found that 40 percent of Trump voters in 2016 got their news exclusively from Fox News.⁹⁰ By extension, the study found that no single source of news played such a large role for Clinton voters. The following chart displays the large segment of conservative voters dominated by Fox News, and the comparatively diverse news sources attributed to Clinton voters.

Fox News dominated as main campaign news source for Trump voters; no single source as pronounced among Clinton voters

% of voters who named ___ as their “main source” for news about the 2016 campaign



* Among this group of voters, this source was named at significantly higher rates than the source below it. Significance of any other relationships provided upon request.
 Note: Sources shown are only those that were named by at least 3% of each group. Results are based on responses to open-ended questions; respondents could write in any source they chose.
 Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016.
 “Trump, Clinton Voters Divided in Their Main Source for Election News”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 4. Pew Research Center. A survey conducted November 29 – December 12, 2016.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., & Mitchell, A. (2017, January 18). *Trump, Clinton Voters Divided in Their Main Source for Election News*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center Journalism and Media: <http://www.journalism.org/2017/01/8/trump-clinton-voters-divided-in-their-main-source-for-election-news/>

It is interesting to note that Clinton voters reported a more diverse selection of news sources informed their choice. In terms of the influence that a Fairness Doctrine might have had on such results, it is clear that cable channels and internet sites reigned supreme in the collective consciousness of voters over network television or radio, those channels that were once regulated by the Fairness Doctrine.⁹¹

While each government action alone, a punitive tax structure for family-owned newspapers while promoting corporate-owned newspapers, the ineffective Celler Hearings, the weak Newspaper Preservation Act, Joint Operating Agreements, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and lastly, the fall of the Fairness Doctrine, could not have been said to strike a fatal blow to the newspaper industry, together, all these factors created an environment in which a free and vibrant press could not operate.

While the Federal Communications Commission originally created the Fairness Doctrine to regulate the public airwaves of radio and eventually television, the lifting of that policy cleared the way for clearly partisan communication on the airwaves, giving rise to a truly partisan press.

⁹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER III - THE SUN HERALD NEWSPAPER: 1884-1968

Begun in October 1884, *The Biloxi Herald* started as a modest weekly community newspaper for the small fishing village of Biloxi, Mississippi, located along the natural coastline of the Gulf of Mexico. At the time of the newspaper's first printing, the only notable features of *The Biloxi Herald's* surroundings was the quiet fishing and shrimping industry focused on Biloxi's coastal waters.⁹² Also overlooking Biloxi's coastline in 1884 was a house called Beauvoir (a French word meaning "beautiful view") with its new inhabitant, former Confederate President Jefferson Davis.⁹³ Having written *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* in one of the small cottages on the estate during the late 1870s, Davis moved into the main house when his friend Sarah Dorsey willed it to him at the time of her death in July 1879.

It was among these relatively quiet surroundings that George Washington Wilkes and business partner M.B. Thompson left *The Democrat-Star* in neighboring Scranton (now Pascagoula) and began printing *The Biloxi Herald* on a small hand-cranked press capable of turning out a maximum of 50 sheets per hour.⁹⁴ Although Thompson sold out of the enterprise within a year, Wilkes and his growing family continued the endeavor into the 20th century. Over the intervening 134 years, the small publishing enterprise closely mirrored the changes experienced by other newspapers in the print journalism industry. *The Biloxi Herald* began during a flood of newspaper start-ups in the decades following the Civil War. With more than 12,000 village newspapers nationwide in 1890,

⁹² *The Sun Herald* (undated). History of *The Biloxi Daily Herald*. Internal document. Biloxi, Mississippi. Gulf Publishing Company.

⁹³ Beauvoir: The Jefferson Davis Shrine. (2013, August 3). Complete History of Beauvoir. Retrieved from Beauvoir.org: <http://www.beauvoir.org/complete.html>.

⁹⁴ Kat Bergeron, "Ink starts flowing on Herald pages." *The Daily Herald*, October 7, 1984: A-4.

that number tripled in the following 20 years.⁹⁵ Wilkes continued to operate *The Biloxi Herald* until his death in 1915, seeing it through the transition from a weekly to a six-day-a-week daily publication, *The Biloxi Daily Herald*, in 1898.

The Origin of *The Sun Herald*

George Washington Wilkes said of *The Biloxi Daily Herald* while the paper was still in its infancy, “In storm and sunshine, the *Herald* has kept on in the even tenor of its way, striving always to advance the moral and material interest of the people of the town... It has always been a friend of laboring men as a class.”⁹⁶ While the newspaper operation began humbly on Howard Street in Biloxi in 1884, by 1888 it had moved to a two-story wood-frame building on Lameuse Street in Biloxi. Later in 1888, the unthinkable happened and the wood building burned, destroying not only the presses, back issues of the paper from 1884-1888, but also account ledgers and business documents. To add to their misery at the time, the \$1,000 insurance policy Wilkes had taken out on the business had been sold to a wildcat company that was later indicted for fraudulent business practices and fled the country. Friends and fellow newspapermen came to Wilkes’ aid and offered to allow him to print the *Daily Herald* at their facilities. Wilkes chose to accept the offer from H. P. Beeman of the Pass Christian *Beacon* newspaper as it was closest to his Biloxi base. For several weeks, the *Daily Herald* was published there.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960*, (1962). Pp. 478.

⁹⁶ Kat Bergeron, “Ink starts flowing on Herald pages.” *The Daily Herald Centennial Edition*, October 7, 1984: section 1 page 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Collecting \$500 on newspaper accounts that Wilkes could recall from memory (since there were no paper records remaining), he also borrowed more money from a future mayor of Biloxi, Harry Howard, and took that money to New York to buy a press.

Like many family-owned newspapers, the leadership of *The Biloxi Daily Herald* passed on to the next generation when the previous generation died. Also like many other family-run businesses, not everyone in the younger generation was inclined to take their place in the family operation. Upon George Washington Wilkes death in 1915, management of the newspaper passed to his wife and five children.⁹⁸ A son, Walter G. Wilkes, became the business manager, and another son, Eugene P. Wilkes, became managing editor, but the ownership of the newspaper continued to change. Two daughters sold their interest to the other members of the family and then just before her death in 1928 the mother sold her interest to the three sons.⁹⁹ Later, the oldest son, Charles H. Wilkes, sold his interest to Walter and E.P. Upon Walter's death in 1943, E. P. "Gene" Wilkes became general manager of the newspaper.¹⁰⁰ Over the years, *The Daily Herald* continued to move and expand, moving to West Water Street in Biloxi in January 1948. Five years later, the newspaper installed a two-story, Goss Universal high-speed rotary press capable of churning out 36,000 newspaper an hour even though it would take them till 1966 to reach a total circulation of 34,1152.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *The Sun Herald*, History of *The Biloxi Daily Herald*, Internal document, Biloxi, Mississippi, Gulf Publishing Company.

⁹⁹ *The Biloxi Daily Herald*, 3 October 1959, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Biloxi Cemetery Records, accessed 10 February 2019:
<http://files.usgwarchives.net/ms/harrison/cemeteries/biloxi1.txt>.

¹⁰¹ Kat Bergeron, Boom years see circulation on rise, *The Daily Herald Centennial Edition*, 7 October 1984: section 3, page 4.

First Decision to Sell The Daily Herald

As E.P. Wilkes entered his early 80s in the late 1960s, the Wilkes family in Biloxi, Mississippi, faced the decision to pay an enormous estate tax on the newspaper or sell. It was then that the family began to seek in earnest for a buyer for *The Daily Herald*.¹⁰² The purchase of *The Daily Herald* was announced on the front page of the newspaper on July 10, 1968, ending 84 years of family ownership.

This decision to sell on the part of newspapering families throughout the United States speaks to the continuing question of the impact upon print journalism by tax law and business trends in the media industry. Therefore, the decision by the Wilkes family in July 1968 can be seen as representative of the same decision being made by countless other newspaper families within the industry as a whole. To see the real impact in human terms to the individual newspapers, the journalists who produce them and the readers who consume them is to look at an individual newspaper that has experienced the industry trends at roughly the same time.

Throughout the last half of the 20th Century, *The Daily Herald* in Biloxi, Miss., was representative of national industry trends.

When Gene Wilkes inherited the full responsibility of *The Daily Herald* upon the death of his brother Walter, he continued to work at the newspaper for the remainder of his life, remaining editor emeritus at the time of his death in February 1980 at the age of 94.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Bergeron, Kat. Boom years see circulation on rise. *The Daily Herald Centennial Edition*, October 7, 1984: section 3, page 4.

¹⁰³ The Daily Herald staff reports. (1980, February 11). Daily Herald editor-emeritus Eugene P. Wilkes dead at 94. *The Daily Herald*, pp. A-1.

While Gene Wilkes had three children, a son and two daughters, to carry on the Wilkes legacy, not all children were interested in running the family business. The only child who seemed to take a keen interest in taking over the newspaper when Gene stepped down was a daughter, Jo Wilkes Reicker. Ironically, Reicker would predecease her father in August 1977. Wilkes lived on until February 1980. As Gene Wilkes entered his early 80s, the family was forced to consider their options in regard to maintaining the newspaper. With a hefty estate tax of up to 70 percent of its fair market value looming at Gene's death as well as critical upgrades to the physical plant that had been put off for years, the time was ripe for a sale.¹⁰⁴

In an oral history granted to The University of Southern Mississippi on April 3, 1975, Gene Wilkes stated that the true reason for selling *The Daily Herald* in 1968 was as follows: "Our three children were all of different temperaments and I thought they wouldn't get along too well," Wilkes told interviewer Michael Garvey.¹⁰⁵

Almost ten years after the sale of *The Daily Herald*, Wilkes expressed some regret over the transaction. "I think I made a mistake when I sold it," Wilkes told Garvey. "These people are paying us out of profit. They're paying over a ten-year period. We tried to serve our advertisers and stuff like that as cheap as we could and they try to make as much money as they can. If we'd adopted that policy, we'd have had a mint down there. They're paying us half a million a year and that's all out of profits."

¹⁰⁴ Weeks, Roland. (2013, December 3). Former Publisher and General Manager, The Sun Herald. (J.D. Isbell, Interviewer).

¹⁰⁵ Eugene P. Wilkes, Oral History with Michael Garvey, The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, (April 3, 1975) v.588.

On *The Daily Herald's* A-1 on July 10, 1968, E. P. Wilkes and Jo Wilkes Reicker announced the sale of the newspaper to the State-Record Company of Columbia, South Carolina.¹⁰⁶

In their report of the sale, the Wilkes said the decision was made after more than a year's consideration of offers from newspapers around the country. Of the 20 newspapers who expressed interest in *The Daily Herald*, 12 made firm offers, and the Wilkes said they selected the State-Record Company of Columbia, South Carolina because "we believe they will render the Coast and employes [sic] the type of service *The Daily Herald* has been providing."¹⁰⁷

The family voted on the sale on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 9, 1968, and ran the story on that decision in the next afternoon's paper, announcing E. P. Wilkes would continue as editor of the paper, Jo Wilkes Reicker would continue as publisher and Roland Weeks Jr. of Columbia, South Carolina would join the operation as the new general manager.

This would be the first major sale of *The Daily Herald* to corporate owners.

In Weeks' earliest days at *The Daily Herald*, he found a small-town newspaper in desperate need of improvement. While they did "a very good job of the 'who, what, when, where, why' reporting," Weeks said, they were far behind their peers in making the modernizations that were taking place in the industry.

As an interesting aside, Weeks noted that *The State* newspaper, the origin of the State-Record Company itself, had been close to going on the sales block before family

¹⁰⁶ *The Daily Herald*. 1968. "Announce the Sale of *The Daily Herald*." *The Daily Herald*, July 10: A-1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

ownership brought in additional family members to grow the paper into a small chain rather than sell *The State*.¹⁰⁸

Because *The Daily Herald* at the time of the State-Record Company purchase operated as a daily paper run more like a weekly paper, many changes came soon after Weeks came on board as general manager and president of Gulf Publishing Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the State-Record Company.¹⁰⁹ First, the rack price of *The Daily Herald* was five cents when *The New York Times* was charging ten cents a copy for weekday editions of their paper.

“It didn’t stop for years,” said Weeks, referencing the gradual updates and improvements to the organization and operation of the newspaper. “They were way behind, even then, making the changes that were taking place [in print journalism at the time].”¹¹⁰

Carefully navigating the remaining family connections throughout the paper, Weeks’ top priority was to drag the newspaper into a new level of professionalism. Part of the deal for the purchase of *The Daily Herald* was keeping E. P. Wilkes as editor of the newspaper and his daughter, Jo Wilkes Reicker, as publisher. As general manager at 31 years old, Weeks was in charge of overall operations and had to contend with other family members throughout the paper, whether they bore the name Wilkes or not.

One of E. P. Wilkes’ sons, Walter, stayed on at *The Daily Herald* for a few years after the State-Record buyout. While under family ownership, Walter Wilkes was

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ *The Daily Herald*. (1973). 89th Anniversary of *The Daily Herald*. Internal History Document, Gulfport, MS: *The Daily Herald*.

¹¹⁰ Roland Weeks, interview by Judy Day Isbell. Former Publisher and General Manager, *The Sun Herald* (December 3, 2013).

technically the manager of the composing and press room but in reality, maintained old Linotype equipment. When Weeks' modernization replaced the old Linotypes, he put Walter in charge of building maintenance, which he did for another two years before retiring.¹¹¹

Another of E. P. Wilkes' daughters, Audrey Wilkes Miller, worked in *The Daily Herald's* advertising department. On Weeks' fifth day at the newspaper, Miller invited Weeks to her home for coffee and conversation during which she asked Weeks to fire the current ad director and put her in that position. "And I said, 'I can't do that,'" Weeks recalled. "She said, 'Well, why not?' I said, 'Well, your father hired Harry Stone 20, 30 years ago and you want me to fire him the day I walk in?' She said, 'Yeah, I do.' And I said, 'Well, I'm not going to do it.' She said, 'Well, I quit.' And I said, 'Ok.'"¹¹²

The transition from a family-run business to a professional newspaper operation was a long process.

Another unusual business practice left over from the family-run days of the newspaper was the payment of employees in three different types of checks: a weekly paycheck, a month-end bonus, and a year-end check presented at an annual banquet. Weeks met with resistance when he put all the checks together and paid employees every two weeks. "They loved going up and getting their check," Weeks said. "It really was one of those things where human nature liked being treated that way even though under normal circumstances, they would have resented it."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Two other areas targeted for improvement was employee pay and facilities, but a force of nature intervened, moving up the date for new facilities for the newspaper. On August 17, 1969, a little over a year after the State-Record Company purchased the coastal paper, Hurricane Camille roared ashore in Harrison County. At the time of the great storm, *The Daily Herald* had editorial offices in Biloxi on Lameuse Street and in downtown Gulfport, with the newspaper being printed at the Gulfport plant.¹¹⁴

In the immediate wake of Camille’s devastation of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Weeks made a trip to corporate headquarters in Columbia, S.C., to make a case for a brand-new facility.¹¹⁵

“I went to Columbia and told them we had this property on DeBuys Road that we bought with the newspaper and that we needed to provide leadership,” Weeks said. Principals at the State-Record Company agreed and they immediately pulled in architects and contractors to get a new \$1.8 million plant started on the dividing line between Gulfport and Biloxi.¹¹⁶

“We broke ground in December [1969],” Weeks said. “It was 11 months later that we moved in.” In addition to a speedy recovery from the storm, *The Daily Herald* also benefitted from Weeks’ leadership in planning for the future with a hurricane-resistant design that has withstood many storms since – including the nation’s worst natural disaster in August 2005 – Hurricane Katrina. Popularly referred to as “Fort Weeks” by inhabitants of *The Daily Herald* building post-Camille, it was also located north of the

¹¹⁴ *The Daily Herald*. (1973). 89th Anniversary of *The Daily Herald*. Internal History Document, Gulfport, MS: *The Daily Herald*.

¹¹⁵ Roland Weeks, interview by Judy Day Isbell. Former Publisher and General Manager, *The Sun Herald* (December 3, 2013).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*.

east-west railroad tracks that stretch the length of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.¹¹⁷ This track provided an elevated dividing line between the beach and the buildings north of it – saving many structures in the storms after Camille and Katrina.

While the physical facility was undergoing a metamorphosis, so was the physical manifestation of the newspaper itself and the way in which it was produced. Up to this point, *The Daily Herald* had been a six-day-a-week daily newspaper, publishing Monday through Saturday in the afternoons. In January 1970, the Saturday evening paper was shifted to a Saturday morning edition to open up time in the printing schedule to produce a Sunday edition.¹¹⁸

In addition to the advancements at the new Biloxi-Gulfport plant on DeBuys Road, *The Daily Herald* added a Jackson County bureau in Ocean Springs in December 1969 and a Hancock County bureau in Bay St. Louis in October 1971. A capitol bureau was opened in April 1973 in Jackson with one correspondent to report on the statehouse and supplement wire stories from the state capitol.¹¹⁹

With the new facilities also came new technology like photocomposition replacing Linotype and the hot lead process. Later, the first computers, IBM 1130s, and smaller electronic devices were installed in the composition room.¹²⁰

During this time period of tremendous growth and change, *The Daily Herald* recorded its guiding principle as “to serve our readers and advertisers by publishing

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *The Daily Herald*. 89th Anniversary of *The Daily Herald*. Internal History Document, Gulfport, MS: *The Daily Herald*. (1973).

¹¹⁹ Bergeron, Kat. (984, October 7). Sunday papers begin after Camille. *The Daily Herald Centennial Edition*. Pp. Section 4, Page 4.

¹²⁰ Bergeron, Kat. Sunday papers begin after Camille. *The Daily Herald Centennial Edition*, October 7, 1984: Section 4, page 4.

newspapers that present fair and objective news, offer constructive leadership, and contribute to the economic, political and moral health of the community.”¹²¹

Weeks recalled the genesis of the current profit-hungry version of the journalism business model. He said the people who were buying up newspapers in the late ‘60s were smart “but they really didn’t give a damn about journalism.”¹²²

He described the new owners of media corporations as longing to be “typical Americans.”

“Go out and buy something that makes money,” Weeks said. “So, they began buying newspapers and that’s what really began the whole thing.”

Weeks recalled a man named Carmage Walls who owned Southern Newspapers, Inc., as one of the individuals who took the lead in accumulating newspapers strictly as investment properties. Weeks said existing newspaper families saw the prices that people like Walls were paying for newspaper properties and that began the buying frenzy in newspapers during that time.¹²³

“That created an environment that made people wake up and say, ‘Hey look, I can make \$6 million,’” Weeks said.¹²⁴

Another dynamic in the sales of family-owned newspapers was likely similar to the environment in place at *The Daily Herald* in 1968. The primary owner of the newspaper was in his 80s and the family faced a significant tax burden at the time the

¹²¹ Roland Weeks, interview by Judy Day Isbell. Former Publisher and General Manager, *The Sun Herald* (December 3, 2013).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Roland Weeks, interview by Judy Day Isbell. Former Publisher and General Manager, *The Sun Herald* (December 3, 2013).

ownership changed to a new generation in the Wilkes family. In addition to that enormous financial drain (up to 70 percent of the value of the newspaper), was the impending expense of modernizing the newspaper plant and technology. Prior to the sale to the State-Record Company, *The Daily Herald* was still using “hot type” and Linotype machines. Newspapers were moving quickly to computers and *The Daily Herald* was far behind with no resources to make the transition. In addition to this, the extended Wilkes family, who were all stockholders and part of the newspaper’s board, were well aware of the buying frenzy going on in the newspaper industry and the millions of dollars properties were commanding on the open market.

“By then, there were 200 members of the [Wilkes] family,” Weeks said. “One of the dynamics was even if one or two of them didn’t want to sell, the others were all stockholders, they had a board and the board said ‘We want our money, sell.’ The reason a lot of them sold was not that one or two wanted to do it, but the family members got bigger and bigger and bigger. They wanted to do it.”¹²⁵

All of this activity in Biloxi, Mississippi, was not unlike the buying and selling frenzy taking place throughout the rest of the country at the same time.

“Looking at what happened in the next 20-30 years, that some of the folks who then became really big, the McClatchy’s and so on, they don’t really count. Some of the large companies really cared about journalism, they arguably made the newspapers better, not only in terms of providing basic services but better in reporting and

¹²⁵ Ibid.

editorializing,” Weeks recalled.¹²⁶ But at the heart of all this professional journalism, was still money, he said.

“They did that as long as they could make more money, and then when they finally reached that tipping point, they went off,” Weeks said, noting that companies began to care more about serving stockholders than serving their communities. “These were big companies with lots of stockholders and a huge amount of pressure on them to produce.”¹²⁷

Weeks said he hoped that the push for content that simply gets people to buy newspapers or click web pages will “bottom out.”

“I hope that somewhere it bottoms out and leaves newspapers and journalism as an important force in the world,” Weeks said. “But whether that’s going to happen is the big question.”

The question also becomes whether the force for profits takes over completely and eliminates any concern for good journalism.

“To me, that’s the fight,” Weeks said. “And who is going to fight for good journalism? And what is the motive for doing that? There are a lot of good people fighting for all kinds of wonderful things but they’re marginalized. They’re off making noises and having some degree of influence on people’s thinking, but they’re the academics, they’re the people who aren’t in the mainstream. So, if that’s where we’re headed, God bless us. We’re in big, big, BIG trouble.”

¹²⁶ Roland Weeks, interview with author, Biloxi, Miss., 3 December 2013.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Another battleground in modern journalism exists in the space in which the wall between news and advertising once existed. While some have argued that this wall has become porous, Weeks asserts that the wall is gone.

“It doesn’t exist in my somewhat learned opinion,” Weeks said. “I don’t think democracy can exist without a learned press, without a free press, without a press that is not only willing but able to tell people what they **don’t** want to know.”¹²⁸

Weeks recalled a time in his management of *The Sun Herald* when he was brought into a discussion about frivolous features creeping into the newspaper’s pages.

“We were worried about a few little things that were in the paper that wasn’t important, not only comics but a lot of other things that were there to give people who don’t think much a reason to buy the newspaper,” Weeks said. “My comment was somewhat jokingly, ‘Give the bastards enough of what they want so we can continue to give them what they need.’ But what has happened over the years is that what they want has taken over.”

Weeks theorizes that social media has created an atmosphere in which people share the ridiculous. “It’s not just sharing what’s out there, but it’s creating a lot of it, and encouraging a lot of foolishness.”

While the current business model for newspapers seems broken, Weeks said he doesn’t see another business model waiting in the wings to replace it.

“We’ve allowed free enterprise to just go too far,” Weeks said. “If I ever worked on a report or book it would be on the importance of balance. I think the one word that is missing today is balance.”

¹²⁸ Roland Weeks, interview by author, Biloxi, Miss., 3 December 2013.

Subsequent Sales of *The Sun Herald*

In the coming years, two more sales of *The Sun Herald* would follow that initial sale to the State-Record Company.

United Press International reported on October 28, 1986, that Knight-Ridder, Inc. was set to purchase the smaller State-Record Company of Columbia, S.C., by December of that year in what Knight-Ridder chairman Alvah H. Chapman Jr. said would be the largest purchase in the history of his company.¹²⁹ At the time of the sale, State-Record CEO Ben Morris said that it was “hard to maintain family ownership with about 100 major stockholders, many descendants of the families that began *The State* in 1891, dispersed around the nation.” Morris went on to say that he had always held Knight-Ridder in high regard. He continued as publisher of *The State* and went on to take a seat on the Knight-Ridder board until his retirement two years later in 1988.¹³⁰

The sale of Knight-Ridder two decades later was a much messier affair with stockholders pushing for maximum profit at the cost of the business enterprise itself. This type of boardroom maneuvering is indicative of what many in the industry have said has shifted the focus of the newspaper business – from running a good newspaper to producing pure profit despite the higher calling of a business so intricately connected with the operation of a democracy.¹³¹

At the time of the 2006 sale, reports circulated that Private Capital Management CEO Bruce Sherman “has been unhappy with Knight-Ridder’s stock performance and

¹²⁹ United Press International. (1986, October 28). *Knight-Ridder to buy State-Record*. Retrieved from UPI: <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/10/28/Knight-Ridder-to-buy-State-Record/3847530859600/>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Pete Carey and Chris O’Brien. *San Jose Mercury News*. Knight-Ridder bought by McClatchy. (2006).

believed the company's breakup value was greater than what its stock price reflected, then in the low \$50s."¹³²

So, the question for journalism in the future is whether the real value of journalism can be measured in its contribution to democracy rather than in dollar signs for shareholders. As long-time *Sun Herald* publisher, Roland Weeks Jr., lamented, "I don't think democracy can exist without a learned press, without a free press, without a press that is not only willing but able to tell people what they don't want to know."¹³³

A review of the events leading to the current state of operation of today's *Sun Herald* can be an illustration for the wider industry. By carefully considering the step-by-step process that leads to the existing structure of the coastal newspaper, it's possible to more closely appreciate the larger events that have acted upon it, and by extension, the industry as a whole.

Firstly, in the sale of the family-owned *Daily Herald* in 1968, there was the pressure of a repressive tax structure, discouraging family-owned business and encouraging larger corporate structures. This tax inducement for corporations to buy up smaller papers also created the feeding frenzy among the newspaper owners for the big payoff.

Secondly, in the 1986 sale of the smaller State Record Company to Knight Ridder, the acceleration of corporatization of newspapers into larger conglomerates continued to feed the business imperative to cultivate larger and larger profits for

¹³² Roland Weeks, interview.

¹³³ Roland Weeks, interview.

publicly-held corporations. However, this insatiable thirst for ever-higher profit margins would eventually catch up to even the large chains like Knight Ridder.

Thirdly, the attempt of McClatchy to take on the debt associated with the purchase of Knight Ridder would also end disastrously. There simply wasn't enough profit left in the newspaper stable of Knight Ridder after years and years of cost-cutting and layoffs in a futile attempt to satisfy shareholder demands and keep the Knight Ridder chain intact.

We've allowed free enterprise to just go too far," said Roland Weeks. "If I ever worked on a report or book, it would be on the importance of balance."¹³⁴ Accepting balance rather than "compromise," Weeks said, "is what is missing today."

Certainly, McClatchy isn't the only newspaper chain guilty of slowly strangling their goose that once laid golden eggs. The same industry pressures that have applied to McClatchy have certainly acted upon the other major chains, including the behemoth Gannett. In a January 14, 2019, *New York Times* story, it was reported that the hedge fund MNG Enterprises was backing a hostile takeover bid for Gannett worth \$1.3 billion.¹³⁵ By February 5, 2019, Gannett's board had rejected the hostile takeover bid, for now.¹³⁶ Still, as the reporter for *The Washington Post* noted in his article that MNG has intensified its pursuit of Gannett by hiring an investment bank to finance the deal and threatening to nominate new members to the Gannett board who would be more inclined

¹³⁴ Roland Weeks, email interview with author, 3 December 2013.

¹³⁵ Edmund Lee and Tiffany Hsu, "Hedge Fund Called 'Destroyer of Newspapers' Bids for USA Today Owner Gannett," *New York Times*, 14 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/business/dealbook/gannett-takeover-offer-mng.html>.

¹³⁶ Jonathan O'Connell, "Gannett board rejects hostile takeover bid. But that may be just the start." *The Washington Post*, 5 February 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/02/04/gannett-board-rejects-hostile-takeover-bid-that-may-be-just-start/?utm_term=.c09c62fab6e1.

to accept their “premium cash offer or other alternatives for immediate and certain value.” Again, corporations are ensuring that newspapers who might report on their dealings are weakened to a point of ineffectiveness.

CHAPTER IV – THE DECLINING NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

There have been numerous causes for the perfect storm of adversity that is washing away professional print journalism in the early 21st century. One of the key factors in the decline of newspapers has been the tipped balance of expenses over revenues for the industry as a business. While there have been several issues affecting this change, three are paramount: increasing costs of generating and publishing news content, corporatization and the inherent push for profits over public service, and the rise of the internet which precipitated a decline in readership and advertising.

These three forces exerted an enormous amount of strain unique to print journalism. The costs associated with running a newspaper steadily increased over the 20th century and into the 21st century with the expense of newsprint and ink, fuel and other energy costs associated with running large presses, salaries, benefits and health insurance for employees who went out to get the news. Of course, corporatization of newspaper ownership rose exponentially toward the close of the 20th century and into the 21st century. In the case of *The Sun Herald*, the purchase of Knight Ridder by the McClatchy Company accelerated cost-cutting as McClatchy was in no way prepared to take on the debt of Knight Ridder and their stock values plummeted and have never come close to pre-Knight Ridder purchase levels. Adding to disaster that was newspapers held hostage by shareholders for profit, there was the rise of the internet as a competitive environment for the traditional print edition of a newspaper. Believing they could continue to access news content for free, consumers believed they could abandon the print product without investing in the reporting that produced online editions. From where did they imagine the reporting would come? Certainly, with social media, many

participants believe they are offering valuable information, yet there is no credibility or ethics implied in such “reporting.”

Increasing Cost of Generating and Publishing News Content

In addition to the economic downturn in the United States as a whole, the newspaper industry has experienced other forces that have made profitability difficult to achieve.¹³⁷ Increasing costs of operation in the form of fuel, newsprint, ink, healthcare costs for employees, and upgrades to equipment, increasing competition from internet news sites, and overall consolidation of newspapers resulting in elimination of some papers in the realignment of properties by new owners – have all combined to create a perfect storm of economic calamity for the newspaper industry.

While the news consumer currently benefits from free online news content, the question remains, if all the professional journalists who are currently creating that content at newspapers are laid off, where will professional news content be generated? Will ethical content adhering to journalistic standards of excellence be generated?

The current economic storm for newspapers can be said to have truly begun with the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 when media consolidation was accelerated with looser ownership rules.¹³⁸ These consolidated media corporations were answerable to their shareholders more than to their readerships. As more business majors pushed aside journalists to take the reins at newspapers across the country, decision-

¹³⁷ Pew Research Center. 2008. *The Changing Newsroom: What is Being Gained and What is Being Lost in America's Daily Newspapers?* Independent Think Center Report, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

¹³⁸ Blevins, Jeffrey Lane. 2007. "The Political Economy of U.S. Broadcast Ownership Regulation and Free Speech after the Telecommunications Act of 1996." *Democratic Communique* 1-22.

making was based on bottom-line considerations rather than news judgment.¹³⁹

Newsrooms shrank to grow profit margins.

Operating with a diminished product to keep profits high, now newspaper ownership is facing the genuine financial difficulty that not only threatens formerly high-profit margins but profitability in general.

On July 21, 2008, the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism released a report on the state of journalism in an era of competing forces literally tearing the profession asunder.¹⁴⁰ "On the one hand, financial pressures sap its strength and threaten its very survival," the report reads. "On the other, the rise of the web boosts its competitiveness, opens up innovative new forms of journalism, builds new bridges to readers and offers enormous potential for the future."

Among the key findings of the report were:

- Today's newspapers overall are suffering from a lack of staffing and ever-shrinking news hole.
- Certain topics once covered effectively by newspapers are being cut; top among these is international news coverage.
- The remaining newspaper staff is younger, more tech-savvy and more high-energy, yet seasoned veterans have been forced out and with them have gone valuable institutional and community memory.
- Newspaper websites are both a source of hope and fear. While newspapers recognize their potential for disseminating news, they have yet to discover a way to make their websites profitable.¹⁴¹

Like the famous motto used in Bill Clinton's first campaign for the White House in 1992, "it's the economy, stupid," newspaper executives are very aware of the impact

¹³⁹ Pew Research Center. 2008. *The Changing Newsroom: What is Being Gained and What is Being Lost in America's Daily Newspapers?* Nonpartisan Think Center Report, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

¹⁴⁰ Pew Research Center. 2008.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

of a faltering economy on their businesses. While skyrocketing fuel costs have been the propellant for huge increases in the cost of other materials needed to publish a newspaper, newsprint has been a cost-prohibitive resource for some time.¹⁴² This has caused newspaper management to squeeze every drop of profit from every single broadsheet page rolled off the presses – including adopting a narrower broadsheet page size itself. The amount of editorial matter on each news page, the “news hole,” has also shrunk in many newspapers – pushing the envelope for usable ad space on each page. This is a tricky business as even advertisers recognize that their ad won’t be as valuable if it doesn’t touch editorial matter on some border. The recognized rule of thumb in the industry is that no newspaper reader will generally read an ad that is completely surrounded by other ads.

As the economy worsens overall, many consumers cast about for household expenses that can be eliminated. When judging these items in their budget, the decision process centers on “essentials” and “expendables.” Considering that news content can be easily obtained online (assuming the family has another line item for internet access) then the print version of news content which has become more expensive and requires them to retrieve it from their front lawn or front shrubbery, and leaves black newsprint on their hands is likely to be one of the items to be cut from the family budget.

As circulations drop for a newspaper, so does advertising dollars when advertisers realize that the reach of the newspaper is shrinking and potential customers who might see their ad are also much fewer. When revenue drops for the paper, internal budgets must be cut and this equates to fewer reporters covering beats in the newsroom. The few

¹⁴² Simon, K., and R. L. Bishop. 1977. “Trends in the Newspaper Budget.” *Journalism Quarterly* 750-755.

reporters left are covering multiple beats with less time to devote to each one. Another significant trend has been the near elimination of photojournalist positions in daily newspapers since the *Chicago Sun-Times* laid off its entire photo staff of 28 in May 2013.¹⁴³ With this move, remaining news staffers are asked to not only gather and write news but shoot still photos and video for both print and online editions of their newspaper. This kind of work demand on a dwindling newsroom causes serious quality lapses.

In the Pew Research Center “State of the News Media 2015,” television news, both local and network, continues to fare well with network news seeing a five percent increase in evening audience growth and two percent increase in morning audience growth. Local television news saw a three percent increase in average evening broadcast news viewership. However, cable news saw an eight percent decrease in prime-time median viewership while newspapers saw a three percent drop in daily and Sunday circulations.¹⁴⁴ Having completed 12 years of their State of the Media reports, Pew also noted in the 2015 report that newspaper weekday circulation has now fallen 19 percent since 2004.

The 2015 Pew report also noted that more news consumers are spending more time accessing news content from mobile devices than desktop computers, according to the Pew Research Center’s analysis of comScore Media Metrix conducted in January 2015.

¹⁴³ The Associated Press. 2013. “Chicago Sun-Times Lays Off All Its Full-Time Photographers.” *The Bismark Tribune*, May 31: A2.

¹⁴⁴ Pew Research Center. 2015. *State of the Media 2015*. Nonpartisan Think Tank Report, Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

“Americans’ changing news habits have a tremendous impact on how and to what extent our country functions within an informed society,” Pew cited in their report.

The 2008 Pew study on the changing American newsroom also pointed out that in addition to cutting frontline news-gathering positions, newspapers were also cutting copy desk positions and junior editors.¹⁴⁵ These cuts mean that fewer eyes are reading copy that has been written in much shorter time frames. So, in comparison to several years earlier, newspapers have a more error-prone copy being checked less effectively for those errors. Compromising quality, losing circulation and ad revenues creates a vicious cycle of deterioration for America’s newsrooms.

Corporatization and a Push for Profits

The vital role of the press in ensuring the continuation of American democracy has spurred many scholars to closely scrutinize the effects of media ownership in maintaining a healthy check on governmental and industrial power in the United States. The debate over the strength and objectivity of the American press in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has generated extensive study of the subject from many perspectives.

Growing frustration with corporate intrusion in the gathering and reporting of news is evident in surveys conducted by such organizations as the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Andrew Kohut, late director of the Pew Center, reported worrisome findings in a 1999 Pew survey which found “that many people worry that the press may be a lapdog rather than a watchdog when bosses’ interests are involved.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Pew Research Center. 2008.

¹⁴⁶ Kohut, Andrew. 2000. “Food for Public Distrust.” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April: 18.

Ben H. Bagdikian wrote in the 1983 edition of his book, *The Media Monopoly* that around 50 corporations controlled more than half of the media outlets in the United States.¹⁴⁷ Of course, in 1983, CNN had just begun, most journalists were still using typewriters to produce their copy, and the internet as we know it today was still a long way off. In the fifth edition of his book in 1997, Bagdikian determined that the number of “media corporations with dominant power in society” was closer to ten. The frightening aspect of these few media giants, he wrote, was that they have power to “surround almost every man, woman and child in the country with controlled images and words.” This power gives the media monopoly the ability to “exert influence that in many ways is greater than that of schools, religion, parents and even the government itself.”

Martin Gilens and Craig Hertzman of Yale University conducted a study on how media outlets with varying levels of television ownership covered the 1996 Telecommunications Act loosening ownership restrictions on television stations.¹⁴⁸ Content analysis of 27 newspapers showed that newspapers with significant television ownership showed distinct areas of bias in “straight news” reporting on the issue. Those newspapers with a controlling interest in television stations emphasized the more positive aspects of the telecommunications bill and failed more often to even list the negative aspects of more control of mass media going into fewer hands.

Leo Bogart in his article *The Management of Mass Media: An Agenda for Research*, considered the origins of the media elites and what characteristics brought them into a position of decision-making in the industry. “Normally, there is always some

¹⁴⁷ Bagdikian, Ben H. 1983. *The Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.

¹⁴⁸ Gilens, Martin, and Craig Hertzman. 2000. “Corporate Ownership and News Bias: Newspaper Coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Bill.” *Journal of Politics* 369-386.

point at which even the most permissive or indifferent absentee owner asserts his residual property rights,” Bogart wrote, “when his income, equity or cherished beliefs are threatened.”¹⁴⁹

Another observation by those who have studied mass media and corporate intervention in the news gathering and disseminating process is that there seems to be a direct correlation between the level of “involvement” of corporate owners and the level of censorship at the controlled media outlet.

The University of Maryland’s International Center for Media and Public Agenda released a 2007 study ranking the top 25 news websites in the world on their various levels of operational transparency.¹⁵⁰ Graded on three primary criteria, reviewers looked for transparency in listing the individual media outlet’s journalistic standards and operating procedure, willingness to correct errors, and the level of interactivity with readership through contact mechanisms online.

According to the study, most news organizations were unwilling to allow the public to see how their editorial process works. Fewer than half of the websites would post corrections or clarifications on their web pages.

Taking an even more pessimistic view of the national media environment is Mark Crispin Miller, director of The Project on Media Ownership at New York University

¹⁴⁹ Leo Bogart, 1974, “The Management of Mass Media: An Agenda for Research,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 580-589.

¹⁵⁰ International Center for Media and Public Agenda, 2007, “Openness and Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets,” Accessed July 30, 2007: <http://www.icmpa.umd.edu/pages/studies/transparency/main.html>.

where he is a professor of media ecology. Miller refers to corporate monopolies that own the largest share of American media as the “U.S. media cartel.”¹⁵¹

In the July 3, 2006 issue of *The Nation*, Miller asserted that ten years earlier, many in America dismissed the alarm bells of media monopolies as “unfounded, overblown or premature” as there had as yet been no obvious cases of corporate censorship of newly acquired media properties.

Comparing the rising crisis in media ownership in America to the global warming debate, Miller makes clear his thoughts on the predicament:

Now, as the oceans rise and simmer and the polar bears go under, only theocratic nuts keep quibbling with the inconvenient truth of global warming. And now, likewise, few journalists are quite so willing to defend the Fourth Estate, which under Bush & Co. has fallen to new depths. Although its history is far from glorious, the U.S. press has never been as bad as it is now, and so we rarely hear, from any serious reporters, those blithe claims that all is well (or no worse than it ever was).

Miller aptly points out that important news is tuned out or played down while trivialities are given fresh focus on the agenda of the American media:

The press that went hoarse over Monica Lewinsky’s dress is largely silent on the Bush regime’s subversion of the Constitution; its open violation of the laws here and abroad; its global use of torture; its vast surveillance program(s); its covert propaganda foreign and domestic; its flagrant cronyism; its suicidal military, economic and environmental policies; and its careful placement of federal

¹⁵¹ Mark Crispin Miller, “The Death of News,” Retrieved from *The Nation* (June 20, 2006): <https://www.thenation.com/article/death-news/>

establishment into the hands of Christianist extremists. Whether its such tawdry fare as Jeffrey Gannon’s many overnights at Bush’s house, or graver matters like the Patriot Act, or the persistent questions about 9/11, or the President’s imperial “signing statements” or – most staggering of all – the ever-growing evidence of coast-to-coast election fraud by Bush & Co., the press has failed in its constitutional obligation to keep us well informed about the doings of our government.

Do the modern American media make up, as Bagdikian claims, a “private ministry of information”?¹⁵²

One of the maverick television entrepreneurs in American history has also pointed a wary finger at the overwhelming consolidation of American media in the 40-plus years since he bought his first television station in Atlanta, Georgia. Ted Turner reported in an August 2004 article for *Washington Monthly* that:

Today, media companies are more concentrated than at any time over the past 40 years, thanks to a continual loosening of ownership rules by Washington. The media giants now own not only broadcast networks and local stations; they also the own cable companies that pipe in the signals of their competitors and the studios that produce most of the programming. To get a flavor of how consolidated the industry has become, consider this: in 1990, the major broadcast networks – ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX – fully or partially owned just 12.5 percent of the new series they aired. By 2000, it was 56.3 percent. Just two years later, it had surged to 77.5 percent.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ben H. Bagdikian, 1998, “The realities of media concentration and control.” *Television Quarterly*, Vol. 29 Issue 3: 22.

¹⁵³ Ted Turner, 2004, “Break Up This Band! How Government Protects Big Media – and Shuts Out Upstarts Like Me,” *Washington Monthly*, Vol. 34, Issue 7/8: 30.

Like no other businessman, Turner understands the value that the entrepreneurial small media owners bring to the table. “Unless we have a climate that will allow more independent media companies to survive, a dangerously high percentage of what we see – and what we don’t see – will be shaped by the profit motives and political interests of large publicly traded conglomerates,” Turner said. “The economy will suffer, and so will the quality of our public life.”

Even as the *Sun Herald* staff celebrated their 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service Journalism, Knight-Ridder executives were negotiating the final terms of a sale of the venerable newspaper chain to the much smaller McClatchy Company. This purchase benefitted Knight-Ridder stockholders but placed many former Knight-Ridder properties into instant peril.¹⁵⁴ While some were immediately resold outright by McClatchy, others have undergone extreme cost-cutting measures in an attempt to boost plummeted stock values for McClatchy, a company that took on far too much debt to affect the purchase.¹⁵⁵ Journalist interviews regarding specific aspects of work life before and after the McClatchy purchase are especially telling of the dramatic changes that have occurred.

While many at the newspaper were too overwhelmed by covering the story of a lifetime with the arrival and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, learning that they had been sold to this small, upstart company initially came as a mixed blessing. There was the fear

¹⁵⁴ Associated Press, March 13, 2006, *NBC News – March*. Retrieved from NBC News: http://www.nbcnews.com/od/11802770/ns/business-us_business/t/mcclatchy-buying-knight-ridder/#.W-kSc-JRdPY.

¹⁵⁵ Seth Sutel, June 16, 2008, *McClatchy cutting jobs at newspapers*. Retrieved from *The Post and Courier*: https://www.postandcourier.com/business/mcclatchy-cutting-jobs-at-newspapers/article_97b64631-400d-58f6-aa5d-a5d9da805f2b.html.

of the unknown since McClatchy was clearly an unknown entity to most, but there was also the relief that a sale didn't go through with the infamous Gannett Corporation which already owned many of the major newspapers in the state of Mississippi.

The Sun Herald's story was not unique in 2006.

When Gina Lubrano, Reader's Representative for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, tapped out a final farewell to the newspaper's readers on December 18, 2006, she had been one of 67 employees of that paper to receive "voluntary retirement incentive packages." Lubrano and her fellow retirees each had 30 or more years of service with the newspaper yet were pushed out "in these days of declining ad revenue and dropping circulation," Lubrano wrote.¹⁵⁶

The Rise of the Internet and Decline of Readership and Advertising

While both the tax structure and economic environment seemed to offer roadblocks to the continued health of the newspaper industry, other competition from new media arose in roughly the same time frame to further complicate matters.

The rise of the internet as a source of information to rival tradition print journalism really took hold between 2007 and 2008, according to a study by the Pew Research Center.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Gina Lubrano, 2006. "A farewell to a changing industry." *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, December 16: B7.

¹⁵⁷ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, December 23, 2008, *Biggest Stories of 2008: Internet Overtakes Newspapers as News Outlet*, Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.people-press.org/2008/12/23/internet-overtakes-newspapers-as-news-outlet/>

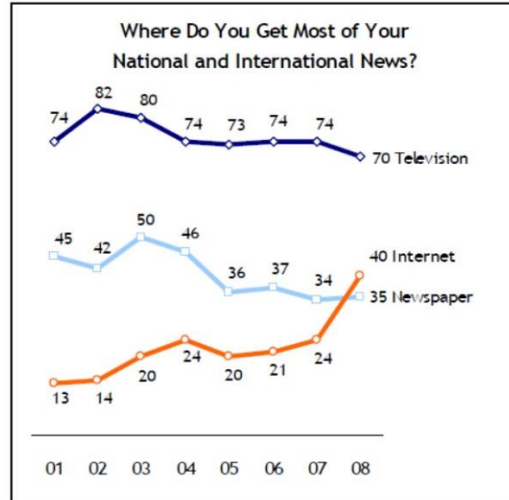


Figure 5. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. A survey conducted December 3-7, 2008 among 1,489 adults.

In 2016, Pew Research Center surveys found that only two-in-ten adults often get their news from print newspapers. That was a drop from 27 percent in 2013. The age difference in those accessing news most often from newspapers is stark: only 5 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds often get news from a print newspaper whereas about half of those 65 and older do. This would point to newspaper readers literally dying off.¹⁵⁸

Compared to print newspapers, nearly twice (38 percent) as many adults get their news online either through news websites or apps or on social media.

In 2016, television continued to be the most widely used news platform with 57 percent of adults most often getting TV-based news through local television stations, cable or network TV, or a combination of the three.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, Michael Barthel, & Elisa Shearer, July 7, 2016, *The Modern News Consumer: News Attitudes and Practices in the Digital Era*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/>

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

One of the most startling shifts in how consumers access news programming came when the Pew study revealed that news consumption on mobile devices rose from 54 percent in 2013 to 72 percent in 2016.¹⁶⁰ In this large number of individuals accessing news through mobile devices, the younger they are, the more they tend to access by mobile phone with 70 percent of those ages 18-29 preferring or only using mobile phones for getting digital news, 53 percent of those 30-49 preferring mobile phone, 29 percent of 50-64 preferring the mobile phone and only 16 percent of those 65 and over preferring to get digital news on their mobile phone.¹⁶¹

In 2018, the Pew Research Center found that those moving from larger mobile devices like laptops and tablets to mobile phones increased in each age group.¹⁶² By 2018, 71 percent of those ages 18-29 preferred mobile phones over desktop (a 1 percent increase from 2016), 67 percent of those 30-49 preferred mobile phones (a 14 percent increase from 2016), 52 percent of ages 50-64 preferred mobile phones (a 23 percent rise from 2016) and 37 percent of those 65 and over preferred the mobile phone (a 21 percent increase over 2016 numbers).¹⁶³

The numbers in the 2018 Pew study seem to indicate that while the younger the individual the more likely their use of mobile digital devices will be in accessing news content. However, it also points to the rapid acceptance of digital devices as a conduit for news access. Conducted May 30 to October 23, 2017, the Pew Research Center survey

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Sophia Fedeli, & Katerina Eva Matsa, 17 July 2018, *Use of mobile devices continues to grow, outpacing desktops and laptops*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/17/use-of-mobile-devices-for-news-continues-to-grow-outpacing-desktops-and-laptops/>

¹⁶³ Ibid.

stratified participants by age, gender, race, education level, income, and political leanings.

Newspapers have long accepted that in the world of news media, there will always be some newer, more exciting medium to come along. With the first commercial radio broadcast in 1920,¹⁶⁴ to the first regular television service begun July 1, 1941,¹⁶⁵ and the first files uploaded to the internet for public consumption in August 1991,¹⁶⁶ new methods of communication most definitely came along. The key has been to find a way to use the new technologies for the benefit of the newspaper industry rather than sit passively by and allow new media to replace newspaper journalism.

Something akin to a competitive familial relationship has always existed between journalists of the various media – with newspapers being the serious, older brother who knows how everything should be done, radio taking on the role of the more progressive middle child and television as the upstart baby of the family. A careful examination of a decade's worth of *The Quill* magazine, a publication of the Society of Professional Journalists, shows the two elder siblings rightfully predicted a sea-change in the journalistic landscape with the arrival of television news in the formative years of 1948-1958.

At the very outset, television was recognized by journalists of the time as a medium with limitless potential that had to be configured to function in a finite world.

¹⁶⁴ Public Broadcasting Service. 1998. KDKA begins to broadcast, 1920. Accessed January 31, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dt20ra.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Wild, Larry. 2015. Television in the US: History and Production. October 10. Accessed January 31, 2016. <http://www3.northern.edu/wild/th100/tv.htm>.

¹⁶⁶ CERN. 1992. History to date. August. Accessed January 31, 2016. <http://info.cern.ch/hypertext/WWW/history.html>.

However, what television provided in dynamic, immediate, and visual news coverage – it often lacked in depth and completeness. Now, the latest entry into the media family promises to provide not only immediate, visual news coverage but a level of completeness that even newspapers could not boast. With literally limitless scrolling pages of content, the World Wide Web offers not only complete coverage but dynamic links to untold databases of knowledge and background.

While radio and television may not have spelled the end for print journalism, there is a renewed argument that the latest entry into the media fold – the internet – may destroy where the earlier electronic media may not have done.

According to the Pew Research Center’s State of the News Media 2018, the percentage of consumers who often get news through various platforms, includes TV, Online, Radio and Print Newspapers. For those aged 18-29, 27 percent said they got news through TV, 50 percent said they got news online, 14 percent said they got news on the radio, and only five percent said they got news from newspapers.¹⁶⁷ The other age ranges reported they “often” consumed media in the following platforms:

¹⁶⁷ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “The Modern News Consumer: News attitudes and practices in the digital era,” Pew Research Center, July 7, 2016, Accessed November 12, 2018: <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/>.

% of each age group who *often* get news on each platform

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
TV	27%	45%	72%	85%
Online	50	49	29	20
Radio	14	27	29	24
Print newspapers	5	10	23	48

Note: Just 1% said they never got news on any platform (not shown).
 Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.
 "The Modern News Consumer"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Table 2 *Pew Research Center. A survey conducted Jan. 12 – Feb. 8, 2016. Note: Just one percent reported they never got news on any platform (not shown).*

Back in 1954, Harvey J. Levin wrote a paper titled “Competition Among Mass Media and the Public Interest” in *Public Opinion Quarterly*.¹⁶⁸ The fascinating aspect of this very old paper is that it seems to support some very basic truths about media in America. In its synopsis, Levin concludes “that the Federal Communications Commission’s discouragement of cross-channel affiliation seems to induce adjustments which are likely to improve the media.”

Even now, media researchers are pushing the same message that cross-channel affiliation or multiple media outlets in affiliation or owned by the same corporation hurt media in general and American democracy in particular. With the same editors setting the news agenda across multiple media outlets means that fewer voices have influence over what the public reads, views, hears or discusses in the public square. Levin points out that this measure of control over discourse in a democracy can be unhealthy.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Harvey J. Levin, 1954, “Competition Among Mass Media and the Public Interest,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring: 62-79.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Throughout his career, Levin wrote several books on media ownership and regulation and predicted what society has learned from the overwhelming consolidation of media in the last several decades.

- Fewer independent outlets of communication with fewer individuals selecting and interpreting news or determining editorial policy
- Fear that partisan tradition of newspapers may carry over into their electronic subsidiaries
- The diversity of expression which results from diverse ownership is necessary to the democratic process

With a background as an economist, Levin also brought financial insight to the issue of media ownership as early as the 1950s.

“Financially unstable media appear more susceptible to pressure from organized groups in the community, and consequently less able to be fair and impartial,” Levin wrote in his article.

Levin pointed out that effective, comprehensive coverage of social, political, cultural and other news is expensive when done well. When turning a profit becomes the number one priority, quality will certainly be lost.

Levin theorized that newspaper journalists originally got into electronic media as a hedge against the unknown. While newspapers blamed the radio industry for a decline in their circulations and ad revenue in the 1930s, Levin analyzed the rises and falls of newspaper circulations and advertising revenues and found parallels existed more with the ups and downs of the national economy overall. When income levels rose after World War II, newspaper fortunes also increased.

It is amusing to hear Levin describe the threat of “new media” to newspapers of the 1950s when “new media” meant radio and television at that time. And now, more

than 60 years later, the “new media” that threatens newspaper profitability is the internet. The same arguments made in 1954 regarding television’s impact on newspaper circulations can be made today regarding internet impact on newspapers.

“Differences in the basic appeals of TV and other media suggest merely that TV’s impact need not be lethal,” Levin wrote. “After a period of adjustment, the older media may come to prosper side-by-side with TV just as newspapers have done with radio.”

Old media always adjusts to new media, Levin said. To be competitive with TV and radio, newspapers dropped prices and advertising rates and increased quality coverage with more columns devoted to commentary and evaluation which is best disseminated in a newspaper column than in a brief TV or radio report.

In the final analysis, Levin holds that old media will continue despite competition from new media by making strategic adjustments. The author also supported the idea of an anti-affiliation rule by the FCC. Unfortunately, the FCC has continued to relax

While American newspapers’ circulations have been dropping annually since 1987, online readerships of newspaper websites have continued to increase.¹⁷⁰ The problem with this transition is that readership is moving from a profitable enterprise to a non-profit or very low profit one within the newspaper industry. Newspapers are selling ads on their websites, but these do not come close to the advertising rates commanded by the print editions of the newspapers.¹⁷¹ In a study published by Jack Herbert and Neil Thurman in the United Kingdom, there are several factors still playing a large role in taking a publication online and making a profitable enterprise of it.

¹⁷⁰ Carl Sessions Stepp, 2008, “Maybe It’s Time to Panic.” *American Journalism Review*: 22-27.

¹⁷¹ Jack Herbert and Neil Thurman, 2007, “Paid Content Strategies for News Websites,” *Journalism Practice*, 211.

- Balancing the need to develop additional revenue streams with the demand for traffic in a buoyant advertising market
- The extent to which cannibalization of the print parent is still a concern
- The complementary benefits of developing digital products
- Strategies for archived content
- The value of columnist content to online users
- The success of digital editions and email alerts
- The potential of mobile services and the rapidly developing number of online services and commercial partnerships hosted by newspapers on the Web

Herbert and Thurman note that most online newspapers have yet to find a business model with which they are completely comfortable.¹⁷² From their analysis, the authors noted that in the United Kingdom, *The Guardian Unlimited* has had the most success with a formula of free online content but aggressive advertising after having built the UK's largest online newspaper audience. In addition to online advertising, *The Guardian* also sells online commercial services, which has become another revenue stream for online journalism. Newspapers have also charged for specific content closely related to their publication or areas of specialization, Herbert and Thurman said. *The Financial Times of London* charges for online access to their financial analysis, but not for general business stories.

Other newspapers have long charged for specialized services outside the range of general news delivery, for instance, for access to newspaper archives which contain stories published beyond one week of the current date.

“Clearly, there is still a significant amount of uncertainty in the online newspaper market, and potential for dramatic change,” Herbert and Thurman said in the conclusion of their study. In the 2008 Pew study, the authors of that report called their analysis a

¹⁷² Herbert and Thurman. 2007. 3.

study in how newspapers are caught in a race between innovating at an unprecedented pace and cutting back to stay afloat financially for the time needed to continue to innovate for a business model that might bring more long-term financial stability. But the primary question remains, how quickly can newspapers invent a new kind of journalism online, build an audience, and then monetize the new model?

Important steps for newspapers converting to an online business model, according to the Pew Research Center, includes:

- Track readership through specific stories to fight for the protection of the newsroom that produces them. Web analytics should allow a newspaper to see specifically where users are clicking and lingering on their website. This is potent ammunition to protect the reporters who generate popular copy.
- Convince newspaper advertising sales staff to more aggressively promote online advertising to existing and new customers. The 2008 Pew report cited 90 percent of ad sales still remained with the print editions of newspapers.
- Develop new software to fuse the newspaper advertising to online data about the advertisers. One newspaper was cited in the Pew study as developing its own software called “Marketplace” which allowed local advertisers to post commercials, profiles, and other information, enriching their online advertising value with the newspaper. The key, newspaper representatives said, was the localization of the advertising product.

Because of the race to profitability, the editorial side of newspapers has become much more involved in the search for revenue streams to ensure the paper’s very survival. Fully 97 percent of editors surveyed in the Pew study said they were involved in the search for revenue in some fashion. This involvement effectively lowers the wall between editorial and advertising sides of the newspaper – at one time an ethical dilemma in journalism. The Pew survey indicated that many editors still see it that way – especially editors at smaller papers. Editors at larger papers who have seen the deepest

cuts, seem somewhat less concerned about the ethics and are more focused on simple survival.

The positive aspect of today's smaller, younger, more energetic newsrooms is that it has instilled hope in editors that journalism will prevail in this climate of cost reduction. A majority of editors interviewed in the Pew study said that overall, they believe the quality of journalism produced in their newsrooms is equal to or better than what was produced before all the layoffs. While this may seem an incredibly optimistic viewpoint with the financial forces arrayed against them, editors look to the more versatile newsroom as a source of comfort. New hires are required to have at least some videography or web editing skills to bring to the table.

Doing more with less has also caused newsrooms to achieve a tighter focus because time on any given project is tighter, editors said.

New hires are also now expected to produce copy for much more than a print newspaper. In addition to a print edition, many reporters now provide stories for the online edition, associated websites contracted with the newspaper, local television stations who contract with the newspaper for news copy, web-linked television operations, specialty publications which include tabloids and magazines, and instant news services pushed out to subscribers throughout the day.¹⁷³

Even the language of journalism is evolving with the technology and revised delivery systems. Once called newsrooms, groups of journalists are now referred to as "data teams." The new name is appropriate to the renewed vision of the modern newsroom. Reporters are teaming with data analysts and archivists to produce more data-

¹⁷³ Pew Research Center. 2008.

driven stories, by data mining topics of interest to the community and spinning off stories from that data. One example used in the Pew study was searching the health inspection records of local restaurants and bringing in the paper's food critic and doing a team story on some surprising results found online at the county health inspector's office. The same approach worked well on a story localizing the national story on home foreclosure. By data mining those records for the local area, it brought the national story into sharp focus for the newspaper's local readership.

New technology has also created a new breed of contributor to the news operation at local newspapers – the mobile journalist or “Mo Jo” for short. These are local citizens armed with a digital camera and video recorders who capture news content and send it to the newspaper. Some are briefly trained by the newspaper to provide this content; others are simply offering the content as a citizen journalist. While this provides content to the newspaper at little or no cost, the question remains whether the quality of the MoJo content will be adequate and could these citizen journalists get themselves into dangerous situations and are the newspapers who take their content in any way liable for the Mo Jo's actions?

In summation, print journalism has been assailed primarily by three essential forces in the workplace: the increasing cost of generating and publishing news content, increasing corporatization and consolidation of newspaper ownership through the push for profit by shareholders in media corporations, and the rise of the internet alongside the decline of advertising and readership.

CHAPTER V - WHAT THE JOURNALISTS OF THE SUN HERALD SEE IN THE FUTURE OF THEIR PROFESSION

Thirty-four current and former journalists with *The Sun Herald*, *The Daily Herald*, and *The South Mississippi Sun* participated in interviews with the author between 2013-2018. They were questioned regarding their own history with the newspaper and their views regarding the viability of *The Sun Herald* in particular and newspapers in general.

Before these interviews, however; a national survey was conducted in 2007 by the author with journalists around the United States through individual state press associations. Similar questions were asked regarding the state of print journalism and each individual journalists' role in it. The responses in 2007 showed concern about the newspaper industry, but not to the extent expressed by journalists of *The Sun Herald* some eight years later.

The 2007 National Survey

In February 2007, the author conducted a nation-wide survey of American journalists through their state press associations to establish a benchmark for attitudes within the newspaper industry regarding its own viability. This survey arrived at a time when the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press would proclaim that the "Internet Overtakes Newspapers as News Outlet."¹⁷⁴ In this Pew survey, 40 percent reported that they get most of their news about national and international issues from the

¹⁷⁴ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Internet Overtakes Newspapers as News Outlet*, 23 December 2008, p. 1.

internet, with only 35 percent reporting that they rely mostly on newspapers, and a full 70 percent turning to television as their main source for national and international news.

With 88 respondents in the author's 2007 survey, the majority (58 percent) had been in the newspaper industry for more than 21 years.¹⁷⁵

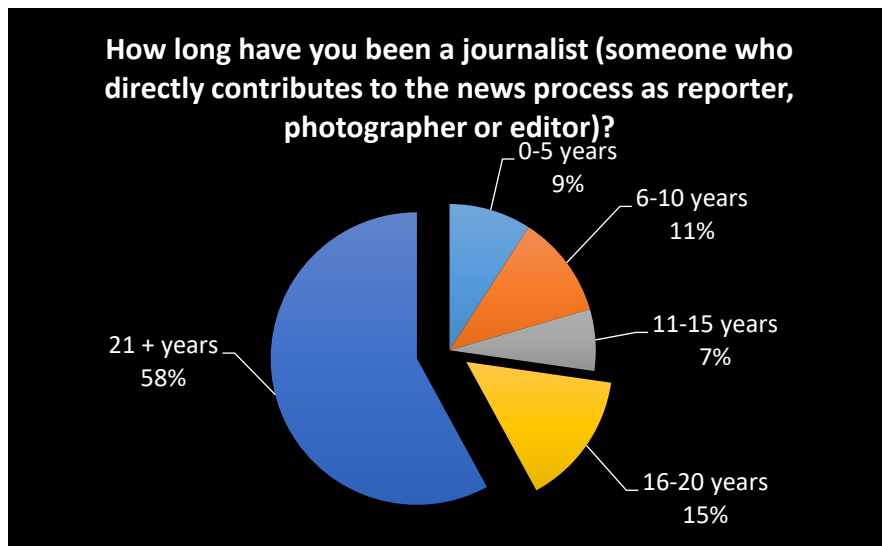


Figure 6. Journalists' tenure, survey of a nationwide pool of journalists through state press associations, February 2007.

The next largest group (15 percent) surveyed identified themselves as having worked in newspapers somewhere between 16 and 20 years. These two groups combined meant that 73 percent of respondents had worked in newspapers for 16 or more years.¹⁷⁶

Of the complete pool of respondents, 72 percent self-identified as having worked for four or fewer news organizations throughout their careers. These statistics imply that the overwhelming majority of those responding to the survey had spent long tenures at relatively few news organizations.

¹⁷⁵ Judy D. Isbell, "Corporate Influence on a Disappearing Fourth Estate," Class Paper, University of Southern Mississippi, 2007.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

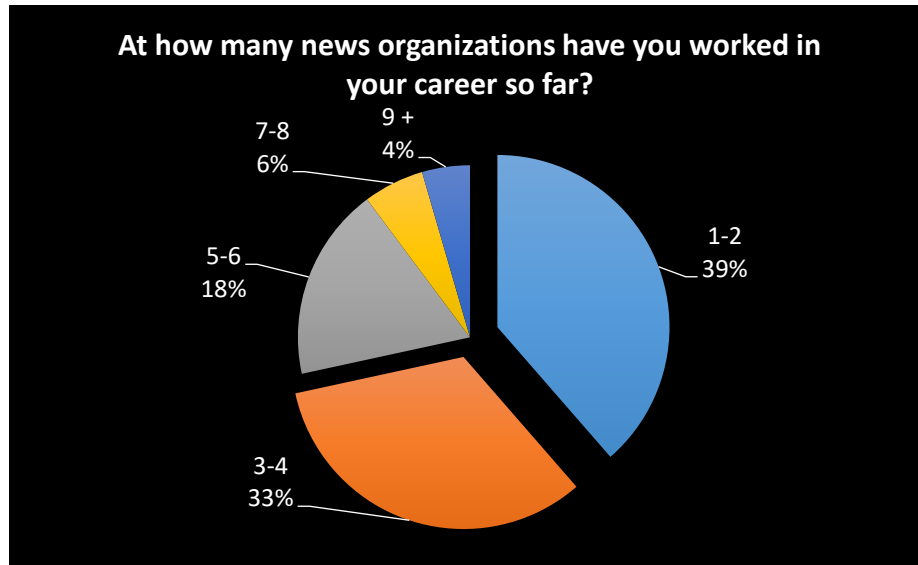


Figure 7. The number of news organizations for which respondents have worked, results from a national survey of working journalists through their state press associations, February 2007.

The respondents also seemed to have relatively elevated positions within their organizations as well. Of those surveyed, 36 percent were publishers or vice presidents, eight percent were executive editors or station managers, and 19 percent were managing editors or news directors. So, 563 percent of respondents were in leadership positions within their news organizations. The remaining 37 percent of respondents identified as either front-line editors or producers or reporters/photographers.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

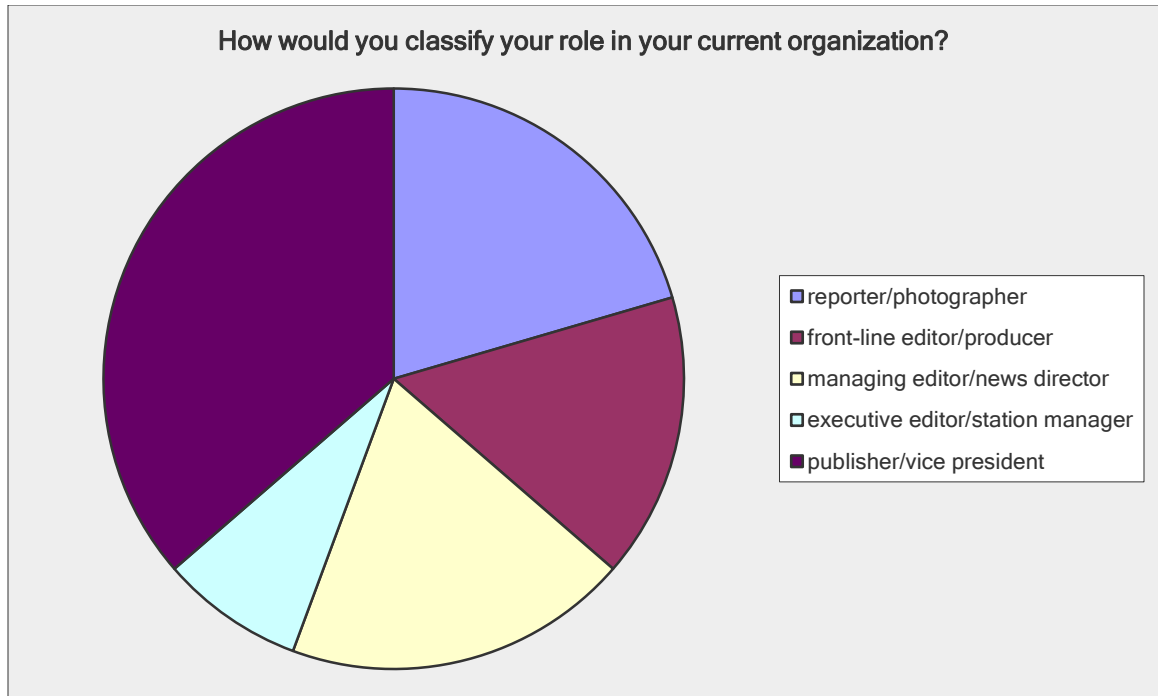


Figure 8. Respondents current position in news organization, results from a national survey of working journalists through their state press associations, February 2007.

The issues identified as most important at that time were, in descending order of importance:¹⁷⁸

- Financial cutbacks and budget constraints
- Circulation/audience decline
- Credibility of profession
- Corporate ownership influence on newsroom operation/decision-making
- Attracting and retaining talent in the newsroom
- Micromanagement of newsroom operation
- Sensationalism in reporting

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Already at that time, these leaders in their news organizations recognized the deep impact of corporate ownership on their operations with 61 percent answering affirmatively that ownership “influences how you perform your responsibilities of gathering and reporting news.” Yet 61 percent also asserted that despite the influence of corporate ownership, the journalists at their news organization do not alter how they “gather/report news based on learned preferences of ownership/management.”¹⁷⁹

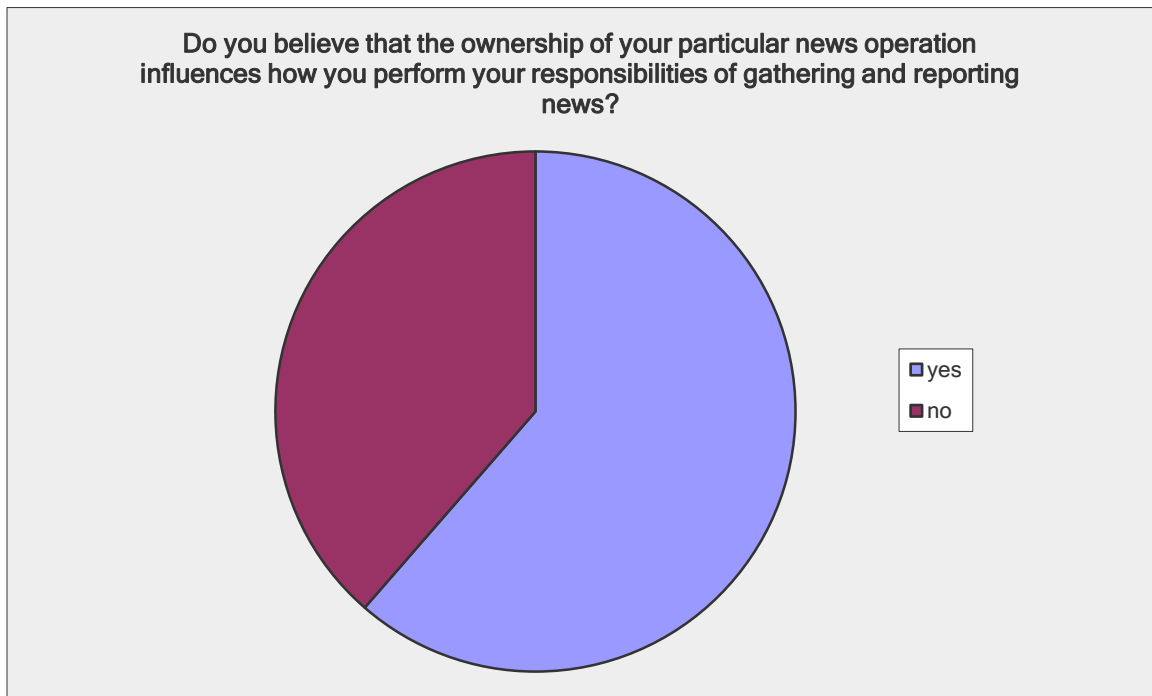


Figure 9. Ownership influence over reporting, results from a national survey of working journalists through their state press associations, February 2007.

A full 67 percent of those surveyed said they did not feel their credibility as journalists were called into question as a result of ownership/management influence on their jobs.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

An overwhelming majority (77 percent) responded that they did not feel pressure to abandon or alter stories because “the story might harm your news organization’s business interests.”

Despite the mounting dissatisfaction with their profession, 84 percent of journalists surveyed in 2007 said they planned to stay in journalism until they retired.¹⁸⁰

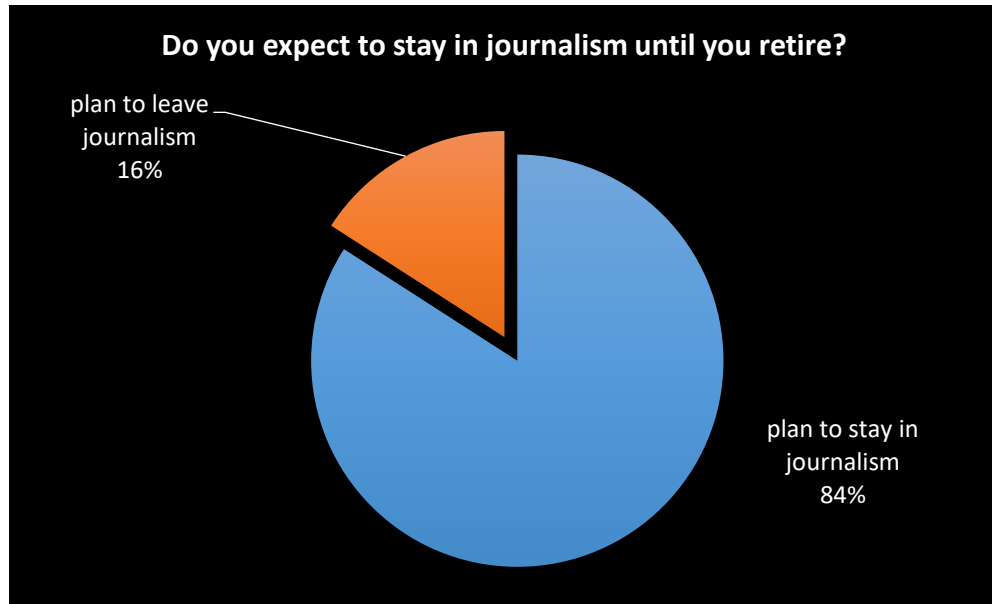


Figure 10. Journalists’ long-term career expectations, results from a national survey of working journalists through their state press associations, February 2007.

The Sun Herald Interviews

In 2015, 34 past and present journalists of *The Sun Herald* were interviewed, many have exceptionally long tenures for a newspaper, particularly in a time of tremendous turnover. Ranging from 18 months to 32 years, the average tenure for all those interviewed was 12-16 years. Certainly, those interviewed had enough experience on the front lines of journalism to have very well-formed opinions about how the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

newspaper was run during their tenure there and how they would like to see it run now. This perspective from the trenches of modern journalism paints a much more detailed picture of where print journalism is and perhaps where it is headed.

Several themes emerged during the course of the interviews with *The Sun Herald* staff regarding the changes in journalism and how it is practiced.

Journalistic Integrity as the First and Foremost Expectation

Reporters, photographers, and editors who had worked for *The Daily Herald*, *The South Mississippi Sun*, or *The Sun Herald*, in general, noted a higher expectation of ethical journalism practice in the newsroom when they began at the newspaper than when they left it.

Roland Weeks, Jr., retired general manager and publisher of *The Daily Herald*, *The South Mississippi Sun*, and *The Sun Herald*, noted that the ethical boundary between reporting news and collecting advertising revenue began to disappear in the mid-1990s. The “invisible wall” separating editorial and advertising department of a newspaper was chipped away, becoming more porous as time passed and stockholders demanded ever-higher profits.

“It’s worse than porous,” said Weeks. “The wall is not there anymore. If news can be part of what attracts readers and advertisers, fine. If not, something else will do just as well.”¹⁸¹

Weeks became general manager of *The Daily Herald* in Biloxi, Mississippi, when the State-Record Company of Columbia, South Carolina purchased the family-owned newspaper in the summer of 1968. New corporate owners brought with it a level of

¹⁸¹ Roland Weeks, interview by author, Biloxi, Miss., 3 December 2013.

professionalism unknown to the community newspaper. In time, the State-Record Company sold out to a newer, larger corporate owner in the Knight-Ridder Company, and eventually, these new owners were forced to bow to boardroom pressure and sell yet again. Weeks stayed on board as general manager through the State-Record and Knight-Ridder reigns.

After a long career in newspapers, Weeks expressed concern regarding the future of journalism as a profession and as an integral part of a functional democracy. Weeks spoke of “the force” that has driven the profit-driven business model of journalism as one of the key factors determining the future of The Fourth Estate.

“So, the question becomes whether that force simply takes over and eliminates any concern for good journalism or not. To me, that’s the fight,” Weeks said. “And who is going to fight for good journalism? And what is the motive for doing that?”¹⁸²

People fighting for a free and unfettered press tend to be marginalized, Weeks said. “They’re off making noises and having some degree of influence on people’s thinking, but they’re the academics, they’re the people who aren’t in the mainstream,” he said. “So, if that’s where we’re headed, God bless us. We’re in big, big, BIG trouble.”

Those battling for responsible journalism have nothing less than the United States’ democratic form of government at stake. When asked where democracy would be without a truly free press, Weeks had a direct response based on his many years in the business. “It doesn’t exist in my somewhat learned opinion,” he said.

Explaining the essential role of the Fourth Estate, Weeks continued. “I remember years and years ago when we were worried about a few little things that were in the paper

¹⁸² Ibid.

that weren't important – not only comics but a lot of other things that were there to give people who don't think much a reason to buy the newspaper. My comment was somewhat jokingly, 'Give the bastards enough of what they want so we can continue to give them what they need.' But what has happened over the years is that what they want has taken over."¹⁸³

Corporate ownership and stockholder pressure have continued to drive newspapers in the direction of "anything that sells" over "responsible journalism," Weeks said. "We've allowed free enterprise to just go too far," he said.

Michael Tonos, managing editor and executive editor of *The Sun Herald* during the 1980s and 1990s, also noted a more porous "invisible wall" between news and advertising functions of the newspaper as revenues declined.

"As far as conflict of interest, it's always been there (at least in modern times, as newspapers sought to become objective purveyors of news). But until the late 1980s and 1990s, it was easier for publishers to enforce the wall because, as the only game in town, they were making money. But when revenue started to fade, well after readership started declining, the wall was lowered and the lines were increasingly blurred," Tonos said.¹⁸⁴

While the efforts of newspaper publishers to fill the revenue void initially involved attempts to increase advertising opportunities within their print and online editions, the real concern for journalists became the change in the news product itself. Tonos sees journalism in a transition from the old ways of reporting the news to a new multimedia model that still provides the journalism needed in a democracy.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Michael J. Tonos, email interview by author, 23 January 2014.

“My overall concern is that the public’s definition of journalism is changing, and not necessarily for the better,” he said. “Think Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, etc., as well as opinionators who use social media to espouse ideas through opinion pieces. I worry that too many people confuse this type of writing with fact-based journalism.”

Stan Tiner, the executive editor of *The Sun Herald* from 2000 to 2015, helmed the ship during some of the most tumultuous and gratifying chapters of its history and maintained an optimistic view of print journalism in the 21st century.¹⁸⁵

“One of the strengths of this newspaper is we have a decent blending of veterans who still have institutional memories of the communities that we live in and they’ve understood the need to adjust to the technology,” Tiner said.

The technology in newsgathering has continued to advance in recent years with all *Sun Herald* reporters being issued iPads to assist in not only taking notes and shooting and editing photos and videos but transmitting from the field while on assignment. Now that the journalists of *The Sun Herald* must create content not only for the print edition of the newspaper but for the online edition on the web and all social media channels, the need for greater speed in submitting that content is more pronounced. Where the newspaper was once limited by its daily publication schedule, with continuous updates of its website and social accounts, newspapers can now compete with broadcast media in breaking important news.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Stanley R. Tiner, interview with author, Gulfport, Miss., 5 February 2014.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Over the years and particularly after Hurricane Katrina, Tiner said the newspaper had to further refine its news prioritization process into what Tiner now calls “news triage.”

More than ten years after the storm, news triage remains in practice at *The Sun Herald*. While acknowledging that there are some stories the paper cannot cover, Tiner said one of the avenues for storytelling that the newspaper has carved time for is its investigative journalism. The choice was a logical one.

“There’s a lot happening on the internet, on the social media, that people are telling each other stories about the minutiae that we used to cover that we can’t possibly do,” Tiner said. “Some stories that once would have made the print edition now go into the online edition, sparing the expensive newsprint and ink product the extra pages of type.”

In the end, Tiner said the ultimate goal of *The Sun Herald* hasn’t changed that much. “We’re trying to be mindful and do journalism and also have some fun,” he said. “Just make sure that at the end of the day, the people feel like *The Sun Herald* reflects everything about this community.”

Long-time sports editor Cliff Kirkland worked at *The Sun Herald* in the 1970s and 1980s and recalled a more principled environment in the newsroom.¹⁸⁷

“I was lucky to spend my entire career in an environment that valued journalism ethics, where newspapers were rightfully considered authorities of record rather than purveyors of celebrity gossip and instant gratification,” Kirkland said. “I worked in

¹⁸⁷ Cliff Kirkland, email interview with author, 1 March 2015.

newspapers when they mandated crisp, clear writing, but also valued colorful features and columns that were more entertaining than explanative.”¹⁸⁸

Since leaving the newspaper in January 1989, Kirkland has continued to work on the Mississippi Gulf Coast as a communications official in municipal government and as an executive with the casino industry. Kirkland is now the Civic Innovation and Development Officer for the City of Biloxi and still spends time reading and critiquing *The Sun Herald*.

“I’m saddened by the state of newspapers in general and *The Sun Herald* in particular, and I have been for many years,” he said. “Newspapers have regressed to the point that rather than inform the public they claim to serve; they contribute to its dumbing-down. Like many other papers around the country, *The Sun Herald* is but a shadow of its former self, from staffing to editorial quality to reliability.”¹⁸⁹

While Kirkland is clearly disappointed by the direction of newspapers and *The Sun Herald* among them, he explained that this is because he continues to believe in the necessity of a well-run newspaper in the life of a community. Unfortunately, the current path of American newspapers seems destined to destroy that which Kirkland loves.

“*The Sun Herald* and most other newspapers have become self-fulfilling prophets of their own doom,” Kirkland said. “Instead of continuing to pursue the lofty ideals upon which journalism was grounded while adapting to changing times, *The Sun Herald* has compromised its integrity. It’s no long THE source of local news, it’s just A source. Investigative journalism has been replaced by ‘revealed’ journalism.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Kirkland explained “revealed” journalism as writing that is accomplished when journalists no longer go outside the newspaper plant to “work” their sources in the community to “uncover important news in a timely fashion.”

“Newspapers have failed to maintain the historically high standards that solidified and underscored the industry for the past 150 years,” Kirkland said. “Instead of finding creative ways to perpetuate an honorable profession, newspapers have stepped aside and genuflected to the vacuous instant messaging culture that places value only on timeliness and never on accuracy.”

Kirkland asserts that this abdication of a core responsibility is at the heart of what ails modern journalism.

“Newspapers have failed, thus far, to remain focused on their core responsibility to serve their communities as the best source of news. Instead, they have parroted the internet by minimizing their news content in order to pander to celebrity and lifestyle fluff of negligible culture or intellectual value,” Kirkland said.

“*The Sun Herald* has become a shell of its former self,” he said. “There are fewer reporters covering fewer beats. There are fewer editors catching mistakes before they get published. Even corrections are now being corrected. And the voice of *The Sun Herald* – its editorial – has become an occasional afterthought, pedestrian in execution.”¹⁹¹

Having spent more than 30 years at *The Sun Herald*, staff photographer Tim Isbell also sees a clear difference between the journalism practiced when he arrived at the

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

newspaper in the spring of 1984 versus the kind practiced when he was laid off by McClatchy in August 2017.¹⁹²

“It was good journalism and fair,” Isbell said. “Nothing like that ‘fair and balanced’ crap you hear on TV. To me, we told good stories whether it was with words, photos or a blending of both.”¹⁹³

Describing the mid-80s to mid-90s as the “hey-day” of his journalism career at *The Sun Herald*, Isbell said “I think we did a better job reflecting the true Mississippi Gulf Coast back in the 1980s and 1990s than we can ever hope to do now. Our agenda then was ‘do good work.’ I think such a concept was a reflection of our publisher, Roland Weeks.”

Isbell said the dynamics of *The Sun Herald* newsroom changed over the years he worked there.

“During our hey-day, we were truly a family,” Isbell said. “Employees at *The Sun Herald* enjoyed being around each other at work and away from work.” In the 1990s, Isbell said he started pick-up football games among employees of all departments of the newspaper on Saturdays at the Broadwater Beach Marina greenspace, and sometimes at Beauvoir Elementary School in Biloxi.

“As part of a family, we shared knowledge and information with our fellow employees,” he said. “I thought this was a hallmark of *The Sun Herald* for my first 20 years there. The last ten years, I can’t say that this was the case. We became an

¹⁹² Timothy T. Isbell, email interview with author, 16 March 2015.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

‘information is power’ place and helpful hints weren’t always shared. We became more of a ‘look out for number one’ place.”

Isbell attributes much of the shift in attitude in the newsroom to the emphasis management places on the individual newsroom worker’s analytics, how many page views their content receives on the newspaper website. “To me, that doesn’t foster an atmosphere of teamwork, something I think my early years at *The Sun Herald* were built upon,” he said.¹⁹⁴

Although the Knight-Ridder ownership of *The Sun Herald* marked some of the best work of the newspaper, Knight-Ridder eventually succumbed to the same shareholder financial pressures that were driving other publicly held media corporations to sell their businesses.

“I have always called the demise of newspapers the result of GAS – Greed, Arrogance, and Stupidity,” Isbell said. “When [Knight-Ridder CEO Jim] Batten died, the running of the papers shifted from journalists to non-journalists in positions of power.”¹⁹⁵

Isbell said that Batten “had a journalism background and although Knight-Ridder was a business, Batten never let it be forgotten that we had a higher calling as a member of the Fourth Estate.”

With Batten’s death from a malignant brain tumor in 1995, Anthony “Tony” Ridder took over as CEO and Chairman of Knight-Ridder, Inc.¹⁹⁶ It wasn’t long after Ridder’s rise to the chairman’s seat that stockholders began implementation of an

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ William Glaberson, “James K. Batten, 59, Knight-Ridder Chairman,” *The New York Times*, 26 June 1995, p. 1.

“activist investor” movement of bullying company leadership into taking actions beneficial to investors regardless of any detrimental impact on the corporation itself.

In an appearance before the Knight-Ridder Board of Directors at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in San Francisco on July 19, 2005, Bruce Sherman, CEO of Private Capital Management, the single largest shareholder of Knight-Ridder stock, explained to the Knight-Ridder brass that while they had “long respected Knight-Ridder’s distinguished history of serving the public,” Sherman believed that Knight-Ridder needed to give stockholders what he described as a “fair return” by selling the newspaper company.¹⁹⁷ Knight-Ridder’s operating profit margin for 2001 was 19.4 percent and remained as high as 16.4 percent in 2005 through brutal cost-cutting to offset dropping ad revenues and rising operating expenses.¹⁹⁸

Granted, most businesses would be thrilled to post double-digit profit margins, but expectations for newspaper stocks had always been high. When Sherman bought into Knight-Ridder, he paid on average about \$65 a share. By the time of the April 2006 meeting with the Knight-Ridder Board, Knight-Ridder stock was trading at \$62 a share.¹⁹⁹ So, taking whatever measures necessary to reverse losses on investment balance sheets, Bruce Sherman and Private Capital Management, Inc. pushed the Knight-Ridder board to squeeze profits from the newspaper company prior to selling it at auction to gain the last ounce of profitability for stockholders.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Layton, “Sherman’s March,” *American Journalism Review*, February/March 2006, p. 18-24.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Liedtke, “Knight-Ridder’s demise reflects sobering times for newspapers,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 23 June 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Layton, “Sherman’s March,” p. 18-24.

While all the boardroom maneuvers were taking place in the sale of Knight-Ridder, *The Sun Herald* was experiencing its high point as a newspaper – winning the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service Journalism in 2006 for its coverage of Hurricane Katrina. It could be said that Knight-Ridder went out with a bang, not a whimper. Pulling in all of its considerable resources to assist the devastated news staff of *The Sun Herald*, Knight-Ridder nationalized the Biloxi newspaper’s newsroom, bringing in reporters, photographers, and editors who all worked under *The Sun Herald* flag. For example, reporters from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote their stories under a *Sun Herald* byline.²⁰⁰

“Almost every paper in Knight-Ridder sent someone here,” said *Sun Herald* Executive Editor Stan Tiner. “And instead of working for *The Charlotte Observer* or the Fort Worth paper, they worked for us.”²⁰¹

It was not surprising that *The Sun Herald* won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service Journalism (along with *The Times Picayune* of New Orleans) with such resources and dedication at hand. It would be the final team effort of the vaunted Knight-Ridder chain.

“The change from Knight-Ridder to McClatchy came at a very difficult time, not only for newspaper companies nationally but for us at *The Sun Herald* personally, as we were just a few months into the recovery from Hurricane Katrina,” said Sharon Fitzhugh, digital projects editor for *The Sun Herald*. “The sale was presented to us as ‘the best option’ for us among the suitors.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Stanley R. Tiner, interview with author, Biloxi, Miss., 5 February 2014.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Sharon Fitzhugh, email interview with author, 1 March 2015.

While it was true that rumors were swirling in late 2005 that Knight-Ridder could be snapped up by Gannett, a chain known in journalism circles as being extremely profit-driven, McClatchy was considered to be a more journalism-focused contender for the future of Knight-Ridder's 32 daily newspapers.

The trouble with a journalism-focused news operation in the current publicly-held media landscape is that shareholders and the investment firms who represent them are interested much more in the largest profits possible rather than the best journalism possible. As happened with Knight-Ridder and its hounding by Private Capital Management, all thought of repercussions to the country and its democracy seemed completely overridden by the primary objective of profit.

Alice Jackson, a general assignment reporter for *The Daily Herald* and *The South Mississippi Sun* and eventually *The Sun Herald*, said the newspaper was proud of its watchdog role for its community in her early days there. However, over time and changes in management, conflict arose with management over the lack of tenacity in reporting which led to Jackson's final departure from *The Sun Herald* in 1999.²⁰³

"I realized I no longer wanted to work for people who lacked the news values I had," she said.

One of the turning points in her career at *The Sun Herald* was the response Jackson received from management on an investigate piece she'd done on an influential Mississippi Senator who was an unindicted co-conspirator in a federal indictment. Called into the editor's office, she was asked how the paper could explain running the story to

²⁰³ Alice Jackson, email interview with author, 30 May 2015.

the Senator and the community, rather than emphasizing the importance of reporting the truth she'd uncovered.²⁰⁴

“He kept discussing with me ways to avoid running the story,” Jackson said. “I finally told him I thought the story should run and excused myself.”

Over the course of her journalism career, Jackson said there were a large number of newspaper chains in the industry, yet the dynamic within corporate-owned newspapers continued to change for the worse with fewer large chains controlling most of the news content.

“Thirty or so years ago, there were newspaper chains, but most newspapers were owned by individuals or families who viewed their ownership as a personal responsibility to their readers,” Jackson said. “In the 1980s, more corporations moved into news until today there's really only about six or so owners of most of the nation's media outlets.”

Benefitting from Jackson's example, Ruth Ingram Cummins readily admits she learned about ethics, tenacity, and pushing for public access from Alice Jackson.²⁰⁵

“Had I not been such a cub reporter, I could have done a better job in sensing just when an access issue was coming down the pike, either in courts or city/county government,” Cummins said. “But other reporters, such as Alice Jackson, were old hands there and kept public officials well in check and served as role models to me.”

In her days at *The Sun Herald*, Cummins said the reporting staff was encouraged to thoroughly cover the community during her three-year tenure at the Coast newspapers. “Back then, there wasn't the effort to ‘localize’ national or international news, which

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ruth Ingram Cummins, email interview with author, 23 March 2015.

meant your local community got some great coverage,” she said. “I spent a lot of my time in the state and federal courts, and we absolutely were encouraged to stand up for all access that the law allowed.”²⁰⁶

Beginning in 1987, photographer John Fitzhugh recalled his first days at *The Sun Herald* as exhibiting “strong news coverage.”²⁰⁷

“Back then we were a full paper with a full features staff and sports staff, so we covered a wider variety of things than now,” he said.

As part of the staff that experienced the purchase of Knight-Ridder by McClatchy, Fitzhugh said he is careful to stay aware of what is going on around him, despite being somewhat powerless to impact the changes.

“You have to stay aware,” Fitzhugh said. “You can see what is happening locally with our layoffs, and we follow what is happening at other McClatchy papers, and the industry as a whole. The trend is toward regional production centers and expecting people to have more skill sets.” Staying current with social media and video production is part of the new reality for journalists in the 21st century. “It is clear that the industry has moved toward digital over print, you have to go with it or step aside.”

His biggest frustration with newspapers is the feeling that corporate greed is killing the industry. “I will never understand why corporations that own newspapers continue to have profit expectations that are clearly beyond reality,” he said. “I have a dream of newspapers owned by not-for-profit corporations, or at least privately-owned

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ John Fitzhugh, email interview with author, 22 March 2015.

companies that don't have to answer to never-ending demands of increased profits by stockholders.”

Kate Magandy Holzhauser, the digital editor at *The Sun Herald*, worked at the newspaper from 1985 to 2018 when she was laid off by McClatchy. Her first job was as a sports copy editor.²⁰⁸

Holzhauser witnessed two changes in ownership at *The Sun Herald*. First, from State-Record Company to Knight-Ridder and then from Knight-Ridder to McClatchy. “I'd say when it went from State-Record to Knight-Ridder, we seemed to have more resources because it was a bigger company,” Holzhauser said. “When we moved to McClatchy, things became more centralized and because of the economy, there has been much downsizing and doing more with less. We also have transitioned to more of a digital company and the newsroom changed with that philosophy.”

The news isn't free, Holzhauser contends, whether consumers are paying for the technological hardware to access news, the internet connection or the digital subscription.

“If they want reliable information, they should pay for it,” she said. “Rumors and innuendo floating around on social media and disreputable websites is not journalism.”

Former *Sun Herald* columnist and features writer Ken Fink indicated a level of dedication to journalism ethics under Knight-Ridder ownership. Under Knight-Ridder, *The Sun Herald* was very community oriented,” Fink said. “Readers appreciated that and it was effective. Accuracy, objectivity, and relativity were important.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Kate Magandy Holzhauser, email interview with author, 22 March 2015.

²⁰⁹ Ken Fink, email interview with author, 22 March 2015.

The journalistic integrity of many newspapers is now gone, Fink said.

“I could care less for today’s *Sun Herald*. It is no longer the newspaper I once worked for and loved so much,” Fink said. “Print journalism is fast dying. *The Sun Herald* is already dead.”

Based on the changes he has witnessed in the newspaper industry during his career, Fink said he isn’t optimistic about the future of print journalism.

“Print journalism continues to wilt and wither,” he said, “and with the latest ‘cyber-based’ generation, it will collapse. Journalism in general, particularly broadcast and cable, has become absolutely politically divisive and the mindset seems to have changed from objectivity to blatant left/right, liberal/conservative, republican/democrat. Frankly, I find that quite sickening. In all, Edward R. Murrow would not only be spinning in his grave, but he would also be crying.”

Paul Hampton, former politics editor for *The Sun Herald* recalled the days under Knight-Ridder CEO Jim Batten as the best for journalism.²¹⁰

“But those were flush years,” he said. “They did encourage getting out in the community and just listening. They let us hire Urban and Associates who were the groundbreakers in the local-local movement.”²¹¹

Until newspapers find a way to make more money off the digital product, Hampton said he expects them to stay “lean and mean.”

“Journalism will be viable but it will never be like the heyday of print,” Hampton said. “That’s probably a good thing for the survivors because we have so many new ways

¹⁹⁸ Paul Hampton, email interview with author, 11 March 2015.

²¹¹ Ibid.

to tell stories. I don't expect print to last forever, but it probably will outlive the dire predictions of its decline.”

Jimmy Lee Hannaford worked as a reporter and photographer for *The Sun Herald* from 1989-1996 in the newspaper's Jackson County Bureau.

While Hannaford said he was proud to have worked for *The Sun Herald* during a “quality time in its history,” he said he mourns the loss of print journalism, “though I realize it is not completely dead.”²¹²

“The newspapers in my area are barely hanging on with a reduced staff augmented by inexperienced freelancers and bloggers,” Hannaford said. “I believe we had more ‘investment’ and pride in our daily journalistic endeavors – not to mention a few hard-assed editors who demanded that of us. Good journalism does still exist in some newspapers, magazines and on some websites. I think people have more distractions now, and many do not focus on any particular thing for very long.”

Riva Brown worked for *The Sun Herald* as an intern and a general assignment reporter from 1989-1997 and remembered the work environment in her early days as being “collegial and family-like.”²¹³

Brown's original internship with *The Sun Herald* was as a Knight-Ridder Minority Scholarship Program scholar, working summers at the newspaper until she graduated from The University of Southern Mississippi. After graduation, Brown was offered a general assignments reporter job at *The Sun Herald*. It was on July 18, 1994, that Brown was attacked in the newspaper's parking lot by fellow Knight-Ridder

²¹² Jimmy Lee Hannaford, email interview with author, 23 March 2015.

²¹³ Riva Brown, email interview with author, 3 March 2015.

Minority Scholarship recipient Ya-Sin Shabazz. He fired a shotgun blast through the driver's side window of Brown's car, causing injury to her left arm and internal organs. She ran into *The Sun Herald* building where she was assisted by coworkers until first responders and medical treatment could be summoned.

While Brown attempted to continue her journalism career, returning to the scene of her attack proved difficult. She filed suit against Knight-Ridder, *The Sun Herald*, and Swetman Security Services, Inc., the security contractor for *The Sun Herald* property on DeBuys Road in Gulfport at the time of the shooting.²¹⁴ Her case was that neither Knight-Ridder or Swetman Security provided a safe enough working environment to avoid the incident that nearly cost Brown her life.

In time, Brown chose to return to The University of Southern Mississippi to earn her doctorate in Mass Communications and is now an assistant professor of communication at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Arkansas.

Despite the bizarre turn of events that coincided with the conclusion of her journalism career, Brown looks back at that career with a sense of bereavement.

"Journalism and news as I was taught no longer exists," she said. "While I left a newspaper in 2009, we no longer produced news; we compiled information and created content, which is not the same as news."²¹⁵

Terri Queen, a copy editor, and designer with *The Sun Herald* from 1985-1995 recalled a trend away from journalistic integrity as the years passed.

²¹⁴ United States District Court, S. M. (1997, September 15). *Brown v. Knight-Ridder, Inc.* Retrieved from [www.leagle.com:http://www.leagle.com/decision/19976231FSupp2d622_1538/BROWN%20v.%20KNIGHT-RIDDER,%20INC](http://www.leagle.com/http://www.leagle.com/decision/19976231FSupp2d622_1538/BROWN%20v.%20KNIGHT-RIDDER,%20INC).

²¹⁵ Riva Brown, email interview with author, 13 March 2015.

“The State-Record Company seemed to be very hands-off and happy with just making a profit every year,” Queen said. “They let us focus on being a newspaper that served the community. Sure, we wanted to sell newspapers, but we wanted to do it because of good journalism, not gimmicks.”²¹⁶

Queen said she noticed the focus of newspaper management subtly shifting during her ten-year tenure at the newspaper “from covering the news to increasing readership.” Other changes in Queen’s day-to-day work life at *The Sun Herald* weren’t so subtle.

“My workload kept increasing,” she said. “They had separated design from copy editing, which I was not in favor of. I thought treating the pages as a whole instead of pieces/parts made a better, more cohesive product and led to fewer errors.”

In addition to the issues of burn-out and compromised quality in the reorganization of copy and design desks, Queen also faced a change from day shift to night shift after ten years of service in the organization. Following her departure from *The Sun Herald* in 1995, she said continuing to stay in touch with friends at the paper and is aware of additional changes that have been made.

“I think *The Sun Herald* has overall been going in the wrong direction,” Queen said. “They’ve cut too much staff, focused on the wrong types of stories for the wrong reasons, and are trying to run it vis the bottom line rather than by producing an exceptional project.”

Like many of his contemporaries at *The Sun Herald*, Jimmy Creed, a sports writer for the newspaper from 1989-1992, said he recalled a particularly hard-hitting string of stories covering the murders of Judge Vincent Sherry and his wife, Biloxi City

²¹⁶ Terri Queen, email interview with author, 17 March 2015.

Councilwoman Margaret Sherry, the Dixie Mafia and the conviction of Biloxi Mayor Pete Halat for collusion in the murder of the Sherrys.²¹⁷

Referencing *The Sun Herald*, Creed said: “I would definitely call it a newsroom where good, old-fashioned, hard-nosed journalism was practiced.”

Creed said he was particularly impressed with the in-depth reporting practiced by staff writers Gene Swearingen and Anita Lee on the aforementioned stories. “I have no doubt it was the finest example of depth reporting I saw in all my time in the newspaper business,” he said.

Three years after joining *The Sun Herald*, Creed left to become editor of *The Saints Digest* in New Orleans. He said he does keep in touch with some former *Sun Herald* colleagues, though not to stay informed on the current condition of the newspaper. “Unfortunately, I believe the viability of *The Sun Herald*, like newspapers in general, is seriously waning, and in the case of *The Sun Herald* I believe that a big part of that is because someone has been allowed to take what was once one of the finest newspapers I have ever seen, much less worked for, and turn it into something that resembles the Sunday comics page,” Creed said.

The changes that have taken place at *The Sun Herald* have made it a laughingstock within the journalism community and within the Gulf Coast community as well, he said. “The few people I know who still take the paper on a daily basis often tell me they don’t feel like they get their money’s worth for what they pay because it has very little news in it anymore,” Creed said. “Couple that with the fact that the physical size of

²¹⁷ Jimmy Creed, email interview with author, 18 March 2015.

the paper is smaller and that it has a terrible look, and I would venture a guess that if it's allowed to continue on this course, the future is bleak."

It wasn't only the product that changed during the last five decades, said David Purdy, a former photographer at *The Sun Herald* from 1985-2007. The newsroom atmosphere became more stressful for Purdy after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. While his mother in Iowa had become ill and he wanted to be near family just then, more importantly, he felt the newsroom had become more hostile with pressure to work longer and longer hours without compensation. This led to Purdy's departure from *The Sun Herald* in 2007. "It was a do it or else atmosphere that really did it," he said.²¹⁸

The major cause of the decline of the newspaper industry, Purdy said, is the stock market. "The first and foremost thing newspapers need to do is get off the stock market," he said. "They have been bending over backward to serve investors instead of serving readers. I think the instant news of the internet is a moving target. I think print is still very viable but again you have to make it about community and not national news."

Lea Ivey Stone, Daily Living Editor for *The Sun Herald* from 1981-1986, laments the change in the newspaper over the years, particularly in terms of the quality of the publications.²¹⁹

"I think the saddest part is that folks think, read and react so fast that reporters do not check their facts, their spelling or their sources," Stone said. "If it's on the internet, it must be true. [There's] very poor journalism today."

²¹⁸ David K. Purdy, email interview with author, 19 March 2015.

²¹⁹ Lea Ivey Stone, email interview with author, 1 April 2015.

Supporting Stone's assessment of poor journalism today is Amy Tyler Mair, general assignment and military reporter for *The Sun Herald* from 1995-1997.

"It makes me very sad," Mair said. "You don't seem to need the writing and editing skills you once did. The pay has always been bad, but you knew you were making a difference, so it was OK. I recently edited a regional home and design magazine. It has subsequently closed. I was so stressed about the budget. It was hard to do a quality job with the resources available. My superiors did not care about the quality of the writing. They wanted content. You have to work extra hard to come up with a fresh angle because you know that people will have read so much online before they ever pick up your publication. People will always want content. So, as a writer, I have to get behind the changes or change professions."²²⁰

Another alumnus of *The Sun Herald* newsroom who believes journalistic integrity and quality has slipped is Eugene Stockstill, a night reporter and religion editor at *The Sun Herald* from 1996-2001.

"I don't live on the Coast anymore, so I don't have specific suggestions about *The Sun Herald*," he said. He has continued an interest in print journalism and has experienced a level of disappointment in the decreased quality of newspapers.²²¹

"I stopped my subscription to a daily newspaper twice because of spelling errors in headlines," Stockstill said. "A poorly edited paper destroys credibility. In the electronic age, newspapers have to focus on local news; they should be the caretakers of local news."

²²⁰ Amy Tyler Mair, email interview with author, 18 March 2015.

²²¹ Eugene Stockstill, email interview with author, 18 March 2015.

Stockstill said he doesn't believe newspapers should attempt to compete with all digital forms of communication. "Newspapers cannot compete electronically," he said. "What they can do is record thorough and thoughtful history of their communities. If they do this, they will continue to thrive."

Whether newsrooms themselves will continue to thrive in a work environment that not only pushes for more work in less time – but for less pay, is questionable said James Jones, features reporter and sports lead from 1992 until 2018 when he was laid off by McClatchy.

"We never had furloughs under Knight-Ridder like we've had at McClatchy," Jones said. Coworkers relationships off the clock have also changed. "We all did things together as groups, whether it was playing softball together at company picnics or football on Saturday mornings," he said.²²²

Karen Bryant, a former copy editor at *The Sun Herald* from 1990-2000, said she is primarily saddened by the overall turn away from objective reporting.

"I am so sad to see such bias in news reporting today (national news media) and a decline in the use of proper grammar, sentence construction, usage, and spelling," Bryant said. "I am afraid that idiocracy is real and has taken hold. I see the community newspaper of the future looking like and reading like a comic book."²²³

Another former copy editor, Ben Castle, from 1999-2009, said when he first arrived at *The Sun Herald*, the newspaper adhered to strict journalistic standards.

²²² James Jones, email interview with author, 18 March 2015.

²²³ Karen Bryant, email interview with author, 19 March 2015.

“Standards were high,” Castle said. “We existed for the benefit of the reader. It wasn’t perfect. Like any journalists, we faced the challenges of the day. But in hindsight, it looked great compared to what the future held.”²²⁴

While the life of a journalist was always one of uncertainty, it has become even more so in recent years, Castle said. “The reality is that electronic journalism has been much more of a deal breaker than TV ever could have been for newspapers,” he said. “It’s like the wild, wild west, and it is every journalist for himself.”

After several years of mostly unemployment and occasional newspaper jobs that lasted for a few months at a stretch, Castle finally landed at the Scripps’ Central Desk and at Driscoll Children’s Hospital in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Another *Sun Herald* reporter, Joey Bunch, arrived at *The Sun Herald* in March 2001 to work with his former editor from Mobile, new *Sun Herald* executive editor Stan Tiner. Initially taking on the casinos beat, Bunch eventually covered the statehouse toward the end of his 18-month tenure at the Biloxi paper.

After a brief time at the statehouse, Bunch was switched back to casinos and decided it was time to try for more stability elsewhere. He took a job in Denver.

Tim Boone, a business reporter, joined the staff of *The Sun Herald* in January 2000 only to quickly see a tremendous change.²²⁵

“Ownership didn’t change, but it seemed like things started to get cheaper and tighter during my time there,” Boone said. “Of course, we had a change in publishers and

²²⁴ Ben Castle, email interview with author, 18 March 2015.

²²⁵ Tim Boone, email interview with author, 21 April 2015.

it was a big drop off going from Roland Weeks to Ricky Matthews. Ricky showed his true colors by coming in and destroying *The Times Picayune*.”

Still, Boone said in his earliest days at *The Sun Herald* he noticed that the newspaper put an emphasis on doing good journalism, “and trying to tell stories in an interesting way.”²²⁶

“I remember having regular conversations with my editors,” Boone said. “How can we do this story in a different way?’ There was also a good sense of cooperation. People were willing to lend a hand to get a story done right.”

Boone said he noticed a stark difference in the editorial style of the two editors with whom he worked while at the newspaper.

“Stan [Tiner] is a lot more aggressive than Mike [Tonos],” he said. “He has a vision for what he wants to see and you have to provide it. It was pretty interesting. You would kind of hang loose for the first couple of hours a day because you never knew if Stan would come in and say, ‘I heard something about corn on the radio on the way in this morning. Corn prices are way down. I want a good corn story for tomorrow’s paper.’ We would go out and get a corn story.”

Boone received an offer from *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge in 2004 and left *The Sun Herald*. Since that time, he has kept in touch with some colleagues through social media and reads *The Sun Herald* newsfeed on Facebook and says he has noticed some disturbing trends in his old newspaper’s pages.

“It seems like there’s not much news in the paper,” he said. “I think the writing is still good, but the news hole has shrunk so much. I guess the new owners are cheap. This

²²⁶ Ibid.

sort of stuff worries me. You have to spend money to put out a good product. If you put out a newspaper without much news and run people off, people stop buying the newspaper. I hear talk about Sun Herald staffers having to do week-long unpaid furloughs and that depresses me.”²²⁷

Gina Dykeman, a copy editor for *The Sun Herald* beginning in January 1995 and eventually leaving in June 1998, said she noticed a distinct shift in the newsroom atmosphere during her off-and-on tenure at that newspaper. Dykeman served a nine-month stint at *The State* in Columbia, South Carolina from September 1996 till June 1997 when she returned to *The Sun Herald* newsroom.²²⁸

“Tonos seemed to be a lot less hands-on when I came back as newsroom systems specialist,” Dykeman said. “There seemed to be less of a ‘family’ atmosphere in the newsroom and that was reflected in the newspaper.”

During her first tenure at *The Sun Herald* as a copy editor, Dykeman said she had heard from friends who work for other newspaper chains that they “were already being treated like numbers rather than people and I was happy and proud to work for Knight-Ridder.” Her return to *The Sun Herald* newsroom in 1997 saw changes in the newsroom even though the owner had not yet changed.

Philosophical disagreements with the managing editor and operations manager led Dykeman to leave *The Sun Herald* for the second, and final time.

Willie Jefferson, copy intern editor for *The Sun Herald* from 1996-2000, also noticed a definite shift in editorial philosophy during his tenure, noting a bolder news

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Gina Dykeman, email interview with author, 19 March 2015.

philosophy in his earliest days. “There were more risks taken then,” Jefferson said. “The paper didn’t mind death threats.”²²⁹

Tammy Leytham, Jackson County Bureau editor from 2012 to 2014, saw a similar evolution in editorial philosophy at the newspaper during her time there, calling the level of change “immense.”²³⁰

“We went from being adamant about giving customers a print news product and swung to the opposite extreme of putting more resources into the digital product,” Leytham said. “The Jackson County edition lasted two years, then ended with the shift to digital.”

Leytham said her wish for *The Sun Herald* and other newspapers is to “keep doing great journalism”

“Don’t try to shift with every new trend because the technology changes so quickly,” she said. “Definitely keep up with new technology as a tool, but it should just be a tool to help better tell the story, which should be the ultimate goal.”

Sue Ann London, a staff typist for *The Sun Herald* from 2001-2003, noted that the newspaper has not devoted the resources to community news that it once did.²³¹

“I know that there is a lot less personnel to do the same amount of work,” London said. “I attend local City Council/Board of Aldermen as well as Board of Supervisor meetings and *The Sun Herald* is not always represented. They may not have enough folks to cover all local news due to the downsizing.”

²²⁹ Willie Jefferson, email interview with author, 11 April 2015.

²³⁰ Tammy Leytham, email interview with author, 19 March 2015.

²³¹ Sue Ann London, email interview with author, 19 March 2015.

Barb Lowell, one-time features editor for *The Sun Herald* from 2001-2004, recalled a greater emphasis on local reporting at the outset of her career at the newspaper.²³²

As time passed in *The Sun Herald* newsroom, Lowell said focus shifted from local reporting to winning awards and “pushing for national tie-ins.” In 2004, Lowell left *The Sun Herald* for a better paying job with Gannett. This gave her scope for comparison between Knight-Ridder and Gannett working philosophies.

“As opposed to Gannett, Knight-Ridder did indeed pay more attention to the community and fostering a sense of community within the newspaper itself,” Lowell said. “I met Tony Ridder a few times and he once told me, ‘You need to feel like people care about you at work.’”

Rudy Nowak, graphics/design editor for 16 years from 1998-2014, said his entry into *The Sun Herald* newsroom was during a time called “local-local,” in which local news took precedence over other news in the paper. While everyone agreed that strong local coverage was what would set the newspaper apart from their competition, Nowak said it was disconcerting to see their paper’s A-1 compared to others when a major national or international event was getting top play. Eventually, the local emphasis moved to a more traditional coverage model.²³³

“Big stories were given the front page because they were important, not because they were local news,” Nowak said.

²³² Barb Lowell, email interview with author, 18 March 2015.

²³³ Rudy Nowak, email interview with author, 23 April 2015.

When McClatchy bought Knight-Ridder, and *The Sun Herald* along with it, in 2006, Nowak said he noticed many changes occur as McClatchy ownership asserted itself.

“I do know the newsroom became much more aware of financial situations as McClatchy’s ownership lengthened,” Nowak said. “We saw departments folded – the composing room was phased out. A special publications department was closed. A big shift to online news first was endorsed. The copy desk moved from a copy desk to a production desk handling page design, copy editing, web editing, output of the paper to plate and publishing web material online. Whereas, under Knight-Ridder, many of those functions were handled by their own department.”

Disturbing changes that Nowak has watched unfold at his old newspaper since his departure in 2014 have included high turnover, featured content eliminated, less paper, less reporting, less editing and design work. While those changes may mean less cost to ownership, Nowak said the changes will also cost them their very value as a marketable news source.

“If newspapers lose the ability to inform, they have lost their worth,” Nowak said. “The in-depth stories that separated print from cable news have largely disappeared. No one wants to read those stories anymore. They want the condensed version. So, newspapers charge more for producing less.”

Serving as both Managing Editor and eventually Executive Editor of *The Sun Herald*, Mike Tonos spent a total of 24 years at the newspaper under both State Record Company and Knight Ridder. Beginning as a copy editor in 1973 for *The Daily Herald*, he moved over to *The South Mississippi Sun* in 1976 as copy desk chief. He eventually

became City Editor at *The South Mississippi Sun* before moving on to *The Vicksburg Evening Post* as Managing Editor. Three years later, Tonos returned to the Mississippi Gulf Coast as Managing Editor of the combined newspaper, *The Sun Herald*.²³⁴

Tonos is now Instructional Assistant Professor of Integrated Marketing Communication at the University of Mississippi.

“My overall concern is that the public definition of journalism is changing, and not necessarily for the better,” Tonos said. “Think Glen Beck, Rush Limbaugh, etc., as well as opinionators who use social media to espouse ideas through opinion pieces.” His fear is that the public will confuse this type of opinionated writing with fact-based journalism.

As for a potential solution to the current flawed business model for print journalism which leaves newspapers at the mercy of ravenous stockholders, Tonos offers the Tupelo, Miss., newspaper, *The Daily Journal*, as possible example of a way forward.

“I suggest the model found in Tupelo, having a community foundation as the sole shareholder, could work as well or better than most others I have seen or worked for,” Tonos said. While every ownership scenario has its benefits and drawbacks, Tonos said, “I have found Tupelo more to my liking – local control but not necessarily running at the whim of a family, no shareholder demands or expectations, and a strong connection to the community.” Another stipulation of the community foundation ownership is that the newspaper cannot be sold to outsiders.

Longtime *Sun Herald* publisher Roland Weeks came to the old *Daily Herald* in 1968 as a young man of 31 and retired from that job July 31, 2001. During those 33

²³⁴ Michael J. Tonos, email interview with author, 23 January 2014.

years, he saw many changes to his newspaper and its industry. He said he hopes that eventually, the forces tearing journalism asunder will abate.

“I hope that somewhere it bottoms out and leaves newspapers and journalism as an important force in the world,” Weeks said.²³⁵ “But whether that’s going to happen is the big question.” If the push to simply get more readers, viewers, and advertisers continues to dominate any concern about good journalism, “to me, that’s the fight,” Weeks said.

And who will fight for good journalism? Weeks asked the rhetorical question. “There are a lot of good people fighting for all kinds of wonderful things, but they’re marginalized,” he said. “They’re off making noises and having some degree of influence on people’s thinking, but they’re the academics. They’re the people who aren’t in the mainstream. So, if that’s where we’re headed, God bless us. We’re in big, big, BIG trouble.”

The overall mission of *The Sun Herald* didn’t have a lot of time for a change during Barin von Forreger’s tenure there as he joined the newspaper as an assistant sports editor and left it in just over a year, from 2002 and 2003. Yet, that snapshot in time was a newspaper with an editorial philosophy of local coverage over national, von Forreger said.²³⁶

“The newsroom was very diverse, with some by-the-book journalists and some rough-edged writers,” he said. “The mix was good, however, with very good reporting around the Coast.”

²³⁵ Roland Weeks, interview with author, Biloxi, Miss., 3 December 2013.

²³⁶ Barin Von Forreger, email interview with author, 22 March 2015.

After leaving the newspaper in 2003, von Forreger said he kept in touch with a few colleagues on social media but lost touch with the newspaper itself.

“I’ve lost touch with the paper, however, the decline of journalistic integrity (and respect from the public) has me worried about the next generation of journalists,” he said. “Print journalism is still the source for my news, but I lose faith in how news is delivered today with so many ‘fake’ news sources being used for information by the public.”

CHAPTER VI – CONCLUSION

When the founding fathers of the United States of America configured their government, they took into consideration not only how the government would be organized and run but also how it would be monitored through carefully considered checks and balances, one of the most important of these through the work of a free and unfettered press as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

While the First Amendment prohibits Congress making any law that would abridge freedom of speech or press or the right of the people to peaceably assemble to petition the government for a redress of grievances, it clearly intends to protect these essential democratic freedoms.

Yet, the evolution of America's Fourth Estate -- a once-powerful fourth branch of government designed to sit apart, yet maintain an all-important check on the other branches of power -- has taken it into unexpected tangents of commerce. With more and more emphasis placed on publicly-held corporations making large profits at the expense of quality journalism for the citizenry, the very function of the press in the 21st century seems to be altered to appeal to a lowest common denominator in readership and avaricious stockholders in ownership.

Given this environment, there are several key questions that must be posed.

How has news content changed after the rise of the internet?

The consensus of working journalists interviewed for this study expressed the belief that one influence of the internet has been to destabilize the business model for print journalism. Why pay for news content in a printed form when you can open a web browser and get it all for free? Naturally, when newspapers began to see the error of their

ways in publishing online content without access fees and began to establish paywalls to their content, it was too late. Consumers expected the online content for free and would click off of their website as soon as they encountered the paywall demanding a login.

Speaking on the evolution of paper-to-web content was former *Sun Herald* copy editor Karen Bryant. “I am so sad to see such bias in news reporting today (national news media) and a decline in the use of proper grammar, sentence construction, usage, spelling. I am afraid that the Idiocracy is real and has taken hold. I see the community newspaper of the future looking like and reading like a comic book,” Bryant said. “Rumors and innuendo floating around on social media and disreputable websites is not journalism.”²³⁷

In essence, given the choice between quality, ethical journalism that requires a fee and accessing less reliable “news” content online for free, consumers seem to be abandoning reputable journalism for the latter. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center study, about two-thirds of Americans continue to access news content via social media although they express concerns about its accuracy.²³⁸

Sun Herald journalists also believe the internet has changed news content overall. As stated by Cliff Kirkland, former sports editor for *The Sun Herald*, “Newspapers have failed, thus far, to remain focused on their core responsibility to serve their communities as the best source of news,” he said. “Instead, they have parroted the internet by

²³⁷ Karen Bryant, email interview with author, 19 March 2015.

²³⁸ Shearer, E., & Matsu, K. E. (2018, December 30). *News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2018*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: http://www.journalism.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2018/09/PJ_2018.09.10_social-media-news-FINAL.pdf

minimizing their news content in order to pander to celebrity and lifestyle fluff of negligible cultural or intellectual value.”²³⁹

Web-based journalism also promotes more sensational stories in search of more clicks on newspaper websites. Sharon Fitzhugh, digital projects editor for *The Sun Herald*, said that while there is still a desire to pursue important stories, the push for clicks seems to dominate.²⁴⁰

“Current philosophy pushes hard to pursue stories of interest to readers and to dig deeper,” Fitzhugh said. “However, I feel we are much more sensational in our story selection and placement. We are fighting for attention (sales) and clicks, so it’s often the case that when the latest child sex or porn story breaks, it goes to the top of the website and the front page.”

How has the work of journalists changed after the rise of the internet?

Journalists of *The Sun Herald* interviewed agree that time and resources to do quality reporting have been sacrificed to meet unrealistic profit margins for corporate owners. Emphasis has been placed on stories and imagery that generate hits and clicks on the newspaper website, rather than simply covering community news.

As former staffer Tim Boone observed, “It seems like there’s not much news in the paper,” he said. “This sort of stuff worries me. You have to spend money to put out a good product. If you put out a newspaper without much news and run people off, people stop buying the newspaper.”²⁴¹

²³⁹ Cliff Kirkland, email interview with author, 1 March 2015.

²⁴⁰ Sharon Fitzhugh, email interview with author, 1 March 2015.

²⁴¹ Boone interview.

While many reporters expressed a desire to see journalism thrive in a digital age, they admit that the digital business model does not yet support it. Former *Sun Herald* editor Kate Magandy Holzhauser pointed out that in the digital age, people assume they can get news “for free,” yet Holzhauser said, “It’s not free, whether they pay for the technology, the internet connection or the digital subscription. If they want reliable information, they should pay for it.” Otherwise, how will ethically, professionally obtained news be generated?²⁴²

What have been the major changes to print journalism under corporate ownership?

The consensus of responses from *Sun Herald* journalists point to smaller staffs, fewer resources for travel or professional training, less time for research and interviews, in essence, less people, time and resources to create strong, reliable news content.

As of January 2019, *The Sun Herald* fired their last remaining photojournalist.²⁴³

What have been the effects of these changes on print journalism content?

Fewer meaningful stories, substantially smaller editions of the print edition of the newspaper, falling circulations, fewer advertisers, lost jobs, much smaller newsrooms to cover local news leads to the eventual closure of newspapers.

In this hostile environment for newspapers, corporate owners are forced to cannibalize their newspapers for short-term profits to assuage stockholder pressure for big returns on their investments. This has been particularly disastrous for the McClatchy Company after taking on the Knight Ridder newspapers and the debt associated with them following the raiding of that company by its stockholders prior to sale to

²⁴² Holzhauser interview.

²⁴³ John Fitzhugh email interview January 10, 2019.

McClatchy. Consider the latest long-term stock chart for the McClatchy Company showing their stock close prices from 1988-January 2019.²⁴⁴

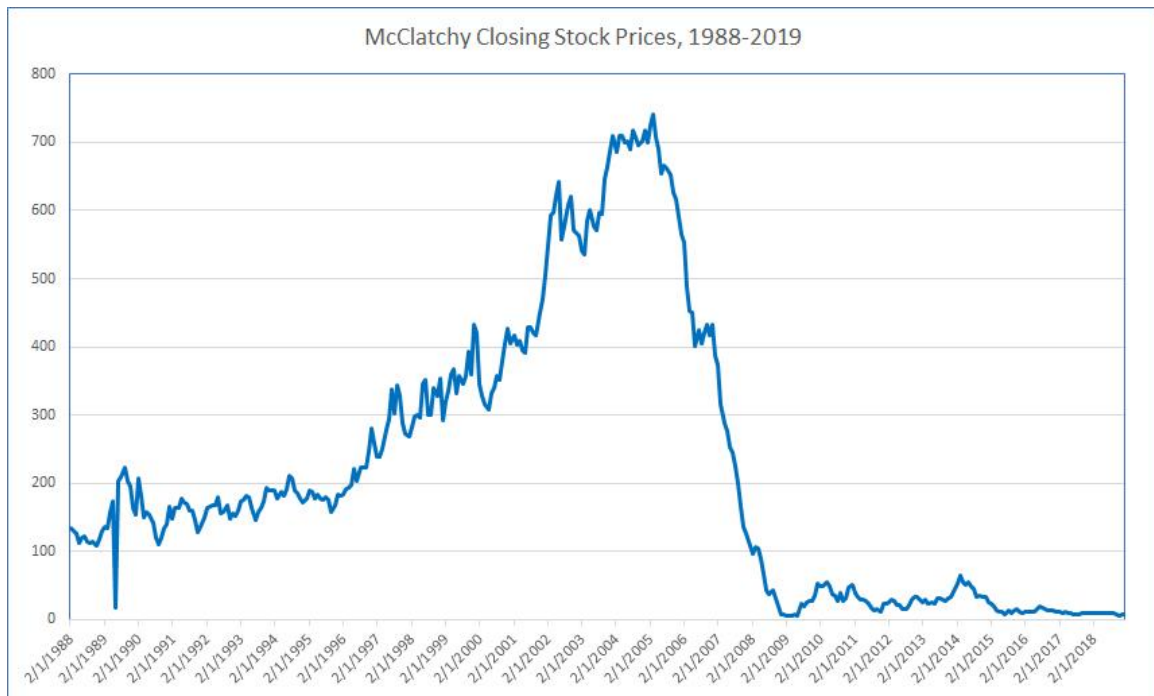


Figure 11. Long-term stock prices for McClatchy Company (MNI) reflecting the time period from 1988- January 2019. (NYSE)

The steep decline for McClatchy can be seen to begin in 2006 when they purchased Knight Ridder.

The subject of this research, *The Sun Herald* newspaper in Biloxi, Miss., has placed its physical plant up for sale and on Friday, January 4, 2019, “for sale” signs were erected on their property at 205 DeBuys Road in Gulfport. This prompted an outpouring of emotion on social media networks where photographs of the signs were posted.

²⁴⁴ New York Stock Exchange, Closing stock prices chart for McClatchy Company, 1988-2019.



Figure 12. “For Sale” signs appear on *Sun Herald* property at 205 DeBuys Road in Biloxi, Miss., on Friday, January 4, 2019.

Former *Sun Herald* photojournalist Tim Isbell created a Facebook post on his account with a photograph of the sign in front of his old newspaper and a reaction to the sight.²⁴⁵

When I see this building and For Sale sign, a wide range of emotions are brought forth. APPRECIATION – Although there are too many to mention, I am thankful to have worked with so many great journalists and friends. NOSTALGIA – The stories I can tell, and often do tell, will make you cry and laugh so hard that you do cry. HISTORY – During the 30-plus years I worked at *The Sun Herald*, we went from shooting only black and white film to color film to digital images. When I was Photo Editor, I wrote the proposal that had us switch from using film to going digital. In a

²⁴⁵ Tim Isbell, Facebook post, January 4, 2019, accessed at: https://www.facebook.com/tim.isbell.90/posts/2462307263784294?_tn__=K-R=K-R

small cluttered closet, there are thousands of different negatives ranging from Hurricane Camille to the late 1990s. From the late '90s to present day, we produced the same history, but with digital files of today. In this closet is the history of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. That closet is probably one of the most sacred and important locations on the Coast. LAUGHTER – I never knew an office area like the Sun Herald Photo Department could produce so much laughter. Vernon Matthews was often the culprit playing practical jokes or telling funny stories. GRATITUDE – If I had not worked at the Sun Herald, I wouldn't have a best friend like David Purdy and colleagues I respect. STRENGTH – Often called Fort Weeks (after Roland), this building survived numerous hurricanes, allowing us to cover such devastating storms like Hurricane Katrina. It seems it could survive any storm except the storm of corporate journalism. PRIDE – In this structure, meaningful projects such as the Dixie Mafia, my Vietnamese series, Katrina coverage, Sherry murders, my four-year Civil War series, and others were produced. Personally, this building, photo department and darkroom was where I developed film and printed pictures that ran in the pages of the Sun Herald. Images that I produced that come to mind are the Brett Favre Draft Day Jorts photo, photo pages about double amputee Micholas Miller, burn victim Johnny Carter, my Vietnamese project and others. This is where I did my best work as a journalist, as both a writer and photographer. ANGER – One can argue that this is just a “sign of the times.” Personally, I don't like this sign of the times. There is a lyric from a Chicago tune. It simply states “Don't know what you got until it's gone and I found out just a little too late.” This building deserves better. The people who devoted heart and soul to produce quality journalism deserve better. For

me, this building is more than a pile of concrete. It has a soul. SADNESS – It breaks my heart to see the building with such memories to have a For Sale sign in front of it. I guess this is life. EXPECTATION – To truly pay respect to this building and the people who worked there, I think there should be a historic marker placed on the property touting the Sun Herald as a place where a dedicated group of individuals covered and produced history. ONE FINAL IDEA – Before any sale, I would ask that the Sun Herald/Gulf Publishing sign remain on the property. It could be a way to honor all the good work produced at the Sun Herald. As an author, I always appreciate finding some reference to history or a reminder of what once was. Leaving the Sun Herald sign says, “This was where a great Pulitzer Prize winning newspaper was produced.”

Responses to this post brought out many former employees of the newspaper. Former publisher of *The Sun Herald* (following Roland Weeks) Ricky Mathews offered this comment on the post:²⁴⁶

“Such a wonderful tribute... it is sad. I grew up in that building. I met my wife there. And loved what it stood for... and, Tim, you were one of the best photojournalists I ever worked with. Wow. The work you did is still celebrated. I will never forget what that building meant for all employees after Katrina. It was the foundation of our family.”

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Roland Weeks also offered his thoughts:

“I shed a tear or two reading this beautiful tribute to *Sun Herald* employees. Stan and others warmed my heart by offering tributes that were positive and upbeat, in spite of the sadness that all of us are dealing with as a wonderful company slips away, and wonderful employees move on to other jobs in our world of change and challenge and, at the moment, confusion. I love all of you.”²⁴⁷

Paul Hampton, former politics reporter for *The Sun Herald*, offered a humorous recollection as if eulogizing the newspaper:

“I’ll never forget Roland, the publisher, and Chris Shecky Muldoon Goodwin, a fellow copy editor, on the top of that building trying to cover a hole with a tarp as Hurricane Georges bore down. I had a lot of fun at every newspaper I worked for, including those I tossed onto porches and roofs as a kid, but never more fun than I had at the *Sun Herald*.”²⁴⁸

Laurence Kesterson, a former staff photographer at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, had worked with *Sun Herald* staffers following Hurricane Katrina and described what had happened to his newspaper:

“The same thing happened to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* building in 2012. I used to pinch myself coming up the back steps and coming into that cavernous newsroom, described as a cathedral to journalism, every day thinking, “I actually work here!” My only saving grace was that they moved out of the building the day after I was laid off after 24 years. Savor the memories of what once was. The couple of weeks I spent

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

with your staff at the *Sun Herald* was one of the most profound and important highlights of my career. Y'all are all good people down there. It's only a building."²⁴⁹

David Tortorano, a former business writer for *The Sun Herald* commented on the sight of the for-sale sign on the newspaper lawn.

"It was an honor closing out my newspaper career at *The Sun Herald*, and it saddens me that the building is being sold. Nearly all the buildings where I once worked are gone, as are many of the dedicated journalists. It was a great ride. Let me tip my hat to all the great journalists I worked with during my long career at the Huntsville Times, Monterey Bay Publishing Company, United Press International, Pensacola News Journal, Northwest Florida Daily News, Mobile Press-Register and the Sun Herald."²⁵⁰

Stan Tiner, retired executive editor of *The Sun Herald* added his thoughts to the Facebook conversation:

"Thank you, Tim, for your beautiful and heartfelt testimony on the righteous work of those who have told the stories of the people and communities in South Mississippi for generations, for *The Daily Herald*, *The Sun*, and now *The Sun Herald*."²⁵¹

I was privileged to work with you and many others on your roster of names through many of those memorable chapters of *The Sun Herald's* gloried history.

Like you, I am sad to see the building sold, but *The Sun Herald* will forever live in the hearts and memories of those who are the heart and soul of the institution. And, I

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

hope remembered too by those who gained much from the public service journalism that was provided from within these hallowed walls.

But like the church, a newspaper is not the stone and mortar, or even the press, it is the people, the photographers, reporters, the ad staff, and all the others who made it live and breathe over the decades, and who, God-willing, will keep the truth, the news, the stories of the Coast always alive, long after the building is sold, and transformed into something else.

Finally, I pray, those who remain will be given the strength and capacity to fight on in the spirit that you have saluted, Tim, against the many hardships and obstacles that the digital age has arrayed against local journalists everywhere.

They need our support and encouragement as never before.”

Jean Prescott, former features writer for *The Sun Herald* also registered her thoughts on the sale of the old DeBuys Road property:

“I feel nothing but sadness when I look at this picture. The good times, the joy, the camaraderie, the excellent work, even simple “good fair journalism,” all of that died (or was executed) by greedy, small-minded people. What they’re doing is too little too late. Stumble into that Stockholm-syndrome glitch if it makes you feel better, just don’t wallow in it too long. It’s debilitating.”²⁵²

Another former *Sun Herald* staffer named Don Hammack added to Isbell’s listings of thoughts on the end of *The Sun Herald* at its traditional DeBuys Road facility:

²⁵² Ibid.

“Well written, Tim. I’ll add one more: COMMUNITY. Both inside that building and outside it, we were building communities. The employees who were inside performing the daily miracle telling the stories of the people outside living their lives, good and bad. That list of folks you mentioned were beloved colleagues who loved their neighbors enough to put in long hours to sell and design the ads, write the stories, take the pictures, put them on the page or in the internet, run the presses, deliver the papers, pay the bills, keep the building in shipshape, pay the employees and the million other things it took to make everything happen.”²⁵³

Former *Sun Herald* photojournalist John Fitzhugh commented on the post, then later posted that he’d been fired for making his comment:²⁵⁴

“Great words, Tim. The building has been on the market for a while, don’t know why they decided to put the signs outside now. Just another daily reminder of what a sad shell we have become. As I said earlier, it breaks my heart. We’re still trying to produce meaningful journalism. I guarantee that those of us that are left will continue to honor the tradition of quality journalism as long as we can.”

According to *The Sun Herald* itself in a story dated January 6 at 10:58 a.m., the company has been looking for a buyer and decided to place the for-sale signs on the property so that passing motorists could see that the facility was for sale.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ John Fitzhugh, Facebook post, January 5, 2019, accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/john.fitzhugh.9>.

²⁵⁵ Sun Herald Staff Reports, *he Sun Herald is making plans to leave its longtime building on DeBuys Road in Gulfport*,” 6 January 2019, Retrieved from The Sun Herald:

<https://www.sunherald.com/news/local/article223995180.html?fbclid=IwAR03GdXqlxCKzywYyVRzA1xv8MMSaBlglbSp1DDnH-fFtFQAeAFTsSHSAtk>

“We’re looking to move to more modern office space better suited to our digital mission,” said Blake Kaplan, *Sun Herald* general manager, and executive editor. No timetable for a move has been established as the paper must sell the current facility first. This sale is just another in a list of sales McClatchy has made of other newspaper properties, including *The Miami Herald* and *The Charlotte Observer* buildings.

While management at the newspaper touts forward-looking motivations for continued cuts to staff and sale of the newspaper plant, acknowledgement that the newspaper building had been for sale prior to the signs being posted on the newspaper lawn shows a certain desperation in hoping that casual drivers-by might notice the signs and have cause to purchase such a unique, multi-million-dollar property. That specially-designed building created for the express purpose of printing thousands of daily newspapers seems unlikely to easily adapt to another business. The press room in which the large, four-color press once stood, creates a hangar-like space ill-suited to most normal businesses except perhaps a commercial printer.

The Poynter Institute noted in August of 2014 that Digital First Media, the media corporation owned by the same hedge fund company behind MNG Enterprises (the organization attempting a 2019 hostile takeover of Gannett), added 51 newspaper plants to their growing list of newspaper properties for sale, bringing the full total of Digital First Media properties currently for sale to 70.²⁵⁶ Claiming to be “overburdened with underutilized properties,” Digital First is seeking to liquidate the long-time newspaper properties into cash for the company.

²⁵⁶ Andrew Beaujon, 19 August 2014, *Poynter*, “Digital First puts 51 newspaper buildings on the market,” <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2014/digital-first-puts-51-newspaper-buildings-on-the-market/>.

In fact, Digital First Media has a track record of buying newspapers, laying off employees, and then selling the plants in a new rendition of corporate raiding specifically attuned to the weakened newspaper industry. The hedge fund which owns Digital First Media, Alden Global Capital, has a series of affiliated real estate companies for that very purpose.²⁵⁷

Clearly, as long as America's Fourth Estate is left to the mercy of corporate raiders, the future of the democracy falls into question.

²⁵⁷ Jonathan O'Connell and Emma Brown, 11 February 2019, "A hedge fund's 'mercenary' strategy: Buy newspapers, slash jobs, sell the buildings," *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/a-hedge-funds-mercenary-strategy-buy-newspapers-slash-jobs-sell-the-buildings/2019/02/11/f2c0c78a-1f59-11e9-8e21-59a09ff1e2a1_story.html?utm_term=.7e6f5244bf3d.

APPENDIX A – Journalists Interviewed from *The Sun Herald*

The following journalists have been interviewed regarding their experiences and observations at *The Sun Herald*:

1. Tim Boone, Business Reporter, 2000-2004
2. Riva Brown, General Assignment Reporter, 1989-1995
3. Karen Bryant, Copy Editor, 1990-1995
4. Joey Bunch, Casino Reporter, 2001-2002
5. Ben Castle, Copy Editor, 1999-2009
6. Jimmy Creed, Sports Writer, 1989-1992
7. Ruth Ingram Cummins, Staff Writer, 1983-1986
8. Gina Dykeman, Copy Editor, 1995-1998
9. Ken Fink, General Assignment Reporter, 1989-2000
10. John Fitzhugh, Staff Photographer, 1987-current
11. Sharon Fitzhugh, Digital Projects Editor, 1981-current
12. Ruby Grace, Newsroom Staff Assistant, 1989-2009
13. Paul Hampton, Politics Editor, 1989-current
14. Jimmy Hannaford, Jackson County Bureau Reporter/Photographer, 1989-2006
15. Kate Magandy Holzhauser, Digital Editor, 1985-1987, 1992-current
16. Tim Isbell, Staff Photographer, 1984-current
17. Alice Jackson, General Assignment Reporter, 1977-1984, 1992-1999
18. Willie Jefferson, Copy Editor, 1996-2001
19. James Jones, Sports Editor, 1992-current
20. Cliff Kirkland, Sports Editor, 1975-1989

21. Tammy Leytham, Jackson County Editor, 2012-2014
22. Sue Ann London, Staff Typist, 2001-2003
23. Barb Lowell, Features Editor, 2001-2004
24. Rudy Nowak, Senior Graphic Artist, 1998-2014
25. David Purdy, Staff Photographer, 1985-2008
26. Terri Queen, Copy Editor, 1985-2005
27. Sherry Rankin, Copy Editor, 1990-2001
28. Eugene Stockstill, Reporter, 1996-2001
29. Lea Ivey Stone, Copy Editor, 1981-1985
30. Stan Tiner, Executive Editor, 2000-2015
31. Mike Tonos, Managing and Executive Editor, 1973-1976, 1986-2000
32. Amy Tyler Mair, General Assignment Reporter, 1995-1997
33. Roland Weeks, General Manager, 1986-2000

APPENDIX B - Interview Questions

Interview questions for every current and former *Sun Herald* journalist included:

1. When did you first begin work for *The Daily Herald*, *The South Mississippi Sun* or *The Sun Herald*?
2. What was your first position with the newspaper?
3. Who owned the newspaper when you first began working for it?
4. Who was executive editor at that time?
5. Do you recall a specific editorial philosophy at the newspaper during this time?
6. Do you have any favorite recollections of the type of journalism practiced at that time? Any anecdotes that illustrate the type of working environment in the newsroom in your early career there?
7. How many different executive editors did you work for during your tenure at the newspaper?
8. Did the editorial philosophy seem to change much with the changing editors?
9. Did the newspaper's ownership change during your tenure, and did you notice any changes in philosophy or operational methods following changes of ownership?
10. Of the different owners, do any stand out in your memory as best promoting the newspaper's role as a community newspaper and fulfilling the newspaper's role as part of the Fourth Estate? If so, who and why?
11. How long was your tenure with the newspaper?
12. What was your final position with the paper?

13. Why did you leave the newspaper?
14. Do you keep in touch with former colleagues at the newspaper?
15. Do you try to stay informed about the current operation of the newspaper? Do you still maintain an interest in its overall viability and that of print journalism overall?
16. If yes, how do you perceive the changes in the newspaper since your departure? How do you see these changes influencing the future of the newspaper?
17. If you could make changes in the way the newspaper currently operates, what would those changes be and why would you want to make them?
18. Do you have personal observations about the viability of journalism in general and print journalism in particular in the year 2015?

APPENDIX C – Full Interview Responses

Tim Boone

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I started working for *The Sun Herald* in January 2000.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

I was a business reporter.

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Not really. I know they put an emphasis on doing good journalism and trying to tell stories in an interesting way.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

We were always trying to do things in an interesting and different way. I remember having regular conversations with my editors “How can we do this story in a different way?” There was also a good sense of cooperation. People were willing to lend a hand to get a story done right.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

We were always trying to do things in an interesting and different way. I remember having regular conversations with my editors “How can we do this story in a different way?” There was also a good sense of cooperation. People were willing to lend a hand to get a story done right.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

We were always trying to do things in an interesting and different way. I remember having regular conversations with my editors “How can we do this story in a different way?” There was also a good sense of cooperation. People were willing to lend a hand to get a story done right.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Ownership didn't change, but it seemed like things started to get cheaper and tighter during my time there. Of course, we had a change in publishers and it was a big drop off going from Roland Weeks to Ricky Mathews. Ricky showed his true colors by coming in and destroying the Times-Picayune.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

I worked under the same owners.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

A little over 4 ½ years. I left in July 2004.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Still a business reporter

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I wasn't making much money, for one. The biggest factor is I got a job offer from The Advocate in Baton Rouge and I had wanted to move back to Baton Rouge for years and years.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

I wasn't making much money, for one. The biggest factor is I got a job offer from The Advocate in Baton Rouge and I had wanted to move back to Baton Rouge for years and years.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Sort of. I usually pick up a copy of *The Sun Herald* when I visit the Coast. And I follow the newspaper on Facebook, so news is always popping up in my feed. I'm glad to see that the people that are still there are working and doing a good job.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

It seems like there's not much news in the paper. I think the writing is still good, but the news hole has shrunk so much. I guess the new owners are cheap. This sort of stuff worries me. You have to spend money to put out a good product. If you put out a newspaper without much news and run people off, people stop buying the newspaper. I hear talk about Sun Herald staffers having to do week-long unpaid furloughs and that depresses me.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Spend some money and value your experienced people! Give the readers news to read. Boast about the good local content you are doing that no one else is providing. Don't listen to the bean counters who work for the big chains and give suggestions about shrinking the news hole and cutting staff. Those people don't do anything but make a newspaper worse. They are WORTHLESS. Instead of paying six-figure and above

salaries to the idiots in management at McClatchy or Gannett put a chunk of that money toward good reporters for the local newspapers.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I'm VERY lucky in that I currently work for a newspaper that is owned by a local businessman with deep pockets. I think local ownership is the only way print journalism can survive in 2015. The days of these publicly traded chains owning newspapers – those are gone. They have to do too much to make investors happy and they end up destroying the quality of the newspaper. Print journalism is in a tough spot right now – we're like a patient who is just getting over having a massive heart attack. Too many companies are doing things that make the patient worse – trimming the amount of local news content, getting rid of veteran staffers, not doing investigative reporting, stopping printing the newspaper several days a week, getting rid of the AP. Those are awful, awful negative steps. Newspapers need to concentrate on what they do best – a strong local focus. Be a local watchdog on state and local government, let people know what is going on with local businesses and schools and edit wire content to play up news of local interest.

Riva Brown

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I began working at *The Sun Herald* as an intern in the summer of 1989. I also worked there during the summers and school breaks in 1990 and 1991. I began working there full time in September 1993.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Intern then general assignment reporter.

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

no

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

No favorite recollections. I recall the working environment as being collegial and family-like. Everyone seemed willing to help each other with background information on stories.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Two: Pic Firmin and Mike Tonos

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Do not recall.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Do not recall.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Not that I recall.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

On paper, I worked there full-time between 1993 and 1997. In reality, I worked there full time consistently between September 1993-July 1994. I came back around 1995 to try to work, but it did not work out.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Biloxi City Hall reporter

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Crime victim on newspaper property.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Occasionally via social media.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

No. Not really.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

n/a

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

No changes worth noting

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Journalism and news as I was taught no longer exists. When I left a newspaper in 2009, we no longer produced news; we compiled information and created content, which is not the same as news.

Karen Bryant

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

1990

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

proofreader, copy desk

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

I don't recall

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Journalism at that time did not tolerate bias. I loved the camaraderie in the newsroom and the clever wit that my co-workers displayed.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

2 - Mike Tonos and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Well, yes. With Stan Tiner, the focus seemed more on pleasing him.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I don't think the ownership changed.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Honestly, no recollection

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Off and on, I guess about five years, but not sure at all.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

I never left the copy desk. Was corralled briefly to serve as Roland Weeks' secretary, but that lasted about 2 weeks. Long enough for me to scream, "Get me outta here before I send him and me both to heck in a handbasket!"

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Other job opportunities.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes!

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I don't subscribe, but I do care about the people who work there and about journalism in all media.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

The biggest influence I see is technology. I think we are losing our print media altogether and that the paperless society that's been bandied about for years now is taking shape.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Oh, Lord, I don't know. I think maybe to be vital as a community paper, I might make a very strong focus on community news, even bringing back some of the sections from yesteryear because I think folks are nostalgic for the way things used to be. And as far as global news is concerned, that's available instantly online 24/7. I love this little thing I saw in a meme. It said that if a person from the 1970s visited us today, we'd have

to tell him, “I have this device in my pocket that contains all the information known to mankind since the beginning of time. I use it to look at pictures of cats and get into arguments with total strangers.”

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I am so sad to see such bias in news reporting today (national news media) and a decline in the use of proper grammar, sentence construction, usage, spelling. I am afraid that Idiocracy is real and has taken hold. I see the community newspaper of the future looking like and reading like a comic book.

Joey Bunch

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

March 2001

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Casino Reporter

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

McClatchy and Satan

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Stan Tiner

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Not really. Stan and Ricky Matthews were all about selling papers, but I don't recall a guiding philosophy.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Ricky and Stan were convinced WLOX was losing local commercials over the nudity on "NYPD Blue." I had to spend a week writing down the number of local commercials on TV stations in Mobile and New Orleans. There was no difference.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

one

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I only had Stan. His philosophy was much different when I worked for him in Mobile. He was willing to invest in quality, long-form journalism in Mobile; not as much in Biloxi.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

no

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

I think I left just before these changes really started.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

18 months

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Statehouse reporter, but I was transitioning back to casinos

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

They gave me the statehouse job, I invested a lot in that beat and then Stan decided he wanted to give that job to a friend's son, who had no experience and quit before his first session was over. I found out after he started that that was the plan all along -- for me to hold the job for him. Plus, Denver has been a great move for me, so I was lucky I got screwed.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yep. Mostly via Facebook

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Print journalism yes, *The Sun Herald* no.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I can't really judge. It seems much the same, but I don't really talk to people who are still actively working there. Most have moved on.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Focus on quality and not clicks since 1996.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Focus on quality and not clicks.

Ben Castle

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

May 1999

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Copy Editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Do you recall a specific editorial philosophy at the newspaper during this time?

Standards were high. We existed for the benefit of the reader.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

It wasn't perfect. Like any journalists, we faced the challenges of the day. But in hindsight, it looked great compared to what the future held.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not applicable

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Definitely Knight-Ridder. They were a class act or seemed to be from afar.

Perhaps it was just the economic reality of the times, but I doubt it.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

2 months shy of 10 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Slot Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Why did you leave the paper? I survived the first two rounds of cutbacks, but not the third, during the Great Recession. I was laid off in March 2009.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Of course. When you are in the trenches, you remain in touch with those who help you survive each day.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Print journalism, yes, since I am fortunate (or perhaps unfortunate enough) to still be in the newspaper business. *The Sun Herald*? Not so much (to use one of Stan Tiner's favorite phrases). I don't wish them ill will, but I have no reason to cheer them on (other than to ensure my friends there still have a job). At the going away gathering for the 3 newsroom employees who were laid off in March 2009, my immediate supervisor told those gathered that I was their best copy editor. If so, why was I laid off while lesser copy editors kept their job? Is that bitter? Perhaps, although I try not to be. I was unemployed for almost two years and laid off at two different newspapers (The Evil Empire, aka Gannett, hired me at The Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser but laid me off after two and a half months in November 2010) before I secured a position in January 2011 at Scripps' Central Desk in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Not applicable

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I jokingly refer to myself as a “vagabond journalist,” but the title is not a joke. Journalists always have had to struggle; sadly, it’s one of the byproducts of the profession --- and probably the reason so many leave for “cushier” jobs. The reality is that electronic journalism has been much more of a deal-breaker than TV ever could have been for newspapers. It is the Wild, Wild West, and it is every journalist for himself. I just pray that I will be able to retire from a profession I have dedicated myself to. I may not. There is a phrase I like: “There will always be an England.” I would like to say there always will be a newspaper, but it may not be recognizable to those who toiled in its newsrooms for so long. I work for what is considered the wave of the future: a centralized copy desk. Based in Corpus Christi, we copy edit and design all Scripps’ newspapers west of the Mississippi River (4 in Texas and 3 on the West Coast). But even that is changing. Scripps, in its infinite wisdom, last year decided to hold on to its profit-making TV and radio stations and sell off the newspapers to fend for themselves. The deal is expected to go through officially in April. It will be a brave new world for us. Scripps officials say it is a good thing; some people think the newspapers were thrown to the wolves. That is the reality of journalism 2015: Every entity for itself. Sad but true. Even so, though, there always will be dedicated journalists who want to make the world a better place; their

world, though different from ours, I hope will be a good one. “Live long and prosper,”
newspapers. Leonard Nimoy may be dead, but you aren’t.

Jimmy Creed

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

July 1989

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

sports writer

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

There was definitely a philosophy of going out and digging to find the news as evidenced by the special project reporting in the Sherry murders, Dixie Mafia, etc. that had been going on even before I got there and really ramped up after the revelation that Biloxi Mayor Pete Halat was involved as well. I would definitely call it a newsroom here good, old-fashioned, hard-nosed journalism was practiced.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

What I mentioned above about how the Sherry murders/Dixie Mafia/Pete Halat story was reported will always stay with me, especially the work of Gene Swearingen and Anita Lee. I have no doubt it was the finest example of depth reporting I saw in all my time in the newspaper business.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

One

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

n/a

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

no

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

n/a

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

3 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

sports writer

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I left to become editor of the Saints Digest in New Orleans.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

a few

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I do not keep any touch with any of my old colleagues specifically to stay informed about *The Sun Herald* but I do maintain an interest in its overall viability. Unfortunately I believe the viability of *The Sun Herald*, like newspapers in general, is seriously waning, and in the case of *The Sun Herald* I believe that a big part of that is because someone has been allowed to take what was once one of the finest newspapers I have ever seen much less worked for and turn it into something that resembles the Sunday comics page.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

The changes have turned *The Sun Herald* into a laughingstock within the journalism community and, more importantly, within the Gulf Coast community as well. The few people I know who still take the paper on a daily often tell me they don't feel like they get their money's worth for what they pay because it has very little news in it anymore. Couple that with the fact that the physical size of the paper is smaller and that it has a terrible look, and I would venture a guess that if it's allowed to continue on this course the future is bleak.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I would want to go back to the days when journalists were concerned first and foremost about journalism and getting the story right in print and didn't have to worry about Twitting or getting something posted on Facebook or the website. So, I would say that if I could make the changes I'd like to make to *The Sun Herald*, I'd try to bring back some of the strong journalists, excellent writers, page designers and editors from back in the day and tell them to fix the problem the best way they know how. I would want to do that because I know that the long list of people I knew and worked with and learned to respect so much would put out a much better product than what is put out today.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I think all "journalism" today is a joke and print journalism, in particular, is a quickly dying art form. Everyone is so worried about having a Facebook presence and having their reporters and photographers post to Twitter and Instagram and boosting their numbers on their websites that they've quickly lost sight of how to be journalists. We

have “journalists” coming out of some of the most widely respected journalism schools in the country who can’t write or at least can only write something as long as it doesn’t exceed 140 characters, don’t know how develop and cultivate sources and don’t know how to get out and dig for stories on a regular basis. If they don’t have a meeting to cover or a story assignment their editor gives them, they don’t know what to do. I just recently left a position as the managing editor of a six-day-a-week daily in Alabama after only 11 months in the job because I got tired of having to coddle a staff of youngsters who didn’t know what they were doing and didn’t want to learn and bunch of old-timers who were once good at what they did but had long since lost their edge and had no desire to get it back. I had reporters who had no qualms with using anonymous sources in stories on a regular basis, not because they had to but because they were just too lazy or too inexperienced to know how to get the sources to go on the record. And it didn’t bother them that they were seriously lacking in that important area of their job. It was also no big deal to them to turn in stories with typos, AP style errors and even factual errors. In the end, the experience soured me so much that for the first time in my life I walked away from a full-time position with a steady paycheck and insurance and went into business for myself as a self-employed PR/marketing person because I was so disgusted by what passes for print journalism these days. At one time in my life, I loved the newspaper business. I ate, slept and breathed sportswriting. I thrilled to opening the paper every day and seeing my byline and those of other colleagues I respected. I loved working with photographers and designers to put together great-looking pages and packages, but I don’t love it anymore because the journalism profession is not what it was, and I don’t believe it ever will be again. I walked away, and I don’t have any desire to ever go back.

Ruth Ingram Cummins

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

August 1983

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Staff writer, covering Harrison County government and courts

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

It was owned by the State-Record Co. when I got there, and I believe that company was purchased by Knight-Ridder right as I was leaving. I definitely noticed Knight-Ridder's purchase by the McClatchy newspaper group in 2006.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Nothing other than there was excellent interest in covering the rural areas of Harrison, Hancock and Jackson /counties in addition to local communities. That doesn't happen much anymore, unless there's something famous or striking about a rural area – the Mississippi Delta, for example. The paper at the time did put emphasis on local-local news, much of it institutional, but a lot of it what readers actually wanted.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

When I compare it to the pace of the newsrooms I worked in post-Herald, I remember it as very slow, and quite honestly, a place where some reporters took a long time to do their work. The reporters at the time who were more highly trained tended not to stay. There were a good number of staffers who were born and raised on the Coast, some with a good bit of talent and institutional knowledge, and some who were

deadweight personalities. I look back, though, and remember a lack of urgency in covering the news – something I'm sure I thought was just fine when I was there, but later looked back at and wondered why it was tolerated. But, there were plenty of fun moments and warm memories of my co-workers. I remember that we had a Charles Chips can or two in the newsroom, and the Charles Chips delivery man would come periodically to fill them, and we'd share the cost. We also had a birthday club in which we'd put in money each month to pay for a personal pan pizza at the nearby Pizza Hut for the birthday boy or girl. Those type activities really built camaraderie and memories. I remember us weathering Hurricane Elena as a staff, and the long days and nights of work afterward. There were plenty of other memories that were bad or downright tragic, and that you'll inevitably collect in the drama of a newsroom. But overall, I loved my time at the Sun and Daily Herald because probably partially lost on me, I was covering some of the most historic moments in Gulf Coast crime and in the inner workings of the Dixie Mafia. I was in the thick of that, and it really only fully dawned on me after I left that I could have even been in danger if my reporting had been seen by some camps as more meddling than it was.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Really, I think it was just Pic. I remember – if I am correct – that Lloyd Gray and Mike Tonos were managing editors, and Mike Ellzey and Marie Harris were city editors. Tim Krien also was one of the editors; I forget which level. But let me say that Lloyd and Mike had a huge impact on my formation as a journalist. Lloyd taught me that news should be covered with care and with integrity. He was, and is, a Godly man and very, very intelligent, and he challenged me there every day. Mike taught me to develop a zest

for the news and the thrill of the hunt, and he was the first editor I had who was really deadline driven. How fortunate I was at age 22 or so to have Lloyd and Mike as mentors. If not for them, I wouldn't have been as much of a resource as I was for my next stops, and to this day, they continue to influence me.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not so much as it applied to coverage of Coast news. It seemed to grow and expand during the three years I was there, especially with the advent of the closed-circuit news broadcasts we did, hosted for the large part by Mike Lacy. We were ahead of our time and probably didn't realize by just how much, seeing that newsrooms today are video driven. I got bitten by the TV bug then, and I realized how comfortable I was speaking on camera. It was a great venture, and it helped developed journalists like myself on the spot, doing new and unexpected things.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

The paper was purchased by Knight-Ridder literally as I was leaving, so I wasn't there to gauge those initial changes. We were encouraged to thoroughly cover our community. Back then, there wasn't the effort to "localize" national or international news, which meant your local community got some great coverage. I spent a lot of my time in the state and federal courts, and we absolutely were encouraged to stand up for all access that the law allowed. Had I not been such a cub reporter, I could have done a better job in sensing just when an access issue was coming down the pike, either in courts or city/county government. But other reporters, such as Alice Jackson, were old hands there and kept public officials well in check, and served as role models to me. Also, editors and reporters who were raised on the coast, or who had been there many years,

gave me needed guidance on the inner workings and corruption of local political bodies, which helped me cover them and realize that watchdog reporting was needed. Knight-Ridder was literally coming in as I was leaving, so I wasn't there to gauge those initial changes.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

All I can really speak for is my time at the paper, and I certainly think that we were encouraged to thoroughly cover our community. Back then, there wasn't the effort to "localize" national or international news, which meant your local community got some great coverage. I spent a lot of my time in the state and federal courts, and we absolutely were encouraged to stand up for all access that the law allowed. Had I not been such a cub reporter, I could have done a better job in sensing just when an access issue was coming down the pike, either in courts or city/county government. But other reporters, such as Alice Jackson, were old hands there and kept public officials well in check, and served as role models to me. Also, editors and reporters who were raised on the coast, or who had been there many years, gave me needed guidance on the inner workings and corruption of local political bodies, which helped me cover them and realize that watchdog reporting was needed.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Just three years, but it was three wonderful years.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

I was the reporter covering Biloxi city hall and state/federal courts. I have to say I considered it the best beat on the planet.

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

My husband's father died, leaving his mom to raise an elementary-schooler. We needed to get back to the Vicksburg area and help raise her. Within a week, totally unsolicited, I got a call asking me to come work for the Jackson Daily News, and my husband got a call out of the blue asking him to come work for Vicksburg Medical Center. That did it – that and my salary at the JDN being almost double what I was getting at the Sun-Herald. We weren't looking to leave, but between my husband's father's death and two jobs reaching out and tweaking us on the noses, we made the move.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes! Facebook is an awesome thing and really does help to keep friendships warm and ongoing. My family for many, many years vacationed with the family of former Herald staffer Teresa Holmes Taylor, and to this day, we remain close and attend each other's family functions, weddings, and sadly, some funerals. We cherish Teresa and her husband Kevin, and there are certainly others we keep up with and in the wonderful world of media, run into. And, our journalism world can be wonderfully small. My publisher at the Sun-Herald was Roland Weeks. Roland's son, also named Roland, came to work at The Clarion-Ledger for a time as advertising director, and I have gotten to know Roland Sr.'s wife, Sharon, through nonprofit work we've done together. It's been a pleasure knowing so many folks who have come and gone from the Sun-Herald who have crossed my path.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I read the Sun-Herald online and have admired it from afar for many years. It has kicked ass on a lot of Coast news of statewide importance that “Jackson” just did not care to cover, or just totally missed. Its front page design, before other papers in the state, experimented with just two or three stories per front, maybe even two. Its reporting expertise has become much more sophisticated and less institutional through the years, and I daresay, the productivity expectations of reporters are way different than in 1986.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I think I answered this one in question 15.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Truly, I can't accurately comment here because I don't read the paper on a daily basis or often enough to know its current culture. I can say, though, what I wish for the Sun-Herald and any paper, which is: Know who all your readers are, and don't cater to some and deliberately write off the others. Know what your readers want you to write and report, and don't be so audacious or ridiculous as to decide for them what they want out of their print newspaper.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Print is still alive and will be until individual chains kill it off. Many journalists very much want to practice true print journalism, but of course, it's getting harder by the day. The face of journalism has necessarily changed. I mourn the loss of so much reporting, writing, and editing. I mourn the waning appreciation for, and use of, newspaper photography. The really good publications will use all the tools – social

media, video, and web - and still produce good journalism. Sadly, a lot of the veteran, hard-core readers are being lost, forgotten or ignored. The thing about the last 10 years that has really thrilled me is the ability to keep a newspaper's website a living, breathing conduit of breaking news, 24/7, in any circumstances, hurricane, war, whatever. I just hope the news component of that technological wonder not only survives but thrives.

Gina Dykeman

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

January 1995

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

copy editor/designer

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Not really

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

As the A-1 designer, I met every afternoon with Tonos, Andrea, the B-1 designer (usually Derek Johnson), and Judy Johnson to “sketch out” our ideas for the pages. We talked about not only what the stories were about but also the potential impact of the stories on readers and how best to attract the readers to the stories.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Tonos was the only executive editor I worked with; however, I worked with two different managing editors, Andrea Yeager when I was a copy editor/designer and Dorothy Wilson when I was newsroom systems specialist.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Tonos seemed to be a lot less hands-on when I came back as newsroom systems specialist. There seemed to be less of a “family” atmosphere in the newsroom and that was reflected in the newspaper.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

The ownership didn’t change during/between my two tenures at *The Sun Herald*, but some newsroom and non-newsroom managers did and the operational philosophy/methods did, too.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Having worked for only one owner, I can’t speak to what the other owners did/didn’t do. I can say, when I was at *The Sun Herald* as a copy editor/designer, I heard from friends in the industry who were working for Gannett and other companies and were already being treated like numbers rather than people and I was happy and proud to work for Knight-Ridder. That seemed to have changed when I returned from working at The State. I don’t know whether or not the new philosophy was being passed down from corporate, but it was definitely present in the managing editor’s and operations manager’s offices.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

21 months, the first time (January 1995-September 1996)

12 months, the second time (June 1997-June 1998)

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Newsroom Systems Specialist

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

First time: Opportunity to be a designer at The State, a sister newspaper in Columbia, S.C.

Second time: Philosophical disagreements with the managing editor and operations manager.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, especially, via FaceBook.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

After my second/final departure, even though I have family living only a mile away from *The Sun Herald*, I didn't want to walk into the door again as long as the managing editor and operations manager were still working at the newspaper. Yes.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

While I haven't actively kept up with day-to-day happenings at *The Sun Herald*, it was great to see how everyone stepped up and performed before, during, and after Katrina. It's been disheartening as an occasional reader to see how management's philosophy seems to have changed since Knight-Ridder sold the newspaper because they seem to be following the industry's philosophy of doing less with fewer people.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I haven't kept in touch enough to answer this.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Journalism needs to take editorial comments/agendas back to the editorial pages/segments and/or label them as such and return to what journalists in the past did it:

stick to the facts and let the reader/viewer figure out how he/she feels about them. And **GET THE FACTS RIGHT!** Additionally, to re-engage readers print journalism needs to get back to community news – stories not found the internet or other nation/world media outlets – and do it better than the blogger down the street.

Ken Fink

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I Started at *The Sun Herald* in 1989, working in the Ocean Springs Bureau.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

I wrote news, features, and columns for the weekly Ocean Springs supplement (on a long-ago- obsolete Compugraphic system).

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder owned it at that time.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

An old crusty guy named Pic Firmin. Loved the man.

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Under Knight-Ridder, it was very community oriented. Readers appreciated that and it was effective. Accuracy, objectivity, and relativity were important.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

The paper was far from that of a huge metro-style paper, but much larger than that of a common weekly or smaller daily. Coverage ranged from the Vancleave girl who won a pig contest at the county fair, to the arrest, subsequent trial and conviction of Biloxi's mayor. We also had "room" to write. Space was never a giant issue. I was allowed to spend about a month (with a photog) following a woman up to and through a kidney transplant surgery in New Orleans. I believe with jumps, sidebars, and teasers, it took up much of a Sunday issue. Writers, photographers, and editors worked closely to produce a very professional product.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Pic Firmin, Michael Tonos, and Stan Tiner. Dorothy Wilson may have served as an interim between Tonos and Tiner.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Firmin and Tonos seemed to have a great grasp on the community the paper served. Not so under Tiner. In fact, and in my opinion, readership and popularity seemed to decline at that point. The final editor was more concerned with the petty than the poignant.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

It went from Knight-Ridder to McClatchy. I didn't notice very much operational change. Some personnel changed, and as far as I'm concerned, it was negative.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Knight-Ridder truly understood community journalism. I did some pretty "off-the-wall" columns and features and it was all warmly accepted by local management, ownership and the community as evidenced by numerous awards. We were allowed to "stretch our legs" as much as needed under Knight-Ridder.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I began in March 1989 and I was among the mass exodus in 2000. Interestingly, the community noticed the changes, and in a negative way.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

It began and ended writing several weekly columns and daily features, intermixed with the occasional capital murder trial, bank robberies, and coverage of city and county governments.

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

They left on their own, were laid off, or fired. In my case... Well, it's a complicated story. But the excuse they used would not have even been a factor in the earlier years. Only the players and manipulators remained behind and I'm not speaking of sports or photogs.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Almost all could care less for today's Sun Herald. It is no longer the newspaper I once worked for and loved so much. Print journalism is fast dying. *The Sun Herald* is already dead. I had particular admiration for all of the photogs I worked with. They were very dedicated, very talented and on assignment, they did their job and I did mind. Most communication has been through social media because many of us are so scattered now. Fortunately, I did have some great editors: Firmin, Duffey, Creel, Lacy. Best group of people I have ever worked with.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I could care less for today's Sun Herald. It is no longer the newspaper I once worked for and loved so much. Print journalism is fast dying. *The Sun Herald* is already dead.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

n/a

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Go back to the operational methods of the 90s and before. Real people, real news, community appreciation.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Print journalism continues to wilt and wither, and with the latest “cyber-based” generation, it will collapse. Journalism in general, particularly broadcast and cable has become absolutely politically divisive and the mindset seems to have changed, from objectivity to blatant left/right, liberal/conservative, republican/democrat. Frankly, I find that quite sickening. In all, Edward R. Murrow would not only be spinning in his grave, but he would also be crying.

John Fitzhugh

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

1987

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

staff photographer

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Strong news coverage. Back then we were a full paper with a full features staff and sports staff, so we covered a wider variety of things than now.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I remember the coverage of the Sherry murders and the Dixie Mafia. To me, that characterized the type of good journalism we were capable of. Any anecdotes that illustrate the type of working environment in the newsroom in your early career there? There was definitely a camaraderie among the staffers back then. We were all people who were passionate about journalism, we worked well together, but we spent time together off hours as well.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

three - Pic Firmin, Mike Tonos, and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

More so with Tiner, while he likes to think of himself as a hard-hitting journalist, he is very conservative, in my opinion, he doesn't take chances.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, from Knight-Ridder to McClatchy. I always felt like KR didn't care about us because we were a small paper, that was reflected by our being stuck with old software and hardware. With McClatchy, I think everybody suffered because they have been under a huge financial burden since they bought KR. Still the feeling of the smaller papers don't get the respect of the larger papers is still there.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Hard to see the owner's role in that.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

27 years and counting

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Senior Photographer

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

still there

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Some. Former Sun Herald employees are some of the happiest people I know.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

You have to stay aware. You can see what is happening locally with our layoffs, and we follow what is happening at other McClatchy papers, and the industry as a whole. The trend is toward regional production centers and expecting people to have more skill

sets. Keeping up with digital trends (social media, video) is a must. It is clear that the industry has moved toward digital over print, you have to go with it or step aside.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

see above

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

The thing that frustrates me the most is what I perceive as corporate greed killing the industry. I will never understand why corporations that own newspapers continue to have profit expectations that are clearly beyond reality. I have a dream of newspapers owned by not-for-profit corporations, or at least privately-owned companies that don't have to answer to never-ending demands of increased profits by stockholders.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Let's face it, print journalism is an anachronism. there are still enough print readers (myself included) that we need to serve them, but we have to find a way to be viable in the modern market. I have a firm belief that there will always be a role for strong, trustworthy, local journalism, regardless of if it is in print or online.

Sharon Fitzhugh

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

1981 – carrier

1984 – Composing/news paste-up/photom operator

1988 – News/Sports copy editor (the first job in the newsroom, after copy editing internship the summer of 1987)

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

carrier

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

State-Record Company for composing job. Knight-Ridder for my first job in the newsroom.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Not specifically. Being a copy editor, I wasn't on the side of the room that created the content. And fresh out of college, I was just so thrilled to be home and have a job in my field. We just tried to get loads of local and wire copy in print each day in the best form possible. We covered everything and had lots of sections.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I feel the newsroom did its fair share of hard-hitting news and stories on corruption or crime, which served an appetite for the readers. However, the most fun I personally had was in creating the presentation of a story or series and helping to come up with creative ideas for photos or layouts – for news, features or sports. Working with

photographers and our graphic artist regularly was invigorating. However good or bad the result, we had fun trying. We seemed to have the time and freedom to be creative.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Three

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Each obviously managed the newsroom differently. I'm sure their individual philosophies influenced us, but I also felt the corporate hand behind most of the changes in the newsroom even though we prided ourselves in saying we made our own decisions. Obviously, the Knight-Ridder push to make a higher profit margin to satisfy stockholders changed us. Our emphasis on "Covering the Coast" and putting local news in the "front section" was a philosophy that made us stand apart among other newspapers our size, at least at the time. Many other papers still put wire stories in the A section and relegate the "local" news to its own front or inside somewhere. If I had to say one thing that sets *The Sun Herald* apart ... it's this. Current philosophy pushes hard to pursue stories of interest to readers and to dig deeper. However, I feel we are much more sensational in our story selection and placement. We are fighting for attention (sales) and clicks, so it's often the case that when the latest child sex or porn story breaks, it goes to the top of the website and the front page.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I think the change from State-Record to Knight-Ridder thrilled a lot of us because we were then part of a widely respected, national newspaper chain. Others who saw and felt the change in their benefits packages soon felt differently. Many say today that the State-Record family treated us the best, at least financially, but times were different then.

Money was flowing. The change from Knight-Ridder to McClatchy came at a very difficult time, not only for newspaper companies nationally but for us at *The Sun Herald* personally, as we were just a few months into the recovery from Hurricane Katrina. The sale was presented to us as “the best option” for us among the suitors.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

At its core, I think *The Sun Herald* has always tried to do a good job in its role as a community newspaper and in its Fourth Estate role – no matter the owner.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

27 years and counting ...

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Presentation Editor/Digital Projects Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I don't plan to leave until they ask me to ...

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, as many as possible. We have had a lot of very good people work at *The Sun Herald*, in all departments.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Yes. I try to spend at least 15-30 minutes a day reading sites/articles on where we're heading, too, as an industry. I want to be part of the conversation.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

The future of newspapers is the \$64 million question. Our transformation from a primary print product to a digital news source is ongoing.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I don't do well with these, "If I Were King" questions. Who am I to think I know any better than anyone else on what direction the newspaper should take? We are being bombarded from many directions and the best we can do is to try to keep up and every once in a while hope that we make a difference or move a person or the community to a positive or rewarding action.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Overall, I have faith in the viability of journalism, but I am not holding on to the hope that print newspapers will survive another generation. I believe 2015 will see more of the same decline in print journalism as in the past few years. However, I also see this year -- and the next -- as an incredible opportunity to learn amazingly creative new skills in regard to digital storytelling.

Ruby Grace

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

Dec 18, 1989

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Newsroom Staff Assistant

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Merritt Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

No

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

No

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Three, Merritt Firmin, Mike Tonos, and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not that I observed

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, under McClatchy I didn't feel the same amount of caring for us.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

No

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

19 years and 3 months

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Senior Staff Assistant/Receptionist

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

My position was eliminated

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, and I always will.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Not as much as when I was employed.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

Upsetting, too much of staff cutting. It's heartbreaking to visit and see so many empty chairs.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I'm not sure.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I understand we are being prepared for the future, but there's still a huge amount of older people, without, nor do they want, a computer. It so important to have the paper in hand.

Paul Hampton

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

May 15, 1989

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

copy editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

It was pretty tame though I can say it leaned one way or the other. It seemed to me we didn't want to be pot-stirrers.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I thought the Dixie Mafia/Sherry murders reporting was excellent even though we didn't break the original Bobby Jo Fabian story. I think reporters were being encouraged to think of alternative ways of telling a story etc. I came from smaller papers so I thought *The Sun Herald* was cutting edge. I remember Alan Schmidt and Matt Scallan loudly arguing over nuances of page design in the composing room. A week later I found out they were roommates. That was the way it was, high pressure, low boiling points but after it, the paper was put to bed everyone was friends again. (One day Vern Williams called me into the graphics office. He was shirtless and holding a papier-mache globe. He handed me a lighter, sprayed the globe with lighter fluid and said light it. He lost most of

his chest hair but got the photo illustration he wanted.) Tim's football games were a hoot, too. So, there was a bit of a family atmosphere, dysfunctional family.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Pic, Mike Tonos and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I think it changed more with the different publishers: Roland Weeks, Ricky Mathews and Glen Nardi. I think we have become more aggressive in the last couple of years.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I did not notice any operational changes until the belt-tightening began. That was the result of McClatchy taking on a massive debt to buy the much larger Knight-Ridder chain.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Knight-Ridder and Jim Batten (the head of the operation) were the best. But those were flush years. They did encourage getting out in the community and just listening. They let us hire Urban and Associates who were groundbreakers in the local-local movement.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

25 years and counting

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

politics editor (current)

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Haven't been asked to, yet.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

I keep in touch mainly through Facebook with former employees because most have moved far away.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

If I were a genius, I'd solve our revenue problems but until we find a way to make more money off the digital product we're probably going to stay lean and mean.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Journalism will be viable but it will never be like the heyday of print. That's probably a good thing for the survivors because we have so many new ways to tell stories. I don't expect print to last forever but it probably will outlive the dire predictions of its decline.

Jimmy Lee Hannaford

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

August 1989

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Reporter and Photographer for Jackson County Bureau

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

No

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I recall that we all took it very seriously, and we had a large staff of talented people. It seems like there were nearly 30 reporters and photographers – maybe more. I thought of myself somewhat like a young hotshot – I had four or five years of experience at smaller papers in Mississippi. But I remember quickly realizing that I was surrounded by real news veterans with years of practical experience and, most of all, savvy. I learned from them and grew to greatly respect many of them as journalists. I started right at the time that the first indictments were issued in the Sherry murder case, and sitting Mayor Pete Halat was being mentioned as an “unnamed confederate.” It was a bit surreal to realize the magnitude of the stories that were breaking regularly on the beat. It seemed like it was “big time,” and we were confident we would get the story. Also, I was struck by how much thought and conversation the editors put into how to present a story. If it

was something that was going to be controversial, those discussions took place in detail and in advance. On a lighter note, many of us socialized and enjoyed each others' company outside of work. A personal detail: I had worked for Mike Tonos in Vicksburg, and knew that I wanted to work with him again. I kept my ears open and applied for a job at *The Sun Herald* when I knew there were four openings for reporters. To the best of my memory, the others hired at the time were Ken Fink, Sharon Souther, and Sharon Ebner.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Two (Michael Tonos and Andrea Yeager)

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not so much "philosophy," but certainly a change in leadership style. Mr. Tonos seemed to have more of a "hard news" background and everyone seemed to accept his judgment and want his approval. Also, he was a stickler for grammar and style.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

no

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

N/A, but I will say that publisher Roland Weeks had an outstanding reputation in the community and in the newsroom, as well. He always had our backs. And when I left the newspaper, he personally told me I could come back any time I wanted.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Six and a half years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Same – reporter and photographer in the Jackson County Bureau

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Moved out of state to pursue personal opportunities County Bureau

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes. Mostly through Facebook but I also see a few of them from time to time.

Would certainly see more of them if I lived closer (I am in Fairhope, Ala.)

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Not really. Like most people, I no longer rely on a daily printed newspaper. I miss the experience, but the daily newspaper in my area (the Mobile Press-Register) is really not worth picking up.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

Really couldn't say. I'm just proud to have worked there during a quality time in its history.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Not qualified to answer; I have been away

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I mourn the loss of print journalism, though I realize it is not completely dead. The newspapers in my area are barely hanging on with a reduced staff augmented by inexperienced freelancers and bloggers. I believe we had more "investment" and pride in our daily journalistic endeavors – not to mention a few hard-assed editors who demanded that of us. Good journalism does still exist in some newspapers, magazines and on some website. I think people have more distractions now, and many do not focus on any particular thing for very long.

Kate Magandy Holzhauser

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I began work at *The Sun Herald* in 1985. I left in 1987 then returned in 1992 and have been here since.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

I started as a sports copy editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

The State-Record Company

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Not really

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

When I joined in 1985, the copy desks were divided by department. About a month later, it moved into a universal desk, so I went through a transition. But I remember that everyone got together inside and outside of work, which was great. As for the type of journalism practiced, I remember that we got chances to do things to stretch ourselves. For instance, although I was on the copy desk, I was able to write for the sports section, which was my first love.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

a. I worked for Pic Firmin, Mike Tonos, and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I'd say so. I really don't remember much about Pic's philosophy because I wasn't working with him long, but the difference between Mike and Stan is that Stan's editorial philosophy is public journalism is a primary focus. That's not to say it wasn't part of Mike's philosophy, but we've done more investigative work under Stan.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Ownership has changed twice. From State-Record to Knight-Ridder and then to McClatchy. I'd say when it went from State-Record to Knight-Ridder, we seemed to have more resources because it was a bigger company. That was exemplified by the response to not only us after Katrina but also Grand Forks after the flood. All the properties helped out and sent resources to help. When we moved to McClatchy, things became more centralized and because of the economy, there has been much downsizing and doing more with less. We also have transitioned to more of a digital company and the newsroom has changed with that philosophy.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

I'd say Knight Ridder and McClatchy have fostered that philosophy, but I think it's been more embraced by McClatchy – we fight more for public access and hold public officials more accountable for their actions.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I've been with the paper for 25 years come July.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

I am currently Digital Editor and still employed

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I left in 1987 to become sports editor at another paper, which was one of my career goals. I loved the work I did at that paper, but when I had advanced as much as I could there, I came back to *The Sun Herald* to get a chance to advance.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes. Several have become very close friends and we still keep in touch to this day.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Not only do I try to stay informed, but I think the company as a whole does a better job of keeping its employees abreast of changes in the industry that affect us and our operational decisions.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

n/a

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I'd like to see us be able to increase staff so that current employees don't feel so overwhelmed. While we have a smaller newshole in the print product, we are expecting to keep "feeding the beast" online but with fewer resources to produce local copy.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

The print product is still something people want. We saw that after Hurricane Katrina. But in this day and age of having a 24-hour news cycle and information readily available in the digital age, people are reluctant to pay for information they think they can "get for free." It's not free, whether they pay for the technology, the internet connection or the digital subscription. If they want reliable information, they should pay for it.

Rumors and innuendo floating around on social media and disreputable websites is not journalism. And the print platform is part of that.

Tim Isbell

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

My career at *The Sun Herald* began March 1984. Other than four months at the Tuscaloosa News and eight months at Natchez Democrat, my entire photojournalism career was at *The Sun Herald*.

Left *The Sun Herald*?

My position was eliminated in August 2017 in yet another round of cost-cutting by McClatchy.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Staff Photographer – I had numerous positions at the paper (see further down in answers). *The Sun Herald* was the only paper I worked for in my career that initially said: “You are just a photographer.” Every other paper I worked for, also expected me to write as well as shoot.

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

State-Record Company

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Good journalism & fair. . . Nothing like that Fair and Balanced crap you hear on TV. To me, we told good stories whether it was with words, photos or a blending of both. Such a practice was, in my eyes, the ‘heyday’ of my career as a journalist. Such stories didn’t always have to be spot or breaking news. We were really strong in our feature and personality portraits. I think we did a better job reflecting the true MS Gulf

Coast back in the 1980s and 90s than we can ever hope to do now. Our agenda then was to do good work. I think such a concept was a reflection of our publisher, Roland Weeks.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

As of August 2017, I was one of the few people at the paper who could state the following. When I first started at *The Sun Herald*, we actually had two papers and a TV station. The papers were the Daily Herald (the old and venerable publication) and The South Mississippi Sun (the younger more visually graphic paper). On top of that, we had a TV station that gave news updates ala CNN at the top of every hour. The studio was where the current executive editor's office is now located. We had a Plexiglas window separating the studio from the newsroom which allowed viewers to see the newsroom during the broadcasts.

Ironically (given how I feel about video now), I was hired at *The Sun Herald* to replace a still photographer who switched from newspaper to TV. At that time, I saw video as a great thing to learn to further my career. We were so far ahead of our time to have the TV presence and it only lasted a year or two before we shut it down. It would have been nice to keep it going longer. The experience would have helped when the paper went video crazy around 2011.

I have always considered myself lucky to have worked as a staff photographer under Vernon Matthews. Vernon gave me the freedom to grow as a journalist and to learn from my mistakes. Such freedom allowed me to take risks and work on long-term projects for which I became known for producing.

I produced a nine-month project on the Vietnamese Community on the MS Gulf Coast. This was primarily done because I had the freedom to fail or succeed. It was a

resounding success. It was a seven-day series with 52 pictures published in the paper. It was the first true visually-driven project in *The Sun Herald* but also had about 15 reporters working on it too. It was part of that team atmosphere that seemed to thrive at that time.

The Vietnamese project won a Knight Foundation/National Endowment of the Arts Grant and was turned into a traveling museum show across the country. Such an endeavor is something newspapers can do greatly while television can't.

I always thought the Vietnamese project should have been nominated for a Pulitzer but even then, *The Sun Herald* seemed to be more reporter/word driven.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Four: Pic Firmin, Mike Tonos, Stan Tiner, and Blake Kaplan.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Some between Pic and Mike but more so with Mike and Stan. I always viewed Pic as tough but fair, Mike was like a college professor leading the newsroom. He always had a consensus built and team working around him. I think the newsroom was probably the most collaborative under the Pic Firmin and Mike Tonos regimes. Stan is more of a buck stops here/I'm the decider. While it is good to have that buck stops here person, it can also hurt individual and team growth. I've seen middle management editors abdicate making decisions or planning so Stan can make that decision.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Three times. . . We changed from State-Record Company to Knight-Ridder to McClatchy.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Without a doubt, Knight-Ridder was the best thing to happen to *The Sun Herald* as far as corporate ownership. You felt like you were working for the big boys during that time. Under the KR days, it was best when Jim Batten was running the operation. He had a journalism background and although KR was a business, Batten never let it be forgotten that we had a higher calling as a member of the fourth estate.

Sadly, KR was also one of the worst times for the paper too. I have always said the demise of newspapers was due to GAS – Greed, Arrogance, and Stupidity. When Batten died, the running of the paper shifted from journalists to non-journalists in positions of power. To me, that was when journalism began to suffer at the hands of the all mighty dollar.

When KR stockholders were arrogant, greedy and stupid enough to demand the selling of the KR papers, it was one of the worst times to work in the chain. Reality set in that the new decision-makers didn't value or understand good journalism. So, no matter how hard you tried or went the extra mile the true focus was on making big bucks.

My only issue with KR was that they often played favorites with the big papers without totally utilizing all the talent that they had available at their member papers. We were covering a Saints-Eagles football game at the Dome. Philadelphia sent like 2-3 photogs to shoot the game. I mentioned to them that they had a sister paper one hour away from the Dome (*The Sun Herald*). We could have easily shot the game and sent them tons of pictures without Philly incurring the expense of flying so many from Pennsylvania to New Orleans. I could tell such a scenario had never entered their minds. . . probably because they were a big paper and we were a mid to small size paper.

I experienced the same thing when Boise State played USM in Hattiesburg. Boise sent their staff instead of relying on a sister paper to cut expenses.

It would have been nice if KR would have been more like Gannett in that one aspect. Gannett often pulled from its huge talent pool to work on publications like USA Today. In my eyes, KR only viewed the journalists at the big papers as the true talent without totally realizing what they had at their smaller publications.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

About 33 years at the time my job was cut. A great deal changed since 1984.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

My last position was as a senior photographer. During my career, I have also been a reporter, designer, photo editor, and videographer. I also was a photographer for Beach Blvd. Magazine which was a Sun Herald product.

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I left twice before the final separation and both times not because of the journalism but because of two different managing editors doing things that didn't seem right at the time. Both of these editors have since moved on and I'm still there. I wish I would have never felt compelled to leave but each experience made me grow as a journalist and person.

So, I left twice and came back twice. For better or worse, my place to live is on the MS Gulf Coast and my place to work as a journalist has always been *The Sun Herald*.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes! During our heydays, we were truly a family. Employees at *The Sun Herald* enjoyed being around each other at work and away from work. We had parties, beach parties, and other get-togethers.

I started Sun Herald football which was played by individuals from all departments at the paper every Saturday. This grew to Sun Herald volleyball and softball. Whether at work or at play, *The Sun Herald* employees were usually together doing something. I think that is what made the place so special to work at.

As part of a family, we shared knowledge and information with our fellow employees. I thought this was a hallmark of *The Sun Herald* for my first 20 years there. The last ten years, I can't say that was the case. We have become an "information is power" place and helpful hints aren't always shared. We are more of a "look out for Number One" place now.

Having said that, most of my best friends are current or former Sun Herald journalists.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Try is the operative word. *The Sun Herald* used to share everything from circulation numbers to quarterly profits. We tend to be more close to the vest now than in past decades.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

Unfortunately, I think papers grasp at the latest fad as the next end all/be all to cure all that ails newspapers. NIE (Newspapers in Education) was going to save

newspapers. Then, it was video. I don't think there is one sure-fire fix for newspapers. Instead, it will be a series of initiatives. We tend to fall victim to the quick fix all the time. I have said, "Video killed the radio star and it will probably kill newspapers, too."

While I see video as an important newsgathering tool, it is not the sure-fire fix. We are currently putting most of our eggs in the video basket. This is done primarily so ads can be placed on the video instead of any journalistic value. I understand that it is so we can get hits or page views on our website or on social media.

We give incentive awards (Subway or Starbucks coupons), away weekly for videos with the most hits. We don't even acknowledge when a photo gallery gets as many hits or exceeds video. In fact, McClatchy quit counting still gallery hits because they couldn't figure out how to place ads in still galleries. It is about advertising and web hits. It isn't about quality. To get these web hits usually means our stories; galleries and videos have to be salacious in nature.

Newspapers seem to be following television in the give the reader/viewer what they want. I am not a huge proponent of such an approach. One only has to see the utter crap that is on television to understand that newspapers should not go that route. Giving people what they want often dumbs down the product and that is how you end up with Honey Boo Boo, Jersey Shore, and other crappy programming. There should always be an adult in the room to make wise decisions and not just give what "the reader wants."

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Realize how unique newspapers truly are and utilize the talents that newspapers enjoy that other media like television cannot hold a candle to in competition.

To me, print media is the only form of media that embraces all aspects of getting the news to readers/viewers. We have printed publications, magazines, web pages, social media presence and are going full steam into video and more of a television look.

Television media cannot say they do the same or do all the same well.

Instead of embracing this advantage that newspapers have and will continue to have, we are trying to become the next television station that only appears online.

In Biloxi, *The Sun Herald* and WLOX, our primary competition, are located across the street from each other. During my 30 years at *The Sun Herald*, WLOX has had the same reporters and cameramen honing their craft too. We have all grown up and competed with each other for 30 plus years.

No matter how hard *The Sun Herald* tries to master video, WLOX has a 30-year head start in knowledge and experience in doing so. Conversely, *The Sun Herald* has a 30-year advantage in printed material (words & photos) in papers and online. That is where our advantage lies.

Television is quick hits, often mindless chatter and more and more advertising to the point that a normal newscast is hard to watch. Their true advantage is that people can grab a remote, sit down and turn it on. They don't have to navigate paywalls and advertising popping up before the content like newspapers sites.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Much has been made of the broken management model that brought about the newspaper crisis. While many have tried to fix that broken model, there are still broken models that exist in newspapers. I often say newspapers can't see the forest for the trees.

When every household has big screen TVs so that any viewing, be it an NFL game, movie or some silly reality show, is a viewing experience. Meanwhile, newspapers have retreated in print. Photographs, which eye track studies have continually shown get the first look from viewers, have gotten smaller and smaller. Even on the web, potentially eye-grabbing photos are played small or the wrong photo all together is used.

I had more say about the play of my photos in my first year at *The Sun Herald* than I did in my 30th year at *The Sun Herald*. Most, if not all, of our newsroom management, are word people -- not visually literate people. Such a lack of diverse thinking only continues to hurt the final product and true potential of newspapers.

From all I've heard or read, today's reader/viewer/consumer of news really doesn't like to read. They want quick hits which TV/video often gives them. They are drawn to compelling photography which is then shared ad nauseam on social media.

Most word editors will pick a boring group shot over a truly compelling photograph that grabs one's eye and makes the consumer of news want to know more about that image or story.

TV embraces the fact that it is a visual medium. For much of my career, newspapers do battle over words vs. photos. The true strength of the visual medium is often impeded by the utter lack of editors in newspaper ranks who have a visual background or are true advocates of visual journalism.

Alice Jackson

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I worked for the paper two different times. The first time was September 1977-July 1984. The second time was November 1992-July 1999.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

In September 1977, I was a general assignment reporter with a beat that included the environment, City of Pass Christian and anything then-City Editor Mike McCall gave me to do.

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

In September 1977, I was a general assignment reporter with a beat that included the environment, City of Pass Christian and anything then-City Editor Mike McCall gave me to do.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

In 1977, it was Pic Firmin. In 1992, it was Mike Tonos.

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

In 1977 under Pic Firmin, the policy was strictly to cover the news the best possible, truthfully and to get to the bottom and reasons for the story. We were considered watchdogs for the people who read us. Watergate was still fresh on journalists' minds, and many of the young reporters, myself included, had selected news as a career because of Watergate and investigative reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's reporting of Watergate. By 1994 under Mike Tonos, *The Sun Herald* had become much less aggressive and focused. The emphasis was more on what I have

always called “Chamber of Commerce reporting.” We were careful to not offend anyone, even if an official had done something wrong.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin made reporters feel that he stood behind them. If someone called in to complain, he listened to them, then shared their complaints with reporters to get their side of the story. You always knew he stood behind his staffers.

There was a reporter, Bobby Bishop, who covered the Mississippi Coast Coliseum Commission, and he’d done a really good job of digging into some strange things going on there. This was in the early days of the Coliseum. As I remember, the commission members voted in an open meeting to bar Bobby Bishop from future meetings. Firmin stood behind Bishop. He brought in the newspaper’s attorneys to get involved, and the issue was eventually resolved with Bishop returning to cover the meetings.

When I returned in 1994, the newsroom was a different world. I wrote a story that named U.S. Senate Trent Lott as an unindicted co-conspirator in a federal indictment against an African-American couple from Moss Point. The indictment had been floating around for several months before I went back to work there, and I was stunned no reporter had named Lott as the unindicted co-conspirator and why. I did the necessary reporting and verified repeatedly that Lott was the unindicted co-conspirator. After I’d written the story, I was called into the office of then-executive editor Mike Tonos to discuss my reporting, etc. To my astonishment, Tonos was more interested in how he was going to explain running the story to Lott and the community rather than reporting the

truth. He kept discussing with me ways to avoid running the story. I finally told him I thought the story should run and excused myself.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Two—Pic Firmin and Mike Tonos.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes. Firmin understood news and how reporters worked a beat to develop a story. That was always how he began a discussion. On the other hand, Tonos had never worked a beat as a reporter. He came up on the copy desk side of the newspaper, and he was one of the poorest excuses for an editor I've ever met in my 35 years in the news business, including newspapers, television and national news magazines. He was totally a corporate guy. He was not what I considered an editor of the people who read his newspaper. There was absolutely no "fire in the belly" for the higher calling of being a journalist with a responsibility to his readers.

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Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Definitely! The State-Record Co. was exceptionally good to its employees and its dedication to the community it covered was outstanding. This was evidenced by the newspaper's coverage of the Coast following Hurricane Camille. It absolutely devoted itself to helping the people survive and recover.

In contrast, the Knight-Ridder Corp. was a mishmash of corporate ideas, programs, and management. Everything was highly structured with no room for creative thinking. The traditional way of running a newspaper was being thrown aside as Knight-Ridder "re-engineered" how things were done.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

The first time, I stayed for seven years. The second time, I stayed for seven years.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

In 1984 when I left to take a job at WLOX-TV, I was a senior general assignment reporter in the main newsroom.

In 1994 when I left, I was a senior general assignment reporter in Jackson County, working out of the Ocean Springs Bureau.

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

In 1994, I left to take a job at WLOX for \$12,000/year pay increase plus greatly increased benefits and the promise of a future news management position.

In 1999, I left because the newspaper was no longer interested in doing the type of news I specialized in doing. I'd spent a great deal of my own time researching the antics of then-Jackson County Chancery Clerk Lynn Presley. The FBI used my stories as a basis to open an investigation of Presley, which led to federal indictments. The last straw was

the day my bureau chief got on the phone with Presley, crying and discussing with him how I was destroying his life. I filed a human resources complaint against her, and neither Mike Tonos nor any of my other editors (who had worked with the bureau chief on the copy desk) stood behind me. That's when I realized I no longer wanted to work for people who lacked the news values I had. Later, after I'd started working with Time and People magazines, I saw Mike Tonos and the bureau chief at different times. Each of them apologized for the way they had acted against me, but I often wondered if that was only because I'd gone on to a better job.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes! I have many former co-workers who were a big part of my life for many years, and I keep up with them on Facebook and through e-mail since I now live outside Mississippi.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Yes! I was thrilled to learn Stan Tiner will retire later this year. I tried to give him several stories over the years, but he was never interested in any story that might make the business community uncomfortable. I view Tiner as very much a "chamber of commerce" pawn. I try to keep up with trends, etc. in today's news world. I read Poynter.org as well as a number of other media websites.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I think the paper has gotten worse because so many people have been let go. I love seeing stories and photos from people I have worked with for years, and they are still doing good jobs. It is the corporate management that has changed the newspaper for

the worst. At its current pace, I think we can safely say newspapers like won't exist in the near future. One of the most disturbing trends has been what happened in Mobile, Ala., where a daily newspaper is printed only three days a week.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Personally, I believe journalism has gotten worse due to corporate ownership of the news. Thirty or so years ago, there were newspaper chains, but most newspapers were owned by individuals or families who viewed their ownership as a personal responsibility to their readers. In the 1980s, more corporates moved into news until today there's really only about six or so owners of most of the nation's media outlets. When I speak to young journalists, I always talk about how news owners once made a good living from their ownership, although it wasn't equal to today's profit margins. Today, corporations want ever-increasing profits. I like to refer to these type of profits as "Lear jet profits."

I am considering the possibility of starting a weekly newspaper when I retire. As a result, I have kept up with how weeklies are surviving. There are a number of weekly chains doing well, such as the Emmerich chain in Mississippi. I have looked at an economically depressed area that presently isn't served well by any media, and I'm exploring if a weekly newspaper could actually help that area and make a profit.

Also, I think you definitely have to take into consideration changing habits in reading, education and how the American public has devolved in its media consumption during the past 40 years. It's as though they've been fed cheap fast food rather than a well-balanced meal. It is highly questionable whether or not they want to return to a good diet.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

If journalism fails, the country is in huge trouble. We are in huge trouble now.

The biggest stories are going unreported. I read something Bob Woodward said earlier in the week, and it was poo-pooed by some younger journalists. The younger people are so openly biased. This is a huge problem in journalism, i.e. the lack of ethics. However, the same lack of ethics has infiltrated all of our society, i.e. take a look at the U.S. Congress.

Journalism may have to hit rock bottom before it can begin to recover.

Willie Jefferson

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

June 1996

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Copy editing intern

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

No

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

There were more risks taken then. The paper didn't mind death threats.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

2

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

n/a

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

no

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

not sure

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

5 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

page designer/tech support

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I was terminated

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, via Facebook

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

No, I have no desire to follow newspapers

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

n/a

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Listen to the readers. Try to make honest efforts to capture youth. They are the future.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Online journalism is booming, but you need to get youth -- to offer paid internships, high-school programs, and loop in youth.

James Jones

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

1992

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

features reporter

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Just make sure our story was accurate, even if the competition beat us....

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

We all did things together as groups, whether it was playing softball together at company picnics or football on Saturday mornings....It had a family atmosphere

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

two

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

We react more to the news when someone has it first

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes we never had furloughs under KRT like we've had at McClatchy

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Our coverage in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

23 years and counting

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

sports lead (editor)

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

still there

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

yes

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

yes

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I think everyone is overreacting to the print side fading away. I understand the digital strategy, but there are older people who love the print version. The reasons papers in Mobile and New Orleans both died because of poor leadership at the top

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Give more attention to local coverage, because that's our bread and butter. That's a big reason why the Clarion-Ledger has financial problems: going statewide. If the Ledger remained a local paper devoted to the Jackson area, they'd be number one in the state.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Print journalism is still viable and will always be. I love the digital era we're headed into in the future, but I think people should have a choice.

Cliff Kirkland

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

Summer 1975

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Sports Writer, South Mississippi Sun

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

State-Record Co.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Bob McHugh, a disciple of H.L. Mencken and a great journalist.

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

I don't remember a masthead dedication like the iconic "All The News Fit To Print" of the New York Times, but I clearly understood that journalistic integrity was first and foremost the expectation. Yes, even in sports. The South Mississippi Sun was a morning newspaper outgrowth of the staid Daily Herald, which had been serving the Coast for about 90 years when I started working at the plant on Debuys Road. The Daily Herald had an older, established news staff while the Sun was bursting with youthful, inspired talent. The difference in the products was obvious. The Sun was more exuberant and better written. The Herald was the paper of record. That editorial staff of the Sun was incredibly talented. There was Hank Klibanoff, Robert Ellzey & Bobby Bishop (our Batman and Robin), and many others of equal talent and aggressive disposition. The Sun and the Herald were competitive more so with each other than their in-state counterparts. The Sun quickly assumed the personality of the Coast's watchdog and the Herald settled into its role as a record keeper.

Sun reporters were encouraged to vigorously pursue their beats and uncover the unvarnished stories that lay beneath the typical business and government press releases. In sports, we pursued a similar philosophy. Rather than simply report scores and scorers, we were challenged to find more compelling stories. And we were given the freedom to write more features and columns.

Don't forget, this was during the time newspapers were printed in black and white. The only color in the local paper was in the writing.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

It was an interesting atmosphere at the plant on Debuys Road. There were some very talented newspaper people on the Herald side, but most of them were nearing the end of their careers and were dedicated to the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How that was drilled into them for decades. On the other side of the wall, there were the young iconoclasts that comprised the staff of the Sun.

To me, it seemed like the Herald waited patiently each day for someone to give it the news. At the Sun, we believed the news was out there for us to find.

Most Herald staffers viewed us as disrespectful upstarts, though I'm sure there were some Herald veterans who saw in us their own youthful hunger for news gathering.

Our attitude at the Sun was that we should create breaking news rather than wait for it to come to us. I don't mean we were making stuff up. It was our belief that vital breaking news was out there in the community and needed to be uncovered as quickly as possible. We had the staff, the energy and editorial backing to pursue that.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Only three: McHugh, Pic Firmin, and Lloyd Gray. Bob McHugh became one of my newspaper heroes. I admired his writing, his knowledge, and his commitment. And the longer I worked with him, the more I enjoyed his support. We clashed early on when I wrote a tongue-in-cheek column about how to spot Snowbirds (golfers from the North who came south to escape the snow). The column included innocent stuff about Snowbirds traveling in packs of four, their penchant for sleeveless sweaters, and their legs being whiter than the golf balls they kept losing in local ponds adjacent to fairways. I thought it was funny. So, did my coworkers and my friends. McHugh, who was an avid golfer, was not so sure. When his buddies at the golf courses and local motels called to complain that I had insulted their seasonal guests, McHugh called me in to chew me out. He carefully explained to me that the golf courses and motels were our advertisers and that their livelihood depended on a strong Snowbird season during the winter months. He told me not to write about Snowbirds again unless I got the okay from him. Then, when I was leaving his office, he told me that he thought the column was funny and his friends enjoyed it, and to keep up the good work.

Pic was the Exec Editor who promoted me to Sports Editor of the South Mississippi Sun in 1982 and gave me free rein. He also made me Sports Editor of the combined Sun Herald in 1985 when the two papers merged into a morning paper only.

Lloyd Gray is a solid, seasoned newsman whom I respect.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Only slightly. And that's because Roland Weeks remained the Publisher throughout all the changes, including changes in ownership from State-Record to Knight-Ridder.

Certainly, there were minimal changes in editorial style due to personnel changes: different editors had different ways of writing and different rules to follow. But on the whole, the tenor, or the voice of the newspaper(s) never changed. There was always a standard of excellence that was to be upheld.

Roland played a vital role by placing himself between the community and the newsmen and newswomen in his employ. He always stood up for his people and their product, regardless of the occasional heat he faced from dissatisfied public officials or business leaders. I'm sure there's a ton of community pressure that never made it to the newsroom because Roland kept it in his office. He remains one of my journalistic heroes. We certainly never agreed on everything, but I respected him unequivocally.

Most of us were reenergized by the sale to Knight-Ridder. As property of the State-Record Co., we were beginning to feel squeezed by some of the financial pressures the smaller company was under. The Knight-Ridder syndicate brought a new sense of worth to the newsroom. KR was a respected newspaper company with a storied history of journalism excellence.

We first understood that we were valued enough to be bought by an important syndicate. Then, we found out that many of our stories and features would be made available on the KR wire to all its constituent newspapers from Florida to California.

We felt emboldened. Many of us felt we had been rescued from a downward spiral.

Operationally, there was little change because Roland remained our Publisher. At that point, *The Sun Herald* was a respected brand not only in Mississippi but across the region. We were regularly honored for our reporting, our writing, our photography and our editing.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes. In 1987, I believe, we were purchased from the State-Record Company by the Knight-Ridder syndicate that included the Miami Herald.

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Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

I believe both State-Record and Knight-Ridder promoted that role in their own way.

When I started at what was Gulf Publishing (State-Record), newspapers were vital sources of information within their communities. That never changed during my 16 years in newspapers. There occasionally were changes in the perception of what constituted “community newspaper,” but the differences were minimal.

My time in newspapers preceded the internet and social media. Newspapers were the leading source of news in every community back then. National television was the gold standard, but local television and radio news was almost obscenely topical. It was not unusual that local radio & TV news consisted of second-hand regurgitation of that morning’s newspaper headlines.

I was lucky to spend my entire career in an environment that valued journalism ethics, where newspapers were rightfully considered authorities of record rather than purveyors of celebrity gossip and instant gratification. I worked in newspapers when they mandated crisp, clear writing but also valued colorful features and columns that were more entertaining than explanative.

The State-Record Co. and Knight-Ridder each provided the environment for regularly producing quality journalism.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

15 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Sports Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I was fired on Jan. 23, 1989 by Managing Editor Mike Tonos, for what was explained to me was a difference in philosophy. Less than two weeks earlier, at my annual evaluation, I was given a raise and told by Mr. Tonos that he “wished all departments at the newspaper were as well run and productive as the sports department.” To this day, I still don’t know the real reason.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes. Although I left journalism and went into municipal government, I maintained my friendships with former colleagues. I left many friends behind and have maintained most of those relationships, although very few of my colleagues remain at *The Sun Herald* today.

Occasionally, I still write an article or column for *The Sun Herald*.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I have always remained close with a handful of former colleagues and occasionally discuss the current state of newspapers with them. *The Sun Herald* is very important to me. It was an important part of my life. I still have people who come up to me occasionally and ask me if I still work at the newspaper, even though it’s been 26 years since I left. I continue to read the paper every day and enjoy the freedom of being a critic or fan when the results so move me.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I’m saddened by the state of newspapers in general, and *The Sun Herald* in particular. And I have been for many years now.

Newspapers have regressed to the point that rather than inform the public they claim to serve, they contribute to its dumbing-down. Like many other papers around the country, *The Sun Herald* is but a shadow of its former self, from staffing to editorial quality to reliability.

The Sun Herald and most other newspapers have become self-fulfilling prophets of their own doom. Instead of continuing to pursue the lofty ideals upon which journalism was grounded while adapting to changing times, *The Sun Herald* has compromised its integrity. It's no longer THE source of local news; it's just A source. Investigative journalism has been replaced by "revealed" journalism. What I mean by that is reporters no longer go out and work their sources in the community to uncover important news in a timely fashion. Instead, they sit around ~ when not on unpaid leave ~ and wait for someone to bring the news to them. Then they topically respond and call it "quality reporting."

Newspapers have failed to maintain the historically high standards that solidified and underscored the industry for the past 150 years. Instead of finding creative ways to perpetuate an honorable profession, newspapers have stepped aside and genuflected to the vacuous instant-messaging culture that places value only on timeliness and never on accuracy.

Newspapers have failed, thus far, to remain focused on their core responsibility to serve their communities as the best source of news. Instead, they have parroted the internet by minimizing their news content in order to pander to celebrity and lifestyle fluff of negligible cultural or intellectual value.

The Sun Herald, in particular, has become a shell of its former self. There are fewer reporters covering fewer beats. There are fewer editors catching mistakes before they get published. Even corrections are now being corrected. And the voice of *The Sun Herald* ~ its editorial ~ has become an occasional afterthought, pedestrian in execution. And there are fewer columns and features, and even less art (photography) than at any time in the last 40 years.

The paper is smaller than ever before, but still has enough newshole for quality journalism and more local features/columns. Instead, *The Sun Herald* wastes space with canned, uninteresting features from other “news” sources (including the internet), and ridiculous, unnecessary long-range weather forecasts that are less reliable than the Farmer’s Almanac.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

First, I would return daily editorials to the newspaper, or at the least, significantly increase their volume. The editorial is the soul of a newspaper. Editorials are the way newspapers deliver on their promise to serve their communities. Editorials are the voice of leadership. Without regular editorials, *The Sun Herald* is soulless., as it has been for too many years now.

Next, I would return regular feature/column writing to *The Sun Herald*. Features and columns give a newspaper its personality. They challenge readers to think for themselves and they expose the community to its own promise.

I would also dedicate some reporters to enterprise and investigative reporting. The Coast is not nearly as bland as *The Sun Herald* would have us believe. And corruption remains a constant that will never be effectively addressed until such time as the media

returns to its watchdog persona instead of relying on law enforcement to bring charges against those who would betray our trust.

Then, most importantly, I would increase the levels of editing. Staff reductions, especially in editing, have resulted in a slipshod product that is an embarrassment to any elementary English teacher in the area. Many local stories appear to be unedited, with mistakes in the first paragraph. Obviously, the few editors that remain are being overburdened.

Finally, I would revamp the print and online versions to better respond to the separate audiences. Stick to journalism in the print edition. Jam all the fluff into the online version. No one buys a newspaper for a horoscope, next Wednesday's weather forecast, or to see what the top three internet stories were the day before.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I still believe there is a place for newspapers not only now, but for many years to come. Journalism has mutated from an ideal to a shape-shifting phantom that only occasionally appears in print. There is still time to save journalism. Newspapers don't have to pander to the "People Magazine" reading public to survive. A good story still sells. And it's not limited to the "Top Five Things You Need To Know Today."

If you give the public a chance, it will still appreciate good writing, good reporting, and quality journalism. But if newspapers believe their only future is in visual sound bites, then that is what their future will become.

Tammy Leytham

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

October 2012

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Jackson County Editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

McClatchy

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Stan Tiner

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

I was brought in to start a Jackson County edition, and that was the big push at the time. A lot of resources/people were put into getting that launched. There was a big effort to let people know we were still interested in putting out a daily newspaper on paper.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

n/a

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

I only worked there for two years, so only one - Stan.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Even though I was only there a short time, the editorial philosophy changed immensely. We went from being adamant about giving customers a print news product and swung to the opposite extreme of putting more resources into the digital product. The Jackson County edition lasted two years, then ended with the shift to digital.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Ownership didn't change during my tenure, but there was a shift to the importance of digital coming from the top down.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

n/a

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

2 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Jackson County Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Laid off as the paper put more resources into digital

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, a couple

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Yes, definitely

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I have heard of other people leaving - not lay-offs though. There has been a little shift of positions with more positions set aside for breaking news and web content.

Mostly it just seems like fewer people doing either the same amount or more work.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Stick with doing great journalism. Don't try to shift with every new trend because the technology changes so quickly. Definitely keep up with new technology as a tool. But it should just be a tool to help better tell the story, which should be the ultimate goal.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Not too long before I was laid off I was in San Francisco and walked into a coffee shop where nearly every customer was reading a print newspaper. This was San Francisco, which is a high-tech hub, and I thought, if people here are still reading print, we could last a good bit longer. Unfortunately, I think most newspaper owners/publishers have just bailed too soon on print. Finding ways to better serve customers would have been a better way to go.

Sue Ann London

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

2001-2003

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Staff typist (I typed out Sound Off caller information)

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Stan Tiner

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Not a specific philosophy, but it was usually what Stan wanted.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not really – other than some frustration from the section editors and Stan's expectations from them.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Only Stan, but also worked for Dorothy Wilson as the Managing Editor (worked both at the same time)

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

n/a

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

No, still Knight-Ridder when I left.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

n/a

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Three (3) years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Administration Assistant

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

A better paying job in my actual degree field

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, several.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I am interested in the point that I hope the newspaper remains viable and successful, however, I don't seriously check into it.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I know that there is a lot less personnel to do the same amount of work. I attend local City Council/Board of Aldermen as well as Board of Supervisor meetings and *The Sun Herald* is not always represented. They may not have enough folks to cover all local news due to the down-sizing.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I think they probably need more people for better coverage. It seems they rely on wire coverage for many things and I think that local folks would like to have the local perspective. I am also not crazy about their website. I was a subscriber for many years but recently decided not to renew – just too expensive when I can get the same news from other sources without cost to me.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

While I actually like holding the paper in my hand to read it, I think that version of the news will eventually die out. There are so many resources for news, local papers are going to have to work very hard to remain competitive.

Barb Lowell

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

2001

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Features Editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

I think the emphasis was on local reporting.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

There seemed to be a sense of camaraderie, of sharing between departments.

Budget meetings were fun; we laughed a lot.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Two: Tonos and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, Tiner seemed more intent on winning awards and pushing for national tie-ins.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

No, KR throughout.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

As opposed to Gannett, KR did indeed pay more attention to the community and fostering a sense of community within the newspaper itself. I met Tony Ridder a few times and he once told me, “You need to feel like people care about you at work.”

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

3 YEARS

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Features Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Better opportunity, double the salary with Gannett

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Three or four, mostly on Facebook.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

no, as I live far out of the area.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Go back to real reporting and quit letting “citizen journalism” rule. Be the authority through smart investigations and error-free print.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Online is the future, of course, but let that be only for quick hits and breaking news. Don’t abandon the print product.

Amy Tyler Mair

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

December 1995

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

General assignment reporter and military reporter

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

We were just starting to approach larger stories by involving all departments in the newsroom (designers, reporters, photographers, editors) from the outset as opposed to working in isolation. This complemented what I had been taught in journalism school.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

It was a super fun environment. I enjoyed hearing the scanner on the city desk, reacting to breaking news, driving to events with the photographers, watching WLOX and laughing at their approach to leading stories. I felt a sense of camaraderie. You knew that people relied on the newspaper as a central source of news. The quality of writing mattered. You were making a difference.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

1

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

n/a

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

no

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

n/a

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

18 months

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

General Assignment Reporter and Military Reporter

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

To get married, move to Vancouver

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, via Facebook and Christmas cards

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I do check the website from time to time. Like all papers, it seems to rely heavily on AP stories and filler content. I do enjoy the columnists still.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I don't know enough about the specific changes.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I don't know enough about the current operations.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I think the future is dismal. It makes me very sad. don't seem to need the writing and editing skills you once did. The pay has always been bad, but you knew you were

making a difference so it was OK. I recently edited a regional home and design magazine. It has subsequently closed. I was so stressed about the budget. It was hard to do a quality job with the resources available. My superiors did not care about the quality of the writing. They wanted content. You have to work extra hard to come up with a fresh angle because you know that people will have read so much online before they ever pick up your publication. People will always want content. So, as a writer, I have to get behind the changes or change professions.

Rudy Nowak

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

May-98

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Graphics/Design Editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Mike Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Local, local. The local news took precedence over every other story.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Since our focus was local news, it sometimes was disconcerting when big events were pushed to inside pages or sections. You would look at other newspapers and see front pages that were dramatically different from *The Sun Herald*'s front page.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

2

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, we moved away from the local emphasis and into an era of a more traditional approach. Big stories were given the front page because they were important, not because they were local news.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

While McClatchy newspapers purchased the paper while I was there, I did not notice a change in philosophy. I do know the newsroom became much more aware of financial situations as McClatchy's ownership lengthened. We saw departments folded – the composing room was phased out. A special publications department was closed. A big shift to online news first was endorsed. The copy desk moved from a copy desk to a production desk handling page design, copy editing, web editing, output of the paper to plate and publishing web material online. Whereas, under Knight-Ridder, many of those functions were handled by their own department.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

I think both owners have supported the community service aspect of the newspaper. Under Knight-Ridder, I remember the support given to a reporter who was sued over stories about a utility deal and, of course, the coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the insurance lawsuit mess that followed. Under McClatchy, *The Sun Herald* dealt with open records issues with the Department of Marine Resources. So, I think both owners have been supportive of the newspaper's commitment to community service and as a watchdog.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

16 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Senior graphic artist

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

An opportunity I couldn't pass up. I didn't see myself retiring as a newspaper employee. The business model doesn't seem viable for the remainder of my working career. I saw an opportunity in a parallel field and jumped.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, although I should do a better job at doing so.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

To a point. I have an interest because I still know and care about people working at the newspaper. Realistically, I know newspapers are dying from self-inflicted wounds. Technology, corporatization and the 24-hour news cycle help make newspapers obsolete. It is hard to imagine my kids (18 & 20) waiting for a newspaper in the morning. They can find the news they want at any time during the day from hundreds of sources online for free. I have seen grade school kids on phones looking up news stories. Journalism is still relevant. Print journalism, and I am talking about the daily newspaper, is no longer viable in its current form. I think that being separated from the newspaper industry has shown me how indifferent most people are toward newspapers. The most common comments I have heard when people found out I had worked at a newspaper was/is: "The newspaper sure is a lot thinner today." Or, "how much longer do you think it will last." People realize the newspaper industry is dying. There isn't a lot of hand-wringing, though.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

My observations were: There was turnover after I left. New bylines peppered the pages and some of the features content was eliminated. I think it is another case of cost-

cutting. Fewer sections mean less paper, less reporting, less editing, and design work, and all of that equals less cost. If newspapers lose the ability to inform, they have lost their worth. The in-depth stories that separated print from cable news have largely disappeared. No one wants to read those stories anymore. They want the condensed version. So, newspapers charge more for producing less. And, as I stated before, there are hundreds of sites to get your news from for free.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I believe newspapers will have to become more like a 24-hour news blog. I'd say it might look something like the Huffington Post, but with links to other newspapers (from the same newspaper chain) that have a mutual interest. The 'newspapers' could pool journalism talent, advertising revenue and provide a constant news feed for the short attention spans of the general public. I think this would allow for more reporting, larger staffs and reduce redundancies in reporting. The print side would not have to change significantly and it would allow for a gradual move to online only.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I think the biggest problem facing the newspaper is the staff continues to get younger. That new staff probably doesn't use the newspaper the same way as the people who subscribe to the paper. I think there is a serious gap: technologically and socially. If your average reader is 60+ and your average reporter is 20-something, there is a 40-year gap that will always be difficult to bridge. Recently *The Sun Herald* added a senior life package to the paper. While helpful to their subscribers, I can't see too many young reporters lining up, wanting to report on those topics. In order to retain young talent and

keep the news gathering fresh, the reporters have to have an interest in what they are reporting.

David Purdy

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I started in September of 1985 and worked briefly for both newspapers before they changed the name of the paper to *The Sun Herald*.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

I was a staff photographer when I was with the newspaper. I think I finished as a Senior Photographer.

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

The State-Record Company.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Pic Firmin

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Honestly, I don't specifically remember for Pic. I think it was just hard news all the time.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*? Any anecdotes that illustrate the type of working environment in the newsroom in your early career there? I liked the news all the time and the fun features assignments. Always chasing city council and supervisors around making sure they were doing their job.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

3 executive editors

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, it changed. I think Mike Tonos changed it for the better with more push to a watchdog journalism with a community news and new features.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, it changed three times. Honestly, it did change because we were always given orders from corporate on their latest approach to covering the news and how we should be running our coverage to match their master plan for the company for what they considered industry standards. That said, they didn't dictate exact stories but they did have numbers of investigative stories that we should be doing each year to meet their expectations for our market size.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

I think Knight-Ridder was our best owner and partner to actually listen to our local needs. There were some great years with Mike Tonos and Knight-Ridder. I think the newsroom grew in positions where it was needed like the business and education departments.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

23 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

I was classified as a Senior Photographer for pay purposes but honestly, I think I was still classified as a staff photographer. On my business card, I had senior photographer.

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

We left for a couple of reasons. One because my mother was sick and I wanted to be closer to family. Second and biggest reason was the hostile newsroom atmosphere and constantly being threatened to work excessive hours and days because news desk editors and executive managing editors wanted it. My Photo editor was an abusive man that

made sure my daily work was only the crappy assignments that he didn't want to give to his chosen photographer. I was his punching bag. He took turns between abusing me and another staffer named James. He was totally incompetent and always passed the buck to lay blame on staffers when he screwed up. It was a do it or else atmosphere that really did it.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

There is a handful of people I still have contact with.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

It is a mild interest. I follow their feed on Facebook which looks like it is up to industry standards but honestly, I live so far away it is hard for me to get a good overall read on their operations. I would like them to regroup and be successful.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I think it has been a total downturn with little or no connection to the local market and they do little to connect with readers. I think the only way to save that newspaper is to get rid of Stan Tiner to turn the newsroom around. That said they would almost have to clean house on the news desk also.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

They have to engage the local readers and reconnect with them. How you do this I really don't know. They have spent a decade getting people to run away from their product. I really don't know how to fix that. I think their website is up to industry standards and they are starting to build a decent staff of young reporters. Where to go

from there will require someone who knows how to do community journalism and to find a way to bring the readers back.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

The first and foremost thing newspapers need to do is get off the stock market. They have been bending over backward to serve investors instead of serving readers. I think the instant news of the internet is a moving target. I think print is still very viable but again you have to make it about community, not national news.

Terri Queen

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I started work at *The Sun Herald* on Dec. 18, 1985. I was one of the first hires on the combined paper. I came down for my interview two weeks after Hurricane Elena, in September. They held the job for me until I graduated in December.

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

The first position was as a copy editor on the night desk, which also included page layout.

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

The paper was still owned by the State-Record Company.

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

I'm pretty sure Pic Firmin was executive editor. I know Lloyd Gray was managing editor and he was the one who hired me.

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

I would say that the editorial philosophy rested on hard news and traditional avenues of reporting such as covering governmental bodies, both state and local. Also covering courts. Traditional watchdog journalism.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I hate to cop out on this particular question, but it's one of those "because you asked me my brain refuses to come up with anything" kind of deals. If I think of something I'll shoot you an email.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Two executive editors, Pic and Mike Tonos

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I thought Tonos was softer than Pic. Pic was more of a “nail ‘em to the wall” kind of editor. But the situations they were in were very different, which leads us to the next question.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, Knight-Ridder took over not long after I got there. The immediate changes happened in the Business Office, but changes to all the other departments started not long after. The focus changed from covering the news to increasing readership.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

The State-Record Co. seemed to be very hands-off and happy with just making a profit every year. They let us focus on being a newspaper that served the community. Sure we wanted to sell newspapers, but we wanted to do it because of good journalism, not gimmicks.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I was there for 10 years.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Final position was as page designer on the alleged “Universal Desk.”

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

I left the paper for a lot of reasons. I suffered from extreme burn-out. My workload kept increasing. They had separated design from copy editing, which I was not in favor of. I thought treating the pages as a whole instead of pieces/parts made a better, more cohesive product and led to fewer errors. They also wanted to put me back into the night rotation and I thought that after 10 years I had earned daytime hours. I wanted to

work with features and not news anyway. There are other reasons, but those are the biggies.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Some. Not the crazy ones.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Yes, I do. Mostly because it's like watching a train wreck in slow motion.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

I think *The Sun Herald* has overall been going in the wrong direction. They've cut too much staff, focused on the wrong types of stories for the wrong reasons, and are trying to run it via the bottom line rather than by producing an exceptional product.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I would stop printing a physical product. It's not cost effective in any way and we're a digital society now. I would put the focus back on traditional stories and investigative pieces. Get rid of the entertainment and fluff. And stop doing single-source stories.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I think print journalism is dead. Let's go ahead and bury it so we can move forward. I think there are some internet-based sites that are doing a great job of pursuing important stories and print journalism should follow their lead.

Sherry Rankin

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

June 1990

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

copy editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Roland Weeks

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

No, other than honest, fair news coverage.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Working on the copy desk provided great training and opportunities for growth in other areas of the newspaper such as page design and reporting. Trent Roberts often helped us learn from our mistakes by posting them on his "Wall of Shame."

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

Two: Roland Weeks and Stan Tiner

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not that I can recall

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Not that I can recall

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

Under Knight-Ridder, the newspaper gave community members a public voice through sections such as Marquee and features such as Sound Off.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

11 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Copy editor and page designer for features

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Moved with my husband to Jackson, MS to be closer to family.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, I do keep in touch with several former colleagues.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I still read Sun Herald online occasionally but I haven't seen a print version in a number of years.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

Technology has changed the market for news. Nowadays, most people want brief, concise information and how it may affect their lives. Newspapers likely will continue to suffer as people are able to read their version of news quickly on their tablets and phones, browsing through for items that interest them and disregarding other information.

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Newspapers' use of the online format likely has helped them to survive and will keep them afloat. Snippets of stories with photos, charts, etc. draw people in, and the

papers could likely have a web link to longer versions of the stories. Print versions will likely have to provide shorter stories, more graphics, and references to the online version for longer versions of the stories. People nowadays rarely have/make time for a leisurely read of the news.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Explained in item 17.

Eugene Stockstill

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

June 1996

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Night reporter

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Michael Tonos

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

No

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

I have a great picture of John Fitzhugh and me, our jeans caked with dirt to the knees. We had been covering a crime story and really got into our work. I remember Sharon Fitzhugh hollering at me when I went on a night assignment: "Go find me the hero!" I was drafted to do feature stories on sushi and the Macarena. Lots of other stories, but those are enough.

I guess I would say it was lots of fun to work there, especially in the beginning.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

2

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, substantially.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

No

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

n/a

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

5 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

religion editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Divinity school in Birmingham.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, mostly via Facebook.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Not really

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

N/a

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

I don't live on the Coast anymore, so I don't have specific suggestions about *The Sun Herald*. I stopped my subscription to a daily newspaper twice because of spelling errors in headlines. A poorly edited paper destroys credibility. In the electronic age, newspapers have to focus on local news; they should be the caretakers of local news.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Newspapers cannot compete electronically. What they can do is record a thorough and thoughtful history of their communities. If they do this, they will continue to thrive.

Lea Ivey Stone

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

I began working in September 1981

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

copy editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Can't remember - South Carolina [reference to State-Record Company of
Columbia, S.C.]

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Jim Lund

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

Very conservative and very local.

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Fun/family atmosphere.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

I left the week after The Sun and The Daily Herald merged.

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, much more liberal.

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, but not much changed in the newsroom. Mainly affected the business office.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

The first ones I worked with. They cared about the employees and the
community.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Just shy of five years.

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Daily Living Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Did not like my new supervisor at all.

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, some.

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

Not really.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

n/a

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Not enough good news and feel good news.

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

I think it's difficult to get folks to read a newspaper (or a book) because everything is digital. 24/7 in your face. I think as I get older, the more I want to read an actual paper again. I can imagine it is hard to fund the operations of a paper because even the ads and coupons are now digital. I think the saddest part is that folks think, read and react so fast, that reporters do not check their facts, their spelling or their sources. If it's on the internet, it must be true. Very poor journalism today.

Stan Tiner

Transcript of interview with Stanley Ray Tiner, executive editor of *The Sun*

Herald:

[SRT is Stanley Ray Tiner, executive editor of *The Sun Herald* and JDI is Judy Day Isbell, the author.]

SRT: I was the first-grade reporter for the Cotton Valley Wildcat. I used to have stories. The paper was mimeographed. Every grade had a reporter and you reported something about your class. I don't know why I got the job, to begin with, but that's what I've always done.

JDI: I could barely write my name in first grade...

SRT: So, at any rate, I was always that guy that was the reporter, the editor of church papers, school papers, on a ship to Vietnam, putting out the troop newspaper that was again mimeographed. And so, at any rate, I was always that guy – the newspaper guy. Nobody in my family, I didn't know anybody who was a journalist or anything, so here I am. So, my start in journalism was very early. So, I'm talking about like 1948. Interestingly, perhaps only to me, my second-grade teacher was a woman named Loyce Hanks. So, decades passed and I came back and I was managing editor of the little paper in Minden, La., my second job. So, that meant I did everything, I did the photos, darkroom work, covered the meetings, did everything in a little daily newspaper. Anyway, so opening day at school in 1969, I went to take pictures and write stories and there was a Mrs. Hanks there. I said, "Hmmm... Mrs. Hanks, I said. I used to have a teacher named Mrs. Hanks." She said, "What's your name?" I told her and it was my

Mrs. Hanks. Cotton Valley and Minden are in the same parish, in Webster Parish in Louisiana. At any rate, that's what I've always done.

SRT: You know I went to Vietnam as an infantry guy. I had been the high school correspondent for the *Shreveport Times*. When I was about to go to Vietnam, the editor said "Why don't you go ahead and write a story about Louisiana marines and send it for our Sunday magazine? We'd like a story like that." So, he had to write a letter and get permission. Turns out, I was a 0311, an infantry guy, a guy who carried a rifle around. And so, they wrote and said could you write a story. The Marines have always been very good about marketing and branding themselves. I went and did that. The marines got to Vietnam. They arrived in March of '65, landed on the beach at Da Nang and I was there in June of '65 – so very shortly afterward. When I got there, there was a shortage of guys to cover the war. You can be an infantryman and one of the things you could be in the Military Occupational Specialty is a combat correspondent. So, they said, how would like... we only had eight guys in the whole country doing this, you look like you could probably do it, would you like to change over there? I said I'm an old country boy but that sounds like a good idea. That's what I did for almost all the time I was there. Then I went back to school at Louisiana Tech on the GI Bill and became the student editor.

SRT: But I was reminiscing about this morning. We were talking about kids and journalists and I was talking to Will Norton the other day and journalism enrollment at Ole Miss has doubled since he's been there. I was talking to somebody else today about it and they said the same thing was happening at another school he knew about. I said you know that's interesting at a time when there's not as many jobs and a lot of upheavals. He said don't you remember young people don't worry about all that stuff. You think about

what's in here [touches chest over heart] and what you want to do and how you can change the world and all that stuff. I said, yea, well, you don't have to go any further than me. My best job offer out of school was at what was then Louisiana Power and Light Company and it would have paid more than twice, almost three times as much money as my first newspaper job. You've got to say right away not smart people who make those decisions.

JDI: That was my first journalism class, the first meeting of my first journalism class in college, the professor said if you're going into this field to make a good living, you need to go ahead and leave right now because you're not going to.

SRT: Yea, I'd go ahead and say there's something inside that makes you want to make a difference and I think that continues to be and we all hope it continues to be a part of whatever journalism is going to become.

SRT: I came here in 2000, so I'm coming up on my 14th anniversary. It was a Knight-Ridder paper when I got here and it was until we sold to McClatchy. So, I've served under Knight-Ridder and McClatchy. Before this, let me say I had only worked for newspaper companies that were owned by families. So, this will get us back there eventually. But you know, all those papers at that point were pretty much... the paper in Texarkana by Walter Hussman and his family still owns that paper. The Arkansas Gazette, the Times in Shreveport was owned by the Ewing family and they also owned the Monroe paper and had the old New Orleans *State*, John D. Ewing is listed as old stuff but it's fairly famous stuff, was very involved in Democratic politics at a national level. He supported Huey Long's rise to power and then he was tossed out by Huey Long. So, the old ownership had political motivations as well as economic interests in all this.

SRT: At any rate, then I had... the Mobile paper was owned by Advance Communications, which was the Newhouse family, which now is very famously involved in some of the biggest changes in the industry. So, they were private even though they owned a number of papers. They were a family ownership of a group of papers. During the time I was with them, it was incredible, we doubled the size of the newsroom in the first year I was there.

SRT: Knight-Ridder was the extent I ever thought about ever working for one of these companies. One of the aspects of working for these families was you were pretty isolated. There's no interaction with other editors and that sort of thing. So, I knew a lot of people through ASNE [American Society of Newspaper Editors]. I knew Knight-Ridder editors and they seemed like the kind of person I wanted to be. Their company seemed like great places to work. It was that way when I got here. But the pressures for change were obviously beginning to be felt, but less so in Knight-Ridder than Gannett or some of the other companies you've heard about.

SRT: So, you ask about 'were you on the staff during the time period when the newspaper was sold.' I was here when it was sold to McClatchy. There was some anxiety about it. There were articles being written and you could keep up with some of what was going on. Not that we had any knowledge that anybody didn't have. We just heard what Romanesco posted or something like that. But we were insulated in the post-Katrina world by that's all we could do. We were keeping our heads down and that's what I told the staff. "There's a lot of things we've got to worry about -- this is not one of them. Whatever is going to happen, none of our activities are going to change any of that. The only way that we can affect our future is to work hard and put out a good newspaper."

We're particularly blessed right now in a way we wouldn't necessarily choose to be because of what this storm did to this community. So, the things that motivated us to be journalists in the first place had manifest themselves as an opportunity to actually do good and have a purpose, a very terrifying time in the history of this part of the world and it allowed us to focus our minds and our energy on doing that and not just worrying about ourselves. There was a little bit of that. There was a lot of impacts, as you would know, on all kinds of people in this newsroom.

And we could sit around and moan and cry about it or we could do our jobs. And I think the job kept us thinking about that and not the other stuff. And with most people, I think it really worked that way.

JDI: I think another thing that happened in the days post-Katrina was the tremendous amount of support from Knight-Ridder.

SRT: Absolutely. I'm so glad you said that. And I ought to tell you, there were a lot of people who ended up not liking Tony Ridder so much and there were some things that went on – some of that before I got in the company. But Tony Ridder was here either day two or day three – I'm a little bit foggy about that – but he got here and we went in the boardroom – actually he walked in. We were having a meeting there. He walked in and said right then and there, "We're going to support you in every way." They had already sent a lot of things. Knight-Ridder was exceptionally capable at dealing with disasters. They had done so after Andrew and the flood in the Dakotas. So, they had constructed an emergency response plan that was phenomenal. I don't think anybody else has done it. So, they had people pre-staged to come in here. They were close. On Day 1, people like Bryan Monroe and others came. They came in here and they had stuff like

chainsaws, and they had cash money... Bryan had like \$10,000 in cash. And satellite phones. They had stuff that we needed and in very short order they were bringing water, ice, and RVs for people to stay, and communication people to set up satellite dishes. They really did a phenomenal job. But Tony Ridder came in and said we're going to support you all the way. We're going to do everything you need to do to do the journalism. You don't have to worry about that. We're going to provide you... and actually, we were the first place that Knight-Ridder did this... They'd sent journalists before but I think it was maybe they learned some lessons. I don't know why they decided to do it this way, all I can say is "Thank you." But they decided to nationalize the reporter force that came in here. You had people – volunteers – coming from all over the company, almost every paper in Knight-Ridder sent somebody here. And instead of working for the *Charlotte Observer* or the Fort Worth paper, they worked for us. So, we could say when we plan "what are we going to do today," there were people sitting out there from Bellville, Kansas City and Wichita and all these places and you know we would assign them and they would do what needed to be done.

So, Tony Ridder said we're going to support you all the way. And we're going to raise money for your people and whatever the employees raise, the company's going to match. I would lose track of when this happened. You may recall better than I would. They ended up with a lot of money – a few hundred thousand that was divided up and given to everyone in the company who had participated in it. You know being able to hand out a check to somebody. I mean, people would sit right where you're sitting and just ball.

Knight-Ridder was phenomenal. We couldn't have done what we did in that period. But all of this other stuff was going on back behind the scenes. Literally, I think it saved us a lot of worries. There was nothing we could have done. We had a lot to keep us busy and that's what we did. You asked what caused the sales to happen. It's all a sweep of history. Everything that's happened from my beginning in Texarkana, really my college days, was hot metal. I literally went from melted lead, creating a line of type and all of that to what we see today. In one lifetime, one career, all of that is pretty freakin' amazing. I don't know where it ends. Nobody knows where it ends.

What we're going through now is like periods of history like the shifts from agricultural to industrial. Those transitions from one age to another didn't take place overnight. It took place over a hundred or more years. No one could have foreseen at the beginning of that because somebody had a machine over here that was going to spin cotton or whatever it was going to do with its impact on labor. You didn't know the internal combustion engine was going to do something that mules had done. None of these things could have been foreseen. There's what I call the gradualism of life and the technology's impact on that is phenomenal. It's so true here. Every step of this way, I have seen people resist the change and history and the machinery of history will run over the people who resist it. I've just seen that.

In our industry, because I've had an unusual span as a top editor of a paper, I have seen different editors whose --I'm going to call their "gag factor" that's the spot where "I can't take it anymore" whatever it is "this is just too much for me" -- and it's come at different times for different people and a lot of editors that were very good at what they did, didn't like that. They couldn't put up with it. It was offensive to their sensibilities

about what was right and wrong. You can stand up to this and say “we’re not going to do whatever it is.” It was a different thing all along the way. We’re going to draw a line and say “putting an ad on the front page is the worst thing in the history of the world” Even though from the very beginning, if you knew the history of this business... I would say this, one of the things I accepted early on because I saw a lot of evidence of it was that the ads are one of the main reasons people buy papers. There’s a lot of research. I haven’t seen research lately because we don’t have money for research and that’s one of the things we’ve lost out on. Advertising is interesting. People want to know what’s for sale and so forth. And I’ve also understood that a newspaper’s a business. If we don’t make it as a business, then the people out there don’t keep their jobs. People don’t get informed. There’s a lot of things that may or may not happen if the business fails.

In the beginning, I think I felt “Ooooh, that’s awful if I’m doing this just to sell newspapers.” That was a very common charge against newspapers, “you do it just to sell newspapers.” I remember one time I was speaking to a civic club in Shreveport and someone asked me. I’d come to peace with what I’m about to say. “Isn’t it true that you do that just to sell newspapers?” I said, “Well, I guess guilty as charged.” General motors probably comes up with colors that people want to buy, they probably make interiors that are comfortable. They’ve learned from the Japanese to put places for coffee cup holders, they’ve put better sound systems just to sell automobiles. Isn’t that something? I said, retailers, the women’s fashion, they make skirts shorter, longer, skinnier, wider, they do stripes and all these things because they want to sell their merchandise. I said I guess so as you’ve put it that way. Everybody finally said, yea, I guess so. It’s OK just to do

something to sell. This is what I've got to sell. If you don't buy it anymore, it's not going to last.

In the beginning, there were guys who literally took a printing press and put it on a wagon and took it across the prairie. A lot of those people had an idea, they had a political point of view. Maybe they just wanted a business, maybe they just wanted to print a story, but there was an opportunity to do that and newspapers were a good place to have a point of view. In a new state, you could be a power, you could help create a civic sense of who we are and what we are and to impact the kind of people who got put in office. There were good publishers and some really lousy publishers, some really corrupt people. All these things. So, we were never pure -- never have been and probably never will be. There were some really great guys and then there were some, these people who had this grand idea to sell papers on a much bigger scale. There was Hearst. There were a lot of guys like that. I have gone from having these local people who ran papers, really most of mine were very good and treated me decently. I always said back when it was like this, I would say my biggest job is to hire a good publisher. It does start if you don't have a good publisher to that's going to back the things you're doing, it ain't really going to happen. Then we went through this the Shreveport Times sold to Gannett and the Journal that I was an editor of was sold to a wealthy entrepreneurial guy who wanted to own a newspaper. I won't go too deep down that. That was the time when chains were beginning to buy more papers. Part of what that was about was tax law. It was forced upon us by onerous taxes. If you had a paper, the way it used to be, if your daddy had it, you ran it, your children were going to run it and it was just kind of passed along. The tax law then said, "you're going to be taxed on the value of the newspaper at the time of the

generational shift.” Let’s say up until now you and your sisters and brothers, whoever owned it, have made a nice little living on the paper in Biloxi, that’s great. OK, so your daddy dies and you’ve been running it for a few years and it’s a nice little family enterprise except now we’ve valued this at \$25 million and you’re going to pay the highest tax rate of 50-60 percent. Where are you going to get \$12 million to pay your taxes? People came up with devices, hand it on to the next generation or something.

SRT: I think Tupelo probably, I don’t know exactly this for certain, creating the trust, the way they set that up allowed them to avoid that taxation thing. That’s just a guess on my part. The value of newspapers was consequently driven up. What people thought people were valued at was x, but what turned out what they were really valued at was y. and Al Neuharth at the Gannett Company understood that better than anybody else. He said a newspaper is worth whatever you’re willing to pay for it. And he understood that early on and went and paid more money than anybody else did for most of these properties. The Shreveport paper was going to be sold. But the family thought it was worth a little bit. So, they had been making a decent living, but the third generation of family ownership of things gets to be a problem. By then you’ve spread it out and you’ve got wives and nephews and nieces and they all have high expectations to live – got have a big house, a big car, and a boat. Eventually, you could only split the pie so many ways and it gets to be a problem. So, along comes Neuharth and the Shreveport paper happened to be one of those benchmark things that let people see what it was really was going to be – it sold for \$50 million. Which was more than anybody thought it would sell for. It had a lot of other properties in with it. Once you told the family they were going to get to split \$50 million, there wasn’t any... there was sort of a dissident family

member who was unhappy with his plight and he went and sought somebody to buy it. He actually went to Hart Hanks to start with. Once the family realized this was going to be a lot. Neuharth got involved and said whatever the other guys pay, I'll pay more and he bought it. And that's the way it happened all over. So, the chains bought all those local papers – some for better and some for worse.

SRT: Then everything changed in the world. The economy went down. There was a digital revolution. You know, before if you wanted to advertise to a mass audience, there was nothing quite like a newspaper to hit everybody who is basically literate. Television and radio marketed to those mass audiences in a different way. But newspapers, if you think about it, pretty incredibly maintained a dominance for a long time. Anybody could have run a newspaper and made a lot of money. A lot of people who didn't have a lot of expertise ran them and didn't make a lot of money.

But by the, certainly by the 90s that were changing pretty rapidly. The glory days of the chains – the Gannetts and the Knight-Ridders were changing. They went from people – the Gannett folks that ran it – the Knight family that owned most of those papers and I'm sure there's a great amount of study of that transition, there's the book *Knight Fall*, takes a critical look at what happened. But the Knight brothers who poured the wealth into the Knight5 Foundation, everybody agreed that they had the highest level of principles and dedication to good journalism. Their newspapers for years created certainly, the best most notable, powerful journalism in the history of American journalism. Then they combined and the Knights and the Ridders went together and Tony Ridder was thrust into that seat of power at a time that these changes were taking place. So, I'm not going to sugarcoat or try to portray – so alto of this was done long before I

was in the company. The changes that people disliked about Tony were there, but you relate to the fact that he was pressured into the deal. At the time, you had a dissident stockholder who was driving the conversation and in a publicly-held environment, the pressure to provide and to be a good steward of the stockholder's value falls to the people who are managing it. So, I think there was that was going on that was happening at a time when we wouldn't have had an impact on any of that. When McClatchy bought Knight-Ridder, they examined all the properties and decided whether they wanted to buy Biloxi or not. They spun off a lot of papers that they didn't want – Philadelphia, San Jose. I think they found that we were a very successful, very profitable, very well-run paper, so they kept us. The thing that has continued to insulate us or makes us stand out in a good or bad way, we're an outlier geographically. What's happened in the modern world is that these companies have tried to put together clusters, geographic clusters of papers that create a synergy in a particular region. The California papers have a lot in common. You can write about state government. You can write about the drought in California – this affects all our papers. You can write about political corruption in the government. You can write about PAC 12 football and all the teams are all our teams. The same things are true in the Carolinas, they've Columbia, and Charlotte and the Bluffton paper. Again, critical mass can do a lot of things together. The only thing like that that we've been able to participate in now is called the Saxotech group. We have a Saxotech system. They created a thing called the Southeast Group and we have worked with them to do what we can to share certain responsibilities, copy editing, any of those papers –that means us, Bradenton, Macon, and Columbus -- have access to everything that the other guys got. If there were to be a disaster to befall them, we could go online and take all that material

and create a paper from here. And there's been times that we can fill in for them and they can fill in for us. If we have a problem, the other can help out. We can do a little bit but not at a very high level. But that seems to be where we are right now in terms of that.

SRT: You say in an era of diminishing resources; do you find the focus of day-to-day operations of daily newspapers is on the quality or quantity of content? Can there be a balance between the two?

I think you can say I'm a realist but I'm also pretty optimistic. I've never given up on what we do. And part of that is because I think that what we do – I long ago stopped thinking of myself as a newspaperman. We're in the communications business. I don't care if it's walking around on the street corners telling people what's going on or putting it on paper or creating an internet site, tweeting it, I mean I buy all that stuff. I think all is good and we have to be capable in all of that. One of the things, you ask about beat structure. We're sort of conventional and we're sort of not conventional. We have people because I find if you don't have someone to represent. It's not having a lawyer, you don't get well represented. Everybody's got an area that they're a lawyer for – somebody covers county government, somebody covers cops, somebody covers schools, and somebody covers medical but then they have to do other things too. So, we have tried. I know I drive people crazy because I relate so much of what I think my newspapers being the newsrooms that I've been in have to do is to the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps has either taught me a lot of it has probably caused people some pain that I follow those conventions. The Marine Corps survives very well in hard times because we are good stewards of the resources that the people give us. The thing the Marines take pride in is that we always do more with less than anybody else. We're always going to try to not be

the organization that the government looks at and says “the Marines spend too much or they lavish or whatever.” The other thing is that every Marine is a rifleman. Before you’re anything else, you have to be able to take a gun and fight the enemy. In this newsroom and other newsrooms that I’ve been affiliated with, everybody’s got to be able to write a story, tell a story – you may be a cook, you may be something else but at the end of the day you pick up your rifle and fight. That’s what we did after Katrina. Everybody in this newsroom told stories. We went out and dug up and found the people, we knew how to get there, we had the hometown advantage and we told those stories very well. Right now, we have retrained. Everybody in our newsroom can do just about anything. So, wherever we have a need, we can plug in somebody over here or plug in somebody over there. That has served us very well.

We’ve adjusted. I think we still have a future. I don’t know what that future’s going to look like. I just think somebody’s got to tell it and you’ve got to tell it from a standpoint of there is more information in the world than there’s ever been. You can find out more about anything or everything that you ever wanted to know.

If our kind of journalism goes away – what we would call the journalism of verification – if you don’t have some sense and I don’t believe that people think, I’ve seen the polls and some people say “Well, we don’t believe newspapers.” Well, we’re all skeptical. We’re all cynical. To some extent, the industry has brought some of that on ourselves by having some bad apples. But mostly for all the reasons we talked about people came in here not to get rich but they want to do something of value, telling the story of this part of the world, nobody does it better than we do. I feel particularly good about the future of papers like ours, of news organizations and companies like ours.

Nobody else knows south Mississippi like we do. Nobody else has a sense of belonging to it like we do. So, we don't just come in in some valueless point of view, it doesn't matter, it's totally neutral – we're not neutral about south Mississippi. We want it to succeed. We have a stake in it. We live here. We want people to be safe. We want them to have money to pay for their kids to go to school. We want them to be able to put groceries on the table. We support things about this area that nobody else does. We support USM football. We want them to be successful. It's better for us when they're winning basketball games or football games than when they're not. We don't mind sharing a little bit for our high school teams versus other high school teams. We're a part of south Mississippi that we think people reward us by buying our papers and going to our website – we're the top website here.

One of the things, on the way that things are changing in this digital transition the thing I didn't see in the beginning that I'm seeing more and more is the pool of money that the paper made, let's say 95 cents of the dollar was made on the print side where a nickel was made on the digital side. So, we're really trying to bridge this period over into the digital age or whatever the age of going to be. Then it got to be a dime, then it got to be 20 cents, then it got to be 30 cents, so then you can begin to see where we're on the right road. But again, you can sort of come to believe something like this is going to happen, but you can't be the same size company on the 30-cent model that you were on the dollar model. It's not like we've given up on the print because we're still making money on the print side. We're still a proper newspaper and we're getting there. You could go back and say the industry made a lot of mistakes in the beginning. I don't think anybody was wise enough to say it was going to be like this. One of the things I always

wished we had done, was to create an Associated Press news cooperative ownership of all the digital information that newspaper companies collected at the beginning, like the AP. If you're a member, we all share in this together. You pay a fee to belong to the thing. They can take all your information, they can distribute it to other buyers, the other members of the cooperative. I think that would have been a big plus for us, but we didn't do it so it's kind of pointless to talk about. From a news standpoint to me, that was one of the things we should have done that we didn't do.

I guess the point I'm saying is I find reasons for encouragement all the way through, and I thought about the people who got the gag factor, a lot of people who couldn't take this change went somewhere else. They got into another job. Did other things. But I find the young people that are coming up... I have to say the veterans here have adjusted pretty damn well, but the young people coming in have a lot of optimism about it. They don't seem to worry so much about it. The colleges seem to be adjusting to training them.

One of the strengths of this newspaper is we have a decent blending of veterans who still have institutional memories of the communities that we live in and they've understood the need to adjust to the technology. I think most everybody on the staff has embraced that this is a good thing that we do. They've taken the training and moved into it. We're getting where the company is now empowering us with more technology. We recently got all the reporters iPads. It may seem like a small thing, but it's the thing.

You know, they've just been able to cover a lot more things and our use of social media. I don't know whether you saw my column recently that talked about how we rank pretty high on a lot of lists for digital stuff. For our part of the world, we're a player that

is still very relevant in the lives of most people. I think one of the things that we have that held us in good stead is our commitment to investigative journalism, that people know that if we don't do this, nobody else is going to do it. Public officials have got to be held accountable. For all the federal money we got after Katrina and the oil spill and everything, if the newspaper didn't do this, I think the average person here understands, "Whoa, we're in trouble!" We're in trouble even with the watchdog, but the watchdog keeps some people mindful that they might get caught.

I think people appreciate it and we hear a lot about that. It's a challenge because you have fewer resources and I would say Katrina taught us a lot of things. One of the things we learned is what we call news triage. There were literally a thousand stories a day we probably knew existed. We couldn't cover a thousand stories a day and so we have to rank order in some kind of way, probably not always the best way. But we came up with what do we think, "What's going to keep people alive today? How do we keep them going?" Point people to where the water is, medical assistance, you've got a disease, where do you go? Very utility driven but also try to add a human dimension. That's what we do now. We realize we can't cover all the stories that we used to cover. There are some things that we have to lose and so we've sort of committed ourselves that we're not going to let the investigative journalism be one of those things we lose. In all truthfulness, there's a lot happening on the internet, on the social media, that people are telling each other stories about the minutia that we used to cover that we can't possibly do. We're certainly not going to manufacture more newsprint to put news that just going to affect five people. When I first got in, people would come to me from the Daughters of the American Revolution, you've got to put in our story about last month's meeting in so

we can put it in the scrapbook. We can't fill up all the scrapbooks anymore. The good thing about the internet is we can post all that stuff on the internet and they can print that stuff out or do whatever they want to. So, that has really enabled us to do more of that in a way that still satisfies with community news and allows us to still tell the overriding issues that we think are important to people here.

Let me say this, we've learned, the marketplace has taught us a lot. There are certain things we've learned that we might not have done before that we do because we know they're going to reward us with big numbers. We're not going back to do it just to sell papers. We do it just to sell the internet. We've got have those numbers.

We're trying to be mindful and do journalism and also have some fun. One of the things that we don't do is take ourselves too seriously. That's hard for a newspaper. That's been a tough lesson to learn, but try and have some fun. Just make sure that at the end of the day, the people feel like *The Sun Herald* reflects everything about this community. Of course, there's going to be bad stories, the crime, the political corruption and all this. But there's a heck of a lot of good things going on and we really try to push some of that out. Make sure that people understand that young people are doing a lot of terrific things and that there are reasons to be hopeful. We look to the hopefulness in the world and not just the hopelessness, those sorts of things.

51:37

About educators, I don't know about that. If I were running a journalism school, I wouldn't just want theoretical minds. I think those are good to have – somebody thinking about what's happened and what's going to happen and certainly people to teach values and traditions, but I would sure want a good mix of people who've actually done it. I

think maybe some journalism schools are doing that. More practitioners are in faculties. So, I think that's what I'd want is a good blend. Another thing I'd do, hearing myself saying this, I can see where it would be a burden in a sense, but I'd get some of those people in and require them to spend some time with modern news organizations to see what the real world is like. That's the thing, I think. I really can't fault the graduates we get from Southern Miss and Ole Miss. We don't get many from State. LSU, we got a couple from. The kids come in knowing how to do all that stuff. Apparently, the schools are doing a good job of teaching them and putting the heart here [touching chest over heart] which is one of the things I look for.

Then the question about the free and unfettered press, that's one of the big things to be seen. You're already beginning to see this cycle that goes back to where I started is that people with money that wanted to influence their community or the world are beginning to do that. Jeff Bezos success at the Washington Post, Warren Buffett who I think of in a somewhat pure way. I don't know that he needs to convince anybody of a political point of view. I'm not sure what his view would be anyway, he's certainly kept it mostly to himself, but the fact that he's investing mostly to say to the world, A, I think it's a good investment and B, I think he understands the civic value of a newspaper. But I do think you could very well see people – it's gone through a lot of the news business and these big companies have gone through a series of shakeouts where investment funds are wringing profits, and then passes it on to the next guy and there's just wave after wave of horrible staff reductions, and you're seeing no end to them. But at some point, I think they're going to succeed and taking out all the potential for all those people to take any more money out of it and I think there's going to be fire sale situation in the towns where

that happens. It's like an NFL franchise or a sports franchise, those have always been rich people's toys. I heard someone talking last night on Gumbel's HBO show talking about sports business and they were saying that the owner of one of the smaller NBA franchises was losing money and could afford to do it. Some people can afford to lose money but they either want to get in to be a big shot in the world. That's one way you can be a big shot is to own the dominant news source in your town. Some want to do it for altruistic purposes. They think the world needs a good paper. Some want to push Democrats or Republicans into office. That might be a motivation, although I'm not sure that a newspaper has that much influence that they would succeed very much.

I also think that it could take it to a place where a foundation run organization – even the companies that used to do that so well, the Poynters, at some point money ran out and but it could come, I could very well see that it could come back to local people owning papers and hopefully they'd want to own it for the right reason. Now Mike Tonos has worked for a company that does something like that. I've never been a part of that. I've read about it and understand something about it, but no matter whoever runs an organization there's some point of view in that. I couldn't even tell you who the board is that decides editorial policy in Tupelo, but whoever they are, they have a point of view and that would be true wherever. They could say we only want positive news in the paper, but that's not the world. Maybe the way you make the town better is by pointing out where it's not so positive, what are the deficiencies? How could we work on this? I'm not saying they don't do it. I'm just saying, in general, that could be a problem that a theoretical board of directors at any place not necessarily any more dedicated to truth, justice, and the American way than a good editor or good publisher could be. It all

depends on who the people are in place. But I think the thing if we can hold on to a critical mass of journalists who are trained in doing what we've done so well for so long. I do believe in survival of the fittest. The ones who've stayed the longest and fought the hardest and made it through this difficult period are well equipped for whatever is going to come. And that's sort of my innate optimism. I see a lot of problems. I'm anguished over a lot of things I've seen and people I've known who have been hurt by this cycle. It's change that's been here and change it's going to be and by golly, we better get used to it.

JDI: I was glad to hear you say the reporting staff still maintains something of beats. One of the concerns I have was with all the reductions, and the changes that the relationship between source and reporter can't really be diminished too much or you lose a lot.

SRT: Right. One of the things I'd say also that there's been the change of the day I see different newsrooms and there will be some big ballyhoo thing "we're going to do this," in the way the newsroom is designed. At every stage of my career, there have always been the expert things. I'm not against experts. I'm for them. I just never had money to play. There was a period in our days, it was all about design. There were certain designers that got millions of dollars to redesign newspapers and cost a lot and took a long time to do. The story I used to tell was when I went to Mobile. At that point, it wasn't a very good newspaper and I was fortunate that I was able to be the editor at that particular time. It needed changing rapidly, so we went to a church camp in Baldwin County and took all the editors down there. We brought a big bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and some soda pops. We got together and spent a couple of days and redesigned

the Mobile Register in about a week. So, for \$100 we redesigned it and people liked it. But it wasn't the design that made the Mobile Register successful, it was the content. It was always the content. If we don't deliver the good stuff, and the good stuff can be a lot of different things but it's the things people need and want to make their lives happy, and it's relevant to them in the current days. Papers have gone through phases where we didn't do that very well. And frankly, all this competition has forced us to be smarter and sharper about what we do. There was a snobbishness to journalism at a time that we'd turn our nose up at certain things. This chain period that I talked about when the Gannetts and Knight-Ridders bought everything, there was a period in which there was sort of a theory of neutrality in papers. We shouldn't endorse people and we shouldn't do this... there's this side and there's that side... boring! We created some fairly boring things. I think papers do better that have a heart and have passion and have spirit. That's reflected in what we do. I don't think you get that out of everybody. First of all, I think this just pure objectivity is more of a theory than a reality anywhere... we should always strive to be fair and have an understanding of what the different groups and the people we need to make sure their voice is heard but at some point, we should kind of know what *The Sun Herald* stands for. We're going to stand for investigative journalism and try to keep people informed about bad roads or whatever is relevant or important in their lives, about the quality of education and things like that. We shouldn't just print the news. We have an opinion. Our opinion pages make a difference sometimes.

Mike Tonos

Transcript of an extended interview with Mike Tonos, former executive editor of *The Sun Herald*:

I joined the Daily Herald in October 1973 as a copy editor after graduating the previous summer with a journalism degree from Ole Miss. I ended up on the Coast after applying for a job at the Delta Democrat Times in my hometown of Greenville, Miss. The managing editor at the DDT was Pic Firmin. He didn't have any openings but referred me to the Coast, where a new morning paper (the South Mississippi Sun) was being launched on Oct. 1 by Gulf Publishing Co., which also published the afternoon Daily Herald. The Sun had no openings, but the Daily Herald had a spot on the copy desk, and I was hired for that position. I started Oct. 15. I worked at the Daily Herald until 1976, when Pic, who had become editor of The Sun, hired me for that paper as copy desk chief, and eventually, I became city editor. I was at GPC as the two staffs started to merge, although we still produced two newspapers. That was the situation (I believe) when I moved to Vicksburg to work as managing editor for the Evening Post. When I returned to the Coast three years later as managing editor, we were producing only one paper – the morning Sun Herald.

I became familiar with the history through my own research but also by listening to my co-workers, many of whom worked for the Wilkes family when the Daily Herald had offices in both Biloxi and Gulfport.

Part of that history involved the change from the family to State-Record, which occurred before I got to the Coast. I had returned as ME of *The Sun Herald* a few months

before the announcement of the sale to Knight-Ridder. I had left before the paper was sold to McClatchy. So, I actually worked under State-Record and Knight-Ridder.

I was on the staff at the time of the sale to Knight-Ridder. I wasn't in on the sales discussions, but my understanding is that the Morris family (owners of State-Record) were ready to sell. I can't speak to the necessity of the sale, but I do know that in the newsroom, at least, the sale was seen as a good thing, especially with K-R's reputation for journalistic excellence. Overall, I think the sale to K-R was a good thing, at least in the early stages. It helped in the sharing of resources and expertise and gave us a peer group in which we could compare our performance with others. It did require and precipitate an evolution in culture from the "family" view of the operation and employees to a more businesslike "community" view.

When I arrived, we had two newspapers – the established afternoon *Daily Herald* and the new a.m. *South Mississippi Sun*. Both newsrooms were in the same building, but each had its own staff and was set up in a traditional model. We had bureaus in Jackson, Hancock County, and Jackson County. The only shared resource that I recall is the photo staff. In the 1980s, the staffs were merged but still produced two newspapers. That was the situation when I left in 1983; when I returned in 1986, it was one newspaper – *The Sun Herald*, a daily a.m.

The invisible wall – Yes, it's porous, as newspapers try to figure out how to stay in business. As far as conflict of interest, it's always been there (at least in modern times, as newspapers sought to become objective purveyors of news). But until the late 1980s and 1990s, it was easier for publishers to enforce the wall because, as the only game in town, they were making money. But when revenue started to fade, well after readership

started declining, the wall was lowered and the lines were increasingly blurred. Ad directors had no qualms about making their views known to the news side, and everyone came to learn that their jobs depended on how much money came in. In Knight-Ridder, we began pushing customer service in the newsroom as well as business literacy for news folks, which made perfect sense but was seen as dragging journalists more into the business operation (and I don't think that was necessarily a bad thing). And in the search for revenue, marketing material was presented in news formats, unusual ad placements were created and previously all-news pages, including the front page, started carrying prominent advertising. Some of these changes are now taken for granted, but at the time journalists regarded them as cheapening the journalistic product.

The product doesn't have to be good – I'm not sure I've heard this. What I have heard, and have come to appreciate, is that in many cases “good enough is good enough.” I've always felt that readers to a large extent determine the quality. If they like and value it, they'll buy it; if they don't, they won't. That doesn't mean journalists don't or aren't encouraged to produce outstanding work, but now it's a matter of choosing your spots. And it also depends on the organization's standards. But with staffs shrinking in size, everyone is asked to do more, and that's likely going to mean working in some mediocre, quick-and-dirty work with the type of work journalists would rather spend time on. As with the invisible wall, there always has been and always will be a tension that has to be managed. Finally, I believe that when it comes to local news, quantity is part of the quality – a good local newspaper has lots of local news, not just one stunning piece of enterprise surrounded by wire copy.

Future of democracy and social media – I think good news organizations will provide journalism that is both wanted and needed, and I think the industry and profession will adapt to find ways to produce the journalism needed for democracy to work. Right now, I think we're still in a transition phase, and I think readers/viewers are stumbling along with us. My overall concern is that the public's definition of journalism is changing, and not necessarily for the better – think Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, etc., as well as opinionators who use social media to espouse ideas through opinion pieces. I worry that too many people confuse this type of writing with fact-based journalism. The notion that readers like people who support their own views have moved from the narrow world of the opinion pages into an entirely different and much greater dimension on the Web and through social media.

Ownership models – I suggest that the model found in Tupelo – having a community foundation as the sole shareholder – could work as well or better than most others I have seen or worked for. Each form has its benefits and drawbacks, but overall, I have found Tupelo more to my liking – local control but not necessarily running at the whim of a family; no shareholder demands or expectations; and a strong connection to the community (one part of the deal is that the paper can't be sold to outsiders).

Barin von Forreger

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

2002

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

Assistant Sports Editor

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Stan Tiner

Early Editorial Philosophy of *The Sun Herald* during your tenure?

local coverage over national, community

Recollections from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

The newsroom was very diverse, with some by-the-book journalists and some rough-edged writers. The mix was good, however, with very good reporting around the Coast.

Number of executive editors during your tenure?

One

Editorial changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

N/A

Ownership changes you recall from your tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

Changed to McClatchy, I didn't see any change.

Who was the best owner of the newspaper in your opinion?

From the news side, we continued to do what we did best ... community/local coverage. The guys with offices were pressured, which made the newsroom dicey, at times.

What was your length of tenure at *The Sun Herald*?

1.5 years

What was your last position at *The Sun Herald*?

Assistant Sports Editor

What was the reason you separated from the newspaper?

Joined wife at MSU in Starkville

Do you keep in touch with colleagues at *The Sun Herald*?

Yes, through social media

Do you stay informed of activity at *The Sun Herald* following your departure?

I've lost touch with the paper, however, the decline of journalistic integrity (and respect from the public) has me worried about the next generation of journalists.

Do you have specific thoughts regarding changes at the paper following your departure?

If you had control of *The Sun Herald*, what changes would you make?

Maintain community coverage

What are your opinions regarding the state of the newspaper industry?

Print journalism is still the source for my news, but I lose faith in how news is delivered today with so many 'fake' news sources being used for information by the

public. If newspapers don't find a strong stance with social media and mobile apps, the degradation of news as I've known it will cease to exist.

Roland Weeks

When Started at *The Sun Herald*?

1968

First Position at *The Sun Herald*?

General Manager, Gulf Publishing Company

First Owner when joining *The Sun Herald*?

State-Record, Knight-Ridder

First Executive Editor when joining *The Sun Herald*?

Gene Wilkes

Transcript from an extended interview with Roland Weeks, retired publisher of
The Sun Herald:

[RW is Roland Weeks and JDI is Judy Day Isbell, the author.]

RW: I started in 1963. Let me tell you quickly when I finished college, I was an engineer. I worked for two years as an engineer. And then the newspaper called and said hey do you want to come work? I went back to my boss and he talked me out of going to work on a newspaper. Then our company was sold in Greenville, S.C., so I said Oh my God, and went back to the folks at Columbia newspapers. They gave me a hard time but they hired me. The deal was I could work for five years -- I could work in every department. I worked one year in each of the departments in an effort -- I didn't realize at first -- to be trained to be a generalist to be one of the first generalists in the newspaper business with the thought that that company instead of being bought would buy other newspapers because it was at a time 1963 at a time when newspapers were either buying

or selling. It was in that mode. But I worked for five years and then we bought the newspaper here and I came here.

And it was interesting. When I came here you can imagine the newspaper was all by itself was a story. You could probably make a book that thick that would be interesting and fun and humorous in many ways but it truly was one of the old newspapers owned by a family that had no idea what it was doing beyond just daily putting out a small-town paper. So, the daily paper ran much like a small-town weekly newspaper. So, I came here. Two things. One, they were way behind even then making the changes that were taking place. The other thing was that they were doing a good job of the who, what, when, where, why reporting. They were stuck in the old kind of reporting but they did a very good job of that. As time went on, it was interesting that we sort of got away from it. We were so embroiled in doing beautiful journalism, we weren't doing beautiful journalism pretending that we forgot what we were really about – reporting on what was going on in a small town.

I joined the Columbia newspaper. It wasn't a small-town newspaper but it was a family newspaper that came very close I think to selling and then they brought in some family members who were capable of growing instead of falling apart. There was one family member they were wise enough to bring him in and they carried on. That's sort of where I come from.

JDI: What was the organization of the newspaper operation like when you arrived?

RW: When I came here, I was 31 years old and the State-Record Company bought the newspaper and sent me here to run it. But, to buy the newspaper they had to

agree to keep Mr. Wilkes as the editor – which was a good plan anyway – to keep Jo Riecker was a necessity. It probably was wise to keep her just so that there wasn't this revolution that changed everything and got the local community up in arms. They were up in arms anyway. There were some people who were very, very unhappy and thought I was a real scalawag. I came from South Carolina so they couldn't confuse me with being a Yankee. One of the newspapers that tried to buy this and came very close was from Vermont, I think. But anyway, one of those states up there. Just quickly as an aside, the man who tried to buy it who was a friend of the man I worked for who did buy it, John Magee, he and I and John were together one time and he laughed, he said, "Son, he said, don't worry, he said, you can't do anything wrong." Which wasn't entirely true. But I mean the point was the newspaper really was a Rube Goldberg just wild and crazy thing.

When I came in, Jo Wilkes Reicker said: "Ok, I don't know where we're going to put you, I think we'll put you upstairs." They put a floor in over the lobby. It was just built in. I mean the lobby had a tall opening and so they just went in and built it. And on the second floor were these rickety steps that went up there. There was this little room made up of window casements nailed together. They were all windows all the way around with a little door. On the outside of those window casements were back copies of the newspaper. That was where the newspaper was stored. And they were stacked so when you looked through these windows you looked at newspapers all the way around. Well, that was my office. Jo decided that we're going to put you up there. And so, I went in and there was nothing in there. She said, "Well, take Mr. Weeks a desk." So, an older black man came upstairs with this metal desk and the drawers wouldn't open. And they put it down and they had a chair and I swear to God I'm not exaggerating; the chair was

a... back in those days they had what they called a typist's chair. The typist's chair had a wider seat than a regular chair. And the seat was sitting on top, but it was not attached, it would fall off. And they walked out and left me there. So, one of the smartest things I ever did in all of my years of trying to manage a lot of crazy things, I called Columbia. I said "John, I want to ask you a question but first let me tell you, so I told him. I told him what happened and he laughed and laughed and laughed. And he said, what are you going to do? I said, well, John, one question: I said do I control the money? He said 'you do.' I said 'Thank you.' I called Joan Theron. I asked her to come up to the office. I said 'Joan, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go to a store that sells office furniture and I want a new desk, not a fancy or expensive one, but a new metal desk. And I want a chair and I want a credenza.' You could have heard a pin drop when that furniture arrived. It was the first time new furniture had come into that plant in 50 years I suppose. And so, when that came in it was a signal that I had taken over. God bless her, Jo fought a little bit but she kind of understood. And Mr. Wilkes took me to a local meeting – Moose Club or something -- and he introduced me as his new boss. I was embarrassed. I didn't particularly want that, but anyway at that point I literally took over. I was the general manager and she was the publisher. That lasted for... she left after maybe three years or four years. But her partner, you remember her? She had a partner who worked in the composing room. Technically the superintendent of the... her brother was the manager of the composing and press room but he wasn't, and Jo's partner was. It was one of those crazy things where Walter, who was the brother, was treated like a fool. And he wasn't. It was a shame. But the old man for some reason as much as I liked him, he treated his son like dirt and he treated Jo like she was a queen. Walter was production manager but he

had no authority whatsoever. When we got rid of the Linotype machines, which he maintained, that was really what he did, he came to me and he said: “What am I going to do?” And I said, “Well, Walter, I’ve thought about it and I want you to be in charge of building maintenance.” And he cried. The man was 65 years old probably. And I said let me tell you, Walter, I said you know, I was 31 years old, I said “you know and I know you’ve never had respect here and you’ve never really been production manager. This is a job, this is your job, it’s a big job and you have full authority” and he brightened up and cheered up and he stayed for a couple years and then he left.

And then there was a sister who worked in the advertising department and after about 5 days she said, “Will you come to my home?” It was not far from here. I went and had coffee and she said, “I want you to fire the ad director and make me the ad director.” And I said, “I can’t do that.” She said, “Well, why not?” I said “Well, your father hired Harry Stone 20, 30 years ago. And you want me to fire him the day I walk in?” She said, “Yea, I do.” And I said, “Well, I’m not going to do it.” She said, “Well, I quit.” And I said, “Ok.” And that’s how it all started.

It didn’t stop for years. It wasn’t only family but there were a lot of people there who were part of the family but weren’t part of the family. Every year they would have a banquet. I think people had to pay their way to come to the banquet. The Wilkes paid people in three different checks. One was a weekly paycheck. The second was a month-end bonus and then the third was one you got once a year at the banquet. And to get your bonus at the banquet you had to come up and have Mr. Wilkes hand up a check – one employee after another was handed their check. So, I changed all that and put it all together in one check and paid it every two weeks. People were furious. They loved

going up and getting their check. It really was one of those things where human nature liked being treated that way even though under normal circumstances, they would have resented it.

The pay was pitiful. They charged a nickel for the newspaper in the racks. I don't know what it was home delivered but it wasn't much. The building was filthy.

JDI: My theory was that the Wilkes were facing major changes that they couldn't handle and they needed to find deeper pockets.

RW: That was true.

Camille was 1969. I went to Columbia and told them we had this property on DeBuys Road that we bought with the newspaper and that we needed to provide leadership and what we ought to do is build a new plant now. I had tears in my eyes and met with the board. They agreed and we brought an architect in from Denver that day or the next day and we brought a contractor in from Columbia because the contractors here were not yet doing anything and we signed the contract. That was August and we broke ground in December. It was 11 months later that we moved in. What I told them was I didn't want all this baloney – they had three different examples and I picked one and they said “Well, that's just an example,” and I said, “I don't care, you work with it.” They used that as the basis for it and they began drawing and we began working, and so we had a rare situation where the drawings were coming out as the building was going up. And so, it was fast and it turned out just fine.

We did add on. You may remember we added on to the newsroom.

JDI: Yea, I was thinking that a lot of people looked at the building and saw that a lot of thought went into the next hurricane and the next because it was obviously a very different design from previous Sun Herald buildings.

RW: Yea, I wanted few windows – it was not popular back then, but the idea was to prevent another hurricane.

JDI: When Katrina came through, they had a few leaks but that was it which said a lot for that building.

RW: It was in the right place, too, north of the railroad tracks. You know that area goes up to the tracks and it went all the way down and it was a swampy area right in the middle of that whole area. We had to fill in and there was an incredible amount of slop down in there and they had to dig it out and dig it out for when we started construction and bring in the filler. And then that area behind it back there was a low area that was damp and then it went along beyond that to the golf course.

JDI: How did you come to take the position of General Manager for The Daily Herald? How did the Columbia-based State-Record Company sell the position to you?

RW: At that time, I worked for a guy named John Magee. This is probably not a good part of the story, but at that point, folks were just looking for newspapers to buy. It was close to the height of the time when you either bought or sold. The reason for that, very simply was, up to a point in time you had second generation owners and then third generation owners, and frankly it just sort of slid down. It went from like the old man who owned this newspaper who really knew what he was doing, he did a hell of a good job. He realized that Gulfport was growing so he put the main plant over in Gulfport which was a brilliant move. These people that I worked with, they didn't have a clue.

They were just sort of waiting to see what was going to happen tomorrow. The old man who owned it, to begin with, made a lot of very wise entrepreneurial based decision. So, by the time that Gene Wilkes came along, he didn't have a clue. He could write and he couldn't make decisions. The story was that he ran an editorial that made some people mad. He got so upset he wet his pants and swore he would never run another editorial – ever.

When I got here, they were running on the editorial page, they were clipping out little stories little nice things for the editorial side and they were getting them out of the Sunshine Magazine and they would give them attribution. These little nice stories. That was how bad it was.

That was somewhat typical. A lot of newspapers had just sort of bogged down and realized that then suddenly some really smart people came along.

They were smart but they really didn't give a damn about journalism. This is all business and they recognized that there was an opportunity to be a typical American – go out and buy something that makes money. So, they began buying newspapers and that's what really began the whole thing. There was a guy named Carmage Walls who was real, you know Carmage was one of the guys just out buying newspapers, smart as hell, but didn't give a damn about what he was buying – it was just an opportunity to make money. That created an environment that made people wake up and say “Hey look, I can make \$6 million,” ‘because I think that's what they paid for this newspaper. If the truth was known and the folks in Columbia half knew it – that was a steal because you could pretty quickly make changes like you know go up to ten cents, that's doubling the income from racks, that wasn't big money, but I mean it was typical. So, a lot of folks were out

buying newspapers and they were paying what the folks who were second and third generation good ole boys [were asking] because there weren't any girls back then except for Jo Wilkes Reicker. People were offering big and folks were selling. By then, there were 200 members of the [Wilkes] family. One of the dynamics was even if one or two of them didn't want to sell, the others were all stockholders, they had a board and the board said we want our money, "sell." The reason a lot of them sold was not that one or two wanted to do it but the family members got bigger and bigger and bigger, they wanted to do it.

JDI: In going through *The Sun Herald* history files, the next generation [after George Washington Wilkes, the founder] had a lot of interest, but they weren't really journalists. With fewer real journalists in the family and the cost of running a newspaper growing, it became the perfect storm for selling.

RW: In the beginning, I'll go on and tell you this, looking at what happened in the next 20-30 years, that some of the folks who then became really big, the McClatchy's and so on, they don't really count. Some of the large companies really cared about journalism, they arguably made the newspapers better, not only in terms of providing basic services but better in reporting and editorializing. They did that as long as they could make more money, and then when they finally reached that tipping point, they went off. Of course, now you can see a huge drop. That drop started probably 15 years ago where they peaked and then the companies began to care more about holding on – and serving stockholders, these were big companies with lots of stockholders with a huge amount of pressure on them to produce.

JDI: Tony Ridder was really pressured at the time of the McClatchy sale, wasn't given any choice. That I think is the thing that has a lot of media scholars doing a lot of research now on what is the business model for the future for journalism if it's to succeed or continue? There seems to be an inherent conflict of interest between the profit model and the responsibilities of the Fourth Estate? They always said there was that "invisible wall" between the editorial side and the advertising side, but now it seems very porous...

RW: Well, it's worse than porous. I was interested, and because I was interested, I went over to a big conference in New Orleans. I was president of the publisher's association, so I called and with that reasoning, I was offered an opportunity to come over and participate. So, I sat through like four days. The news is now called "content," the emphasis is on "content," and news is one part of that, but the thing that is important to the publishers is content and of course you can deliver it any number of ways. I came away being just furious, but then I sat and thought and realized if I was still there and wanted to continue to earn my keep, I would have to look at it the same way. It's a matter of either the government deciding you're going to do it one way with rules or the free enterprise system telling you what you have to do. So, I understand but the wall is no longer there at all. If news can be part of what attracts readers and advertisers, fine. If it isn't, something else will do just as well.

JDI: There has been a message to the troops at the front level of "it doesn't have to be good."

I hadn't heard that. That makes me mad again. And I really think that based on knowing the people at the *Sun Herald* that they still care and they're still doing a hell of a good job.

JDI: A middle management editor is the one saying “just do it.”

RW: It’s also a case of the old-time editors and reporters and the folks who are coming along. The new ones coming along who haven’t been imbued with “get it right,” they are understandably a part of the new way of thinking. But the people who’d been around a long time still care in spite of everything – they’re almost pushed to not care but they care anyway. When they die off, I don’t know what’s going to happen.

JDI: One of the things the university has been looking at it is how do we change the curriculum for journalism to prepare these people for what they’re going to face now? There seems to be an ideal taught at university and they get to the working world and experience, “whoa, what is **this**?” They are trying to take stock of how do we prepare people for what they are going to be expected to do? When you look at the inherent value of what’s being put in video...

RW: It’s all terrible. It’s all shameful. You know it’s interesting. I hadn’t thought about journalism schools, but I hope that somewhere it bottoms out and leaves newspapers and journalism as an important force in the world. But whether that’s going to happen is the big question – whether the force is to get readers and advertisers – and now it’s viewers and advertisers. So, the question becomes whether that force simply takes over and eliminates any concern about good journalism or not. To me, that’s the fight. And who is going to fight for good journalism? And what is the motive for doing that? There are a lot of good people fighting for all kinds of wonderful things but they’re marginalized – they’re off making noises and having some degree of influence on people’s thinking, but they’re the academics, they’re the people who aren’t in the

mainstream. So, if that's where we're headed, God bless us. We're in big, big, BIG trouble.

JDI: And that's part of the emphasis of this dissertation – where is democracy without a truly free press?

RW: It doesn't exist in my somewhat learned opinion. I don't think democracy can exist without a learned press, without a free press, without a press that is not only willing but able to tell people what they don't want to know. You know that I remember years and years ago when we were worried about a few little things that were in the paper that weren't important – not only comics but a lot of other things that were there to give people who don't think much a reason to buy the newspaper and my comment was somewhat jokingly, "Give the bastards enough of what they want so we can continue to give them what they need." But what has happened over the years, is that what they want has taken over. For a time, there were things in there that were put in there that were simply fun and appealed to the masses. Now we have to put in all this other stuff to give them a reason to read the newspaper. I have a Facebook site and I'm on there at this point primarily to see what the hell people are thinking and what's going on. I realize that all that [social media] creates a lot of what's going on. It's not just sharing what's out there, but it's creating a lot of it and encouraging a lot of foolishness.

JDI: Social media has become sort of an agenda setter for legitimate media. It's really a 180 of what it used to be and makes you wonder, where's the bottom, we keep finding more low spots and no bottom.

RW: You know, one of the dynamics of this is in the old days for me even. There were a lot of people out there who didn't think much but had no real opportunity to

participate in the discussion. Now, everyone is able to participate and an awful lot of uninformed, really almost dangerous people are able to participate and influence. One of the problems of Washington today is not just the people there but it's us. It's the people who influence them who determine who's going to be elected and what's expected of them. In the old days, most of the folks out there were just sort of wandering around and relatively few people making decisions and telling them in Washington what they thought and what they wanted and expected and now everyone does. That's one of the tremendously important, new dynamics in this thing. The folks there, we blame them, but they're a reflection of what's going on here. It's sad.

JDI: When you read Facebook and Twitter and wonder "how many people are there out there like that?" My son's 23 and he no longer goes to Facebook because he recognizes the stupidity of it. It gives me some encouragement. There are some students in Long Beach who have abandoned Facebook because of the politicization and polarizing discussion. They stick with Instagram, take pictures of things and have quick comments.

RW: I only go because I'm really curious to know what they're talking about.

JDI: I was going to ask what you thought of the different ownership models now. I know the Guardian is owned by a trust. I wonder sometimes if there is a way somewhere amongst the trusts or employee ownership that could be a way forward for journalism?

RW: I don't see it. I would like to have that belief. I just don't see any way in a so-called free society that that can happen. We've allowed free enterprise to just go too far. If I ever worked on a report or book it would be on the importance of balance. I think

the one word that is missing today is balance. You talk about compromise which is part of it, but you can easily criticize compromise as something that shouldn't be in our life. I don't think it's a dirty word. It's too easy to say you should compromise your principles. Balance is a word you can use without having that same reaction. I think that is what is missing today. That is what we have lost. In so many ways, we have simply allowed things to get so far out of hand that there is no way to have a degree of balance in any of these huge forces that are controlling our lives.

JDI: I think there's not a lot of productivity. Think about the government shutdown recently. There is no compromise anymore just to look at a big picture example, everybody is in their entrenched positions and there's been no room left for finding middle ground anywhere.

RW: I agree and I really think that the reason comes back to what we're talking about. It comes back to the people. It comes back to too many folks influencing those decisions. You can say that's very un-American because we believe in having everybody have their rights and all the rest of it.

JDI: Well, the electoral college – the forefathers saw something in that notion that there had to be calmer heads prevailing.

RW: But I think that the problem of the lack of balance is affecting almost everything.

JDI: I remember Shelby Foote was famous for saying that we had the Civil War because we failed at our one great strength which was compromise.

RW: I think we've always been black and white, but we haven't had the tremendous buildup of forces on both sides. We've always had people screaming and

yelling at each other across lines. But the masses were always in the middle waiting to see what happens. Go back to the Civil War, it was a case of a few people really making a lot of folks decide whether they wanted to or not, this is what I'm going to do. And today, you don't have that same dynamic. You have everybody deciding, well, maybe you do, you don't have people stupidly moving along doing whatever the few people making decisions want them to do, but you do have Twitter and all the rest of it telling people what they ought to think and making them part of that movement. I think a lot of people back in the day were simply caught up in the Civil War. They were forced. Even if you go in the 50s and 60s and what was going on then – still a lot of people – you consider how quickly we changed from a society that hated black people to a society that in Mississippi only that went almost to the other side of that coin. It is remarkable and you wonder how it happened. Well, it happened simply because we had people who were not – you had a few people over here were rabid. But the masses were simply listening to the people in control. And when the other people came, they moved over without much difficulty. That's why we almost overnight changed from a hateful society to one that is nominally hateful. We hate football teams now.

JDI: What was the Knight-Ridder purchase like?

RW: I don't know whether I can answer your question very well but I can tell you what occurred to me as we went along. The State-Record Company was sort of caught in the old way of doing business. And it was a good newspaper, but it wasn't as sophisticated as the papers like the *Miami Herald* and so forth and so on. It was still a good old boy newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina. And it had come a long way but it was still one that was run by some of the old timers with some of the older ways of

thinking and covering news – not all bad. When I first went there, we didn't really have air conditioning in the building and folks still had liquor bottles in the bottom drawer. You know it was one of the old-time newspapers. Folks pretty much did what they wanted to do and there wasn't a hell of a lot of extremely complicated management running things. It just sort of ran itself. So, it was part of the old way but it was the big city. When the newspaper recognized it had to either – to satisfy its stockholders – they had to convince them they were going to become one of the big new chains to make their stock more profitable or they had to sell. That was the dynamic. That was the thing that made the difference. When they bought this newspaper, they were still flailing away at “We've got to become something different.” And they weren't. They hired John Magee from Charleston, S.C. They brought in Ambrose Hampton, who was an engineer working in North Carolina to replace the Hamptons who were really... I could go on. One of them drove a big red pickup truck. He told me one day “I wish niggers were still niggers.” He meant that not in a mean-spirited way, he just... when we were changing. I was hired first as the HR director, the first one, personnel manager. I almost immediately took down the signs at the restrooms, the water fountains and the rest of it. They almost fired me. I told them “fine. If you want to fire me, do it.” And they said, “Why did you do it?” And I said, “It's the thing I think we should do.” And they finally sort of said “OK.” But anyway, somewhere along the way, that Hampton was just a good old boy. But they were the people who were a little more sophisticated than Gene Wilkes but that was the kind of newspaper it was.

When they began developing, they began to change their ways to become a more sophisticated management company that was run by managers as opposed to everybody.

But they had not developed the sophistication that Knight-Ridder had at that time. Interestingly, when I rejoined Knight-Ridder there was a huge emphasis on good journalism. That was one of the things that made me very happy about that change. When I met with representatives of the company who came to see us, they had two people who always came – one was an editor and a business person. They had a dual responsibility. The editor was there to see to it that we did a good job and the business person was there to see to it... I wonder today if that's the case. It was interesting that we went from the old way of thinking and doing it and to an interim getting better about running a company and reporting news to when we became part of Knight-Ridder to a company that really cared – about people, they cared about journalism and they cared about stockholders.

I remember one time, as an aside again, when I had a conversation with these two people. Sometimes they were a little contentious – they were giving me a hard time and I was fighting back to the extent that I thought I could. And I told them, I said, “I serve three masters: one the stockholders which you represent, readers and employees.” I said, “I tell you how I put them, readers come first, employees come second, and stockholders come third.” Of course, I could see the angst. They were there to represent not only the people who ran the company, but they ran the company for the owners and the owners were stockholders. I understood that. I appreciated that. In order to negotiate a little freedom to do what we did back then, I wanted them to know that I cared mainly about our readers, and then I cared about the employees, and then I cared about the stockholders. My argument was if I cared about the readers first and the employees second, then I'm really doing the best job for the stockholders.

APPENDIX D – IRB Approval Letter



The University of
Southern Mississippi

Institutional Review Board

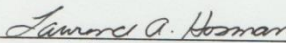
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**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **27091801**
PROJECT TITLE: **Journalists' Observations on the State of the Profession**
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **10/01/07 to 12/05/07**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Judy Day Isbell**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**
DEPARTMENT: **School of Mass Communication & Journalism**
FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **09/24/07 to 09/23/08**



Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

9-24-07

Date

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