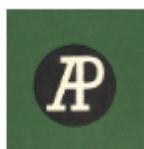


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Connecting April 06, 2021

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Colleagues,

Good Tuesday morning on this the 6th day of April 2021,

With sadness Connecting brings you news of the death of one of AP's finest journalists.

Sharon Cohen, who was a national writer based in Chicago for half of her more than four decades at The Associated Press, died Monday at her Chicago home. Her death at the age of 68 came more than a year after she was diagnosed with brain cancer.

Her partner for 40 years, **Mike Robinson**, a former AP staffer, asks that for now, rather than flowers, that donations be made in Sharon's name to the [Lou and Jean Malnati Brain Tumor Institute](#).

If you have a favorite memory of Sharon, please send it along to share with your colleagues.

Congratulations to Ron Nixon ([Email](#)), global investigations editor at The Associated Press, who is winner of the first-ever News Leader of the Year award from the News Leaders Association. See the story below.

Are there any survivors of garage bands of the '60s and '70s among our group?

That was the subject of my latest Spotlight in my hometown newspaper, The Messenger of Fort Dodge, Iowa, about groups of teens who formed bands following the February 1964 appearance of



the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show. Click [here](#) to read – and send along your own experiences, with a photo. I should mention that our colleague **Mark Mittelstadt** once performed garage rock and was featured in the story.

Have a good day – be safe, stay healthy.

Paul

Sharon Cohen, much-honored AP national writer, dead at 68



Associated Press national writer Sharon Cohen poses for photo in Chicago on July 26, 2017. Cohen, a matchless reporter who told American stories with great skill and

compassion over more than four decades at The AP, died Monday, April 5, 2021, at her Chicago home. She was 68. (AP Photo/Kiichiro Sato)

By JERRY SCHWARTZ

Sharon Cohen, a matchless reporter who told American stories with great skill and compassion over more than four decades at The Associated Press, died Monday at her Chicago home. She was 68.

At her death, more than a year after she was diagnosed with brain cancer, Cohen was a national writer, a prestigious position she had held for 20 years. From her base in Chicago, she unreeled an array of stories about the triumphs and tragedies of people both ordinary and extraordinary.

There was the story of Vashti Risdall, the foster mother of 162 children who retired at age 96 only because her 74-year-old daughter insisted. Of Marine Sgt. Merlin German, the “Miracle Man” who survived a bomb blast in Iraq, dancing with his mom after 100 surgeries. Of barber Gilbert Peppin, who lived under a shadow for 30 years, unjustly suspected of his wife’s murder.

Every story got the Sharon Cohen treatment: determined reporting, zealous fact-checking, direct and evocative writing. She knew no other way.

“Sharon’s genius was in capturing the stories of Americans as they lived out the intense changes and disruptions of the last 40 years — struggling when their town’s factory closed, trying to pull away from drugs or violence, bewildered when they came back from war,” said Sally Buzbee, the AP’s senior vice president and executive editor.

“Her stories often made me cry. They always opened our minds. As a reporter and writer, she was a dream — both utterly precise and dogged and also hugely compassionate.”

Cohen was an idea machine, never comfortable unless she had one story she was working on, another on deck and others in line. In the days before the internet, when she was a regional reporter covering the Midwest, Cohen subscribed to a score of small newspapers; she was always looking for that three-paragraph brief on page 38 that might turn into something special.

She gathered far more research than she could ever use, filling file cabinets throughout the Chicago bureau.

“You know the iceberg principle of writing, where most of the writer’s research and knowledge is below the surface?” said former AP editor John Dowling, a longtime friend and colleague. “The bottom of Sharon’s story-iceberg was more like an Antarctic ice shelf.”

She wrote just about every kind of story imaginable in the course of her career, but patterns emerged. She wrote true crime stories -- a ring that used babies to smuggle drugs, for example -- but also larger pieces about women jailed because of opioids,

about juveniles in prison, about the failure to investigate the disappearances of Native American women.

She wrote about American workers: struggling farms, the lives of meatpackers 100 years after Upton Sinclair wrote "The Jungle," auto workers forced to commute 500 miles to new jobs when their plants closed.

She wrote about America's fighting men and women. In 2008, she told the story of "The Long Haul" -- a 15,000-word, seven-part serial that won smashing front-page displays in newspapers across the country.

"This is the story," she wrote, "of a very long deployment of a very long war, of how members of the 1st Brigade Combat Team/34th Infantry Division lived and died in Iraq, how their families endured while they were gone, and how what happened in a far distant land still resonates today."

And she wrote about her native city.



Cohen was a devoted daughter of Chicago. She never left it, aside from attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She worked for community newspapers, the suburban edition of the Chicago Tribune and United Press International before joining the AP in 1979. *(Photo at left from her late 20s.)*

She knew Chicago's history and its neighborhoods, loved its rambunctious politics, railed against its corruption and greatly admired its hard-working people. She also felt that it was too often stereotyped.

And so she wrote about Urban Prep, an inner-city school that had the audacious goal of sending every member of the Class of 2010 to college -- and succeeded. And one of her final stories, published last fall, was about Auburn Gresham, a Black neighborhood where people found hope despite their struggles with COVID-19, violent protests, gun violence and economic misery.

"I've tried to explain and capture the lives and voices of people who aren't in the headlines every day, because I think those are the most powerful stories," she said in 2015 upon receiving a Studs Terkel Community Media Award for her life's work.

Cohen received many other prizes, including the AP's Gramling Journalism Award in 1999. She won countless Peter Lisagor Awards from the Chicago Headline Club; no one knows just how many.



Associated Press journalist Sharon Cohen and her partner, Mike Robinson, pose for a photo on the California coast in this undated photo. (Courtesy of Mike Robinson)

Little wonder that some colleagues called her “the Queen,” according to AP National Writer Martha Irvine. Cohen was intense, and intensely private. For a long time, Irvine found this diminutive woman -- who always wore high heels, even while reporting in the oil fields of North Dakota -- hard to befriend.

“Then on one of our trips ... she walked down the aisle of the plane, dropped a chocolate bar on my tray and grinned ever so slightly as she continued on,” Irvine recalled. “I’d finally made it.”

Chocolate was not necessarily the most prominent of Cohen’s passions -- she loved to travel, she was an avid reader, she enjoyed photography and was good at it. But this notoriously finicky eater’s love of chocolate and other sweets endured nearly to her life’s end, said Mike Robinson, a former AP staffer who was her partner for 40 years. (He survives her, as does her brother, Marshall Cohen of Chicago, and his wife and two children. She was predeceased by her parents, David and Esther.)

As recently as January, Robinson said, she ordered babkas from two Jewish bakeries in Brooklyn. It was a sort of experiment, to see which one was best.

Both were delicious; it was too difficult to decide. So they ate them both.

Click [here](#) for link to this story. Shared by Peg Coughlin.

Remembering Sharon – ‘fun and funny, but in a uniquely curmudgeonly way’

Chris Sullivan ([Email](#)) - What to say about the shattering news of Sharon Cohen’s death?

She was fun and funny, but in a uniquely curmudgeonly way. Her feelings about things ran deep, but she kept them mostly from public view. As a reporter she was an ace, but always modest about her accomplishments and the accolades they brought. We used to kid her that she could wallpaper a room with the Peter Lisagor Awards she won from the Chicago Headline Club. She just smiled.

When I learned how serious her illness had become, I sent a card with a letter tucked inside, apologizing for the length. I recalled working together at least as far back as the World Series earthquake in San Francisco in 1989 and as regional and national writers on stories like the Oklahoma City bombing, Mississippi River floods and lots of others. At Newsfeatures, I was one of her regular editors for a couple of decades. No one ever came up with more wide-ranging, important, humane story ideas and then executed them through more exhaustive reporting. These stories, I told Sharon, taught us things we’d never otherwise know. They changed people’s lives and stayed in readers’ minds. These stories would last. She wrote economic stories with a human heart, like one about what happened when a hedge fund bought and then closed a shoemaking factory in a little Missouri town. She wrote about police corruption in Chicago, which quietly enraged her; about transformations wrought by the new oil economy in North Dakota, one piece focusing on the revival of a high school football team called the Comets; about a blind medical student, leading with a scene she witnessed in a lab where he probed and memorized “white and reddish-brown muscles bundled like a nest of telephone wires” – none of which he could see.

In a long career, I told Sharon, ‘the single story that I am proudest to have had a part in carried your byline, not mine.’ This was a serial narrative that Jerry Schwartz referred to in his fine obituary. It was called ‘The Long Haul’ – one story told in seven parts -- and described the experience of the longest-serving National Guard unit in the Iraq war. Through many trips to Minnesota where the unit was based and endless followup phone calls, Sharon isolated several characters whose intertwined stories we’d follow – officers and grunts, men and women, one decorated for bravery and others terribly, even fatally, wounded, and as if that were not enough, intimate stories of their families back home while they were away. As I reminded Sharon: ‘Tom Kent wrote a note to the AP staff afterward, noting that in a time of shrinking newsholes we might well have doubted the prospects of a 15,000-word narrative – but then he enumerated the scores of front pages and websites across the country that had set aside seven straight days to showcase the story, all because of what you’d put into it and what it showed us about ourselves.’ I thanked her for the opportunity to have had a small part (as an editor, along with Jerry) in that triumph.

I will always remember Sharon Cohen’s stories – and even more the beautiful soul who found and crafted them.

AP's Nixon Wins News Leader of the Year Award From NLA

NEW YORK (AP) — Ron Nixon ([Email](#)), global investigations editor at The Associated Press, has won the first-ever News Leader of the Year award from the News Leaders Association.

The NLA Awards continue the long traditions of the previous ASNE and APME Awards, and are among the most prestigious in journalism.

Nixon's investigative team produced an award-winning series on labor abuses in the palm oil industry. He was nominated by his team, which credited Nixon's leadership in building diversity and infusing the company with greater investigative capacity.

From the judges:

Nixon began his role in March 2020 and was nominated in a heartfelt letter from his team who described his leadership as having "instant impact." He led them to produce important work through an "unthinkably challenging time." Their investigative series on labor abuses in the palm oil industry, "Fruits of Labor," won the 2021 Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting and the 2021 Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics. Nixon advocated that "the decision to diversify news staff ultimately rests with those who have hiring power." He then quickly built a more diverse team. "His message has been clear: Break down internal barriers and infuse the broader AP with greater investigative capacity."



The association also honored The Guardian and Kaiser Health News for their work accounting for deaths among frontline medical workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other award winners include Jack Dolan and Brittny Mejia of The Los Angeles Times for an investigation on delays in medical care; The New York Times for coverage of police misconduct; Stephanie Clifford, who wrote about the relationship between a journalist and Martin Shkreli, the "pharma bro," for Elle magazine; The City, for work on obituaries in collaboration with Columbia Journalism School and the Craig Newmark Graduate School for Journalism at CUNY; Jenee Osterheldt of The Boston Globe for opinion writing on race and culture; and Kelu Chao and the journalists of Voice of America for standing up for the rights of journalists.

The News Leaders Association advocates for a free press and helps train future leaders in journalism.

Click [here](#) for link to this story. Shared by Lou Boccardi, Mark Mittelstadt.

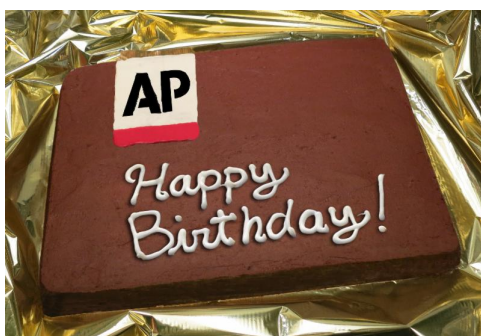
Bill Sikes & Joe Holloway Jr.

David Breslauer ([Email](#)) - Bill Sikes' recollection of staff photographer Joe Holloway Jr. (in Monday's Connecting) brought to mind similar memories for me. I was a staff photographer on The Red & Black, the student paper at the University of Georgia in 1973. Joe was introduced to me before a football game. He handed us (student photographers) a "brick" (20 rolls) of Kodak Tri-X film to share. For a bunch of students that were used to bulk loading film, this was like gold. And so it went, every home game in Athens, Joe would bring us a brick of film to share. Since none of us had cameras with motor drives, the film lasted quite a while.

I remember attending a meeting of the Society of Professional Journalists during my time at UGA where Joe was the guest speaker. He was showing some of his images from his days covering the civil rights struggles a decade earlier. The dean of the journalism school commented about some of the photos being made with available light. Joe dryly remarked that yes, his flash was the only light available.

I attended UGA for just two years before transferring to The University of Texas and had the pleasure of getting to know other venerable AP staffers like Ted Powers (who I eventually replaced in Austin) and Dave Taylor, the Texas Photo Editor.

Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



Kia Breaux - kbreaux@ap.org

Mike Tharp - bucktharp33@aol.com

Stories of interest

What it's like to be a reporter in the courtroom during the Derek Chauvin murder trial (CNN)

By Alexis Benveniste, CNN Business

New York (CNN Business) The Derek Chauvin murder trial is well underway, and CNN correspondent Sara Sidner said it is unlike any other that she's covered as a journalist.

Last week, jurors heard testimony from bystanders who described the moment they witnessed Chauvin kneel on George Floyd's neck.

"This is the first time an entire trial from start to finish has been filmed," Sidner, told CNN's Chief Media Correspondent Brian Stelter on "Reliable Sources" Sunday. She added that the entire courthouse and other nearby government buildings are surrounded by security apparatus, including fencing and barbed wire.

As for the courtroom itself, "Everyone is paying attention in a way that I haven't seen before," Sidner said. "There is pin drop silence. You can hear yourself breathe."

Read more [here](#).

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Newspapers Emerging from the Pandemic (Editor & Publisher)

By Gretchen A. Peck

It's been a year since the newsroom at the Springfield (Mo.) News-Leader began to work remotely. When the decision came down from parent company, Gannett, the staff was certain it would only be for a couple of weeks. They were well-poised to work in this way. Everyone had laptops and hotspot smartphones. They had Microsoft Teams and Zoom for meetings and collaboration. The workflow worked out.

"Of course, COVID and the lockdowns had a business effect as well, and one of the ways Gannett dealt with that was some furloughs, which was—at least from my perspective—better than the alternative," said editor-in-chief Amos Bridges. "But it created a staffing crunch that we had to deal with."

Having an agile newsroom team helped. "For example, our photographers cover a fair amount of breaking news, and just like everyone else, they're 'cross training' and comfortable writing those stories," Bridges said.

Read more [here](#).

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San Francisco Examiner names Carly Schwartz editor in chief

The San Francisco Examiner has named Google's Carly Schwartz as the 156-year-old publication's next editor in chief.

Examiner owner Clint Reilly announced the hire to Examiner staffers at their regularly scheduled editorial meeting Monday morning, explaining to employees that Schwartz will oversee The Examiner newsroom, along with editorial operations at The Nob Hill Gazette and SF Weekly, which all fall under the ownership umbrella of the Clint Reilly Communications company.

“Identifying the right candidate to oversee the editorial vision of our portfolio was no easy task,” said Reilly, in a statement. “I’m excited by everything Carly brings to the table: deep, firsthand knowledge of San Francisco, an entrepreneurial spirit, nuanced understanding of digital media platforms and industry trends, a keen editorial perspective, and sparkling educational credentials, among other things. She is uniquely qualified to help us build The Examiner of tomorrow.”

Read more [here](#). Shared by Allen Matthews, a Connecting colleague who is thusly mentioned in the story: “Allen Matthews will join The Examiner as director of editorial operations. He will “oversee all operational aspects of the integrated editorial program,” according to a company release. Matthews comes to the job after a long career with the San Francisco Chronicle, where he served in a number of high-level editing positions for over 20 years.”

Today in History - April 6, 2021



By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, April 6, the 96th day of 2021. There are 269 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 6, 1909, American explorers Robert E. Peary and Matthew A. Henson and four Inuits became the first men to reach the North Pole.

On this date:

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Shiloh began in Tennessee as Confederate forces launched a surprise attack against Union troops, who beat back the Confederates the

next day.

In 1886, the Canadian city of Vancouver, British Columbia, was incorporated.

In 1896, the first modern Olympic games formally opened in Athens, Greece.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I as the House joined the Senate in approving a declaration of war against Germany that was then signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1945, during World War II, the Japanese warship Yamato and nine other vessels sailed on a suicide mission to attack the U.S. fleet off Okinawa; the fleet was intercepted the next day.

In 1954, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., responding to CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow's broadside against him on "See It Now," said in remarks filmed for the program that Murrow had, in the past, "engaged in propaganda for Communist causes."

In 1968, 41 people were killed by two consecutive natural gas explosions at a sporting goods store in downtown Richmond, Indiana.

In 1974, Swedish pop group ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest held in Brighton, England, with a performance of the song "Waterloo."

In 1985, William J. Schroeder (SHRAY'-dur) became the first artificial heart recipient to be discharged from the hospital as he moved into an apartment in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 2008, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, speaking at a private fundraiser in San Francisco, spoke of voters in Pennsylvania's Rust Belt communities who "cling to guns or religion" because of bitterness about their economic lot; Democratic rival Hillary Rodham Clinton seized on the comment, calling it "elitist."

In 2017, Don Rickles, the big-mouthed, bald-headed "Mr. Warmth" whose verbal assaults endeared him to audiences and peers and made him the acknowledged grandmaster of insult comedy, died at his Beverly Hills home at age 90.

In 2019, former South Carolina Democratic Sen. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings, who had also helped guide the state through desegregation as governor, died at the age of 97; he was the eighth-longest-serving senator in U.S. history.

Ten years ago: Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi appealed directly to President Barack Obama in a letter to end what Gadhafi called "an unjust war"; he also wished Obama good luck in his bid for re-election. Portugal became the third debt-stressed European country to need a bailout as the prime minister announced his country would request international assistance.

Five years ago: A federal judge in Charleston, West Virginia, sentenced former coal executive Don Blankenship to a year in prison for his role in the 2010 Upper Big Branch Mine explosion that killed 29 men in America's deadliest mining disaster in

four decades; Blankenship maintained that he had committed no crime. Country giant Merle Haggard died in Palo Cedro, California, on his 79th birthday.

One year ago: Hours after Democratic Gov. Tony Evers issued an executive order postponing the following day's election for two months, the Wisconsin Supreme Court sided with Republicans in the state legislature who said Evers didn't have the authority to reschedule the race; the decision left Wisconsin as the only state proceeding with an April election amid the coronavirus outbreak. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was transferred to the intensive care unit of a London hospital where he was being treated for COVID-19, after his condition deteriorated. A federal judge refused to block Los Angeles officials from shutting down gun stores as nonessential businesses during the pandemic. Amid glimmers of hope that the pandemic could be slowing, stocks surged worldwide, capped by a 7% leap for the U.S. market. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a complete lockdown over the upcoming Passover holiday to control the country's coronavirus outbreak.

Today's Birthdays: Nobel Prize-winning scientist James D. Watson is 93. Actor Billy Dee Williams is 84. Actor Roy Thinnes is 83. Movie director Barry Levinson is 79. Actor John Ratzenberger is 74. Actor Patrika Darbo is 73. Baseball Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven is 70. Actor Marilu Henner is 69. Olympic bronze medal figure skater Janet Lynn is 68. Actor Michael Rooker is 66. Former U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., is 65. Rock musician Warren Haynes is 61. Rock singer-musician Black Francis is 56. Actor Ari Meyers is 52. Actor Paul Rudd is 52. Actor-producer Jason Hervey is 49. Actor Zach Braff is 46. Actor Joel Garland is 46. Actor Candace Cameron Bure (buhr-RAY') is 45. Actor Teddy Sears is 44. Jazz and R&B musician Robert Glasper is 43. Actor Eliza Coupe is 40. Folk singer-musician Kenneth Pattengale (Milk Carton Kids) is 39. Actor Bret Harrison is 39. Actor Charlie McDermott is 31.

Got a story or photos to share?

Got a story to share? A favorite memory of your AP days? Don't keep them to yourself. Share with your colleagues by sending to Ye Olde Connecting Editor. And don't forget to include photos!

Here are some suggestions:

- **Second chapters** - You finished a great career. Now tell us about your second (and third and fourth?) chapters of life.
- **Spousal support** - How your spouse helped in supporting your work during your AP career.
- **My most unusual story** - tell us about an unusual, off the wall story that you covered.



- **"A silly mistake that you make"**- a chance to 'fess up with a memorable mistake in your journalistic career.
- **Multigenerational AP families** - profiles of families whose service spanned two or more generations.
- **Volunteering** - benefit your colleagues by sharing volunteer stories - with ideas on such work they can do themselves.
- **First job** - How did you get your first job in journalism?
- **Connecting "selfies"** - a word and photo self-profile of you and your career, and what you are doing today. Both for new members and those who have been with us a while.
- **Most unusual** place a story assignment took you.

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