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## Connecting September 21, 2021

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Colleagues,

Good Tuesday morning on this Sept. 21, 2021,

Today's lead story comes from **Tom Jones** of Poynter – on the meaning of “off the record” and a controversy tied to that well-known journalism tool.

I found it interesting and hope you do too – and that it spurs some memories of a story you may have pursued that evolved from or involved information obtained “off the record.” Hope you share.

More memories of encountering someone famous in an elevator are in today's issue.

Here's to a great day – be safe, stay healthy!

Paul

# What does 'off the record' mean? The latest journalism controversy

By TOM JONES, Poynter

"Off the record."

It's a well-known journalism phrase. So well known, in fact, that even those outside the business are familiar with it.

But what does it actually mean?

The common belief among many is that when a source tells a reporter something "off the record" that means the reporter cannot or should not publicly share that information. But that's not exactly how it works. Just because a source says something is "off the record" does not mean it truly is "off the record."

Here's how it should work. A source should ask a reporter first if something can be off the record. Then the reporter can agree or refuse. The source then can decide whether or not they want to share that information.

If the reporter agrees to an off-the-record request, the ethical thing to do is not report or even repeat that information. Off-the-record comments are supposed to remain strictly between the source and the reporter.

So that's why it was odd when two journalists — two very prominent journalists, as a matter of fact — were at odds over whether something was or was not off the record. The incident even had other journalists mulling over the policy.

Here's what happened: A Politico newsletter, West Wing Playbook, wrote an item late last week about Washington Post opinion columnist Jennifer Rubin. The item called Rubin "one of the most reliable defenders of the Biden administration." It also wrote, "It's been a mutually beneficial relationship. Though it often dismisses the Beltway press, the administration can leverage the credibility that comes with a washingtonpost.com link. And Rubin's columns are frequently among the most popular on the site, according to Washington Post employees. But Rubin's emergence as one of the administration's go-to validators has stoked some divisions among Democrats and within the Post newsroom itself."

There's a bunch more, which you can read for yourself. But that led to Rubin reaching out to Alex Thompson, one of the West Wing Playbook authors and a White House reporter for Politico. According to Thompson, Rubin sent him an email with the subject line of "OFF THE RECORD."

Thompson tweeted, "Since we never agreed to conduct such an off-the-record conversation, we are now publishing it in full." Then he published Rubin's comments, which were critical of Politico and came off as a little whiny, but certainly weren't earth-shattering, vulgar or even newsworthy.

So was Thompson out of line or perfectly within his right to publish what Rubin sent him?

Read more [here](#).

## A covey of -ists trying to figure it out

**Mike Tharp** ([Email](#)) - Well, hell, there goes my goal of becoming a male stripper in my dotage.

Ten chemo injections over the past five days raised roseate chain-mail blobs around my belly, marring my dreams of glitter and a silver pole.

The chemo kills bone marrow cancer. It also kills red and white blood cells and platelets, to wean those messengers of life to my heart from the Dali-shaped cancer that's clogging my veins and arteries.

It was diagnosed a month ago. That explained why I've had severe shortness of breath since April 2020. Two stents inserted then didn't help much. I've been on oxygen tethered to a walker since May.

A covey of -ists tried to figure it out. Finally, a hematologist scraped my hip's bone marrow in late August.

Eureka.

Now I'm one week on chemo, three weeks off. After the first two injections--which take only about 30 seconds--I puked. Not since. Just tired and sleepy.

Jeralyn has been a combo of Florence Nightingale and Nurse Ratched. My kids, close fam and friends make me feel like a Homecoming candidate.

This will last 4-6 months. Appreciate any good reads or flicks I might like.

Then I'll go with John Keats:

Can death be sleep when life is but a dream?  
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?  
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,  
And we think the greatest pain's to die.

Meanwhile Comma Peace

## Denne Freeman: one of the greatest



**Charles Richards** ([Email](#)) - Among the several dozen former AP colleagues who were at an AP reunion Friday through Sunday at Arlington, Texas was Denne Freeman, a longtime great sports writer with whom I worked at both United Press International in the '60s and again at The Associated Press in the '70s, '80s and '90s.

The above picture is Denne and me on Saturday evening at the AP reunion gathering at Rio Mambo Tex-Mex restaurant in Colleyville, a few minutes north of Arlington.

Denne was one of the greatest. When others in the press box were typing away on their story on a just-ended game involving the Dallas Cowboys, Texas Rangers, Dallas Mavericks, Cotton Bowl or whatever, Denne could pick up a phone and -- just looking at his notes -- dictate his story to me or another newsman back in the bureau. His complete game story usually began moving on the AP wire within minutes -- sometimes seconds -- of the game's conclusion.

One of Denne's greatest of many scoops over the years was on Feb. 25, 1989, when billionaire oilman Jerry Jones In his first day as the owner of the Dallas Cowboys fired head coach Tom Landry and replaced him with University of Miami coach Jimmy Johnson, a former teammate of Jones at Arkansas.

At that time the only coach in franchise history, Landry had led the Cowboys to two Super Bowls titles, 13 division championships, and a winning record in 20 consecutive seasons.

Landry, with his trademark fedora and suit, was a driving force behind Texas' fanaticism with professional football.

After Jones' announcement that he had fired Landry, sports desks everywhere scrambled to find Landry for comment. Only Denne Freeman did.

A short time later, Denne called the AP bureau in Dallas, where I was the night supervisor, and dictated a story. Minutes later, I dispatched Denne's exclusive to the world.

The only quotes that sports desks in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and elsewhere had from Landry that day came from Denne's story.

You have no idea how badly the writers on a sports beat hate not getting something on their own and having to add ... "Landry told The Associated Press."

And then being asked: "How come Denne Freeman was able to get hold Of Tom Landry and you couldn't?"

## More of your celebrity encounters in an elevator (or...)

**Linda Deutsch** ([Email](#)) - I live in Hollywood and one would expect that I run into stars everywhere. But mostly they keep to themselves.

A few years ago (in the Before Times), I was invited to the annual Christmas party of a friend who is a retired reporter and her husband who is a political consultant. I expected to see lots of politicos there, but when I stepped into the elevator at their elegant high-rise condo I came face to face with Warren Beatty and Annette Bening, dressed to the nines and looking like the movie legends they are.

I don't know why we are struck dumb in these situations. I have interviewed tons of celebrities but those encounters were planned and I knew what I would say to the subject. In this case, I kind of burred that I was a big fan of their work and loved her latest movie. They were charming but the elevator arrived and the doors opened before I had a chance to introduce myself. I did join a group talking politics with Warren later and chatted more easily with a couple of other guests, Michael Keaton, who had recently starred in the movie, "Spotlight" about The Boston Globe, and Carl

Bernstein of Watergate fame. We weren't in an elevator and I got to tell them I was an AP reporter. The conversation flowed.

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**Mark Duncan (Email)** - I enjoyed reading about staffers celebrity encounters in Monday's Connecting.

While I can't recall anything specifically in an elevator, there have been several in different venues over the years.

I spent the morning with Prince Albert of Monaco photographing his training for bobsled at the 1988 Calgary Olympics, but that was an assignment from Horst Faas who set it all up.

There was the time when Carlos Santana came into our work trailer at a Super Bowl in San Diego. He had bought a new camera and sought some instruction on using it.

Other performers seemed to show up at odd times. Before an NLCS playoff game in St. Louis, Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler wandered into the photo workroom looking for the bathroom.

But, with oddest was when using the men's room at Boston Gardens during an NBA finals, James Taylor, who was to perform the national anthem, came in for a last break before the game.

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**Martha Raffaele (Email)** - Here is likely the least impressive celebrity-in-an-elevator story you will hear about. I was thoroughly unimpressed to find myself sharing an elevator with Pro Football Hall of Famer Franco Harris in the Pennsylvania Capitol at one point during my tenure as a reporter in the AP's Harrisburg bureau (2001-2009). I'm not a sports fan, and therefore am not starstruck in the presence of sports figures. I vaguely remember the former Steeler was an ally of then-Gov. Ed Rendell, and he was likely in town as a prop for a Capitol news conference. I was either in my way to or leaving an event in the governor's reception room. I didn't exchange words with him during our brief ride together, which was just as well because my only specific memory of being in such close quarters was that he had bad breath.

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**Ed Williams** ([Email](#)) - Alabama newspaper woman, author, and ghost storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham the first time I met her. It began a friendship of many years and it really did start in an elevator at an Alabama Press Association convention in Montgomery.

## Reporting from the boonies

**Norm Abelson** ([Email](#)) - I am often intrigued by the wondrous stories on Connecting from reporters who have covered wars, international affairs, Washington politics, major sports events and the like. My entire AP writing life was from a couple of thinly populated northern New England states. After all, hardly having the panache of reporting from WX, NY, CX, or any exotic foreign capital.

What must it feel like, I've wondered, to interview a world-famous luminary, to be present at the fall of the Berlin Wall, to report on the Olympics, to cover the Senate, to sit in at a White House news conference.

But wait – let's take a look back to see, what I was involved in covering. There was one session of the Maine legislature, my first AP writing assignment, and later four biennial, sometimes rowdy, meetings of the outsize New Hampshire General Court, with 424 members the nation's largest. The once-in-a-decade Constitutional Convention, giving voters a chance to change things.

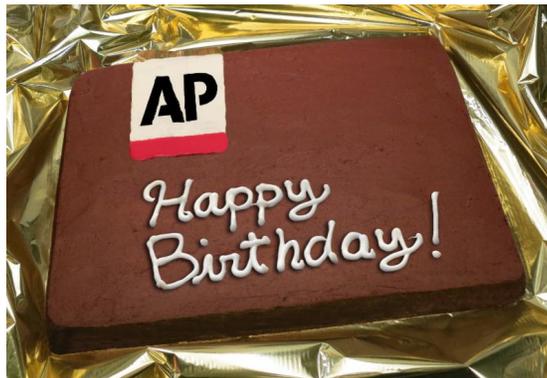
There were New Hampshire's famed first-in-the-nation presidential primaries, working alongside AP's top political reporters. (I got an AP beat on Eisenhower deciding on a presidential run by entering that primary.) Gov. Sherman Adams being named Eisenhower's chief of staff, and later taken down in a scandal involving a vicuna coat. I helped cover Ike's later major visit as president to the famed Old Man of the Mountains.

I was aboard as three major hurricanes battered the state. Oh, that armed robbery at the bank right across the street from our AP office. I scored another AP beat on a jail-house interview with a young man who had just surrendered after murdering his entire family. Pitching in when Alan Shepard of Derry, N.H., was named the first American astronaut. And when "Peyton Place," the steamy novel by Laconia, N. H., author Grace Metalious, hit the headlines. Also that time a commercial airliner crashed in the White Mountains. Covering the state supreme court was an education in itself. As was meeting with a bunch of White Russians emigres, supporters of the assassinated Tsar, on the day the hated Stalin died.

And, memorably, I was with an AP team in a Manchester park that chilly November evening, the night before the 1960 election, when Sen John F. Kennedy gave a stirring end-of-campaign address.

Maybe, after all, it isn't where you're reporting from; it's what's you're reporting on.

## Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



Grey Montgomery - [grey.montgomery@gmail.com](mailto:grey.montgomery@gmail.com)

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# Welcome to Connecting



Lauren Bartlett - [laurengbartlett@gmail.com](mailto:laurengbartlett@gmail.com)

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## Stories of interest

### ***The Battle To Keep Local Journalism Alive*** (NPR Fresh Air)

In the past 15 years, one in four newspapers has shuttered in the U.S. We talk with Art Cullen, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, editor, and co-owner of 'The Storm Lake Times' in the meatpacking town of Storm Lake, Iowa. He and his family are the subject of a new documentary, called 'Storm Lake,' about the challenges the industry is facing as news moves to free digital platforms and ad revenues dwindle. The film is opening in select theaters and be on PBS Nov. 15.

Click [here](#) to listen. Shared by Terry Anderson.

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### ***The Washington Post is adding 41 new editing jobs as part of its expansion.*** (New York Times)



**Sally Buzbee, the former top editor of The Associated Press who took the helm at The Washington Post in June, announced the creation of 41 editing roles in a note to staff on Monday. Credit...Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images**

**By Katie Robertson**

The Washington Post is expanding its editor ranks as it pushes forward with plans for growth in national and international coverage under its new executive editor, Sally Buzbee.

Ms. Buzbee, the former top editor of The Associated Press who took the helm at The Post in June, announced the creation of 41 editing roles in a note to staff on Monday, saying the positions will increase The Post's capacity to cover global news as it breaks.

The roles include two new deputy managing editors to The Post's masthead to work alongside the existing two, one of whom will oversee The Post's live coverage of developing news. A number of positions for assignment editors, breaking news editors and multiplatform editors will also be created, as well as two roles for editors charged with upholding newsroom standards.

The new positions will increase the number of journalists of color in editing roles, Ms. Buzbee said in an interview.

"A real benefit toward us in a situation like this is ensuring that this will also improve the diversity of our staff, provide career paths across the newsroom for a more diverse group of people, for people from a wide variety of backgrounds and skill sets," she said.

The jobs are mostly based in Washington, she said.

Read more [here](#).

Click [here](#) for Washington Post story.

Click [here](#) for Washingtonian story.

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## ***The mysterious reporter on the Biden beat*** (Politico)

**By RUBY CRAMER and ALEX THOMPSON**

He has become a familiar yet mysterious presence in the White House press corps. He is short in stature, usually behind a video camera, uploading uneventful videos of President JOE BIDEN's arrivals and departures, a credential dangling from his neck. Perhaps you've seen him, if only because he is seemingly everywhere — and often when you'd least expect.

"Hello on a rainy day in Florida," began a White House pool report from a Wednesday last May, labeled "AF1 Arrival Report #1."

At the bottom of the email, the signature read, KYLE MAZZA, UNF News.

The only problem: Mazza, a 24-year-old journalist who founded UNF News, was not the pooler that day. He and his outlet, which stands for Universal News Forever, are not even in the pool, though he would like to be. The unsolicited report puzzled poolers on duty that day, as well as members of the White House Correspondents Association. In an interview, Mazza said he was simply trying to contribute, not realizing that the event was reserved for poolers only.

Read more [here](#).

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## ***How news organizations used automated news to cover COVID-19*** (Poynter)

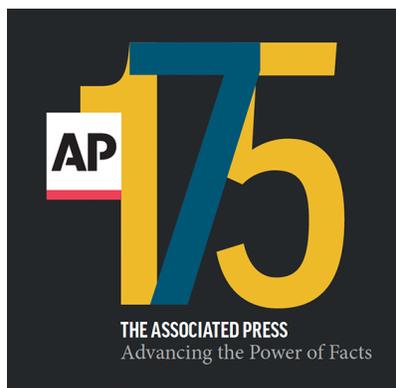
**By: Samuel Danzon-Chambaud**

In a sense, COVID-19 could be the perfect story to automate. As the virus spread across the world at the beginning of 2020, governments and health authorities made a considerable amount of open-source data available to the public, such as the number of deaths, patients in intensive care units, and seven-day incidence rates.

This type of well-arranged data, which can fit into narratives that can be created in advance, lays the groundwork for a recent journalistic development known as "automated journalism," a computational process that creates automated pieces of news without any human intervention, except for the initial programming.

Automated journalism generally implies the use of algorithms that fetch information on external or internal datasets, and then fill in the blanks left on templates that have been prewritten. This process, which can be compared to the word game Mad Libs, constitutes a basic application of Natural Language Generation, a computer technique that has been around for several decades in domains such as weather forecasts, sports and financial results.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Bob Daugherty.



## Celebrating AP's 175th

**AP store for 175th, vintage merchandise**



The AP has created a store with 175th anniversary merchandise available for purchase, as well as items branded with some of AP's most historic logos.

Click [here](#).

**AP Through Time: A Photographic History**



AP Through Time: A Photographic History” - created by Director of Corporate Archives, Valerie Komor, is a keepsake commemorating AP’s 175th year. Small in size (6 ¾ x 6 ¾ in.), it is organized chronologically in eight segments that trace the broad outlines of AP’s development from 1846 to the present: Beginnings, Evolution, New Century, Modernity, Expansion, One World, Speed, and Transformation. Click [here](#) to view and make an order.

## Today in History - Sept. 21, 2021



### By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 21, the 264th day of 2021. There are 101 days left in the year.

#### Today’s Highlights in History:

On Sept. 21, 1989, Hurricane Hugo crashed into Charleston, South Carolina (the storm was blamed for 56 deaths in the Caribbean and 29 in the United States). Twenty-one students in Alton, Texas, died when their school bus, hit by a soft-drink delivery truck, careened into a water-filled pit.

#### On this date:

In 1792, the French National Convention voted to abolish the monarchy.

In 1912, magician Harry Houdini first publicly performed his “Water Torture Cell” trick at the Circus Busch in Berlin.

In 1938, a hurricane struck parts of New York and New England, causing widespread damage and claiming some 700 lives.

In 1948, Milton Berle made his debut as permanent host of “The Texaco Star Theater” on NBC-TV.

In 1961, the first Boeing CH-47 Chinook military helicopter made its first hovering flight.

In 1981, the Senate unanimously confirmed the nomination of Sandra Day O’Connor to become the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

In 1982, Amin Gemayel, brother of Lebanon’s assassinated president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, was himself elected president. National Football League players began a 57-day strike, their first regular-season walkout ever.

In 1985, in North Korea and South Korea, family members who had been separated for decades were allowed to visit each other as both countries opened their borders in an unprecedented family-reunion program.

In 1987, NFL players called a strike, mainly over the issue of free agency. (The 24-day walkout prompted football owners to hire replacement players.)

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act denying federal recognition of same-sex marriages, a day after saying the law should not be used as an excuse for discrimination, violence or intimidation against gays and lesbians. (Although never formally repealed, DoMA was effectively overturned by U.S. Supreme Court decisions in 2013 and 2015.)

In 2001, Congress again opened the federal coffers to those harmed by terrorism, providing \$15 billion to the airline industry, which was suffering mounting economic losses since the Sept. 11 attacks.

In 2008, baseball said farewell to the original Yankee Stadium as the Bronx Bombers defeated the Baltimore Orioles 7-3.

Ten years ago: Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer, two Americans jailed in Iran as spies, left Tehran for the Gulf state of Oman, closing a high-profile drama that brought more than two years of hope and heartbreak for their families. The state of Texas executed Lawrence Russell Brewer for his role in the gruesome dragging death of James Byrd Jr. The state of Georgia executed Troy Davis, who used his last words to declare his innocence in the killing of police officer Mark MacPhail. Alternative rock group R.E.M. announced on its website that it had “decided to call it a day as a band.”

Five years ago: Outraged Republican and Democratic lawmakers grilled Heather Bresch, the CEO of pharmaceutical company Mylan, about the significant cost increase of its life-saving EpiPens; defending her company’s business practices, Bresch told the

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee she wished the company had “better anticipated the magnitude and acceleration” of the rising prices for some families.

One year ago: President Donald Trump met at the White House with Amy Coney Barrett, as the conservative judge emerged as an early favorite for the Supreme Court seat left vacant by the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. An enormous wildfire in the mountains northeast of Los Angeles was one of more than two dozen major fires burning across California, including five of the largest wildfires in state history. The Las Vegas Raiders, playing their first game at a new \$2 billion stadium following their move from Oakland, defeated the New Orleans Saints 34-24; there were no fans in attendance because of the coronavirus.

Today’s Birthdays: Author-comedian Fannie Flagg is 80. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer is 78. Former Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear is 77. Musician Don Felder is 74. Author Stephen King is 74. Basketball Hall of Famer Artis Gilmore is 72. Actor-comedian Bill Murray is 71. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is 64. Movie producer-writer Ethan Coen is 64. Actor-comedian Dave Coulier is 62. Actor David James Elliott is 61. Actor Serena Scott Thomas is 60. Actor Nancy Travis is 60. Actor Rob Morrow is 59. Actor Angus Macfadyen is 58. Retired MLB All-Star Cecil Fielder is 58. Actor Cheryl Hines is 56. Country singer Faith Hill is 54. Rock musician Tyler Stewart (Barenaked Ladies) is 54. Country singer Ronna Reeves is 53. Actor-talk show host Ricki Lake is 53. Rapper Dave (De La Soul) is 53. Actor Billy Porter is 52. Actor Rob Benedict is 51. Actor James Lesure is 50. Actor Alfonso Ribeiro (rih-BEHR’-oh) is 50. Actor Luke Wilson is 50. Actor Paulo Costanzo is 43. Actor Bradford Anderson is 42. Actor Autumn Reeser is 41. TV personality Nicole Richie is 40. Actor Maggie Grace is 38. Actor Joseph Mazzello is 38. Actor Ahna O’Reilly is 37. Rapper Wale (WAH’-lay) is 37. R&B singer Jason Derulo is 35. Actor Ryan Guzman is 34. Actor Nikolas Brino is 23.

## 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.

**Paul Stevens**  
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