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## Connecting

October 06, 2021

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Colleagues,

Good Wednesday morning on this Oct. 6, 2021,

Connecting's popular series of late – seeking stories on writing your own obituary or preparedness obituaries – struck close to the heart of our colleague **Nora Raum** ([Email](#)), NPR newscaster, attorney and former AP broadcaster.

She writes: “My husband Tom (Raum) often joked that one of the benefits of working for the AP was you got a great obit when you died, although you never knew it.

“Sure enough, when he died early in the morning on January 25th, 2019, there was a **great obit** on the AP website that afternoon. It was written by **Ricardo Alonzo-Zaldivar**, who called me that day to confirm



details. He also came to Tom's memorial service, which I really appreciated.

“As an NPR newscaster, I find obits very hard to write. I'm trying to sum up someone's life in 30 seconds. I'm also trying to explain to younger listeners why this person's life was important.

“As a widow, I found the obit very comforting.”

More of your thoughts on obituaries are in today's issue.

Have a great day – be safe, stay healthy!

Paul

## 40 years ago today: Capturing Sadat's 'Last Smile' minutes before his death



The Last Smile, portrait of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat a few minutes before he was killed. He is looking up at Egyptian Airforce jets flying overhead as part of the parade. AP Photo/Bill Foley



Sadat and Mubarak meeting on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1981. AP Photo/Bill Foley

**Bill Foley (Email)** - Forty years ago today I was covering my fourth 6<sup>th</sup> of October military parade in Cairo. Little did I know it would be my last.

The day before, I had been in Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's residence in Cairo, photographing his meeting with his vice president, Hosni Mubarak. At the parade, the local and foreign press watched and photographed the troops and military hardware parading in front of the reviewing stand where Sadat watched the parade along with members of his government. Ambassadors and other dignitaries also observed this annual ritual.

After making a number of photographs of soldiers, tanks and a myriad of other items of military hardware, I made a portrait of Sadat, smiling as he looked up the Egyptian air force jets flying overhead minutes before he was gunned down by Egyptian army soldiers angry at the peace agreement with Israel. This portrait has become "The Last Smile".

This annual event celebrates the Egyptian army's victory over the Israeli army on October 6<sup>th</sup> of 1973 when Sadat launched a surprise attack and Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal in an effort to liberate the Sinai Peninsula. Egypt lost control of the Sinai during the 6 day war with Israel in 1967. The 1973 October/Yom Kippur war was unsuccessful in liberating the Sinai Peninsula which ended in a cease-fire worked out by the United States.

Mubarak became President after the death of Sadat. Mubarak was forced to resign in February of 2011 during the Arab Spring after 30 years in power, leaving the Army in control.

Egypt remains in the news these days for its continued human rights abuses and detention of journalists and others.

I returned to Cairo in 2018 and on the taxi ride from the airport to my hotel in downtown Cairo, Mohammed, my taxi driver and I talked about the situations in our respective countries. A few minutes into our chat, Mohammed looked at me and said with a serious look on his face, "Shu Trump?" which means "what about Trump?" I said in reply "Shu El Sissi"? We both started laughing.

*Connecting series:*

## Writing your own obituary or preparedness obituary

**Jim Hood** ([Email](#)) - I have enjoyed reading the trickle of obits and obit-related tales submitted by Connecting colleagues the last few days. What stands out more than anything, however, is the rather thin stream of submissions compared to other recent topics.

This may surprise some but not me. I learned the hard way a few years ago that an obituary is like a fire extinguisher -- nobody thinks about it until they really need it.

I had observed at funerals and memorial services for ink-stained, digit-driven friends that they were often strangers to their families. They were the guys and women who went to work in the morning and came home in the afternoon, just like everybody else. The fact that they spent one day on a helicopter covering an oil rig explosion and another cowering behind police cars at the scene of a sniper shooting often went largely unnoticed among complaints about malfunctioning washing machines and problems at the children's school.

These silenced voices of freedom were known to their families as soccer coaches, amateur plumbers and vacation planners but not as the star reporters or brilliant editors they were the rest of the time -- you know, when they were working.

It's not just journalists, of course. Lots of people in lots of different jobs take great pride in what they do and everyone has a few favorite stories that die with them unless they're somehow preserved. These stories, sometimes embarrassing or salacious, seldom make it into the formulaic obits we're all familiar with, however.

But wait, what if people could write their own obit and have it stored safely somewhere, just as Fran Lewine did when she entrusted hers to Sandy Johnson (as recounted in the Oct. 5 Connecting)?

This seemed like a flourishing website just waiting to happen. So I rounded up a handful of names, paying a premium for several, and soon launched ObitCenter.com. It offered free obits and free storage of same until needed. We also put together a collection of news-to-use for the pre-deceased -- cremation vs. "natural" burial, how to write a homily, what to do about previous spouses, etc.

I promoted the story to Paul Stevens, thinking it would be a nice addition to his collection of where-are-they-now tales. But Paul, very gently, said he thought some readers might find it in bad taste. I promoted it to other outlets and got pretty much the same response.

I bought a bunch of Facebook and Google ads. Zero response.

Over a span of about six months, I had collected a grand total of 10 obits. It began to dawn on me that, although crafting one's own preparedness piece may be a wise thing to do, so is taking up rope-climbing as a way to build upper-body strength. You don't see many suburbanites scrambling up and down ropes in their spare time, however.

Through decades of pursuing various brainstorm, I have learned the wisdom of "failing quickly" -- i.e., don't dig in your heels and vow to see it through, no matter what. Instead, cut your losses and get out. So I applied that expensively acquired wisdom in this case and gave the site and all its accoutrements to a deserving non-profit publisher.

I then promptly forgot about it until writing this piece. I went to check on it just now to see how it was progressing and, perhaps not surprisingly, it's nowhere to be found.

I guess the lesson is that, while people of a certain age are known to check the obits frequently, they are not similarly inclined when it comes to preparing their own. The other lesson is that when you start a venture that flops, you should give it to a not-for-profit so that you can at least get a tax deduction. Hey, that gives me another idea ...

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**Marc Wilson (Email)** - A good reason to write your own obituary is that far too many obits are badly written.

Many obits appear to be generated by computers taking information plugged into forms by funeral homes. They all read alike despite greatly varying life stories. Too few newspapers spend time polishing obits. They're just treated as streams of revenue.

I've been interested in obits since I was a little boy and my Grandfather Newberg's obit was published on the front page of the Grand Island (Neb.) Independent. I thought it special that he got front-page treatment even though he was not especially notable (except to his family and friends). He was an area farmer who didn't even own the land he farmed.

So when I edited and published a little newspaper (the "best little weekly in Montana"), we went out of our way to publish selected obituaries on the front page. If everyone in town was talking about someone's death, didn't that merit front-page coverage?

I wrote many of the obituaries, and tried to make each one special. Families sometimes invited me to their homes to help them compose their lost loved one's obit.

I got a call from a “snowbird” living during the winter in Arizona to help write his wife’s obituary. “The funeral home just didn’t do a good job,” the snowbird said. “Betty deserves better.”

Another time, at nearly 6 p.m. on Friday, a local merchant pulled into our parking lot.

“Sorry, we’re closed, Jim,” I said.

“I need you to stay and help me write Alice’s obituary,” Jim replied. “I haven’t told anyone she’s died. I want you to help me with her obituary first.”

So we spent a couple of hours lost in memories, and composing her obituary.

“She’d like this,” Jim said when we were done. The ultimate compliment.

Some of the best obituaries I’ve read were written by the deceased, or by loved ones – but most folks don’t have the skills needed to write their own obits.

The Connecting audience is filled with great writers who can write their own life stories, so I’m sure they’d write obits worth reading.

I haven’t decided if I’ll write my own obituary. It seems a bit of hubris.

But taking care of such details before you die can help reduce the burdens on your surviving loved ones.

And I certainly don’t want some computer program writing my obit.

## Connecting mailbox

*Jim Mone - It's Your Pitch!*



Photo/Bruce Kluckhohn

Kim Johnson of AP Chicago shared [a video package](#) put together for AP Minneapolis photojournalist Jim Mone, who threw out the ceremonial first pitch at the Minnesota Twins' last home game six days ago.

Jim Mone - It's Your Pitch! Is the headline for the video, which noted: "In January of 2022 Associated Press Photographer Jim Mone will be retiring from full-time duty. In recognition of his nearly 50 years of covering the Minnesota Twins, they invited Jim to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at the final home game of the 2021 season.

(Contributed by Mark Hoffman, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel photojournalist, who said, "I first met him when I was 18 and he graciously tolerated my rookie questions and 39 years later he's going to retire in a couple months."

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***Celebrating move to Washington***





The Columbus, Ohio, reporting team poses for a photo during a lunch to celebrate Report for America corps member Farnoush Amiri as she moves on to Washington to become AP's newest congressional reporter. Amiri, second from left, is pictured with reporters Kantele Franko, Julie Carr Smyth and Andrew Welsh-Huggins, Sept. 30, 2021. (Photo courtesy of Kantele Franko)

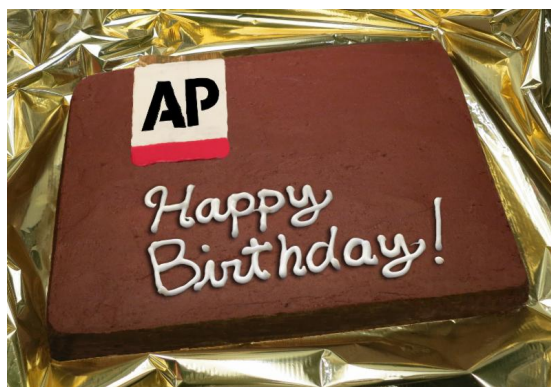
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*Tis the season for pumpkins*



**Hank Ackerman** ([Email](#)) - Seasonal display of mountain pumpkins from Black Mountain, NC, Boy Scouts of America Troop 42 Pack 42 who mounted their marketing just off city's main street, U.S. last Thursday

## Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



**Marcia Budd** - [tantabudd@aol.com](mailto:tantabudd@aol.com)

**Gary Graham** - [garygraham74@gmail.com](mailto:garygraham74@gmail.com)

**Susan Ragan** - [srfotog@gmail.com](mailto:srfotog@gmail.com)

Andrew Welsh-Huggins - [awhcolumbus.1@gmail.com](mailto:awhcolumbus.1@gmail.com)

Adriana Wiersma - [awiersma7@gmail.com](mailto:awiersma7@gmail.com)

## Welcome to Connecting



Dave Ginsburg - [sptswtr@aol.com](mailto:sptswtr@aol.com)

Randall Hackley - [randallhackley@gmail.com](mailto:randallhackley@gmail.com)

## Stories of interest

***Facebook is harming our society. Here's a radical solution for reining it in.*** (Washington Post)

By Margaret Sullivan  
Media columnist

Frances Haugen, who revealed herself Sunday as the Facebook whistleblower, could not have made things any clearer.

"Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they'll click on less ads, they'll make less money," the former member of Facebook's civic integrity team, who left the company this spring, told Scott Pelley of CBS's "60 Minutes."

This wasn't just Haugen's opinion as a digital-economy veteran, with a long stint at Google before she joined Facebook. She had the goods. The huge trove of documents that she took when she left the behemoth social network spells out its ugly incentive

structure in case you had any remaining doubt: Outrage, hate and lies are what drive digital engagement, and therefore revenue.

The system is broken. And we all suffer from it.

Read more [here](#).

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## ***WHAT WE LOST WHEN GANNETT CAME TO TOWN***

(The Atlantic)

**By Elaine Godfrey**  
**Photographs by KC McGinnis**

The grain elevator exploded on a cool April morning in 1987, six years before I was born. My father was testing a clay sample in a lab two miles away when suddenly the dial jumped. He ran outside, thinking that a car had smashed into the building. My mother, doing yard work at home, assumed that the nearby ammunition plant was testing a new explosive.

Dale Alison saw the blast up close. He was 32 years old, and it was his first day as the city editor of The Hawk Eye, a newspaper in Burlington, Iowa. From the front door of the office, he saw the train tracks outside ripple, and the air seemed to vibrate and sway. Then the windows of the newsroom blew out. Alison and his colleagues ducked under their desks, and a few looked out to see a plume of black smoke blocking the sky. The 12-story grain-storage facility—a longtime fixture on Burlington’s riverfront—was wrapped in orange flames.

Alison started shouting out assignments. Matt Gallo should head to the hospital; Susan Fisher and Mike Sweet should drive downtown for man-on-the-street interviews; Steve Delaney, Tony Miller, and the photographers should go straight to the scene. Within the hour, firefighters evacuated the newsroom (train cars containing anhydrous ammonia were parked perilously close) and everyone regrouped at a nearby dive bar. Reporters made calls from the payphone and scrawled their stories on reams of paper someone had nabbed from an old typewriter shop. Photographers developed their film in a bathtub at someone’s house on the northwest side of town.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Carol Riha, Dave Zelio.

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***Under new management: With new local owners, former Gannett-owned newspapers benefit from reinvestment*** (Editor & Publisher)

Gretchen A. Peck | for Editor & Publisher

Gannett remains at the top of the leaderboard for newspaper ownership. It publishes over 1,000 weekly titles and more than 100 dailies, amassed over the years through independent acquisitions and headlining mergers. But the company turned heads in the newspaper world when it recently began selling off some of those newspapers, mostly small-market and community titles that local owners were eager to buy.

This past August, Gannett's CEO Mike Reed granted an interview to local media and advertising analyst Gordon Borrell (Borrell's Local Marketing Trends Podcast, Episode 54). The conversation began with accolades for Gannett's favorable market metrics. Print advertising and marketing services were up; subscriptions were up, and so, too, were retention rates and Revenue Per Unit (RPU). "They all look really, really strong," Borrell said.

They spoke of Gannett's recent five-year \$90 million deal with Tipico, Germany's largest sports gaming developer. The company wants to expand to the United States and banked on Gannett's market penetration to gain traction.

Read more [here](#).

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## ***Pence says media focus on Jan. 6 insurrection is to 'demean' Trump supporters*** (Washington Post)

By Donna Cassata

Former vice president Mike Pence said media reporting on the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection is meant to "demean" supporters of former president Donald Trump, some of whom stormed the Capitol that day shouting, "Hang Mike Pence!"

In an interview with Sean Hannity on Fox News on Monday night, Pence sought to explain media coverage of the Jan. 6 riot in which he was hurriedly evacuated from the Senate chamber and taken to a secure location amid threats to his life.

"I know the media wants to distract from the Biden administration's failed agenda by focusing on one day in January," Pence told Hannity. "They want to use that one day to try and demean the character and intentions of 74 million Americans who believed we could be strong again and prosperous again and supported our administration in 2016 and 2020."

Read more [here](#). Shared by Dennis Conrad.

## **The Final Word**



*“Thank goodness Facebook is back. For a few hours I had no idea where to direct my rage.”*

Shared by Mark Mittelstadt.



**Celebrating AP's 175th**

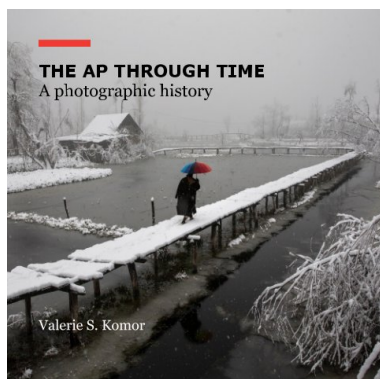
## AP store for 175th, vintage merchandise



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 - Oct. 6, 2021



## By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Oct. 6, the 279th day of 2021. There are 86 days left in the year.

### Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 6, 2014, the Supreme Court unexpectedly cleared the way for a dramatic expansion of gay marriage in the United States as it rejected appeals from five states seeking to preserve their bans, effectively making such marriages legal in 30 states.

### On this date:

In 1683, thirteen families from Krefeld, Germany, arrived in Philadelphia to begin Germantown, one of America's oldest settlements.

In 1889, the Moulin Rouge in Paris first opened its doors to the public.

In 1927, the era of talking pictures arrived with the opening of "The Jazz Singer" starring Al Jolson, a feature containing both silent and sound-synchronized sequences.

In 1928, Chiang Kai-shek became president of China.

In 1939, in a speech to the Reichstag, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler spoke of his plans to reorder the ethnic layout of Europe — a plan which would entail settling the "Jewish problem."

In 1969, the New York Mets won the first-ever National League Championship Series, defeating the Atlanta Braves, 7-4, in Game 3; the Baltimore Orioles won the first-ever American League Championship Series, defeating the Minnesota Twins 11-2 in Game 3.

In 1973, war erupted in the Middle East as Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel during the Yom Kippur holiday. (Israel, initially caught off guard, managed to push back the Arab forces before a cease-fire finally took hold in the nearly three-week conflict.)



In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford, in his second presidential debate with Democrat Jimmy Carter, asserted that there was “no Soviet domination of eastern Europe.” (Ford later conceded such was not the case.)

In 1979, Pope John Paul II, on a week-long U.S. tour, became the first pontiff to visit the White House, where he was received by President Jimmy Carter.

In 1981, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was shot to death by extremists while reviewing a military parade.

In 2010, social networking app Instagram was launched by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger.

In 2018, in the narrowest Senate confirmation of a Supreme Court justice in nearly a century and a half, Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed by a 50-48 vote; he was sworn in hours later.

Ten years ago: In a poor quality audio recording, a voice identified as that of Moammar Gadhafi called on Libyans to take to the streets and wage a campaign of civil disobedience against the country’s new leader.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama offered 102 federal inmates the chance to leave prison early, bringing to 774 the number of sentences Obama had shortened. A jury in Norfolk, Virginia, acquitted a white police officer charged in the shooting death of a mentally ill Black man holding a knife.

One year ago: President Donald Trump, recovering from COVID-19, tweeted his eagerness to return to the campaign trail and said he still planned to attend an upcoming debate with Democrat Joe Biden in Miami; Biden said there should be no debate as long as Trump remained COVID positive. (The debate would be canceled.) Four weeks ahead of Election Day, senior national security officials provided assurances about the integrity of the elections in a video message, putting them at odds with Trump’s effort to discredit the vote. The Food and Drug Administration released updated safety standards for makers of COVID-19 vaccines despite efforts by the White House to block them; the White House said the requirements could delay the availability of vaccines. A grand jury indicted the St. Louis couple who displayed guns while hundreds of racial injustice protesters marched on their private street. (Mark and Patricia McCloskey would plead guilty to misdemeanors; they were pardoned by Missouri Republican Gov. Mike Parson.) Eddie Van Halen, the guitar virtuoso whose speed, control and innovation propelled his band Van Halen into one of hard rock’s biggest groups, died of cancer at 65.

Today’s Birthdays: Broadcaster and writer Melvyn Bragg is 82. Actor Britt Ekland is 79. The former leader of Sinn Fein (shin fayn), Gerry Adams, is 73. Singer-musician Thomas McClary is 72. Musician Sid McGinnis is 72. Rock singer Kevin Cronin (REO Speedwagon) is 70. Rock singer-musician David Hidalgo (Los Lobos) is 67. Pro Football Hall of Famer Tony Dungy is 66. Actor Elisabeth Shue is 58. Singer Matthew Sweet is 57. Actor Jacqueline Obradors is 55. Country singer Tim Rushlow is 55. Rock musician Tommy Stinson is 55. Actor Amy Jo Johnson is 51. Actor Emily Mortimer is 50. Actor Lamman (la-MAHN’) Rucker is 50. Actor Ioan Gruffudd (YOH’-ihn GRIH’-fihth) is 48. Actor Jeremy Sisto is 47. Actor Brett Gelman is 45. R&B singer Melinda Doolittle is 44.

Actor Wes Ramsey is 44. Actor Karimah Westbook is 43. Singer-musician Will Butler is 39. Actor Stefanie Martini is 31. U.S. Olympic swimming gold medalist Bobby Finke is 22.

## 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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