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Connecting

December 21, 2021

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Colleagues,

Good Tuesday morning on this Dec. 21, 2021,

We're saddened to bring news of the death of our colleague **Wayne Slater**, a renowned Texas political writer, author and a former Associated Press newsman, correspondent and news editor.

Slater died Monday in an automobile accident in Williamson County in the Austin metropolitan area. He was 74.

We bring you the story on his death from the Dallas Morning News, from which he retired in 2015 after serving as bureau chief and senior political writer.

Slater joined the AP in 1972 in Charleston, W. Va., under bureau chief **Tom Briley** and subsequently worked for the AP in Topeka, Kan. with correspondent **Lew Ferguson** (1975-77), Peoria, Ill. under Chicago bureau chief **Tom Dygard** (1978-81) and Denver as news editor under bureau chief **Joe McGowan** (1981-84). He joined the Morning News

in 1984, where he reported on politics and government for 30 years as Austin bureau chief and the newspaper's Senior Political Writer.

Several of his colleagues have shared their memories of Wayne. You are most welcome to join them with your own thoughts.

Today's issue also brings you more of your stories relating to the Christmas season. If you have one to share, please send it along.

Have a great day – be safe, stay healthy!

Paul

Journalist, Dallas Morning News politics reporter, author, (former AP journalist) Wayne Slater killed in car crash



Wayne Slater of The Dallas Morning News' Austin bureau, left, listens as then-Texas Gov. George W. Bush responds to an answer during a 1997 availability in Austin. (AP Photo)

By Robert T. Garrett
Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN — Retired Dallas Morning News Austin bureau chief and senior political writer Wayne Slater, who chronicled two Texas governors' rise to national prominence and

co-wrote two books about George W. Bush adviser Karl Rove, died Monday in an automobile accident in Williamson County. He was 74.

Slater died in a two-car accident that occurred at about 10:33 a.m. Monday at FM 487 and Chris Lane near Florence, said Sgt. Deon Cockrell of the Texas Department of Public Safety. Cockrell had no other details, saying a trooper was still working at the crash site.

Two friends said Slater, who lived nearby, was involved in a head-on collision.

Slater personally liked, though he sparred with and oversaw tough coverage of, former Govs. Ann Richards, a Democrat, and George W. Bush, the scion of a dynastic Republican family who in the 1990s, it turned out, was on his way to the White House.

Later, Rove, the 43rd president's top political strategist both in Austin and Washington, became the subject of two books by Slater and former state Capitol TV reporter James Moore, *Bush's Brain* and *The Architect*.

In 1985, Slater, by then a veteran Associated Press reporter, joined *The News'* Austin bureau as a reporter. The paper, then locked in a fight for survival with the *Dallas Times Herald*, was eager to elevate coverage of Texas, and especially state politics.

"I rated our bureau third-best in Austin, when we started to rehab it," recalled former *Dallas Morning News* editor in chief Robert Mong, who was assistant managing editor at the time. G. Robert Hillman was brought in from *The Journal-Herald* of Dayton, Ohio, as bureau chief, Mong recalled. "Hillman knew Slater and really liked him, so we went after Slater." Soon, metro reporters Terrence Stutz (education) and Sam Attlesey (politics) were dispatched from Dallas.

"We did come out of it with the best bureau," Mong said.

Slater may have been best-known for his reporting on George W. Bush's gubernatorial and presidential campaigns.

"Wayne Slater was a hard-working and insightful reporter," Bush said in a written statement late Monday. "He understood Texas politics better than most and contributed a lot to his field. Laura and I send our sympathy to Dianne."

Read more [here](#). Shared by John Lumpkin, Richard Chady, Sally Hale, Betty Osborne, Brian Horton.

Remembering Wayne Slater



Mike Holmes ([Email](#)) - Wayne and I, two Yankees, arrived in Austin about the same time — me with the AP, he with the Dallas News. We worked as colleagues and competitors for two decades. He was not only an outstanding reporter, specializing in politics and state government, but also a remarkably talented writer. And I'll be forever grateful that he took time out from covering W's 2000 presidential campaign to be the featured speaker at my first Nebraska APME convention. He made this brand-new COB look awfully good. Rest in peace, my friend.

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Betty Osborne ([Email](#)) - Such sad news. I remember Wayne so well. An accomplished journalist who did a great job covering Texas politics.

I'm sad for his family. Burl admired Wayne and his dedication to his craft.

(Betty Osborne is the wife of the late Burl Osborne, former executive editor and publisher of the Morning News and former managing editor of the AP.)

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Kelley Shannon ([Email](#)) - Wayne Slater was widely respected in Texas journalism and beyond. I learned a great deal from Wayne when I became the Austin AP correspondent in 2000, as Gov. George W. Bush was running for president. Wayne, then with the Dallas Morning News, explained to me the basics of covering the governor and the Texas capital. I'll never forget this bit of advice: Remember, the lobbyists know EVERYTHING that's happening at the capitol. That certainly proved true in Texas, and I cultivated many good sources thanks to Wayne's wisdom. He remained a mentor and friend for many years, including when I later worked as a reporter during the 2011 and 2013 legislative sessions for the Dallas Morning News and, more recently, during my time on the board of the Headliners Foundation of

Texas, where Wayne was a fellow board member. I will miss Wayne and his vast knowledge of Texas politics and journalism.

Connecting series:

Reporting from our town: Newtown



A state police officer leading children out of the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, after a mass shooting at the school on December 14, 2012. Shannon Hicks—Newtown Bee/AP

Chris Sullivan ([Email](#)) - By Dec. 14, 2012, my family had lived for about 20 years in Newtown, Connecticut. That morning, I'd commuted as usual to the AP office in Manhattan (then 33rd Street) and was at my desk when the news broke, fragmentary details coming in, in my memory now, like shrieks: shooting, elementary school, young children taken to hospitals, Sandy Hook -- a neighborhood of our town!

National Writer Adam Geller and I raced to his Upper West Side home to get his car and speed to Newtown. There, we split up, Adam to join Connecticut staffers reporting on the breaking story, I to write a profile of the place where this had unfolded. Having covered many tragic stories, from natural disasters to the bombing in Oklahoma City, I was acquainted with the hollow feeling one has when parachuting into a scene visited by mayhem. Still, I'll never forget the sense of unreality as I drove past our house, the recognition that the most personally searing event I'd ever report on in a four-decade career had just happened here. For that moment, everything intimately familiar turned weirdly alien.

It helped, of course, to be able to tap into networks of acquaintances for help in reporting. The daughter of a neighbor, for instance, had been a classmate of the shooter and she gave me her school yearbook, from which I sent a picture to AP Photos. Adam and I, after getting our first stories out, drove that night to the home of another fellow student, arriving unannounced in the dark and surprising ourselves by being invited inside; though the student wasn't home, he spoke briefly with me on his parents' phone (providing a small insert for the breaking story) while Adam, interviewing the parents, got a contact for a former teacher, now living in another state, who would give him exclusive, insightful detail on the killer.

In the following days, our house became an occasional workplace for some visiting AP writers – and even for a New York Times friend, who made calls and filed from his laptop downstairs while I did the same upstairs.

It was close to Christmas, and I noticed that yard displays of lights all over town had gone dark. That fact, along with the decision of other locals, in spite of all, to try to find ways to preserve the season, became elements of a Christmas Eve story that I wrote under the dateline of our hometown. It began:

NEWTOWN, Conn. (AP) – Bells and lights and gifts. These have always shown us it's Christmastime. But this year, in this town, the bells toll in mourning. The brightest lights glare from TV satellite trucks. And gifts? Some around town suggest that presents and other rituals ought to be put off in this joyless season.

Could anyone imagine celebrating Christmas under the pall that has spread since the horror at Sandy Hook Elementary School?

The answer, somehow, is yes. The spirit of Christmas has pushed through, even here, where people are seeing lights and hearing bells in ways they never had before, and reminding themselves which gifts are truly the most precious...

Stories from Christmas

The Christmas Tree Fire

Ed Williams ([Email](#)) – "If anyone asks, tell them I'd like to be remembered as a crusading editor," Jimmy Mills told me in 1995. I was writing a history of the Alabama Press Association at the time, and my research took me to Birmingham to interview Alabama's oldest living newspaperman.

James E. (Jimmy) Mills, who died March 5, 1998, at age 97, told me that he wanted to be remembered as a crusading editor.

As editor of the old Birmingham Post and later the Birmingham Post-Herald from 1931 to 1966, one of Mills' legacies is a landmark Supreme Court decision that strengthened First Amendment rights.

He fought against loan sharking, for removal of the Alabama poll taxes, and for the lowering of electric rates in Birmingham. He also established the Goodfellows Fund in 1935 to provide toys, candy, fruit and nuts for poor children at Christmas.

The program continues today.

When I think of Jimmy Mills, I will remember him best for a poignant story he told me of a Christmas Eve fire that he covered when he was a young assistant editor at The Daily Oklahoman in Oklahoma City.



It happened in the pre-Depression days, sometime in the late 1920s, on a cold Christmas Eve in a rural Oklahoma community.

"It was cold as hell, blizzardy ... snow all over the ground, and sleet," Mills recalled to me. "It was at a little community at a railroad crossroads. All of the people ... most of the people in the community, were at the little church for a Christmas Eve program. They had the Christmas tree all lighted with the candles on it. And the tree caught fire. And the people in the church all rushed to get out the door, and there they pressed together as a crowd.

"The windows had bars on them to keep people from coming into the little church and stealing things at night. They couldn't get out the windows. There was no escape. Practically everybody in the community was killed.

"I drove down there with another reporter. We drove all night.

"As I said, it was just cold as hell, and we slid off the road on time. We didn't have chains, and the road was a block of ice. And we had to go out and find boards, anything that we could use to sort of pry under the wheels. I got a big board, I think it was a 2-by 6, and put it under another board, and the board hit me on the head.

"It hit me so hard, I thought my head was gone, and I felt to see if it was still there.

"We got there about daylight, and we were the first newspaper people there. We would dictate to The Daily Oklahoman, to the rewrite desk. We didn't have time to sit down and write a story.

"I went into one of the houses, and there were still burning coals in the fireplace. I saw a dog lying in front of the fireplace waiting for his family to come home, the childrens' stocking hanging on the mantel.

"And nobody there. The entire family was dead."

Jimmy Mills' voice quivered, and his lips trembled. He was silent for a few moments. Then he added, "I'll never forget what I saw. But that's what a newspaper reporter does, he covers the good ... and the bad."

When I think of Jimmy Mills, it will be as a crusading editor who changed laws, but I'll also remember him as a gentle, kind, sensitive individual who cared about people and believed that a newspaperman could make the world a better place.

And I'll remember the story that he told me of the Christmas tree fire in a little Oklahoma community so many years ago.

(Ed Williams is a journalism professor emeritus at Auburn University)

Connecting mailbox

Irresponsible Journalism

Bill Wertz ([Email](#)) - See something, say something, right?

I saw today an example of totally irresponsible journalism from Newsweek magazine with the headline: "Millions of Angry, Armed Americans Stand Ready to Seize Power If Trump Loses in 2024."

Two people I know brought the story to my attention, and they were upset.

"That can't be true," I said. "Millions?"

"It's true. You have to read it," one said.

Well, it's not true. It's preposterous, and the first clue is in the first paragraph, where the main figure in the story is introduced. He is Mike "Wompus" Nieznany, supposedly a 73-year-old Vietnam veteran from Georgia who sells motorcycle luggage racks. Nieznany is quoted partially and indirectly saying such things as, "There are lots of fully armed people wondering what's happening to this country," and "We're only going to take so much before we fight back."

To demonstrate the strength of Nieznany's army, it is asserted that more than 4 million people have viewed his political comments on the Quora website. Does that mean they endorse his views, or think he's a loon? We also learn from the article that Nieznany is a Republican who owns a gun. "Many" of these people, we are told with no support whatsoever, "have talked openly of the need to take down – by force if necessary" the federal government. Really? Not any Republicans I know.

The article goes on to cite statistics about the number of Americans who have guns, to assert without evidence that most of them are in the hands of Republicans, and to claim, again with no substantiation whatsoever, that these Republicans are so angry that Donald Trump lost his bid for re-election that they will revolt against the government if it happens again.

I hope you don't go to the Newsweek website to read the story because that would just encourage more sky-is-falling absurdity. The only reason I can imagine for a story like this is to generate "clicks," which is how the media demonstrates its value to

advertisers. For years we could rely on most of the media not to try to scare us with exaggerated or completely phony stories. I don't read Newsweek enough to know whether this story is an exception and others are grounded in reality. But Newsweek should certainly be ashamed of itself for pretending this story is news.

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Viewing bald eagles by live cams

John Willis ([Email](#)) - For those Connecting readers who enjoy spending some time watching live cams on a bald eagle's nest, here is the link to the cams at Berry College in Rome, GA. I have shared this link several times over the years.

I have been watching this nest for five years or so. Last year the female who ruled the roost from the start was run off by a new female, who took over. The older female, who had a broken leg, but managed to deal with it for years, was believed to have been seen near a reservoir in Alabama about 75 miles west of Rome, not long after she vanished from this nest.

A photo taken of a bald eagle in flight with its left leg askew was the evidence we had for the old female surviving the battle for the nesting rights at Berry. Nature in action.

As far as we can tell, it's the same male who has been building this nest for years. He mated with the new female last year, and one egg hatched. The baby died of exposure, however, a day or two later. The second egg never hatched, and was buried in the nest.

This year we were surprised when the female laid two eggs about two weeks ago. That's a full month ahead of the normal schedule with the former queen of the nest, so I think this younger female might have flown in from farther south, where the mating season starts a little earlier.

I looked in Saturday morning, and both eggs appeared in good shape, and mom and pop were tending their duties well.

The incubation period for bald eagle eggs is about five weeks, so we can expect these eggs to hatch around mid-January. It does snow in Rome on occasion, so we may have issues with the elements again this year.

I think it has been three years since we saw a successful fledge from this nest. That reminds us that we are seeing nature in her true form.

Click [here](#) to view.

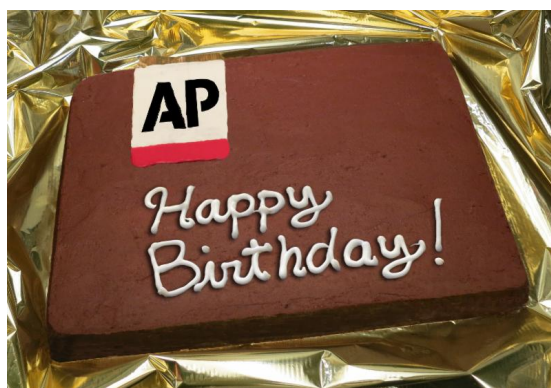
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Connecting sky shot – from the other side



Joe Macenka ([Email](#)) - The other day I shared an image of the sun rising over the Atlantic Ocean in Avon, N.C., a village on Hatteras Island, so it's only fair to also share an image of the sun setting over Pamlico Sound on the other side of the island.

Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



Derrill Holly

Stories of interest

CNN closes its U.S. offices to nonessential staff. (New York Times)

By Tacey Rychter

CNN is closing its U.S. offices to all employees who are able to work remotely, according to an internal memo sent to staff on Saturday evening.

“If your job does not REQUIRE you to be in the office in order to do it, please work from elsewhere,” the network’s president, Jeff Zucker, wrote to staff, citing a surge of Covid cases around the country and within the teams at CNN.

“We are doing this out of an abundance of caution,” the memo read. “And it will also protect those who will be in the office by minimizing the number of people who are there.”

Masks will be required at all times, “unless you are eating, drinking or in a room by yourself,” Mr. Zucker told staff.

Read more [here](#).

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Here’s a look back at the best and worst of news media in 2021 (Poynter)

By: Tom Jones

Good morning and welcome to a special edition of the Poynter Report. Today, I look back at the year in media — from the best to the worst and a bunch in between.

It has been another newsworthy year, one full of hope and inspiration, but also worry and frustration. A year ago at this time, this is what I wrote:

Biggest media wish for 2021: that by this time next year, we will have put a major dent into COVID-19 and that we’ll spend more days not reading or watching news about the coronavirus than days that we do.

Sadly, that is not the case. Yes, we have vaccines that are effective. But COVID-19 has not gone away, we haven’t forgotten it and it is still a major story. In recent days, it has again become the dominant news story. We all are bracing for what could be a rough couple of months.

But we plow forward, having survived a year that not only included a pandemic, but continuing divisiveness in our country over politics, race and social issues. As always, journalists were there to shine a light on it all.

So this is my look at the good, bad and the ugly of 2021 in the media.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Doug Pizac.

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Boomer Voices: Journalism is going downhill, not up

(Boomer Cafe)

*How many different ways can a baby boomer say it? The world has changed, the past is history, the good old days are gone. In this Boomer Opinion piece, BoomerCafé's co-founder and executive editor **Greg Dobbs** looks at the business in which he proudly worked all his life, and has the same laments.*

I spent my life working in network television news. In its heyday, between its quality and its reach, I was glad to be a part of it. Today, I'm glad I'm now talking about it in the past tense.

It's a painful admission. But I'm not proud of where my business has gone. We all suffer because of it.

In the good old days, TV news was a dependable force to be reckoned with. At the two networks for which I worked, we covered the world and, within the limits of a broadcast, we did it pretty well. But thanks to the proliferation of internet-based news organizations (some honorable, some not) and the consequent loss of audience for any one news outlet and the resultant cuts in ad revenue for almost everyone in the news business, those good old days are gone.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Lindel Hutson.



Celebrating AP's 175th

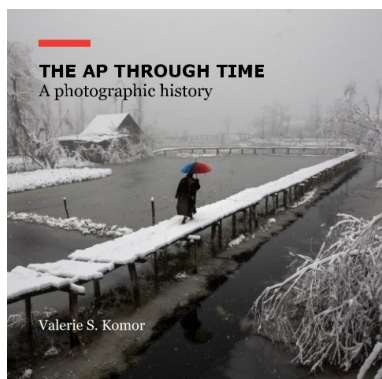
AP store for 175th, vintage merchandise



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 - Dec. 21, 2021



By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 21, the 355th day of 2021. There are 10 days left in the year. Winter arrives at 10:59 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 21, 1988, 270 people were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a Pam Am Boeing 747 over Lockerbie, Scotland, sending wreckage crashing to the ground.

On this date:

In 1620, Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower went ashore for the first time at present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman concluded their "March to the Sea" as they captured Savannah, Georgia.

In 1891, the first basketball game, devised by James Naismith, is believed to have been played at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. (The final score of this experimental game: 1-0.)

In 1914, the U.S. government began requiring passport applicants to provide photographs of themselves.

In 1945, U.S. Army Gen. George S. Patton, 60, died in Heidelberg, Germany, 12 days after being seriously injured in a car accident.

In 1968, Apollo 8 was launched on a mission to orbit the moon.

In 1976, the Liberian-registered tanker Argo Merchant broke apart near Nantucket Island off Massachusetts almost a week after running aground, spilling 7.5 million gallons of oil into the North Atlantic.

In 1991, eleven of the 12 former Soviet republics proclaimed the birth of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the death of the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics.

In 1995, the city of Bethlehem passed from Israeli to Palestinian control.

In 2012, the National Rifle Association said guns and police officers were needed in all American schools to stop the next killer “waiting in the wings,” taking a no-retreat stance in the face of growing calls for gun control after the Newtown, Connecticut, shootings that claimed the lives of 26 children and school staff.

In 2015, the nation’s three-decade-old ban on blood donations from gay and bisexual men was formally lifted, but major restrictions continued to limit who could give blood in the U.S.

Ten years ago: The U.S. Army announced charges against eight soldiers related to the death of a fellow GI, Pvt. Daniel Chen, who apparently shot himself in Afghanistan after being hazed. (Of the eight, five received prison sentences and two received demotions; four of the eight faced dismissal from the service.) Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers was selected the 2011 AP Male Athlete of the Year. Baylor’s Robert Griffin III was selected The Associated Press college football player of the year.

Five years ago: President-elect Donald Trump declared that the deadly truck attack on a Christmas market in Germany that killed 12 people two days earlier was “an attack on humanity and it’s got to be stopped”; he also suggested he might go forward with his campaign pledge to temporarily ban Muslim immigrants from coming to the United States.

One year ago: President-elect Joe Biden received his first dose of the coronavirus vaccine on live television as part of a growing effort to convince the American public the inoculations were safe. The Vatican declared it “morally acceptable” for Roman Catholics to receive COVID-19 vaccines based on research that used fetal tissue from abortions. Undercutting President Donald Trump on multiple fronts, Attorney General William Barr said he saw no reason to appoint a special counsel to look into Trump’s claims about the 2020 election or to name one for the tax investigation of Joe Biden’s son. A statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee that represented Virginia in the U.S. Capitol was removed. Jupiter and Saturn merged in the night sky, appearing closer than they had in centuries. Country singer K.T. Oslin died in suburban Nashville at 78.

Today’s Birthdays: Talk show host Phil Donahue is 86. Actor Jane Fonda is 84. Actor Larry Bryggman is 83. Singer Carla Thomas is 79. Musician Albert Lee is 78. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas is 77. Actor Josh Mostel is 75. Actor Samuel L. Jackson is 73. Rock singer Nick Gilder is 71. Movie producer Jeffrey Katzenberg is 71. Actor Dennis Boutsikaris is 69. International Tennis Hall of Famer Chris Evert is 67. Actor Jane Kaczmarek is 66. Country singer Lee Roy Parnell is 65. Former child actor Lisa Gerritsen is 64. Actor-comedian Ray Romano is 64. Former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is 59. Country singer Christy Forester (The Forester Sisters) is 59. Rock musician Murph (The Lemonheads; Dinosaur Jr.) is 57. Actor-comedian Andy Dick is 56. Rock musician Gabrielle Glaser is 56. Actor Michelle Hurd is 55. Actor Kiefer Sutherland is 55. Actor Karri Turner is 55. Actor Khristyne Haje is 53. Country singer Brad Warren (The Warren Brothers) is 53. Actor Julie Delpy is 52. Contemporary Christian singer Natalie Grant is 50. Actor Glenn Fitzgerald is 50. Singer-musician Brett

Scallions is 50. World Golf Hall of Famer Karrie Webb is 47. Rock singer Lukas Rossi (Rock Star Supernova) is 45. Actor Rutina Wesley is 43. Rock musician Anna Bulbrook (Airborne Toxic Event) is 39. Country singer Luke Stricklin is 39. Actor Steven Yeun is 38. Actor Kaitlyn Dever is 25.

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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