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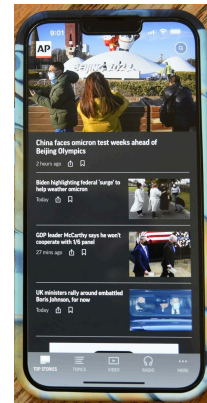
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Connecting

Feb. 9, 2024

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Colleagues,

Good Friday morning on this Feb. 9, 2024,

We lead today's Connecting with the story that moved on the AP wire Thursday on the death of our colleague **Will Lester**, a member of the AP's Washington bureau at the time of his death Wednesday at the age of 71.

The story of his 41-year AP career in South Carolina, Florida and Washington was written by **Meg Kinnard**, who shared a wonderful remembrance of her friend and colleague in Thursday's issue.

We bring you more memories of Will from his colleagues, and if you'd like to contribute your own, please send them along over the weekend.

Have a great weekend – be safe, stay healthy, live each day to your fullest.

Paul

Will Lester, longtime AP journalist in South Carolina, Florida and Washington, dies at age 71



BY MEG KINNARD

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Will Lester, a longtime reporter and editor for The Associated Press who played a critical role in the news organization's 2000 election-night decision not to call the presidential race, died Wednesday. He was 71.

According to his family, Lester died unexpectedly at his home in Maryland.

Fellow AP employees held Lester's good nature in equal measure of esteem with his dedication to covering the news. Executive Editor Julie Pace, who previously served as Washington bureau chief, said Lester "represented the best of AP," calling him "a dedicated editor who cared deeply about his craft," as well as "an incredibly kind person who treated everyone with respect and decency."

A native of Atlanta and a graduate of Emory University, Lester began his decades-long journalism career at The Lancaster News in Lancaster, South Carolina. After a stint at The Columbia Record, he moved to The Associated Press in 1982, serving as a reporter and news editor in the Columbia, South Carolina, office.

After that came his time in AP's Miami office, where Lester served as news editor before reporting on politics. It was that Florida political expertise that would come to

serve both Lester and the AP invaluable after he joined the Washington bureau in 1998.

Former Washington bureau chief Sandy Johnson recalled how Lester's "critical voice" and in-depth knowledge of Florida politics helped steer AP through the murky waters of the 2000 presidential race between George W. Bush and Al Gore, as television networks called the presidency for Bush and then retracted it.

Lester was part of the AP team that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for work on that longest of election nights, an honor Johnson called "a fine legacy for a much-admired colleague."

Carole Feldman, news editor in Washington, recalled Lester hosting parties on the Chesapeake Bay for AP staff and their families, as well as his commitment to "keeping the Halloween pumpkin we kept on our editing desk filled with candy year round. He regarded the AP as his family, and he demonstrated that every day," she said.

"Will always had a sense of humor and, better still, perspective when all hell was breaking loose," said Bruce Smith, a retired AP correspondent in South Carolina who recalled a time when an angry state senator confronted Lester after he had written an unfavorable story.

"Will held up his tape recorder and told him something to the effect of 'Senator, I have everything you said right here on tape,' to which the senator sneered 'Son, your tape — it lies!'"

"Will always laughed about that one," Smith added.

Anna Johnson, AP's Washington bureau chief, called him "an extremely kind and generous colleague who always had a nice word to say about the people he worked with."

Beyond his work covering the news, Lester was remembered for his dedication to supporting fellow journalists. Serving as a co-steward of the Washington shop for the union that represents AP journalists, Lester helped lead efforts to recruit new members and innovate ways to help keep employees engaged with negotiations.

As tributes to him rolled in on social media, many colleagues shared a common refrain, "Will always had my back," several said. "Will had all of our backs," replied another.

Lester also helped lead the awards program for the National Press Club, whose president Emily Wilkins said she was "always struck by his passion and dedication to recognizing and honoring the work of his peers."

Retired AP editor Merrill Hartson perhaps best encapsulated Lester's multi-faceted talents and dogged sense for news: "When there was a Will, there was a way."

A private family ceremony will take place at a later date.

Click [here](#) for link to this story.

Remembering Will Lester

Bob Burns - Will truly embodied the best of the AP — dedication, excellence, humanity, humility, and generosity of spirit. I aspired to be like Will.

-0-

Glen Johnson - I don't have a specific memory of Will as much as I have a general sense of him as one of the many people who have kept the wire great.

He was experienced, conscientious and committed. Most importantly, he was a presence within the Washington bureau when I worked there and for the many years since.

He was a true Southern gentleman and always sincerely interested in you.

It was a gut punch to read "RIP" next to his name last night, in part because the world can use all the Will Lesters it can muster in this day and age.

I'm grateful I got to know Will and that I continued to hear from him from time to time.

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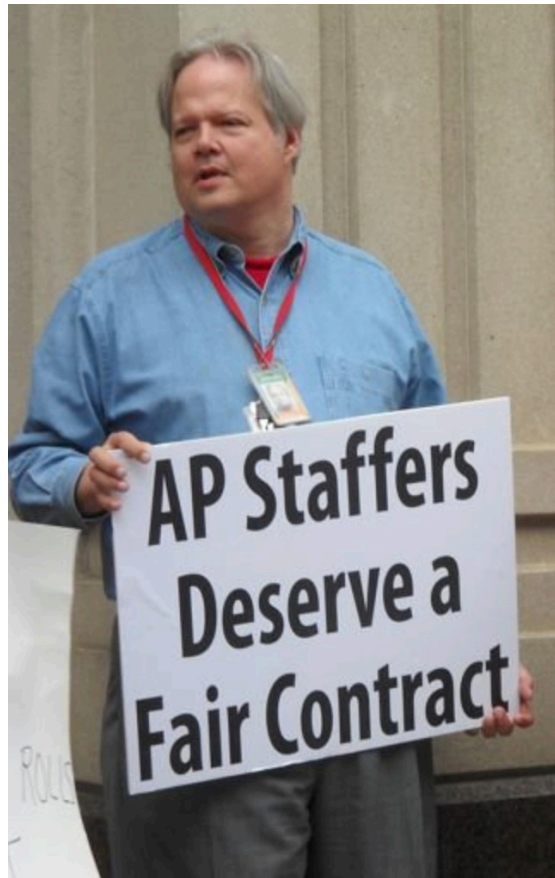


Bill Kaczor - Will and I were phone pals when he was news editor in Miami and I was a correspondent in Pensacola, just about as far apart geographically that you can get in Florida. I probably had one of the best jobs in AP and he had one of the toughest, but Will handled it with ease. He was even-tempered and cool under fire no matter the

crisis. Will also was a stickler for accuracy and probably saved me from a corrective or three. I thought he took it too far, though, in one instance. I had referred to a "secret" compound at Eglin Air Force base where Soviet and other foreign military vehicles including tanks were stored. He deleted "secret" because if the AP knew about it, it wasn't secret. When Brent Kallestad and I retired in 2013, Will flew to Tallahassee from WDC to join many other colleagues who gave us a grand send-off. I am sorry I could not return the favor, but I did get a chance to renew our acquaintance on a trip to Washington in 2019 at a dinner with Will and Marty Crutsinger, another AP stalwart who I knew from his days in Tallahassee. Both are among my favorite AP people (a long list). Will is at the left in the attached photo, I'm in the middle and Marty is on the right.

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Larry Margasak - I probably have a different perspective than most colleagues about this wonderful human being. When I retired after 48 AP years, I was the Guild shop steward for the Washington bureau, and Will was one of two people to succeed me. We both believed that we could love the AP and still fight for better pay, health care and working conditions. So while many could talk about Will as an excellent editor, I can speak to how much he cared about the well-being of his colleagues. When it was time to demonstrate for a better contract, Will never raised his voice, but had this gentle touch to get people moving. He was the same way as an editor, gently asking a lot of questions and finding gaps in a story that you didn't realize were there. I had lunch with Will recently and could see his disability from MS was getting worse. Will had a long ride into D.C. from Maryland's Eastern Shore, but didn't hesitate when I asked him to meet up. But that was Will. He wouldn't say no to a friend. Nonetheless, I was shocked to hear that we lost him. I'm so glad that he stuck around to see the ratification of the new AP-Guild contract he fought for. May his memory be a blessing.



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Jim Reindl - Will was one of the most dedicated newspeople I've worked with. He also was one of the nicest folks I've known. Will often was too dedicated for his own good, putting in long hours as Miami news editor when I was bureau chief in the early 90s. An average news day in Florida would have been the highlight reel of the news year in some of the other states where I worked but average or beyond, Will was there. He went to Washington not too long after I left Miami and I'm glad for any small role I

played to help him. The move clearly prolonged his career and I'm sure was better for his mental health after the wild times in Florida. A good man gone too soon.

-0-

Dan Sewell - Very sad to lose Will this early, and sorry he didn't get to enjoy some retirement years after his long, distinguished AP career.

When I think of Will, I think of his dedication to his job, his caring for those he worked with, and his puckish sense of humor that helped relieve tense news situations.

I worked with Will as a roving Florida correspondent during most of his time as Miami news editor, one of the most demanding jobs in The AP for my money (having been one of his predecessors).

There was a particularly challenging stretch in 1991-92:

--William Kennedy Smith, Ted Kennedy's nephew, was tried (and acquitted) on an allegation he raped a young woman in Palm Beach. The case was highly competitive, heavily covered by media from the supermarket tabloids to the Boston Globe, other major dailies, and Court TV.

--Former Panama strongman Manuel Noriega was tried (and convicted) on racketeering and drug charges in Miami federal court.

--A few months after those long-running cases finally wrapped up, the devastating Hurricane Andrew hit Florida.

Will put in many hours on those stories, coming in early, working late and on weekends.

I know he enjoyed his return to political reporting after the news editor stint, and his time on the Washington desk helping others.

He was among several former Florida hands who were in touch just last month about the death of Fay Gomarlo Clark, widow of former Florida COB Gary Clark.

Alabama station in disbelief after 200-foot radio tower stolen

Doug Pizac - We've had stories of photographers' cars broken into where all their gear was stolen. We've had stories of TV news videographers being held up at gun point and had their cameras stolen. This one is something I've never heard of before and should "take the cake" for these type incidents. Here's a NBC News story on a radio station in Alabama being forced to go silent after thieves stole their 200-foot tall radio tower.

By Katherine Itoh, NBC News

A radio station in Alabama was forced to go silent after thieves stole its 200-foot radio tower and other equipment from a building.

The station, WJLX, sent a landscaping crew to the site Friday morning for spring cleaning, only to find the 200-foot radio tower gone. When a crew member called the station's general manager to break the news, he was in disbelief.

"What do you mean the tower is gone? Are you sure you're in the right place? I actually used more colorful words than that," Brett Elmore recounted to NBC News. "He said there's wires all over the ground and the tower is gone."

Not only was the radio tower stolen, but a nearby building was also vandalized. When Elmore heard the door was left ajar, "that's when reality was starting to set in that something bad had happened."

Read more [here](#).

Behold, the contempt of a camel



[Daniel Haney](#) - Susan and I just returned from a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Jordan and Egypt. Perhaps the low point of the journey was being shamed somehow into riding a camel on the Wadi Rum desert. Here you see me, scared to death, a few seconds after the animal lurched to its feet. Note the sickly fake smile on my face and the look of contempt on the camel's.

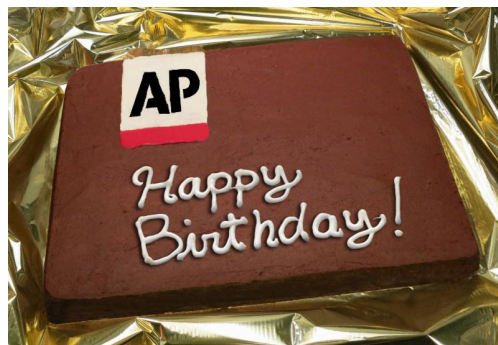
Colleagues from Santiago bureau gather



Lunch at Sergio Carrasco's home. From left: Candice Hughes, Richard Boudreaux, Eduardo Gallardo, Santiago Llanquin Caceres, Sergio Carrasco.

Richard Boudreaux - Sergio Carrasco, Eduardo Gallardo and Santiago Llanquin Caceres gathered to welcome fellow AP veterans Richard Boudreaux and Candice Hughes to Chile for Richard's first visit to the country since his work with them as Santiago Bureau Chief from 1982 to 1986. It was the first visit to Chile for Candice, who retired from AP after reporting from Dallas, the United Nations, Mexico, Central America, the former Soviet Union and Southern Europe. She and Richard live in London, where he is deputy standards editor of The Wall Street Journal.

Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



[Spencer Jones](#)

On Sunday to...

[Jim Smith](#)

Stories of interest

An inside look at The Messenger — from startup to shut down — 10 months and 50 million dollars later

(Editor and Publisher)

Episode 223 of "E&P Reports" - A Vodcast series hosted by Mike Blinder

Darren Samuelsohn, a seasoned journalist known for his insightful political reporting, first made his mark at Politico, a Washington-based digital newspaper company founded by American banker and media executive Robert Allbritton. During his nearly 10 years there, Samuelson demonstrated a keen ability to dissect complex political issues and provide readers with comprehensive analysis.

After establishing himself as a respected figure in journalism, Samuelsohn embarked on a new chapter in his career after being recruited in April of 2023 by The Messenger, a 50 million dollar digital news startup founded by part-owner of The Hollywood Reporter and The Hill, Jimmy Finkelstein.

For 10 months, Samuelsohn focused on his work as part of a team of over 200 journalists with a mission to become a national, politically-centered news brand that would cover politics, business, entertainment and sports.

Finkelstein stated in his first interview that he was creating an alternative to a national news media that he says has come under the sway of partisan influences. The site would be free and supported by advertising revenue, which he projected would be over 100 million dollars at the end of the first year.

Read more [here](#).

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How are journalists in Gaza coping with the war? (Al Jazeera)

When the cameras stop rolling and the press vests come off, how do the journalists who cover war cope?

We often forget that journalists covering wars are regular people, too. They are parents, siblings, friends and colleagues. And sometimes, they, too, are struggling to survive whatever story they are trying to tell. Journalists in Gaza, including our own teams, have had to deal with the horrific consequences of Israel's war – some have

paid with their lives. Others have lost loved ones, colleagues, and their homes. Yet, they have carried on. We invited them for a more personal take on what they have been through these past months and what has kept them going.

Presenter: Anelise Borges

Guests:

Hind Khoudary – Al Jazeera Journalist

Nida Ibrahim – Al Jazeera correspondent

Ali Hashem – Al Jazeera correspondent

Read more [here](#). Shared by Richard Chady.

-0-

Putin uses Tucker Carlson interview to press his Ukraine narrative, hints at swapping WSJ reporter (AP)

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russian President Vladimir Putin used an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson to push his narrative on the war in Ukraine, urge Washington to recognize Moscow's interests and press Kyiv to sit down for talks.

For more than two hours, a largely unchallenged Putin showered Carlson with Russian history and Kremlin talking points.

Putin repeated his claim the full-scale invasion in February 2022 — which Kyiv and its allies describe as an unprovoked act of aggression — was to protect Russian interests and prevent Ukraine from posing a threat to Russia by joining NATO.

Released Thursday, it was Putin's first interview with a Western media figure since the invasion.

Appearing confident and at ease, he made occasional friendly jabs at Carlson, who appeared baffled by the history lecture and tried to interject questions, but the 71-year-old Russian leader stayed on topic for over 20 minutes.

Read more [here](#).

The Final Word

SHOE By Gary Brookins & Susie MacNelly



Shared by Adolphe Bernotas

And, finally, guess who Ollie is woofing for Sunday?



Today in History: Feb. 9, 2024



Today is Friday, Feb. 9, the 40th day of 2024. There are 326 days left in the year.

Today's highlight

On Feb. 9, 1964, the Beatles made their first live American television appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show," broadcast from New York on CBS. The quartet played six songs, including "Love Me Do" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand," to a crowd of screaming teenagers in person and more than 70 million viewers across the country.

On this date

In 1825, the House of Representatives elected John Quincy Adams president after no candidate received a majority of electoral votes.

In 1942, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff held its first formal meeting to coordinate military strategy during World War II.

In 1943, the World War II battle of Guadalcanal in the southwest Pacific ended with an Allied victory over Japanese forces.

In 1950, in a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, Republican Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin charged that the State Department was riddled with Communists.

In 1962, an agreement was signed to make Jamaica an independent nation within the British Commonwealth later in the year.

In 1963, the Boeing 727 went on its first-ever flight as it took off from Renton, Washington.

In 1971, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake in California's San Fernando Valley claimed 65 lives.

In 1984, Soviet leader Yuri V. Andropov, 69, died 15 months after succeeding Leonid Brezhnev; he was followed by Konstantin U. Chernenko, who would only be in power for 13 months.

In 1986, Halley's Comet visited the solar system for the first time since 1910. (Its next return will be in 2061).

In 2002, Britain's Princess Margaret, sister of Queen Elizabeth II, died in London at age 71.

In 2009, New York Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez admitted to taking performance-enhancing drugs, telling ESPN he'd used banned substances while with the Texas Rangers for three years.

In 2018, at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in South Korea, North and South Korean athletes entered Olympic Stadium together, waving flags showing a unified Korea; it was their first joint Olympic march in more than a decade.

In 2020, "Parasite," from South Korea, won the best picture Oscar, becoming the first foreign-language film to take home the biggest honor in film.

In 2021, the Senate moved ahead with a second impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, rejecting arguments that the chamber could not proceed because Trump was no longer in office.

In 2022, it was revealed that Kamila Valieva, the 15-year-old Russian figure skating superstar who had just led her team to an Olympic gold medal, tested positive for a banned heart medication before the Beijing Games.

In 2023, Burt Bacharach, the composer and Oscar winner who delighted millions with the quirky arrangements and unforgettable melodies of "Walk on By," "Do You Know the Way to San Jose" and dozens of other hits, died at age 94.

Today's birthdays: Actor Janet Suzman is 85. Nobel Prize-winning author J.M. Coetzee is 84. Actor-politician Sheila James Kuehl (TV: "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis") is 83. Singer-songwriter Carole King is 82. Actor Joe Pesci is 81. Singer Barbara Lewis is 81. Author Alice Walker is 80. Actor Mia Farrow is 79. Former Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., is 78. Singer Joe Ely is 77. Actor Judith Light is 75. Actor Charles Shaughnessy is 69. Actor Ed Amatrudo is 68. Former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe is 67. Jazz musician Steve Wilson is 63. Country singer Travis Tritt is 61. Actor Julie Warner is 59. Country singer Danni Leigh is 54. Actor Sharon Case is 53. Actor Jason George is 52. Actor Amber Valletta is 50. Actor-producer Charlie Day is 48. Rock singer Chad Wolf (Carolina Liar) is 48. Actor A.J. Buckley is 47. Rock musician Richard On (O.A.R.) is 45. Actor Zhang Ziyi is 45. Olympic silver and bronze medal figure skater Irina Slutskaya is 45. Actor Tom Hiddleston is 43. Actor David Gallagher is 39. Actor Michael B. Jordan is 37. Actor Rose Leslie is 37. Actor Camille Winbush is 34. Actor Jimmy Bennett is 28. Actor Evan Roe (TV: "Madam Secretary") is 24.

Got a story or photos to share?

Connecting is a daily newsletter published Monday through Friday that reaches more than 1,800 retired and former Associated Press employees, present-day employees, and news industry and journalism school colleagues. It began in 2013. Past issues can

be found by clicking Connecting Archive in the masthead. Its author, Paul Stevens, retired from the AP in 2009 after a 36-year career as a newsman in Albany and St. Louis, correspondent in Wichita, chief of bureau in Albuquerque, Indianapolis and Kansas City, and Central Region vice president based in Kansas City.

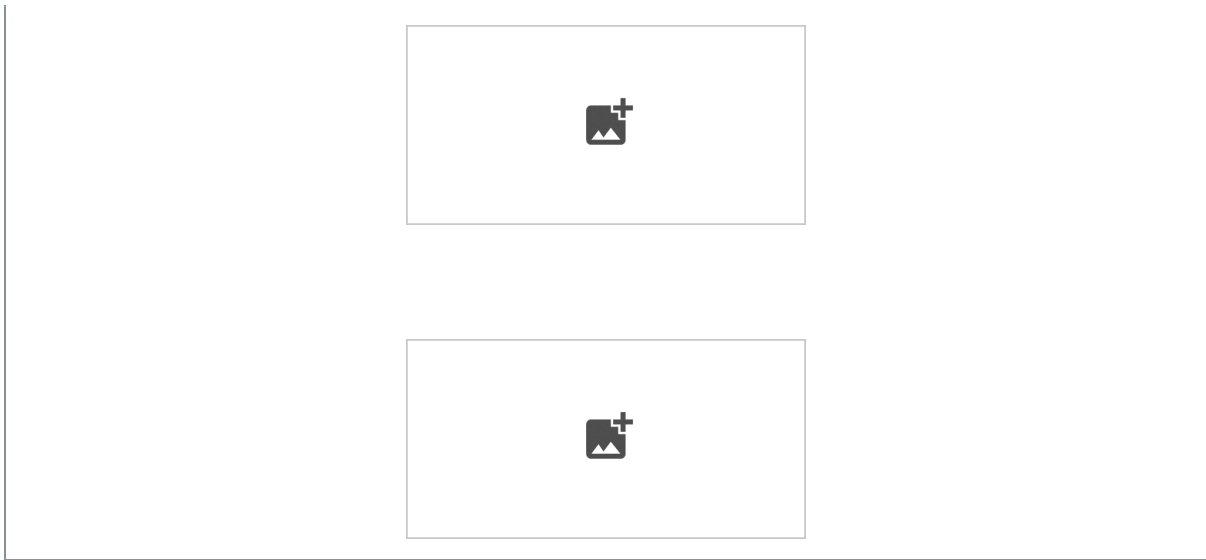
Got a story to share? A favorite memory of your AP days? Don't keep them to yourself. Share with your colleagues by sending to Ye Olde Connecting Editor. And don't forget to include photos!

Here are some suggestions:

- **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.
- **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?
- **Most unusual** place a story assignment took you.

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