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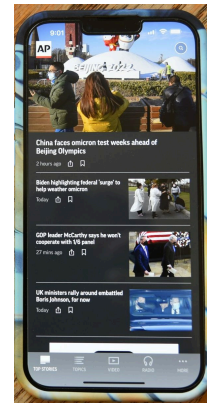
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Connecting

March 27, 2024

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Colleagues,

Good Wednesday morning on this March 27, 2024,

Connecting wishes a very Happy Birthday to our colleague [Eddie Lederer](#) – the AP’s senior employee who just began her 58th year with The Associated Press and who is one of its best-known and respected journalists.

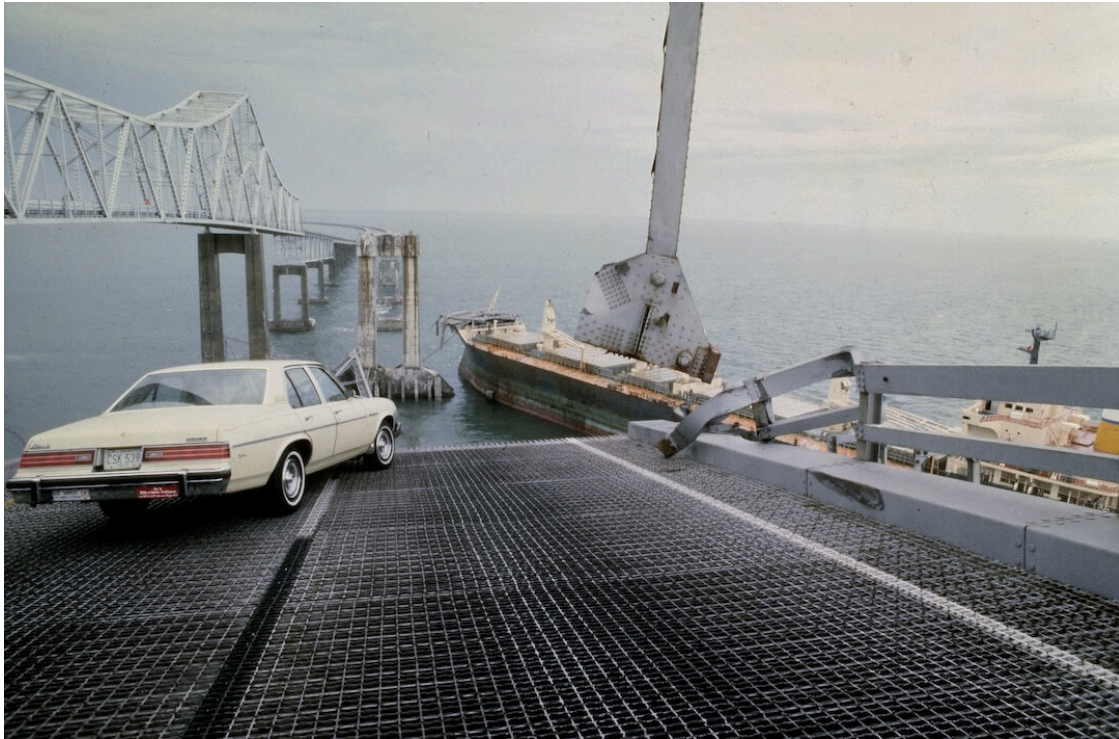
Eddie, the AP’s chief correspondent at the United Nations, started her career on March 11, 1966, in the San Francisco bureau and has covered news from all over the world for the AP.

Mary Zito Obituary – from [Joe Galianese](#): Mary worked at 50 Rock. She was in Purchasing back in the 80s. She died March 21 in Manhattan at the age of 67. Click [here](#) for her obituary.

Here’s to a great day – be safe, stay healthy, live it to your fullest.

Paul

Baltimore bridge disaster stirs memories of Sunshine Skyway collapse



A car is halted at the edge of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge across Tampa Bay, Fla., after the freighter Summit Venture struck the bridge during a thunderstorm and tore away a large part of the span, May 1980. At least 31 persons were killed, 23 of them aboard a bus that toppled into the water. (AP Photo/Jackie Green)

Bill Kaczor - I'm suffering from a case of deja vu while watching TV reports on Tuesday's ship-bridge collision in Baltimore. It has rekindled memories of covering the May 1980 collapse of the Sunshine Skyway bridge across Tampa Bay after it was rammed by the phosphate carrier Summit Venture during a driving rainstorm. The vessel veered 800 feet from the ship channel and collapsed a 1,400-foot section of the bridge. Several vehicles including a Greyhound bus fell 150 feet into the bay, killing 35 people. Only one person survived the plunge.

I had been hired by the AP just three months earlier in Tallahassee and was covering a meeting of the state Board of Regents at Florida State University. The board's corporate secretary, former AP newsman Hendrix Chandler, told me I had a call from the AP bureau. I was told to get on a plane to Tampa ASAP except there were no more flights from Tallahassee to Tampa that day. I flew, instead, to Orlando and drove a rental car through the same blinding rainstorm to Tampa. By the time I got there, it was too late to do anything useful.

Tampa correspondent Pat Leisner and Jacksonville correspondent Matt Bokor, who happened to be in Tampa visiting family, had the situation well in hand. So, I called the

governor's press office to find out if he was going to visit the disaster scene. I then was invited to take a helicopter tour with Gov. Bob Graham the next morning. Graham said mostly nothing on the chopper, but when we landed at a mobile command center at the foot of the bridge, I joined him for a briefing inside while a horde of other reporters and photographers cooled their heels outside. Graham then asked me to join him aboard a Coast Guard boat, but I was anxious to call in details from the briefing at a bank of payphones near the command post. Bokor was among the media scrum outside, so I asked if he could go in my stead. Graham agreed and Matt got a boat ride and lots more information.

A couple days later I was back in Tallahassee, where I paid a visit to the state's business regulation agency and asked to see records of the state Board of Pilot Commissioners as the Summit Venture was under a harbor pilot's guidance. I was informed that another reporter was already inspecting the file. I asked if that reporter was Bill Sloat of the Tampa Tribune. The clerk confirmed that he was Sloat. We were old acquaintances from our time together at Gannett News Service and I had run across him during a brief stay in Tampa. I was in the GNS Tallahassee bureau and he would come up from Fort Myers for legislative sessions.

I told the clerk to let Bill know I was there, and he invited me to help him go through the files that consisted of a couple cardboard boxes filled with paperwork. It didn't take too long before Bill handed me a letter he'd found from a board member, Pensacola harbor pilot R.E. Schaefer, to his colleagues about six months earlier. He wrote that there was a high incidence of mishaps involving a small number of pilots who were not being disciplined. Schaefer then predicted there would be "a major catastrophe" if the board didn't get tougher on incompetent pilots. He was frustrated by being outvoted by the other board members.

That was the lede of my story, which noted the board had never disciplined a pilot in the five years of its existence despite receiving 236 mishap reports. The letter not only preceded the Sunshine Skyway disaster, but the January 1980 collision of a tanker and Coast Guard buoy tender in Tampa Bay. The Coast Guard vessel sank, killing 23 crew members. Bill later informed me that he had led his story with a focus on Tampa Bay mishaps rather than Schaefer's letter, but his editors made him reled on the letter after my story hit the wire.

I wrote some follow ups including a decision in December 1980 by a state hearing officer who recommended that the pilot board take no action against the Summit Venture's pilot, John Lerro, on charges of incompetence and negligence. Lerro and others aboard the ship had testified that the storm was to blame because it blinded the vessel's radar and pulled it off course. The board agreed and exonerated Lerro.

At the two-year anniversary of the bridge collision, I reported that the board began cracking down after that disaster by reprimanding one pilot, putting two others on probation and suspending a fourth. All were from Tampa. The board's executive director denied the crackdown was related to the bridge disaster, contending it was the result of her being hired and the departure of a consultant who kept recommending leniency.

Whatever the reason, Florida has not had another accident of similar proportions. Lerro briefly resumed piloting before retiring due to illness. A federal judge, however,

ruled Lerro had been negligent in a lawsuit against the company that owned Summit Venture. It was settled with 33 plaintiffs getting payments ranging from \$29,069 to \$1.2 million. The state Department of Transportation also won a \$20 million verdict against the company.

Gannett, McClatchy dump AP; Why the audience is to blame

DANIEL P. FINNEY

News media chains Gannett and McClatchy ditched the Associated Press this week, bringing legacy media formerly known as newspapers several giant leaps closer to their awaiting grave.

Gannett owns 200 newspapers nationwide, including the Ames Tribune, Boone News-Republican, Des Moines Register, and Iowa City Press-Citizen.

The AP is the world's largest newsgathering operation with bureaus across the globe.

A Gannett executive, Kristin Roberts, snidely remarked Gannett news organizations "create more journalism every day than the AP."

That depends on what you call journalism.

The "12 biggest restaurants opening this spring" doesn't meet my standard, nor does the burning question of "What's the best beer in Iowa?"

What about this mild curiosity: "How far is the new Mattel Adventure Park from Des Moines?"

I'll save you the click. It's in suburban Kansas City on the Kansas side. Plan your trips accordingly.

These are all headlines from the Gannett outlet store in Des Moines.

Regular readers of these paragraph stacks know I spent most of my newspaper years working for the Register and that Gannett laid me off in 2020, effectively ending my career in the trade and as someone who made a living writing.

I don't want to trash the Register. I have a few friends left on the staff. They're doing their best, but even when I still worked there four years ago, daily journalism felt like trying to serve a meal during the final hours of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

I hate that Gannett and McClatchy are abandoning the AP, but I don't blame them. What are they supposed to do when everyone wants their content for free and the only content they want has nothing to do with what the AP covers most days?

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

Coverage of bridge collapse shows value of AP

John Wylie - On the debate about what value AP has to the major chains, the answer is in the AP's 4 p.m. summary of key aspects of the bridge collapse story in Baltimore. I have a huge number of friends in the DC Metro, and my son has three dozen high level staffers who report to him in DC and many of whom I know live in Maryland. He and his wife do, ironically on Baltimore Avenue a few blocks from the University in the near-in MD suburbs of DC. Many of his friends and colleagues travel a lot for work, as does he, and they will certainly miss the AP coverage if they are in places with no papers except those who have dropped AP. Reuters simply could not have turned out this excellent report, and many outside our profession have no idea how much vital news and information AP provides, and 24-hour cable simply can't compete--because I was watching all-news cable wall-to-wall as soon as I learned of the disaster but had so many unanswered questions until I found the AP package. It answered dozens of key questions that the cable newscasters kept saying they had been unable find out anything about. That what all those readers will be missing, and just another set of nails for the coffins of the affected newspapers.

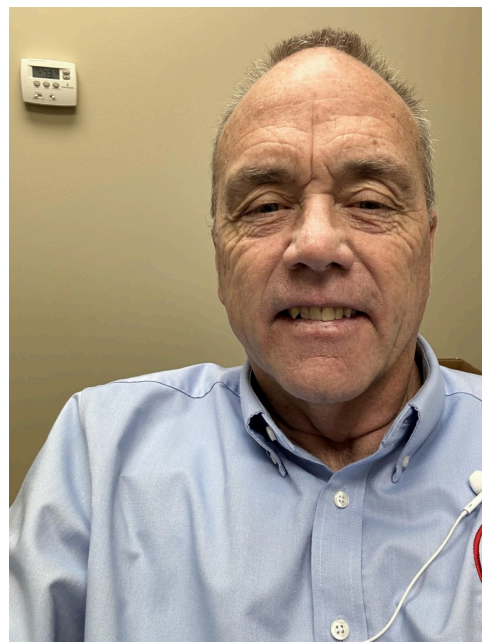
New-member profile: Owen Canfield

Owen Canfield - I became an AP staffer in Oklahoma City in the summer of 1984. I had taken the AP test several months earlier in anticipation of my marriage and move to Oklahoma City from Duncan, Okla., where I was a sportswriter. Four days before the wedding, COB Robert Shaw called to say a position had come open. He interviewed me the next day and offered me the job. It was a tremendous wedding gift.

I spent 19 years with The AP in Oklahoma City, 18 of those as sportswriter. I covered Oklahoma and Oklahoma State football and basketball primarily, but along the way Darrell Christian and Terry Taylor took a shine to my work and that led to me assisting in coverage of nine Final Fours, 15-20 NCAA men's basketball regionals and five Olympic Games (Seoul, Barcelona, Atlanta, Nagano, Sydney).

I left The AP in 2003 to join the Opinion page of The Oklahoman, where I spent 17 years working banker's hours – no nights or weekends after 18 years of nothing but nights and weekends. It was a welcome change with a growing family.

I left the newspaper in January 2021 and now work as a fundraiser for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.



Friends sometimes ask whether I miss covering sports. The answer is no, but I miss the people who made the job fun – fellow sportswriters from Oklahoma and AP colleagues from around the country. I consider Doug Ferguson one of my dearest friends. If he keeps working at it, Doug might just get the hang of that golf beat.

How I got my first job in journalism

[Jim Willis](#) - I got my first paid job in journalism because I had a motorcycle.

It was 1966. James Meredith had been shot on the side of US-51 just south of Memphis. The TV networks were sending crews to cover the remainder of the March Against Fear. The film shot daily had to be rushed from the field to the closest affiliate station or to a color lab for processing.

The quickest way to do that in New York and other large cities was to hire motorcycle couriers. So, the film desk at NBC News in New York called the journalism department at Memphis State University (now the University of Memphis) and said they wanted to hire a student with a motorcycle to serve as a film courier. Since I was the only one that fit that bill, I was hired.

I used my motorcycle to run film for a couple of days until NBC decided it would be better to ferry film in a rental car as that would allow me to fetch lunch for correspondents and film crew members. I also could keep a cooler with soft drinks in the car.

After the march, the job evolved to where the NBC film desk would call, tell me to rent a car and meet a film crew coming in from an owned-and-operated station or a freelance crew and get them where they needed to be in Mississippi.

Often that was in Grenada, where there was a lot of conflict between civil rights workers and town officials. By way of example, I met a freelance crew from Tampa one Sunday morning and took them to the First Baptist Church to report on an attempt to integrate church services.

The crew set up on the median strip between the sidewalk and the curb on the opposite side of the street to await the arrival of the civil rights workers. Before they arrived, however, all of us were arrested for “taking pictures on Sunday.” I knew many southern states had blue laws, but that was a new one for all of us.

Rather than take us to jail, the officer drove about half a mile away and stopped on the side of a residential street. He kept us there until the civil rights workers had been turned away at the church and then said he was going to release us.

The cameraman demanded, however, that the officer take us to jail and book us all on the charge. He declared the officer didn’t have the authority to “unarrest” us, we’d get double-time pay in jail and, besides, we wanted our day in court.

At that point, the officer got on the radio and called for back-up. I thought for sure they were going to beat us with rubber hoses, but when back-up arrived the arresting officer got in the car with the other officer and they drove away.

It was apparent the officer was not going to return while we were still in the squad car, so we “unarrested” ourselves and walked back to the rental car.

It was an exciting summer. We were shot at with cherry bombs and ball bearings launched with slingshots by Klan members, chased down two-lane roads by gun-toting opponents of integrationist and told by police that “newsmen who lie will get a whoppin’.”

I was a news-editorial major, rather than broadcast. Further, I had no illusions or aspirations about a network TV career, so I finished school, served four years in the Air Force and started my career in daily newspaper journalism, retiring after 35 years at the Memphis Press-Scimitar, Birmingham Post-Herald and The Commercial Appeal.

What's going on in that House?

Bruce Lowitt - So Illinois House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch is complaining that a Chicago Tribune reporter was asking politicians questions “that were explicitly political”?

As opposed to ... what? The weather? The Cubs and White Sox? Seen any good movies lately? How's the wife and kids?

A goodbye to his beloved Oliver

Dennis Conrad - My beloved Oliver, aka Ollie, the best dog a family could ever have, took his final nap Tuesday, weeks before what would have been his 17th birthday. Here he is at home with me in North Carolina on March 13th. A Connecting footnote: Oliver lived around the corner of the AP Washington bureau in 2008-2009 when my daughter was a Presidential Management Fellow at the Education Department. Many a time his paws hit the sidewalk in front of the bureau. My daughter discovered him while doing an online search for a possible pet in 2007 when she was a Carnegie Mellon grad student in Pittsburgh.

She drove to West Virginia to adopt him and make him her study companion. She found it fitting to name the Border Collie mix after Oliver Twist. I often took care of him since then and, with my wife Marie, full time for the past 10 years. It was a joy to be with him for thousands of miles of walks and too many dog park visits to count.



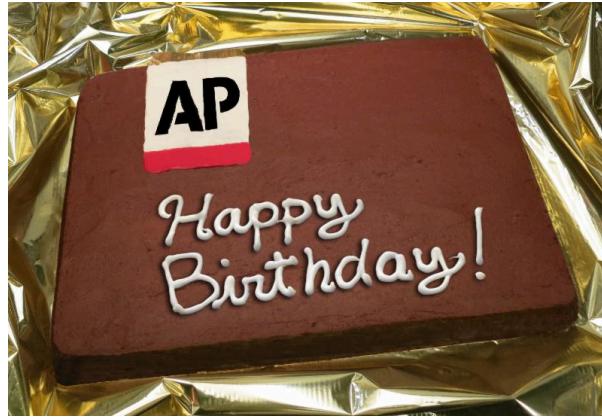
Wherever I went, I felt as if I were walking with Elvis. So many folks loved that dog and had to come up and tell me. Oliver was truly a life's blessing.

Connecting sky shot – Lake St. Catherine



[Howard Gros](#) - Full moon pictured Friday night, March 22, from deck of family's lake house on Lake St Catherine, Vermont. An orange glow from the sunset behind me is reflected on the deck.

Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



[Edie Lederer](#)

Stories of interest

What those covering the Key Bridge collapse can learn from reports about the 1980 Skyway disaster

(Poynter)

By: Roy Peter Clark

For many living in Florida, news of the Francis Scott Key Bridge disaster in Maryland brought back terrible memories. A defining news event for a generation of people living around Tampa Bay was the destruction of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, struck by an oil freighter during a stormy morning in May 1980. Thirty-five people drove off the jagged end of the bridge to their deaths that morning, a tragedy often remembered by those who now drive over the magnificent span that replaced it.

The reporting and storytelling about the Skyway disaster, that day and over the years, are full of lessons for those who are called upon to make sense of the unthinkable.

What follows is a retrospective I wrote in 2021 when one of the last key figures in the Skyway disaster, a veteran toll taker, passed away. It honors the work of one of the outstanding reporters in town by chance that day, Gene Miller of the Miami Herald.

Miller modeled one of the most important reporting and writing strategies: “the bigger, the smaller.” When the bridge falls down, interview the toll taker.

Read more [here](#).

-0-

Russian Court Extends WSJ Reporter Evan Gershkovich's Detention (Wall Street Journal)

By Ann M. Simmons

A Russian court extended the detention of Evan Gershkovich by three months, almost a year to the day since The Wall Street Journal reporter became the first U.S. journalist to be detained there on an allegation of espionage since the end of the Cold War.

The 32-year-old reporter, whom the U.S. government deems wrongfully detained, has been held in Moscow's Lefortovo Prison since March 29 last year, on an allegation that he, the Journal and the U.S. government vehemently deny.

In a closed hearing at the Moscow City Court, a judge granted the request of investigators from the Federal Security Service, or FSB, that Gershkovich remain behind bars awaiting trial until June 30.

Russian law allows investigators up to a year in criminal cases deemed particularly complex to prepare for a trial, but grants further extensions in exceptional circumstances.

Tuesday's ruling, the fifth extension of Gershkovich's detention, comes ahead of the one-year mark of his detainment on Friday and amid efforts by the Biden administration to secure his release. The U.S. government says Gershkovich has never worked for it and isn't a spy.

Read more [here](#).

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NBC has cut ties with former RNC head Ronna McDaniel after employee objections, some on the air (AP)

BY DAVID BAUDER

NEW YORK (AP) — NBC News cut ties Tuesday with former Republican National Committee chief Ronna McDaniel less than a week after hiring her as an on-air political contributor, a decision that followed a furious protest by some of its journalists and commentators.

In announcing the decision in a memo, NBC Universal News Group Chairman Cesar Conde apologized to staff members who felt let down by the hire, acknowledging he had signed off on it.

“No organization, particularly a newsroom, can succeed unless it is cohesive and aligned. Over the last few days, it has become clear that this appointment undermines

that goal,” Conde said. But he said the network remained committed to centering “voices that represent different parts of the political spectrum.”

There was no immediate comment from McDaniel, who stepped down as RNC leader just over two weeks ago. She found out she lost her job through media reports, not from NBC directly, said a person close to her who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about it publicly.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Adolphe Bernotas.

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War correspondent Jane Ferguson pulls back the curtain on her career covering global conflicts (Nieman Labs)

By HANAA' TAMEEZ

Jane Ferguson, a seasoned war and conflict reporter for PBS NewsHour and a visiting professor at Princeton University, was teaching a course titled “War Reporting: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” last fall when the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7.

The 39-year-old Irish-British journalist has reported from Gaza and a number of Middle Eastern countries over her 15-year career. She had planned her syllabus to mostly focus on the war in Ukraine, but soon shuffled her course plan.

“I had lived in and covered that region and that conflict for years and years, but there part of me was watching something very new happen [in the conflict],” Ferguson told me. “I was watching my industry struggle to respond to an incredible amount of misinformation on social media outpacing journalism.”

Ferguson is passionate about helping people understand the human impacts of war and why conflict reporting is necessary. That was something the late veteran war photographer Tim Page did for her in her early days in Afghanistan, and Ferguson credits him with changing the trajectory of her career (more on that below). Her first book, published this past July and titled *No Ordinary Assignment*, is an intimate memoir into the personal and professional challenges in becoming and being a war correspondent. It’s her way of pulling back the curtain on TV news and what it really means to cover war well.

Read more [here](#).

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Manny García, Angel Rodríguez announced as new top editors at Houston Landing

by Houston Landing staff

Manny García is the new editor in chief of Houston Landing, CEO Peter Bhatia announced Friday. Angel Rodríguez will join him as managing editor.

“Manny and Angel... bring decades of experience, leadership and success in our field, an appreciation of the digital world, and a commitment to Houston,” Bhatia said. “They will build partnerships within our Houston Landing team, and the community, and will help us find new ways to make our journalism of more value to a wider swath of readers, using all the reporting, visual and technology tools available.”

After leadership roles at the Austin American-Statesman, the ProPublica-Texas Tribune Investigative Initiative, the USA Today Network, The Naples Daily News, the Miami Herald and el Nuevo Herald (the Spanish-language paper produced at the Miami Herald), García is excited to work in Houston.

He describes it as the city of today and of the future. “It is the gateway of opportunity, the start of the American Dream,” he said. That growth comes with pains, he continued, including a lack of affordable housing, poor infrastructure, worker exploitation, immigration abuses and more.

Read more [here](#).

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She reads the newspaper on TikTok — and her videos are going viral (NPR)

Jordan-Marie Smith

Newspapers are losing the battle against smartphones as the preferred place to learn the news, but one woman has found a way to bridge the divide and bring the print to the people.

Kelsey Russell, 23, makes TikToks — sometimes 8 minutes long — in which she goes through a single article and explains the context along the way.

"I got a subscription to the Sunday New York Times physical copy for my birthday, and I think that bad Gen Z biddies should read the newspaper," she says in one video.

Amid a rapidly changing media landscape, the rise of disinformation, and a bewildering array of social media options, Russell has found a niche as a modern day newsreader — and become a media literacy expert along the way.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Kevin Walsh.

Today in History - March 27, 2024



Today is Wednesday, March 27, the 87th day of 2024. There are 279 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 27, 1973, "The Godfather" won the Academy Award for best picture of 1972, but its star, Marlon Brando, refused to accept his Oscar for best actor, and in what would become one of the Oscars' most famous moments sent in his place actor and activist Sacheen Littlefeather, who spoke out about the depiction of Native Americans in Hollywood. (In 2022, months before her death, the Academy would apologize for the "abuse" Littlefeather received at the time.)

On this date:

In 1513, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon sighted present-day Florida.

In 1625, Charles I acceded to the English throne upon the death of James I.

In 1794, Congress approved "An Act to provide a Naval Armament" of six armed ships.

In 1912, first lady Helen Herron Taft and the wife of Japan's ambassador to the United States, Viscountess Chinda, planted the first two of 3,000 cherry trees given to the U.S. as a gift by the mayor of Tokyo.

In 1945, during World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower told reporters in Paris that German defenses on the Western Front had been broken.

In 1964, Alaska was hit by a magnitude 9.2 earthquake (the strongest on record in North America) and tsunamis that together claimed about 130 lives.

In 1968, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the Earth in 1961, died when his MiG-15 jet crashed during a routine training flight near Moscow; he was 34.

In 1975, construction began on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which was completed two years later.

In 1977, in aviation's worst disaster, 583 people were killed when a KLM Boeing 747, attempting to take off in heavy fog, crashed into a Pan Am 747 on an airport runway on the Canary Island of Tenerife.

In 1980, 123 workers died when a North Sea floating oil field platform, the Alexander Kielland, capsized during a storm.

In 2012, award-winning poet Adrienne Rich, died in Santa Cruz, California at age 82, while art critic Hilton Kramer, died in Harpswell, Maine at 83.

In 2018, retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, in an essay on The New York Times website, called for the repeal of the Second Amendment to allow for significant gun control legislation.

In 2019, Facebook said it was extending its ban on hate speech to prohibit the promotion and support of white nationalism and white separatism.

In 2022, Will Smith slapped Chris Rock on stage at the Oscars and won best actor just minutes later. (Smith was later expelled from the movie academy and received a 10-year ban from the Oscars.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Julian Glover is 89. Actor Jerry Lacy is 88. Actor-director Austin Pendleton is 84. Actor Michael York is 82. Rock musician Tony Banks (Genesis) is 74. Rock musician Andrew Farriss (INXS) is 65. Jazz musician Dave Koz (kahz) is 61. Movie director Quentin Tarantino is 61. Rock musician Derrick McKenzie (Jamiroquai) is 60. Rock musician Johnny April (Staind) is 59. Actor Talisa Soto is 57. Actor Ben Koldyke is 56. Actor Pauley Perrette is 55. Singer Mariah Carey is 54. Rock musician Brendan Hill (Blues Traveler) is 54. Actor Elizabeth Mitchell is 54. Actor Nathan Fillion is 53. Hip-hop singer Fergie is 49. Jazz musician Tia Fuller is 48. Actor Emily Ann Lloyd is 40. MLB catcher Buster Posey is 37. Actor Brenda Song is 36. Pop singer-songwriter Kimbra is 34. Actor Taylor Atelian is 29. Actor/R&B singer Halle Bailey is 24. Classical crossover singer Amira Willighagen (TV: "Holland's Got Talent") is 20.

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

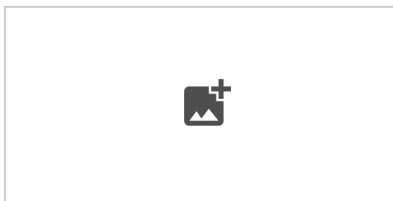
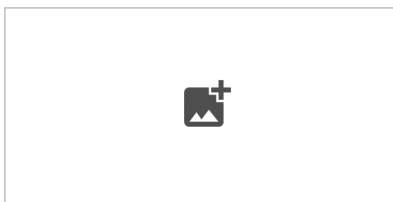


Olde Connecting Editor. And don't forget to include photos!

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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