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Connecting

April 29, 2024

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Colleagues,

Good Monday morning on this April 29, 2024,

Two men who worked tirelessly in California and Florida for the cause of open government and courts are remembered in today's Connecting.

One of them, **Mel Opotowsky**, a Connecting colleague, a former California newspaper editor and fierce defender of the First Amendment, died April 19 at the age of 92. He helped found in 1988 the California First Amendment Coalition, for which he continued to serve as a board member until his death. The coalition later dropped "California" from its name.

The other is **Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte**, whose efforts were key in a decision 45 years ago this month by the Florida Supreme Court that permanently permitted cameras and audio recording equipment in the state's courtrooms.

The former state legislator began his campaign for courtroom cameras 50 years ago while chairman of the state's Ethics Commission, and is remembered by our colleague

Bill Kaczor. D'Albemberte later was president of the American Bar Association, chair of the Florida Constitution Revision Commission, dean of Florida State University's law school and then FSU's president. He died in 2019 at the age of 85.

Here's to a great week – be safe, stay healthy, live each day to your fullest.

Paul

Former Press-Enterprise editor Mel Opotowsky dies at 92



Mel Opotowsky, a retired managing editor of The Press-Enterprise, is seen Sunday, Jan. 6, 2019, at a panel discussion about retired columnist Dan Bernstein's book "Justice in Plain Sight" in Riverside. Opotowsky died Thursday, April 18, 2024, at age 92. (File photo by Milka Soko, Contributing Photographer)

By David Downey | Contributing Writer The Sun, San Bernardino, Calif.

Mel Opotowsky, former managing editor of The Press-Enterprise and fierce defender of the First Amendment, has died. He was 92.

Opotowsky was described as a tough newsroom leader who guided legal challenges that prompted the U.S. Supreme Court to expand public access to the courts.

Opotowsky also helped found in 1988 the California First Amendment Coalition, for which he continued to serve as a board member until his death. The coalition later dropped "California" from its name.

"He is a legend in California journalism," David Snyder, the coalition's executive director, said Thursday, April 18.

"Mel understood at a kind of molecular level how crucial it is for government meetings and government records to be available to the public and the press," Snyder said. "He understood that that is a fundamental building block of a healthy representative democracy. And he fought hard for that."

Read more here.

Click **here** for First Amendment Coalition story, which noted:

Mel served on FAC's board of directors from its first meeting on May 10, 1988 until his death. He attended the board's most recent meeting, and as recently as April 4 was emailing FAC staff with ideas.

The organization expanded during Mel's long tenure from an all-volunteer organization with no staff and a debt of a few thousand dollars to what it is today: a robust and growing organization with a professional staff that shapes public policy, fights important court battles on open-government and First Amendment issues, and trains and educates journalists and others across the state.

Mel, a journalist his entire working life, was still plying his trade as late as last year – writing a piece about the retirement home where he lived with his wife, Bonnie.

Memories of Mel

<u>Dan Day</u> - I got to know Mel well during my San Francisco years, joining him on the board of directors of what was then the California First Amendment Coalition ("California" dropped off later). We held many of our meetings in airport conference rooms or nearby hotels in the LA and San Francisco Bay areas.

I remember Mel, a horseman, picking a group of us one time in his van, apologizing that some straw from his "hosses" was still in the vehicle.

Mel, a tough, no-nonsense newsman, was a terrific advocate for open government and the public's right to know. If he knew that his obituaries in the Press-Enterprise and Los Angeles Times were behind paywalls, he'd probably gripe about it, then burst out laughing.

-0-

<u>Andy Lippman</u> - Mel Opotowsky was a wise, but tough journalist who brought high standards to the newsroom of the Press-Enterprise in Riverside.

He was a beacon for the First Amendment, even after retirement and he never failed to reach out to rally the journalism community in California. Personally, I always remember him as the thin guy in a suit with a thin moustache, which distinguished him and made him look distinguished.

Most of all, he was a loyal friend who cared even after you dropped out of his immediate orbit. I know that I heard from him several times after I retired.

-0-

<u>Peggy Walsh</u> - Mel created California's First Amendment Coalition in 1988 and I was fortunate enough to work with him during my five years with AP in LA and San Francisco.

He never hesitated to pick up the phone in Riverside, even after I moved north. His dedication to the first amendment was life long and unequalled.

We reconnected when he was in a nursing home a few years ago. He was still interviewing residents, writing about restaurants they loved and posting stories about press freedom.

His love and dedication to freedom of the press, especially in these times, will be missed. Rest in peace, Mel. Your work will go on.

The man behind cameras in the courtroom in Florida



<u>Bill Kaczor</u> - Cameras are banned from federal courtrooms and those in New York, where former President Trump is on trial for allegedly falsifying business records to cover up hush money payments to women who say they had affairs with him. Their presence, however, has been a fact of life in Florida courtrooms for nearly a half-

century. The Florida Supreme Court permanently permitted cameras and audio recording equipment in the state's courtrooms 45 years ago this month. The ruling was largely due to the efforts of one man, Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte.

The former state legislator began his campaign for courtroom cameras 50 years ago while chairman of the state's Ethics Commission. The commission was, and still is, largely a toothless tiger, even unable to initiate investigations of official misdeeds on its own. D'Albemberte, who later was president of the American Bar Association, chair of the Florida Constitution Revision Commission, dean of Florida State University's law school and then FSU's president, made the best of a weak position by "jawboning" to expose corruption and advance reforms. That included a 1974 article written for a legal journal. "We will not have truly public trials in today's urban society until we come to grips with the realities of electronic journalism and allow cameras in the courtroom," D'Alemberte opined. He noted most people have never seen a court in action and contended that fact was contributing to distrust of the legal system "that 10,000 Law Day speeches and countless lawyers' public relations cannot overcome."

D'Alemberte the next year represented Jacksonville and Miami television stations that asked the Florida Supreme Court to lift its ban on cameras in the state's courtrooms. The justices two years later ordered a year-long experiment that permitted cameras in a limited number of cases, and then in April 1979 they issued a permanent order allowing cameras with certain exceptions. D'Alemberte returned to the Supreme Court 20 months later to argue on behalf of the Palm Beach Times and Palm Beach Post that judges shouldn't have "unbridled discretion" to make exceptions to the camera rule. That was after lawyers for the newspapers were not permitted to question witnesses and examine evidence before a judge disallowed cameras at a murder trial. The Supreme Court again sided with D'Alemberte and ruled that judges must give the media a fair chance to object before prohibiting cameras. The American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences awarded D'Alemberte a special Emmy in 1985 for his cameras-in-the-courtroom advocacy.

Three months after the Supreme Court's 1979 decision, the first nationally televised trial was held in Miami. Serial killer Ted Bundy personally questioned witnesses during the trial that had been moved from Tallahassee due to extensive publicity there about the bludgeoning to deaths of two women as they slept in a Florida State sorority house. Bundy was convicted of both murders in that case and received two death sentences. He received a third death sentence for murdering a middle school student in a separate trial and was executed in 1989 after several appeals. The three major broadcast networks and about a dozen stations from Florida, Washington state, Colorado and Utah covered the Miami trial. A media center was set up five stories above the courtroom and hosted more than 100 reporters, editors and other media personnel. The presiding judge, Edward Cowart, visited the center and approvingly said the public had a right to see how the court was conducting its business.

D'Alemberte also took other press freedom cases, sometimes pro bono, including appeals to the Florida Supreme Court that prevented reporters from being jailed for refusing to reveal confidential sources or testifying about cases they covered. I reported on many of D'Alemberte's cases involving a wide range of subjects including seeking releases and compensation for people who had been wrongly convicted. The last of his three marriages was to a former reporter, Patsy Palmer, whom I worked with at Gannett News Service in Tallahassee before I joined the AP. D'Alemberte was

born and raised in Chattahoochee, a small Florida Panhandle town, and his father also had been a lawyer. He was elected to the Legislature, though, from Miami where he worked for a large law firm with, among others, Janet Reno, a future U.S. attorney general. He died in 2019 at the age of 85 but he left a legacy that includes campus improvements including a medical school at Florida State, the Innocence Project of Florida that he helped found and, of course, cameras in the courtroom.

A gathering of 100 years of AP



From left: Hank Ackerman, Monte Hayes, Ed McCullough

<u>Ed McCullough</u> - 100 years of AP got together last weekend (Saturday April 27) at Cristof's restaurant in Fort Myers, chosen because it's Old Florida charming and located midway between our north and south starting points: Sarasota and Naples.

Hank Ackerman and his wife Melanie, and Monte Hayes and his wife Sandy, were joined by Ed McCullough whose wife Sue regretfully could not join us.

We spent decades crisscrossing AP bureaus – Caracas, Venezuela; Lima, Peru; Buenos Aires, Mexico City, New York City – ahead of or behind one another and reading each other's news stories though rarely meeting.

Hank retired in 2007 after 35 years. Monte, in 2008 after 30 years. Ed left AP after 35 years in 2016.

The very pleasant lunch, coordinated by Monte, did not bog down into trading "war" stories of yesteryear though from distant locales we had covered drug trafficking, assassinations, bombings, coups, prison riots, heinous kidnappings and miraculous rescues along with the mundanities of elections, corruption, bank crashes, hyperinflation, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and sports results expected or surprising. Incidentally and AP being AP, those often were the biggest stories in the world.

Two of us became AP businessmen which was not as quaint, oxymoronic or non sequitur-ish as may seem. That was AP's model and worked for 150+ years until ... it didn't. The people who created news, photos and video, intimately familiar with those products, then sold them. Correction: licensed them.

Mostly we remembered AP people who brightened our careers and lives: Stan Swinton, Lou Boccardi, Claude Erbsen, Larry Heinzerling, Nate Polowetzky, Tom Kent and George Krimsky to name just a few. OK, OK, and Chuck Green, Eloy Aguilar, Bill Heath, Harold Olmos, Charlie Hanley and ... Paul Stevens. Among quite a few others.

What for each of us began as semi-accidental employment turned into lifelong adventures shared by our families. Mell and Sandy told their own stories about housing (often not the best), kids, schools, languages and sometimes having to shunt their own careers to the back burner.

Hank's son and daughter were born in Buenos Aires. Ed's daughters were born in Caracas and yanked to Stockholm, Madrid, Rome, Mexico City and Miami before heading off to college and lives of their choosing. Sophie, 27, is in Paris as I type.

Each of us wonders how we'd fare in today's journalism of AI, drones, "deep fakes," partisanship, objectivity/subjectivity. Probably not well.

More importantly, none would change experiences that ultimately led a pleasant lunch with stranger/friends in southwest Florida last weekend. We hope to meet again soon. This time with Sue.

AP exclusive details how ERs are refusing to treat pregnant women after Roe v. Wade was overturned



In an exclusive based on documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, Washington-based health policy reporter Amanda Seitz reported on complaints that pregnant women were being turned away from emergency rooms in the months after Roe v. Wade was overturned, despite federal law requiring that they be treated.

When Roe v. Wade was overturned, the Biden administration looked at the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act as a safety net to ensure that pregnant women experiencing a medical emergency could get abortions in states where the procedure had been banned.

After hearing anecdotally that this wasn't the case, Seitz was unable to get clear answers from the administration. She submitted a FOIA request in February 2023 seeking information about pregnancy-related complaints under the federal law.

After almost a year of waiting, the FOIA office finally agreed to release records but said it would take another four years to get the documents. With a crucial U.S. Supreme Court case pending, Seitz didn't let up and negotiated a limited release of some documents in certain states.

Read more here.

BEST OF THE WEEK — SECOND WINNER

Teamwork, expertise and planning lead to bright coverage of Olympic flame lighting



The AP team in Athens went above and beyond across formats to get exclusive access to the behind-the-scenes operation of lighting the Olympic flame, producing excellent work for both traditional and digital clients.

Years of source building and weeks of planning came to a head at the precise moment when the sun's rays reflected on a cauldron failed to light the Olympic flame that in three months will open the Summer Games in Paris. As rehearsed in case the day would be overcast, organizers made sure to use the flame lit the day before, during a rehearsal. And few noticed the detail. But having covered many previous ceremonies and having spent days reporting on the behind-the-scenes preparations that go into the televised event, Athens correspondent Nicholas Paphitis was quick to notice and reflect it in his story.

The moment capped a few days of intense coverage, during which the team in Athens went above and beyond to get exclusive access and innovate with digital storytelling for new audiences: A photo gallery that looked at some of the key venues of Ancient Olympia under the very special light of the stars; a close look at the history of so-called priestesses that perform a ceremony that aims to resemble rites of Ancient Greece; a reflection on the legacy of one of the founding fathers of modern Olympics; rehearsals; spot coverage; reactions; and an explainer in text and video form that was very popular among clients and digital customers alike built the moment in a multistory effort with the Sports team to mark the 100-day countdown to Paris 2024.

Read more **here**.

Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



John Bolt

Dave Fritz

Dennis Gale

Andy Lippman

Bruce Lowitt

Stories of Interest

Praise for decency and a presidential plea highlight White House Correspondents' Association Dinner

(Poynter)

By: Tom Jones

Saturday's night's White House Correspondents' Association Dinner in Washington followed the usual script of jokes and pokes at various politicians, media types, Washington insiders and, of course, President Joe Biden.

For his part, Biden joined in with a few jokes as well.

But there was a seriousness to Saturday's event as well. Especially when Biden, during his address, trumpeted the importance of journalists by calling out the rhetoric of former President Donald Trump and many of Trump's followers.

Biden said, "There are some who call you the enemy of the people. That's wrong and it's dangerous. ... The defeated former president has made no secret of his attack on our democracy. He has said he wants to be a dictator on day one. And so much more. He tells supporters he is their revenge and retribution. When, in God's name, have

you ever heard of another president say something like that? And he promised a 'bloodbath' when he loses again. We have to take this seriously."

Biden then added, "I'm sincerely not asking you to take sides. I'm asking you to rise up to the seriousness of the moment. Move past the horse-race numbers and the gotcha moments and the distractions, the sideshows that have sensationalized our politics. And focus on what's actually at stake. I think, in your hearts, you know what's at stake."

Biden closed with a toast: "To a free press, to an informed citizenry, to an America where freedom and democracy endure. God bless America."

Read more **here**.

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Once dominant at CBS News before a bitter departure, Dan Rather makes his first return in 18 years (AP)

BY DAVID BAUDER

NEW YORK (AP) — Dan Rather returned to the CBS News airwaves for the first time since his bitter exit 18 years ago, appearing in a reflective interview on "CBS Sunday Morning" days before the debut of a Netflix documentary on the 92-year-old newsman's life.

After 44 years at the network, 24 as anchor of the "CBS Evening News," Rather left under a cloud following a botched investigation into then-President George W. Bush's military record. Rather signed off as anchor for the last time on March 9, 2005, and exited the network when his contract ended 15 months later.

With continued enmity between him and since-deposed CBS chief Leslie Moonves, Rather essentially became a nonperson at the news division he dominated for decades.

"Without apology or explanation, I miss CBS," Rather told correspondent Lee Cowan in the interview that aired Sunday. "I've missed it since the day I left."

Rather escaped official blame for the report that questioned Bush's Vietnam War-era National Guard service but, as the anchor who introduced it, was identified with it. CBS could not vouch for the authenticity of some documents upon which the report was based, although many people involved in the story still believe it was true.

In the documentary "Rather," debuting Wednesday on Netflix, Rather said he thought he would survive the incident, but his wife, Jean, told him, "You got into a fight with the president of the United States during his reelection campaign. What did you think was going to happen?"

Rather did not retire after leaving CBS, doing investigative journalism and rock star interviews for HDNet, a digital cable and satellite television network. Over the past few years, he has become known to a new generation as a tart-talking presence on social media.

Read more **here**.

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Two Russian journalists jailed on 'extremism' charges for alleged work for Navalny group (AP)

BY ELISE MORTON

LONDON (AP) — Two Russian journalists were arrested by their government on "extremism" charges and ordered by courts there on Saturday to remain in custody pending investigation and trial on accusations of working for a group founded by the late Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

Konstantin Gabov and Sergey Karelin both denied the charges for which they will be detained for a minimum of two months before any trials begin. Each faces a minimum of two years in prison and a maximum of six years for alleged "participation in an extremist organization," according to Russian courts.

They are just the latest journalists arrested amid a Russian government crackdown on dissent and independent media that intensified after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago. The Russian government passed laws criminalizing what it deems false information about the military, or statements seen as discrediting the military, effectively outlawing any criticism of the war in Ukraine or speech that deviates from the official narrative.

A journalist for the Russian edition of Forbes magazine, Sergei Mingazov, was detained on charges of spreading false information about the Russian military, his lawyer said Friday.

Read more **here**.

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News anchor Poppy Harlow announces departure from CNN(AP)

ATLANTA (AP) — Anchor Poppy Harlow is leaving CNN, according to the network.

Harlow, who joined CNN in 2008 and most recently co-hosted "CNN This Morning," announced her parting from the cable news giant in an email to colleagues.

She called her time at CNN "a gift."

"I have been inspired by you and learned so much from you – who are (and will remain) dear friends," Harlow wrote. "This place has shaped me as a leader, taught me resilience, shown me the value of perspective and how to make hard decisions."

At CNN, Harlow reported on the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings and the 2015 Paris terror attacks, among other stories.

"I got to experience what makes this country great," Harlow wrote in her email. "I sat with people in their best moments and in their hardest. They taught me about the human condition and what binds us."

Earlier this year, CNN announced changes to the time slot for "CNN This Morning" and moved it to Washington.

Read more here. Shared by Adolphe Bernotas.

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A storied Texas Panhandle newspaper halts publication after 130 years (Texas Tribune)

BY NIC GARCIA

CANADIAN — Thursday arrived as usual in the Texas Panhandle. But a new edition of The Canadian Record, this gritty town's definitive source of local news for more than 130 years, did not come with it.

The green flag that told the townspeople that there was a new edition of the newspaper, usually 28 pages long and full of the words and photos of their neighbors and their neighbors' kids, did not fly outside the weekly's Main Street office.

The Record, owned by Laurie Ezzell Brown's family since 1948, suspended its print edition March 2. The final front-page photograph captured billowing smoke. The banner headline yelled, "WILDLAND FIRE BLAZES PATH INTO OKLAHOMA." Brown wrote the accompanying news article. Next to it was a brief about another fire that killed a local woman. There was a feature about the upcoming beef expo and a notice about the upcoming school board election. The school page featured a one-act play at the high school. And the community page had a local woman's blueberry scone recipe. Brown had requested the scones be featured after tasting them.

The only notice the paper provided its readers that the copy they held in their hands would be the last were a few paragraphs on the second page, where Brown often mused about the only town she has called home.

"It is harder to leave our posts here at The Record than you can imagine, but it also seems even more necessary," Brown's goodbye column started.

Read more **here**. Shared by Paul Albright.

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Alfonso Chardy, Who Helped Expose Iran-Contra Scandal, Dies at 72 (New York Times)

By Sam Roberts

Alfonso Chardy, whose methodical reporting ushered The Miami Herald to a Pulitzer Prize for exposing the Iran-contra scandal in 1986 and contributed to three other Pulitzers that the newspaper won, died on April 9 in a Miami hospital. He was 72.

The cause was a heart attack, said his wife, Siobhan T. Morrissey.

Mr. Chardy was instrumental in uncovering a link between the illegal sale of weapons to Iran orchestrated by senior Reagan administration officials to facilitate the release of Western hostages, and the covert diversion of proceeds from that sale to support right-wing rebels in Nicaragua known as the contras.

He wrote more than half of the 10 articles that won the Pulitzer for national reporting in 1987 and revealed the role of Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North in what amounted to a money laundering plot by senior officials to bypass a congressional arms embargo against Iran to secure the hostages' release. The Westerners were being held in Lebanon by the Iranian-supported militant group Hezbollah. In Nicaragua, the contras were battling the leftist Sandinista government.

Read more here. Shared by Richard Chady.

The Final Word



CBS Sunday Morning's farewell to Terry Anderson.

Today in History – April 29, 2024



On April 29, 1429, Joan of Arc entered the besieged city of Orleans to lead a French victory over the English.

On this date

In 1916, the Easter Rising in Dublin collapsed as Irish nationalists surrendered to British authorities.

In 1945, during World War II, American soldiers liberated the Dachau (DAH'-khow) concentration camp. Adolf Hitler married Eva Braun inside his "Fuhrerbunker" and designated Adm. Karl Doenitz (DUHR'-nihtz) president.

In 1946, 28 former Japanese officials went on trial in Tokyo as war criminals; seven ended up being sentenced to death.

In 1957, the SM-1, the first military nuclear power plant, was dedicated at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

In 1967, Aretha Franklin's cover of Otis Redding's "Respect" was released as a single by Atlantic Records.

In 1991, a cyclone began striking the South Asian country of Bangladesh; it ended up killing more than 138,000 people, according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In 1992, a jury in Simi Valley, California, acquitted four Los Angeles police officers of almost all state charges in the videotaped beating of motorist Rodney King; the verdicts were followed by rioting in Los Angeles resulting in 55 deaths.

In 1997, a worldwide treaty to ban chemical weapons went into effect.

In 2008, Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama denounced his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, for what he termed "divisive and destructive" remarks on race.

In 2010, the U.S. Navy officially ended a ban on women serving on submarines, saying the first women would be reporting for duty by 2012.

In 2011, Britain's Prince William and Kate Middleton were married in an opulent ceremony at London's Westminster Abbey.

In 2013, opening statements took place in Los Angeles in a wrongful death lawsuit brought by Michael Jackson's mother, Katherine Jackson, against concert giant AEG Live, claiming it had failed to properly investigate a doctor who cared for Jackson and was later convicted of involuntary manslaughter in his 2009 death. (The jury determined in October 2013 that AEG Live was not liable.)

In 2018, tennis great Boris Becker was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for illicitly transferring large amounts of money and hiding assets after he was declared bankrupt.

In 2020, scientists announced the first effective treatment against the coronavirus, the experimental antiviral medication remdesivir, which they said could speed the recovery of COVID-19 patients.

In 2021, Brazil became the second country to officially top 400,000 COVID-19 deaths.

In 2023, hundreds of Americans fleeing two weeks of deadly fighting in Sudan reached the east African nation's port in the first U.S.-run evacuation, completing a dangerous

land journey under escort of armed drones.

(Birthdays not available.)

Got a photo or story to share?

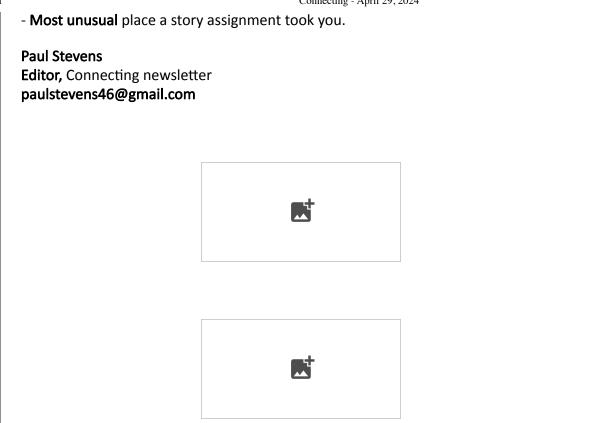
Connecting is a daily newsletter published Monday through Friday that reaches more than 1,800 retired and former Associated Press employees, present-day employees, and news industry and journalism school colleagues. It began in 2013. Past issues can be found by clicking Connecting Archive in the masthead.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



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