



42 years after the Fall: Schnedler's treks

With the following article, we're starting a series on the adventures we've had in our lives and careers since the Fall of the Chicago Daily News. In the next issue Martha Groves will speak her piece, and in the one that follows Henry Kisor will offer his. What has happened to YOU since the paper folded? Let us know.

By Jack Schnedler

Forty-two years ago, I edited the last piece of local copy in the 102 years of the Daily News.

It was early evening on March 3, 1978. The story, put together by Bob Sexter and Sandy Saperstein (now Torry), was a picaresque and bittersweet account of newsroom doings on our paper's final day.

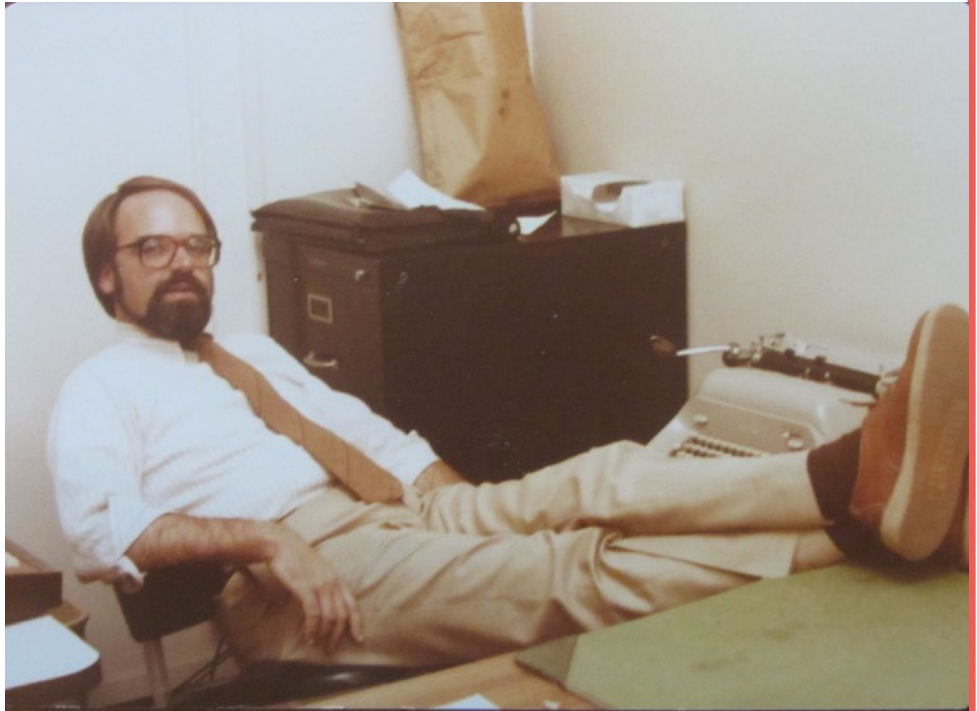
I was 34 years old. If anyone had asked a couple of months earlier about career plans, the answer almost certainly would have been that I expected to work for the Daily News as far into the future as I could imagine—maybe until retirement 30-some years later.

No such luck. Now, 42 years and four other newspapers afterwards, I'm mostly retired but still writing regularly for both a newspaper and a magazine in Arkansas. Like the rest of you reading this newsletter, co-editor Henry Kisor and I have had professional (and personal) adventures (and misadventures) as the calendar has whirled and whirled. Like the rest of you, we have a lot of past mileage in our rear-view mirrors.

So this story and the next to follow are experiments (daft ones, perhaps) to see if y'all (as we say Down South) would like to read about each other's post-Daily News meanderings in the four-plus decades since that dismal day. If the notion catches on, you'll be encouraged to pitch in with your own accounts of life since 1978.

In my case, the first move was looking for a job elsewhere, even though I could have joined the Sun-Times as a "special writer." That would have been an undeserved distinction, given that the other "special writer" was the nonpareil Bill Newman. But I was angry, like many of us, at Marshall Field—though, unlike Nick Shuman, I never cursed the publisher to his face on the elevator. My inchoate ire did propel me to scout for another newspaper employer.

I wound up at the Miami Herald, which in those newspaper heydays had a Sunday circulation of nearly 500,000 and correspondents scattered across Latin America. Wife Marcia and I soon mortgaged ourselves to



In the last week at the Washington Star in 1981 before that newspaper closed, Jack reposes in his Arts & Amusements editor's office.

the hilt (or at least halfway up the blade) by buying a Coral Gables house of mock-Spanish design, decked out with the only palm trees and swimming pool we've ever owned. It was a jolly novelty on winter mornings to sit in my swim trunks beside the pool and browse through the hefty Herald.

As Sunday (i.e. Features) editor, I supervised a dozen or so staffers. I also became the paper's restaurant critic, even though I could barely boil an egg. This sideline called for two reviews each week, which sometimes meant saying to Marcia (working in public relations for the area's electrical utility and volunteering at the Miami zoo, as she had at Lincoln Park Zoo): "Sorry, dear, but we have to dine out again this evening."

John Camper joined the Herald for a little while, before decampering from that paper's editor-heavy operation back to Chicago. He was my dining partner one evening at a Coral Gables eatery run by a chef of Swiss heritage. The place was OK but nothing special, a so-so stature summed up in my review.

The phone rang on the morning the review ran with a call from the steaming chef-owner. He even threatened to sue, alleging (honest!) that I had misidentified a veal dish I'd ordered. No lawsuit ensued. And when we later put our house on the market to depart Florida for another newspaper job, the chef and his boyfriend wound up buying the place for nearly 50 percent more than we'd paid for it 16 months earlier. (He sold it several years later for more than a 50-percent profit, during the South Florida real-estate boom fueled partly by illegal-drug money.)

That other newspaper job turned out to be a dead end. Partly with the encouragement of a friend and former Herald colleague with a Pulitzer Prize, I absconded to the Washington Star, another afternoon newspaper. A struggling underdog to the Washington Post, it had been bought by Time Inc. Marcia got a public relations job on Pennsylvania Avenue (with her own private office and a secretary), while I settled for a glassed-in cubicle as the Star's arts-entertainment editor.

We rented a two-story house in picturesque Old Town Alexandria. Regularly we got together with CDN alumni Ellen Warren, Wade Nelson, Bob Signer and Marj Signer — occasionally to hammer open Chesapeake Bay crabs at an eatery with newspaper tablecloths. On the anniversary of the Daily News closing in March of 1981, we hosted a party that drew some three dozen alums, including Bill Eaton and Bob Gruenberg.

The Star was a high-tension workplace, with lots of large egos and sharp elbows. But Marcia and I were enjoying life in the D.C. area enough that we made a bid one evening in the summer of 1981 to buy a suburban house. When I went to work next morning, it was announced that the Star would be closing in a couple of weeks. Having gotten back up off the floor, I called Marcia and told her to ring up the realtor and cancel that purchase offer.

Now a two-time loser in the newspaper wars, I was quoted in a Chicago Tribune story: "For me, the closing of the Daily News three years ago was like the sinking of the Titanic. This was just another shipwreck."

I then set a likely record for job-hunting futility. I was interviewed by the Washington Post, New York Times, Baltimore Sun, Philadelphia Inquirer and the nascent USA Today. Nary a job offer emerged. Someone had waggishly called me "the Typhoid Mary of U.S. newspapers," so maybe that had something to do with it.



While traveling in China for the Chicago Sun-Times in 1986, Jack filled his lungs with smoke from a cigar hand-rolled by a street vendor in Xian.

Employment salvation emerged with a call from the dean of Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, where I'd snagged a bachelor's degree in 1964. He offered a job as an assistant professor. Returning to Chicago seemed like a winning notion, even though it meant Marcia giving up a very good job. We rented a condo apartment on North Lake Shore Drive, with a view of Wrigley Field out the bedroom windows. I walked to a couple of hundred games in the next 13 years.

It did seem ironic, having shuttered two papers in three years, to be teaching (mostly master's degree) students at a high-priced J-school some of the skills needed to get into the same line of work. Marcia, meanwhile, was searching for but not finding a job in Chicago. My job, having joined the Medill faculty at the same time as Abe Peck and with George Harmon as a senior colleague, proved to be a pleasure. Somehow I was promoted to undergraduate dean at the end of the academic year.

On the day I was moving into my larger office at Fisk Hall, the phone rang. It was Ralph Otwell. He or someone else at the Sun-Times evidently had remembered the series of overseas stories I'd dispatched (by mail, with Marcia's photos) to John Justin Smith, then Daily News travel editor, during two nearly year-long overseas

sabbaticals in 1972-73 and 1976-77. I'd also written a long story for Panorama about the 6,000 mile Trans-Siberian Railway journey we'd taken in October 1976 from Khabarovsk to Moscow. Bill had written the jolly headline, complete with the Russian transliteration of my first name: "Pardon me, Dzhak, is that the Trans-Siberian choo-choo?"

It turned out that J.J. was retiring as Sun-Times travel editor. Would I be interested in talking about being his replacement? My Walter Mitty spirit stirred. I couldn't resist, even though a friend and



On a sub-Antarctic island south of New Zealand in 1991, Jack and a trio of penguins are mutually curious about each other.

former colleague who'd won a Pulitzer Prize for criticism at the Washington Star offered this caution: "You know, Jack, they don't give Pulitzer Prizes for travel editing."

Indeed they don't. And newspaper travel editors are now nearly as rare as the northern white rhinoceros, likewise the sections they once edited. But I couldn't resist getting back into the inky fray. Over the next 12 years, under a half-dozen different owners and a potpourri of top editors, some of whom thought they knew more about putting out a travel section than yours truly, I traveled indefatigably while writing and editing even more indefatigably. I racked up more than 1,800 nights on the road, many of them with Marcia, who became a nationally syndicated columnist writing about travel for older Americans (the ones with most of the money). As for wordage, I guesstimate well over a million written.

Seven months after joining the Sun-Times, I was winding up a trip to East and West Germany to write about the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth. We were in Worms, 16th-century site of the Diet of Worms (not a weight-loss regimen), and I'd bought an International Herald Tribune near our hotel. My eye caught a four-

paragraph story on an inside page, reporting that the Field brothers were putting the Sun-Times up for sale. Gakk!

That October, Marcia and I were on a story-gathering foray in Hawaii when the phone rang at 5 a.m. in our hotel room. It was my immediate boss telling me that Rupert Murdoch was buying the Sun-Times. Triple gakk!

I journeyed on and on at the Sun-Times, to spots as distant and remote as Tibet, both sides of Antarctica, Pitcairn Island, Easter Island, Albania, Rwanda, Devil's Island, Greenland and Guadalcanal. I also made it to both Disney World and Las Vegas with a sense of duty nearly every year, because they were my readers' most popular destinations.

Continuing to savor life a whole lot, both professionally and personally, I was riding high as a winner of editing and writing prizes that came with real money. I also had a book about Chicago published. I was elected president of the Society of American Travel Writers. Marcia became a nationally syndicated columnist (about 125 newspapers at her peak) for travelers of a certain age.

Then demons swooped in during the spring of 1994. They came prowling as the latest Sun-Times buyers in the rapacious form of future convict Sir Conrad Black and his grubbing minions. At age 51, I figured the travel gig would soon be up. The emergence of my widowed mother's dementia added to the angst. Buoyed by a modest buyout, I debouched to Little Rock to work for a longtime friend who was the new editor of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, the victor in a brutal newspaper war.

The next 16 years were rich in professional and personal satisfaction as well. I'd struck a deal for extra time off to compensate for less pay, and Marcia continued her columnist's routine. So we continued to travel and write about it, to places as unlikely as Saudi Arabia, Libya, the Falkland Islands and St. Helena. One of our loopy trips, with me on assignment for Marcia's syndicate, took us to five tiny countries of Europe: Liechtenstein,



Marcia and Jack take notes for a future story at an archeological site on one of Great Britain's Orkney Islands in 1993.

Monaco, Andorra, San Marino and the Vatican.

At that last stop in the heart of Rome, having ascended to the roof of St. Peter's Basilica, we spotted a small structure that very much resembled an outhouse. Marcia peered inside, and that's pretty much what it was. To cap our astonishment, this restroom atop one of Christianity's most sacred sites turned out to be a so-called

“Turkish toilet” or “squatter” — a hole in the floor with porcelain footprints on each side. That had to be the story’s lede — a choice the syndicate’s editor rejected. Apparently, too many of the 100-plus newspaper clients would not be amused by a rudimentary holy toilet.

For the Democrat-Gazette, I wrote hundreds of pieces besides travel, including more restaurant reviews along with profiles and meaty pieces about social and political issues past and present in Arkansas, including a 1927 lynching that concluded in downtown Little Rock. Marcia came to work at the paper as well, and was promoted to edit a Features section on the same month that she began drawing Social Security. We made new friends and found new activities.

Free to be politically active after retiring from the newspaper in 2011, we campaigned door-to-door for Barack Obama in 2012 in Dayton, Ohio, and were buoyed by his re-election. Less joyful was our experience in 2016 going door-to-

door for Hillary Clinton in Toledo, Ohio, and grieving on election night over her loss. Perpetually aghast about the Trump presidency, we might saddle up again this fall to volunteer for his Democratic opponent, whoever that is.

Since retirement we’ve also done volunteer work for a local hospital, the area’s meals-on-wheels program and the Arkansas Arts Center. We do a story each month (writing by me, photos by Marcia) for the Democrat-Gazette on places to go and things to do in

Arkansas—more than 300 pieces so far. Last year, we added a similar monthly magazine article to our portfolio. Henry Kisor and I continue to spin out the newsletter, which has rewarded me many times over via revived contacts and friendships with long-ago colleagues. All the while, the calendar keeps turning.

Views of old age, which we now inhabit, span the spectrum from Robert Browning’s “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be,” to Dylan Thomas’ “Do not go gentle into that good night. . . . Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

There is also a whimsical point of view, from a ditty by Pete Seeger, that suits the Schnedlers as dusk approaches:

*How do I know my youth is all spent?
My get up and go has got up and went.
But in spite of it all I’m able to grin
And think of the places my get up has been.*



Having moved to Little Rock as the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette’s assistant managing editor for Features in 1995, Jack is gifted with an Arkansas Razorbacks hat.



Mike Royko's son David is sixth from left in this photo of a Billy Goat Tavern celebration circa 1975. That's Sam Sianis in the back. Seated at right are Russ (a friend of Sam Gendusa), Tim Weigel, Mike Royko. Standing next to Sam are ringer Tom Bonen, ringer Sam Gendusa, Don DeBat, Bill Sidlauskas of the CDN wire room, ringer Don Garbarino, ringer Mike Tallo and Clark Bell.

Royko's kid goes nostalgia-nuts for a photo

By David Royko

If ever there was an “OMG” pic for me, this is it (above). A huge thank you to Gene Bensinger for forwarding it to me from the Billy Goat Tavern’s twitter feed, where it was captioned: “The only deadline they feared was ‘last call.’”

So, so, so much nostalgia in this photo, I can hardly stand it.

First, I know there probably isn’t a Chicago Daily News softball team picture I haven’t seen at some point, including this one (a long-time favorite).

But I mustn’t have ever focused on the wives/girlfriends side of the table, because this is the first time I noticed, smack dab in the middle of the babes, *me!* (Mom’s not in it because, as she was a photographer, she probably took the pic. As for brother Robby, sitting still for a pic probably wasn’t in his wheelhouse.)

If you don’t know how I looked in high school, circa 1975, I’m the tallest head on the left side, with hair over my left eye, in case you thought I was one of the chicks. (And for young’uns, “chick” is 70s-speak for

“female.” Please don’t cancel me.)

As for the rest of the pic, just “wow.”

These were halcyon days for Dad (sitting in front on the right) and his love for softball. First, the Daily News was, by a light year, Dad’s favorite place he ever worked—his dream job. The paper (which folded in March 1978) was sacred to him, and truly like a family. And this team was the cherry on the sundae.

Chicago Daily News + Softball = Nirvana.

And look at that trophy! Chicago Daily News + Softball + First Place Champions = Nirvana squared.

(Think I’m kidding? The Goat tweeted a second picture from that day (below)—and Dad’s face says it all.)

In the first picture, the two guys holding the trophy are Billy Goat boss and team sponsor, Sam Sianis, Dad’s brother from another mother (no, not literally), and Tom Bonen. Tom was what you call a ringer, common with serious softballers, for someone not otherwise “affiliated” with the paper but brought in secretly (sort of) for some additional, high octane muscle. I remember Dad getting the paper’s human relations department to print out a phony pay stub with Tom’s name on it, which might’ve been more for fun—I never saw anyone checking ID before a game. Bonan’s regular softball gig was with the legendary Bobcats, perennial world champs, so he brought some serious heft.

Third down, top, from the trophy in that first picture is Don DeBat, a Chicago news veteran, focusing on real estate these days. Don was the guy who originally planned the softball team. When Dad heard about it, he immediately crowned himself pitcher *and* team captain, natch, whether Don liked it or not. Don didn’t mind. At all.

Want a little more Chicago sports media trivia? Sitting next to Dad, proudly mustachioed, is Tim Weigel, “Timmy” to Dad. Tim was a Daily News sports reporter before becoming a beloved Chicago TV sports anchor. (More trivia — Tim’s roommate in college was the late Tribune movie critic Gene Siskel.) Tim died of a brain tumor in 2001, at 56. He was one of my favorite people on the team, a funny, smart and sweet guy.

Each and every face brings a memory or ten. And seeing yours truly’s mug among them is my own cherry on the sundae.



Obituaries

Lisel Mueller, immigrant, Pulitzer poet and Daily News critic, dies at 96

The Chicago Daily News was an important part of Lisel Mueller's life. Not only did the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet review poetry regularly for the paper in the 1950s and 1960s, another CDNER, Carl Sandburg, inspired her to become a poet herself, she once wrote. "Sandburg's unadorned, muscular, straightforward diction lured me as the painted women under the streetlamps lured the farm boys in a city named Chicago."

By **Harrison Smith** Condensed from the *Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2020



Lisel Mueller, who fled Hitler's Germany as a teenager and became a nationally celebrated poet in the United States, drawing on her family history for lyrical works about love, art, nature and loss, died Feb. 21 from complications of pneumonia at a retirement community in Chicago. She was 96.

After immigrating to the United States at age 15, Ms. Mueller spent eight decades in the Midwest, where she lived for many years in Lake Forest, Ill. Her poetry career began late, with the publication of her first collection, "Dependencies" (1965), when she was 41. She had effectively come to the United States as a political refugee— her father, a teacher and outspoken leftist, lost his job after criticizing Hitler—and began writing poetry in her second language after her mother died in 1953.

"I sat on a gray stone bench/ ringed with the ingenue faces/ of pink and white impatiens/ and placed my grief/ in the mouth of language,/ the only thing that would grieve with me," she recalled in ["When I Am Asked,"](#) from her Pulitzer-winning book, ["Alive Together: New and Selected Poems"](#) (1996).

The collection was praised by the Pulitzer jury as "a testament that invites readers to share her vision of experiences we all have in common: sorrow, tenderness, desire, the revelations of art, and mortality— the hard, dry smack of death against the glass."

Ms. Mueller won the National Book Award for her 1980 collection, ["The Need to Hold Still."](#) She also lectured and taught at Chicago-area colleges and universities before

glaucoma forced her to write with a large felt-tipped pen to see her words.

She filled her work with references to mythology, folklore and fairy tales; allusions to artists such as Claude Monet, Mary Shelley and Anton Webern; and Romantic imagery of hawthorns, aspens and the birds outside her window. The result was a fusion of past and present, in which a dark history seemed to peer out from everyday dramas or idyllic scenes from nature.

“The message is obvious,” Ms. Mueller once told the Chicago Tribune. “My family went through terrible times. In Europe no one has had a private life not affected by history. I’m constantly aware of how privileged we [Americans] are.”

After she won the Pulitzer, she told the Tribune: “Poetry, for me, is the answer to how does one stay sane when private lives are being ransacked by public events. It’s something that hangs over your head all the time. Luckily, I’ve had a sane and sanguine private life after coming here; we’ve lived in this house for 39 years. I suppose that’s how I come to grips with it by writing, trying to give voice to the unspeakable, to give music to terror.”

Lisel Mueller was born Elisabeth Annelore Neumann in Hamburg on Feb. 8, 1924. She later recalled living in a world that “had a soft voice and no claws,” before learning “the burden of secrets” amid Hitler’s rise.

Her father came to the United States in 1937 and settled in Indiana, where he taught French and German at Evansville College. Ms. Mueller joined him two years later, along with her mother and younger sister, and struggled to assimilate at a time when German immigrants were often treated with suspicion.

The poetry of Carl Sandburg helped ease the transition — “Literal yet evocative, I found it as exotic as the night train on which someone softly says, ‘Omaha,’ ” she later wrote, and so did the work of John Keats, whom she began reading while an undergraduate at Evansville.

She married a classmate, Paul Mueller, in 1943. He became an editor for Commerce Clearing House, a legal publisher, and Ms. Mueller worked as a social worker and librarian while writing on the side, reviewing poetry for the Daily News and developing critical skills as well as awareness of contemporary poetry before focusing on her own work, even as she raised two daughters in Lake Forest, Ill.

Her poetry collections included [“The Private Life”](#) (1976), which won the Lamont Poetry Prize for best second book; [“Second Language”](#) (1986); and [“Waving from Shore”](#) (1989).

Paul Mueller died in 2001, after a 57-year marriage that Ms. Mueller evoked in her poem [“Alive Together,”](#) which began this way: “Speaking of marvels,/ I am alive/ together with you, when I might have been/ alive with anyone under the sun/ . . . the odds against us are endless,/ our chances of being alive together/ statistically nonexistent;/ still we have made it.”

Survivors include daughters Jenny Mueller of St. Louis and Lucy Mueller of Chicago, and a granddaughter.

All the newsletters from November 2013 to December 2019 are now available in .pdf form on DVDs for viewing on your computer. A \$12 check will get you a DVD in a jewel case, a mailer and the postage. Send checks to Henry Kisor, 2323 McDaniel Ave. Apt. 3135, Evanston IL 60201. Or you can send a flash drive and for \$7 he’ll load it, then mail it back to you.

The Chicago Daily News Alumni Newsletter was created, edited and published by Margaret Whitesides from shortly after the closing of The Daily News in March 1978 until her death in August 2002. Bob and Marge Herguth kept the flag flying for the next 11 years until passing the gonfalon to Jack Schnedler and Henry Kisor.



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