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*Sam Kricsfeld:* This is Sam Kricsfeld. Today is Oct. 3, 2020. I'm interviewing John D. Hanna of the Associated Press for the Inside Stories Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists project. This is Part One. The interview is taking place remotely due to the COVID pandemic. This interview is sponsored by the University of Kansas and the Kansas Press Association.

When and where were you born?

*John Hanna:* Well, I was born Sept. 1, 1964, in Orange, New Jersey, in a hospital there. It's actually quite a story. I have a twin brother. His name is Robert and we are, I guess, identical twins. We don't look quite the same now 56 years on, but – now, this is the story my mother [Pat] tells.

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What happened was the umbilical cord snapped. We were born, I think, two months premature because the umbilical cord snapped and wrapped – actually wrapped around my brother's neck in utero, and so we were delivered by Cesarean section, and in a situation like that in those days – again, this was 1964 – usually one or both babies died, or at least had substantial brain damage, and neither one of us came away with that. But the upshot of it was – my mother said was that we all – all three of us – my mother was Catholic. We all three got baptized and last rites at the same moment.

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And I still have this recollection of a little framed certificate on my grandmother's wall in her house in – this would've been in Irving, Texas, and we can explain the movement – that was a blessing on the two of us from the pope. I think it was Paul VI at that time. I'm trying to remember, but apparently was written up in the local medical journal. I've never been able to find the journal. But that's how I came into the world.

My mother's family was mostly originally from [New Jersey].

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They were Polish Catholic, and they'd come over a couple of generations before her. And my great-grandmother [Amelia Bednarczyk] when I knew her, she was very old, and she had slipped back into speaking Polish almost exclusively. She was not very fluent in English. My grandmother spoke some Polish, and then my mother knew all the Polish swear words, and I know no Polish.

So that's my mother's side, and they all lived – my mother lived for a while in New Jersey, around Elizabeth, Orange, that area of New Jersey. And then at some point her father [Ted Bernard] … my mother always described my great-grandmother as the meanest woman in the world.

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I never saw that, but again, she was very old. And my grandfather – there was some family history there, and he had just gotten married, and he just decided he was gonna get out. He was an electrician by trade, and he was just gonna get out and go to California. They made it about halfway to the Dallas area, to Irving, Texas. Irving at that time probably had about 8,000 people. It was, I think, the early '50s, and they settled in a housing development, where all the streets were named after Pilgrim stuff, you know? So, Standish, Alden, and they lived on Mayflower Drive, and so my grandfather made sure he got the lot that was 1620 Mayflower Drive. OK, so that's my mother's side of the family.

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My dad's side, Scotch-Irish, Presbyterians from western Pennsylvania up about 60 miles north of Pittsburgh. And his mother [Ruth Lucille Thompson Hanna, later Patton] was a teacher, and his father [Leonard Lamont Hanna] died in World War II. We think it was somewhere around the Battle of the Bulge or one of those. I've got a book somewhere. It was – I think it was called the Mountain – it was the Mountain Division or something like that. I've got a book, but died when my dad [John Wilbur Hanna; his nickname among his old friends was “Jake”] was about 12 because he was born in 1930 – no, he'd've been about 10 or 11, sorry, because my dad was born in 1933.

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And so my dad was from western Pennsylvania and somehow – not quite clear how he ended up in Texas, around my mother for a job, and she met him there. And so they got engaged in Texas, and they were married the day after Kennedy was shot in Dallas. And I'm gonna tell this story even though it has absolutely nothing to do with me: They went to downtown Dallas to get their marriage license on the day of the parade, and they caught – my dad says – my dad is no longer alive, but he said that they caught just a glimpse of the motorcade and, you know, went on down to get their marriage license. And they heard what they thought was a car backfire, didn't think anything of it, and they – then they went to get lunch, and, of course, everybody was crying and -- beside themselves. And, you know, my dad, having not heard the news, not having –

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not had a radio on or anything like that, asked what happened, and the waitress was like, "Oh, how can you not know the president was shot?" And my dad said his reaction was, "Oh, no, no, no, no, we just – how –" you know.

 So after eating lunch in this diner, they walked back to get their car out of the parking lot of the School Book Depository, and my mother says that nobody stopped them. There was no police tape. There were no officers there to ask them what they were doing. They just – they got their car and they left. I think it was a yellow Mustang convertible, so I like to say if there's a Kennedy conspiracy theory involving a couple in a Mustang convertible, those're my parents. And years later, they opened a museum there, and we went the first year it was open. It's called the Sixth Floor Museum, I believe.

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And, you know, my dad was like, "Yeah, I was parked right over there," you know, pointing at a spot right up next to the building. So right there my parents had a brush with history.

 And my dad was in insurance and eventually he was an executive in a brokerage company, and the way I would describe it – this is what I understood of the job, it's not my field – is that he basically helped people with weird insurance needs find people who provided weird insurance. So, for example, if you had an oil and gas company and you had lots of rigs somewhere, that was one of my dad's specialty was finding you the company that would write you the best insurance for that. Another thing he did was amusement parks and carnivals.

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So if you had a traveling carnival, he would go out and look at the carnival and assess your insurance needs and try to find you the right insurance. And then his company [the last one he worked for was Alexander Howden North America] – they had insurance for, like, you know, riot and civil unrest, so that if you were in a foreign nation that had a lot of civil unrest, they would find somebody to write you insurance to cover you against potential losses for that. And I think the last company my dad worked for was eventually bought up after he retired.

So that – that's what my parents did for a living. I know one of the questions that is in – that you all sent me was whether anybody in my family has ever been in the reporting news media, newspaper business.

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And the answer is not to my knowledge. To my knowledge, nobody in my family has ever done this for a living, and so I guess I'm gonna have to explain to you how I got here because I don't – I mean, I don't remember any – growing up, I don't remember any commentary one way or the other about reporters, about the news media, about anything like that. I mean, I do remember the big three networks. I do remember that my parents had a newspaper subscription. The one I remember is *The Dallas Morning News* when I was older, and I do – I think my mother had some magazines, maybe, like *Good Housekeeping*.

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But I don't ever remember a lot of discussion about the news at the dinner table. We weren't saturated in it. Nobody in the family did it.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* So, we noticed that when you were growing up – in your bio, it says you moved around quite a lot from, like, New Jersey, Boston, Chicago.

*John Hanna:* Yeah. Well – and even that was a function of my dad's work. My dad was a bit of a smartass, and there were two things he did on a regular basis in his career: the first one was when somebody told him he couldn't do something, he wasn't suited for a better job – for example, one of his early jobs was with Liberty Mutual and he wanted to go for a promotion, and – uh –

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and somebody told him he wasn't suited for the job; he couldn't do it. And his attitude was, "I'll show you." So throughout his career, there were various points where he felt blocked in one place, and, you know, "I will show you."

 The other thing he had a tendency to do was to tell his bosses what they needed to hear at exactly the wrong time, the, you know, exact point they didn't wanna hear it. So if, for example, he thought something was not going right in a company, he would say it, and then he would realize, "Holy cow. I just told the boss off, so I need to start looking again." And so, you know, I mentioned all of those cities. We ended up pretty much in suburbs all the time. At least, that's what I remember.

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So, for example, Boston was actually a little town outside Boston on the coast, Duxbury. And it was – one part of Duxbury was all old New England money, and then there was the part we lived in and what I remember is this was when I was like 7 or 8. And what I remember is that we lived on – we lived on a rural road, something like Trout Farm Road, and we were at the end of, you know, all of that, and we were way out, and there're woods all around.

You know, Chicago, we lived in a suburb, and that was, like, nine months. It was, like, – my mother later told me it was a job my dad took *[laughs]* and then immediately wanted to find another one. And we lived there only about nine months – winter months, by the way.

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And it was Buffalo Grove, and I think the story was they called it that 'cause back, way back when it was prairie, you know, the buffalo used to rub their hides on the trees or something.

Los Angeles, it was the San Fernando Valley, Chatsworth, I think. And Dallas, it was pretty consistently North Dallas, around a town called Richardson. And there's Richardson. There's Plano. All these kind of really big suburbs that have 150,000 to 200,000 people in them or did at that time, and they've just kept growing. And the thing to understand about Dallas is that it just keeps kind of expanding ever northward, the suburbs do. And if you've ever been to – it's like Johnson County, Kansas, on steroids.

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And if you've ever been down there, you've got to wonder where all the money comes from because it's endless acres of big strip malls with, you know, upscale stores and big brick-tracked houses and – on tiny lots, by the way – and, you know, just everything looks new and rich. And so it's very definitely upper middle class now.

I think the high school I went to was Richardson High School. It's now an arts magnet school. It was not at the time. It was a regular high school; about three grades, about 2,500 kids. My graduating class was 800-plus.

[**Post-production addition:** The school district had junior highs, seventh, eighth and ninth graders, then three-year high schools.]

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So that's – that's kind of the environment I grew up: a lot of suburbs, a lot of track homes, a lot of cul-de-sacs, you know, all of that kinda stuff. I mean, I was joking with my twin brother this morning, you know, how Dickensian do I want my childhood to sound? It wasn't Dickensian at all, *[laughs]* OK? It was upper middle class, white bread, suburbs, you know, that sorta thing. And, you know, you could – when I was a kid, you could just ride your bike unsupervised for miles and miles and miles, and nobody would worry about you. That was the kind of – that was kind of the thing that I grew up in.

So – and I do need to mention I have two brothers. I have my twin brother, Robert, and then I have a younger brother, Richard, who – the two of us always figured –

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that he was my mother’s favorite, so – because he was the youngest, by about 18 months, so not much younger. So, when they got married, my dad was 30, and my mother was 20, and she had three kids by the time she was 22.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* And what are your brothers' professions?

*John Hanna:* Well, my twin brother is trained by a lawyer. He's living with me now because his practice kind of blew up in California. So he came here to kind of get back on his feet a couple years ago. The other brother is actually – is insurance. He's in the same business that my father was in, the – kinda the broker end of things. He actually trained with some of the people who worked with my father. He's living in Atlanta, the Atlanta area right now. It's north of Atlanta. It's a town called Alpharetta. It's kind of on the north end of the Atlanta metro area.

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And so, yeah, he's doing the same thing my dad did. Of all – of the three of us, he is probably the most – he's probably the most like my dad.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* When you were growing up, how would you describe your family's expectations for you?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think they expected me to do well in school. I think they – I think they understood I was smart. I think they hoped I would do better – even better than my dad did. It was always kinda understood that I was gonna go off to college and probably get some white-collar job. I mean, my dad had grown up initially, I think, on a farm and then moved into town, and, you know, my uncles were kind of working-class, working in plants and that sort of thing. My mother had grown up – as I said, my grandfather was an electrician.

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My grandmother worked as a secretary and an office assistant, and that started back when she was young and in the '30s because she had to help support the family during the Great Depression.

So, they were working-class to middle class. I mean, their – they had this suburban house. They had three bedrooms. It was, you know, probably a typical post-World War II kind of ranch house, and so I think there was an expectation that we would use our brains to get to college and then get some kind of professional job, and that was never prescribed, although I think my parents –

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hoped I would be a doctor or a lawyer – I think more a lawyer than a doctor 'cause I never had any real interest in, like, medicine or anything like that.

But I do remember that when I was in college and I – and we'll get to this – and I took a semester off from college to work for the Associated Press, my mother's initial reaction was, "Well, you can go back to college, get your degree and then maybe go to law school." So, I don't mean to talk about that as a negative thing. I just – I don't think they ever pictured this as a career path for me or for anybody in the family, just because nobody had done it. And – and, you know, that … they were thinking of highly regarded professions, at least in terms of –

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of status and advancement, which would be doctors and lawyers and that kind of thing. And as I said, I don't think they even knew any reporters at all, so this was just kind of – this whole idea of me doing this was just kinda foreign.

 You know – again, when we get into how I got here, we can discuss some of that, but it was a fairly – it was – I think it was a fairly typical suburban upbringing. You know, you were going to a good school. You were fairly bright. You should be working hard and paying attention, getting good grades and setting yourself up to do something –

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interesting and meaningful with your life, having some sort of profession where the sense was, "Hey, my son is a lawyer. My son is a doctor. My son is this." Now, the irony of all this is, of course, after I got into this profession, and they kinda got used to the idea, they were still – they're still proud of what I'm doing. They just – I don't think it was opposition to me doing this. I think it's just that sort of thing, like, "Huh. Who knew you could do that for a living?" you know, just not something anybody had ever contemplated.

And, you know, my mother is still – when my dad retired, he retired at 55.

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They bought a house in a golf-resort community in East Texas, and my dad died in 2015. My mother is still living there, and she has a lot of – it's East Texas, which is very, very conservative. And she has a lot of friends who, you know, don't have a very high opinion of news organizations, and so they know what I do for a living, and I guess because I'm her son, they figure I'm the one OK one. *[laughs]* So – but, you know, I think a lot of people that my parents knew, that whole set, I just – I don't think being a reporter was the thing you did. I think you went into business. You were a doctor. You were a lawyer, you know, something like that. I don't think reporter was on the list of things, yet here I am.

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*Sam Kricsfeld:* What was the media environment like? You said it was Richardson, Texas, correct?

*John Hanna:* Yes.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* What was the media environment like?

*John Hanna:* Well, suffice it to say, it was dramatically different than it is now. Here's what I remember: I remember the big three networks, ABC, NBC and especially CBS. The first I remember of public television was *Sesame Street* going on the air in 1969. I was 5 years old, so I was kinda right on the edge of the group that they were aiming *Sesame Street* at, you know, and I remember coming home or being home every afternoon 'cause kindergarten at that time was, you know, half a day.

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And what I remember is watching it pretty much every day and just, you know, being enthralled *[laughs]* by *Sesame Street*. The character I identified with was Ernie, Ernie and Bert. Ernie, "Hey, Bert. Hey, Bert." and that – 'cause I always viewed my twin brother as Bert, and so I loved the show, still love the show, and actually at one time years later when I was a young reporter, I got to interview one of the writers on that show because she was doing something where I was.

Anyway, that's what I remember in terms of television. Of course, you didn't have cable, so you didn't – nobody binge-watched anything, *[laughs]* OK? It came on. It played. If you missed it, you missed it.

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You might catch it in reruns. What I remember is, like, there were two newspapers in the Dallas area. In particular it was the *Morning News* and the *Times Herald* – I don't think the *Times Herald* exists anymore, and there was a local Richardson paper, but I don't ever remember seeing very much of it. And like I said, I don't recall being a big consumer of news until actually I was in college, except for what I do remember is the Watergate hearings in 1973. I just have this vague memory of the Watergate hearings being on day after day, my mother being frustrated. At that point, she was at home – my mother being frustrated because it was just all this, you know, dry, technical, political stuff that was interrupting stuff she'd rather be watching, that sort of thing.

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And so that's what I remember the media environment. I mean, it was not – the other contrast is it was not ever-present. It was not something that dominated your life. It was something you could turn off and not think about. It was not all around you all the time. And of course, no Twitter, no Facebook. So you weren't – you could be a kid and – like I said, you could be out playing, riding your bike, doin' stuff for three or four hours on a summer day, and your parents – it was like a free-range childhood.

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Your parents – you didn't have a cellphone. Your parents didn't worry about where you were going because there would be a natural limit to how far you would go. You had a good deal of freedom and unstructured stuff going on. It is not like it is today, where it's – OK, it's summer, so we've gotta enroll our kid in a summer camp and keep them occupied and scheduled and all of that. It was – the writer Michael Chabon talks about it being a wild river of childhood before it was tamed by the adult corps of engineers. And things now are a lot more structured than they used to be.

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We just had a lot less – I mean, what I remember about the media environment was there was just a lot less of it, you know? And I don't – I mean, I remember a little radio but not much.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* How would you describe the expectations for men and for women at that time in your hometown?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think they were fairly traditional. I think the men were expected to go out and be the breadwinners and the mothers, the women, were expected to stay home and raise the kids, but that was kind of – you know, this would've been the late '60s, early '70s, so you're starting to see the stirrings of the women's revolution.

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You were starting to see more divorce, although it was still one of those things that was kinda like, "Oh, that's bad." It was something that was not normal. So, I think it was still a little traditional.

My mother tells the story and she was born in '40 – '43, 1943. And my mother tells the story. She had a brother, my uncle [Ted Bernard]. So there were two kids, and he was, like, a year older. And my mother said that her parents sat them down when they were in high school and explained that they had a choice.

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They had enough money to send her brother to Texas A&M – which – big engineering, very highly regarded school, more expensive. Or they could send them both to college, but they would be lesser colleges for both of them and certainly for him. The choice they made was to send him to Texas A&M because she was just gonna get outta high school, get married and have kids anyway. She was not gonna have a career. Now, later, when I was in fifth, sixth, seventh grade, my mother did go back to school, get a college degree in accounting and worked for a while as an accountant, I think four or five years, just because we were getting older and she wanted to do this, I think, and also – I think also because, you know, we were getting to the point where we could take care of ourselves.

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And so I think some of it was that, and some of it was her wanting to fulfill some ambitions that she'd had. And, actually it ended up that she turned out to be the detail person in the marriage. My dad was not the detail person. So, you know, she – it eventually got to the point where she was looking at – after a lot of the details about finances and all that stuff. And so that, I think, kinda played into it. But I think it was still pretty traditional. I mean, we were living in an area of North Dallas that was, I would say, pretty evenly split between – religiously between Catholics and Baptists and Southern Baptists.

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And so you would probably have had in that area a pretty traditional view of what home life was supposed to be. And there was nothing in my upbringing that was not traditional in that sense, I mean, other than this thing that my mother did going back to college.

I mean, when I was growing up and I was in high school, I don't think I had the attitude that, OK, all the girls here are just, you know, gonna get outta high school and get married. I mean, there was the sense that they were gonna go off to college and maybe some of 'em would have careers and all of that. And maybe I got that idea from the teachers, but, yeah, it was still pretty traditional, I would say.

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*Sam Kricsfeld:* Jumping to more historical questions – so since you were born in '64, do you remember the moon landing?

*John Hanna:* You know, it's funny. I really don't remember it. I don't remember watching it. I'm sure we did 'cause everybody watched it, but it did not make the same – it did not have the same impact on me as Watergate did. I remember Watergate in terms of – I don't think I understand it fully, but I remember the hearings, you know, John Dean testifying. I remember – I particularly remember Nixon's resignation, and I have this vivid memory of watching him on television leave the White House and get into the helicopter and do the V for victory. I do remember that.

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I remember the '76 election between Ford and Carter. We were living in California at the time and a bunch of kids – their parents were for Ford, and so you heard a lot of cracks about Carter, and I do remember the election of Reagan, the first election. I remember that my mother didn't like Reagan that much. And then of course in college, I was working. Reagan's second term, I was working at the student newspaper and doing election stuff, so I remember that pretty vividly. But Watergate really was the first thing I remember.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* Do you remember the assassination attempt on Reagan?

*John Hanna:* Oh, yes. Yes, I remember that. I remember that.

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I was in high school that day … and that's how we heard about it. There was a buzz in the hall. Some – the teachers had heard about it. The kids had heard about it. So, yeah, I remember that, and – and I remember the kids talking about it, and of course I remember coming home and seeing the footage of the shots being fired at Reagan and him being pushed, you know, into the car, all of that. I remember all of that. I do remember Al Haig, "I'm in charge now," you know, the crack Reagan made because, of course the Oscars were delayed a day, I think, and he made a crack about, "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia," so I do remember that.

I remember some of the – you know, the discussion about economics, and I especially remember, just kind of the –

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tension in the air between the U.S. and the Soviets, just this notion that Reagan – the thinking at the time or the feeling was among some people – I don't think if you weren’t alive then, I don't think you can understand the sense of how a nuclear war was possible that seemed a realistic possibility during Reagan's first term. And, you know, there was the movie – I think it was a 1983 movie, made-for-television movie, *The Day After*, which was filmed in Lawrence. And Nicholas Meyer directed it. Jason Robards was in it. I think you can still find it somewhere, and that was – when they filmed it – I think it was my first semester in college, and so of course we all skipped class to be extras, all of us.

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And, you know – so that was kind of out there in the zeitgeist.

So, you know, fast-forward, I'm a parent. My daughter Karly is in high school. She does forensics. One of the things that happens to you if you're a forensics parent is that you get hauled in to judge stuff, right? And so I get hauled in to judge debate, and the thing now in high school and college debate is the consequence of everything is global thermonuclear war. That's what the kids will argue, and there was this debate over the lack of engineers in Israel. And these kids had cooked up a scenario where the lack of engineers in Israel would eventually lead to global thermonuclear war. And, I cornered them – this was maybe six or seven years ago, and I cornered them

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afterwards, and I said, "OK, you know, here's why you didn't win on my ballot." I said, "You're talkin' about this leading to global thermonuclear war. I was around when that was a realistic possibility, and I can assure you that a shortage of engineers in Israel will never lead to global thermonuclear war. That's not how a global thermonuclear war starts. OK. So, if you're gonna argue this, it has to be plausible, and you're gonna deal with old guys like me who remember that."

And, you know, I remember vaguely the invasion of Grenada. I remember the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, and I especially remember the *Challenger* disaster. So – because I was working for AP at that point.

[**Post-production addition:** I didn’t really cover the *Challenger* disaster in the sense of writing about it or interviewing people about it. But I do remember the day clearly. Our office then was on the first floor, north wing, of the Statehouse; we shared it with the Capital-Journal. I recall that we had three printers going pretty much all the time: One was for the national wire; another was for the state wire, and a third was the wire for messages between AP bureaus. We also had a small television set on a shelf, but we didn’t have it on much because it was a distraction. What I remember is going to the national wire printer and seeing the urgent lead for the Space Shuttle launch, and it said something like “The Space Shuttle Challenger exploded on lift off,” and I said, out loud, unfortunately, that “exploded” was a weird verb to use with a shuttle launch. I recall a co-worker – I think it was Steve Robrahn, who later worked as AP’s news editor in Louisville, Ky., -- said something like, “What?” And we turned on the television and of course saw the footage of the shuttle exploding, played over several times. It was most likely a network broadcast feed, because we didn’t have cable there at the time.]

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*Sam Kricsfeld:* Jumping a little bit back in time to your childhood, do you have a – what did you wanna be when you grew up?

*John Hanna: [Laughs]* I wanted to be a professional baseball player. That's what I wanted to be. That was the first thing I wanted to be. Oh, yeah, I wanted to – that's what I wanted to do. That looked really cool. At first I was kinda smitten with the Big Red Machine, you know 'cause that was the heyday of the Cincinnati Reds. Later, because I had lived in Boston, I got attached to the Red Sox, and I'm still attached to the Red Sox all these years later. But, yeah, I wanted to play baseball, and that was *[laughs]* never, ever going to happen.

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That just – I played a few years of Little League. I was terrible, played right field, but that was probably – part of it was probably I was playing right before I got my glasses. So, I had not great eyesight, and I just – I am not coordinated at all. I mean, what I will tell you is not only do I have, for example, no rhythm; I've got negative rhythm. So, if I try to do something with rhythm, I throw everybody off around me 'cause I have the wrong rhythm instead of just no rhythm at all.

And I just – I was always – I'm not now, but I was always a kind of a skinny kid, and – yeah, I liked baseball a lot and used to play a little sandlot football, but never any good at sports.

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So – but, you know, what kid – what boy of that era didn't dream of playing Major League ball at some point? Now I guess it's soccer or whatever, but – or basketball. Basketball is much more popular than it was. But in those days, it was more baseball and football. And, you know, those were the heyday – kinda the mid-'70s, early to mid-'70s heyday of the Dallas Cowboys. My grandmother [on my mother’s side, Emily Bernard] was a – my grandmother was a season-ticket-holder from the get-go when they formed in 1960, so she saw the team when they absolutely were terrible and – and they had, you know, the – one of their small investments was in the bonds that built Texas Stadium. Their home was maybe 10 minutes from Texas Stadium – straight down the highway.

[**Post-production addition:** My mother and I recently talked about this; I call her every week, but not when the Cowboys are playing. She said her parents – my grandparents -- had season tickets after the team moved to Texas Stadium, which would have been in the early 1970s.]

*Sam Kricsfeld:* When you were growing up, did you have a specific role model?

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*John Hanna:* Oh, you know, just, like, baseball players like Johnny Bench – because we went to – you know, back and forth between Richardson and other places, a big one was Roger Staubach, who was the great Dallas Cowboys quarterback, very much of a straight arrow, by the way. And then it – just as an aside, I read where he created a huge real-estate company. So those were kinda the role models. And, you know, of course my dad. I mean, my dad could fix anything. At least that's what I thought. My mother said, you know, yes, he could fix anything, but often it took a couple of tries and that sort of thing. But, yeah, those were the main role models. I never had – I didn't have any role models in journalism.

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I didn't – until later, of course, and certainly not in politics. And, yeah.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* OK. And then we're gonna jump to the current day. You and your daughter, Karly, the bio said, are writing a play together.

*John Hanna:* Yes.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* What is it about and what's it like to write with her?

*John Hanna:* Well, the play is a little bit hard to describe. My daughter is living in Chicago and she's trying to be a stage actress there. It's much more difficult with the pandemic. She graduated from a college up there, Elmhurst College, in 2013 with a degree in theater and after that kinda was getting a paying gig maybe once every six months, a little sooner, and doing some other things in local theater there.

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And as a consequence of that, I went up to visit her, and there's another whole backstory to the theater thing, but – that we can get into if you want 'cause my interest in theater goes back longer than this. But we were – it was 2018, and I had come up to visit. And we went to this restaurant near where she lived, and she was living in a neighborhood called Logan Square, and it's one of those neighborhoods that's kind of changing from a working-class neighborhood to a more gentrified neighborhood.

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And we were in this restaurant, and it was – I would describe the restaurant as egregiously hip.

And what I remember was we're sitting there having, you know, fancy brunch, some kinda strange omelet with, you know, sweet-potato biscuits, something you would never get in Topeka, OK, some kind of fusion cuisine. And there's a lounge singer in the background. And the lounge singer is singing lounge songs and – and we're just like, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute." And the song I remember that she was singing as a lounge song was Foster the People *Pumped Up Kicks*, which is about gun violence. And of course, in her hands, it might as well have been a romantic ballad, right?

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So we were just saying, you know – we were just laughing about this, and we said, we oughta write a –you know, here. Let's write a play about this. And – and so that's where it started. And the play is about groups of people, including two Millennials, who are moving up in their careers and who have decided they want to move back into the city from the suburbs, and they have a friend, an older friend of their parents' who's a Realtor who is gonna get them to do that. And it's about gentrification of neighborhoods. It's about the compromises people make to get where they think they wanna go, all of that kind of stuff, and it's told through this couple deciding to buy a house –

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and fix it up and what they do with the house and what they do in the neighborhood and how it contrasts with the young people who work at the restaurant who are going to be displaced by what they do.

And so, I'm – what happens is I write scenes, and I show them to my daughter, and she edits them, basically. And we talk about, "OK, here's what we need to –" I mean, just – it's a really interesting collaborative process. She's actually a fairly decent writer in her own right, even though that's not the career path she chose. But I like the idea of working with her and just writing contemporary, kind of dark-humor –

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stories with her 'cause that is kinda the way I think her humor goes kind of: understated, dark, pretty dry. And of course the problem is now that we're writing it, it's like you start thinking about things, and then suddenly something like the pandemic and all of that switches your – makes you think about some of the things you've written in a different way.

So, yeah, I would like to keep – if possible, I would like to keep collaborating with her and write stories – *[laughs]* I mean, I'll be blunt. I'd like to write plays that she could have a big role in. So – but this is – I mean, this is kinda the culmination of something I've been trying now on and off for at least 10 years. Actually, longer than that.

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I don't know, maybe about 10. Mmm, yeah, a little more than 10 years – 12 years. What happened is I got married in 1992. I'm divorced now and got divorced about 11 years later, and the woman I married [Kirsten Robinson, now Goodman; she’s remarried] had a theater degree, and had taught communications in college and then was back here working in radio. And, oh, I wanna say about 2000 – 2001 we became friends with a woman here in Topeka who is kinda well-known. Her name is Karen Hastings, and she's kind of well-known in the local theater scene, and we also met, kind of a local playwright. His name is Phil, Phil Grecian.

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You probably don't know the name, but if you remember the movie *A Christmas Story*, he wrote a stage adaptation of that, and that's kinda the big thing he did, although he's done a lot of other stuff.

And so we kinda worked with them, and she kind of got involved and – and started doing some local theater stuff, and then I got involved in it and mainly through this old melodrama that's been running in Topeka forever and ever, 60 years, as a matter of fact, called *The Drunkard*, and it's a parody of an old temperance melodrama. And so on and off for the last almost 20 years I've done some of that. And so that kind of – my daughter kind of grew up in that. Another thing we started doing was radio shows, dramatizations on stage of radio-studio radio shows, and my daughter had – the one I remember is *It's a Wonderful Life*, and my daughter had parts in that.

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So she kinda grew up in all of this. So this has been a lifelong interest for her, too. And, now I occasionally do some television stuff in this vein.

And in addition to that, I started about 11 or 12 years ago – I started teaching Sunday School at my church [First Lutheran Church, Topeka], the high school kids, 'cause everybody was like, oh, the high school kids are such a tough group to work with. Not really. And as part of it, every spring we started doing these dramatic presentations -- little, you know, song and musical stories. And about the second one I did, where they handed it to me and said, "Here, do this," I was like, "Well, I could write something better than this." So I started writing these short, 15-to-20-minute little religious dramas, and, you know, they got more – they've –

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gotten more sophisticated as time has gone on; bigger, more complicated themes, more drama, you know, all of that stuff.

And in addition to that, for a couple of years here in Topeka, there's what they call a 24-hour play festival. The group kind of dissolved last year, but what they would do is you would – writers, directors and actors would come together for 24 hours. You'd meet at 8 at night, and writers would be paired with a director, and you'd pick four actors. And the writer would go off and have until, like, 3 in the morning to write basically a 10-minute play. And then you'd turn it in at 3 in the morning. The director would get it at 7:30 in the morning, go to a rehearsal space, you know, block out the directions, and then the actors would come in at 8:30, and they'd rehearse it all day and put it on at 8 at night.

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And so I did that kinda – that's a lot of fun, and I did a couple of those. So I've always kinda been interested in doing this kind of writing as kind of a creative outlet separate from the journalism, which is also – I like, because it is storytelling, but of course it's nonfictional storytelling. It's fact-based storytelling, and so that's how kind of I even conceived of the notion to write a full-length play, which is a lot harder than it looks, just from experience now, just keeping it together and keeping it organized.

And it was really funny because my daughter was going over a draft, and it was like –

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"Well, you know, I don't really like this, and we can move this here, and, really, that scene doesn't really ring true, and you're not being explicit enough about what's going on, and the dialogue seems a little awkward here." And, you know, I'm kinda laughing and saying, “My own daughter is editing me.” *[Laughs]* I put up with this all day long, and my own daughter is editing me, which is fine. That's – I mean, she has the instincts in theater that I don't. She understands what will work on stage. She understands how actors will move. She understands pacing. You know, she understands how shows build or should build. So – and that's why I like working with her.

*Sam Kricsfeld:* This will conclude Part One.

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*Kyle Miller:* This is Kyle Miller. Today is Oct. 3, 2020. I am interviewing John Hanna of the Associated Press for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists project. This is part two. This interview is taking place remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This interview is sponsored by the University of Kansas and the Kansas Press Association. How much formal education did you have?

*John Hanna:* Well, formal education is a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Kansas, and then I like to say 12 years in the -- in Lew Ferguson's Associated Press school for boy and girl reporters. Lew Ferguson [See Appendix] was the correspondent in Topeka when I started both as a temporary legislative relief staffer in 1986 and 1987. He was still the correspondent when I got on full time –

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in June of 1987 and he retired July 1, 1999. So, he was a big mentor of mine, and it wasn't really a formal education, but it kinda was. But in terms of actual university degrees, it's just the bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas.

*Kyle Miller:* OK. Can you tell us about your experience at the University of Kansas, like why did you choose to attend KU since you were from out of state?

*John Hanna:* *[Laughs]* I'm afraid it's not going to re-reflect upon my motives that well. I went to school in a place north of Dallas called Richardson, Richardson High School, and one of the teachers there was a University of Kansas graduate. She taught Spanish. I was taking Spanish from her, and she had Jayhawks on her wall.

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She knew I worked on the student newspaper in high school and the mascot was the Eagles, so the newspaper was called *The Talon* and it came out once a month. So, she knew I worked on that, and my senior year I was the editor of that. And, so we had this conversation, in pretty bad Spanish on my part, about I asked – I was just curious what those weird looking birds on the wall were and she explained that they were Jayhawks. They were for the University of Kansas, and that if you're interested in journalism, you ought to check out the University of Kansas. I think my parents would have preferred me to go a little closer to home. We had talked about the University of North Texas, which is in Denton,

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Texas, about 30 miles north of Dallas. Anyway, we said, “OK, we'll look at the University of Kansas.” You know, when you're from Texas, everybody is like, "Kansas? Why would you go to Kansas? What's in Kansas? It's flat." Anyway, so we came up in the spring, the spring of 1982. The weather was really wonderful and, you know, we took a tour of the campus and some of it was better than others. But the journalism school – Dana Leibengood was the assistant dean at that point, and Dana had this deal where you'd go to his office as a prospective student and he'd walk you through everything you needed to do to get into the School of Journalism as a junior or possibly even earlier, and he would like write out –

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for you, like an adviser would, a class schedule for you and talk about the kinda things you needed to study. So it was very, very hands-on, very direct, very involved, even though you were just considering going to the university. In addition to that, the cost was not that bad for an out-of-state student in those days. I think it was maybe a couple thousand dollars, everything a semester.

*Kyle Miller:* Wow.

*John Hanna:* Yeah, it was much cheaper than it is today. And so, you know, my brother, my twin brother, who I discussed in the previous episode, had gotten a full ride scholarship to Texas Christian University, so this was something – and my younger brother, Richard, would end up going to Baylor, um –

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which is also in Texas. And so this was something they thought they could do. They could manage this. And so that helped, but then, it was spring. The weather was relatively warm and all these nice-looking Kansas girls were wearing shorts. *[Laughs]* And, and I am not gonna lie 'cause I was 17 at the time and that, you know, I – that was one reason to go to the university. So, there you go. And I got up here, I mean the university was really, in those days, was really pretty aggressive about getting students who were interested in journalism into the journalism school, and I had decided in high school that this is what I wanted to do.

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So, I was pretty serious about it. I thought that this was what I was gonna study, and the school had a very good reputation at that time. It still does, but at that time it was maybe one of the top five journalism schools in the country, up there with Northwestern and Columbia and, OK, I never understood why the University of Missouri was on the list, but it was, and, and Kansas.

[**Post-production addition:** I meant this as a joke … Missouri, of course, has a fine school of journalism.]

So we, it was an elite school and, in those days, when I went there, it had a fabulous faculty. I mean, just world class. And, and I'm not saying it doesn't now. I'm just, I'm just saying that, that my experience was you had this core group of faculty members who were the best at what they did.

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If you wanted to be a copy editor, you had John Bremner there, who was known around the world as an expert on language and usage and grammar. If you wanted to get into magazines, you had Lee Young who was a great, one of the foremost teachers about magazine journalism. In terms of teaching reporting, you had Rick Musser and Mike Kautsch, two of the best in the country. If you needed to know about the history of American journalism, you had Calder Pickett, who was just one of the best teachers of that subject anywhere around. So really the University of Kansas has always

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had this great, great ability to have a -- just a top-notch faculty in journalism. And, and so it was just, you know, looking around, liking the campus, I mean, being honest, liking the girls I saw on campus, but, you know, the journalism school going all out to pull me in. So that's why I came to Kansas.

*Kyle Miller:* So I know you were in the School – School of Journalism, but what was your major and why did you choose that major?

*John Hanna:* It was a straight journalism degree, news editorial. So I did the news editorial track. I took the reporting classes. I did take a magazine class from Lee Young, did take editing from John Bremner, did take History of American Journalism from Calder Pickett.

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I worked on the *University* *Daily Kansan* even before I was – I took the reporting class you take to be a reporter on the *Kansan*. I was an editor on the *University Daily Kansan*. I did, I laid out pages. I was a managing editor. I was what they called the campus editor, the equivalent of a city editor. So, I did all those things. A very, you know, I like to joke when -- my first couple of semesters at KU, when I wasn't formally in the journalism school, I had a 4.0 GPA, and it kinda stair-stepped down *[laughs]* the more work I did on the *Kansan* because that, that became my thing. That just became what I wanted to do. And I -- what I remember is, I had one semester left of college when I –

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started working for the Associated Press as a legislative reliever in 1986, and I should explain that. That's a job that they've had on and off for a long time where they hire somebody often in college, often right out of college, and they – it's a full-time job for 20 weeks. So you start in early to mid-January and you go to May and you help with coverage of the Legislature, and the job was there because the Legislature was in session, and so I did that. In the spring of 1986, I took a semester off from school, and then I came back to school in the fall of 1986, finished up, got the degree, and then did this job again in 1987.

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So I mean this was – by that time what I remember when I was graduating was I could not wait to get out of school. Nothing against KU. I had a good experience at KU. I liked being at KU, but I was just -- I was of the mind of, “I am so tired of school. I want to be a reporter. I want to be writing stories” and I, you know, I was gonna have a job waiting for me and I just, I wanted to get out and work. And now 30, going on 30 years or so, you know, I sometimes wonder if that was a mistake, if I shouldn't have stuck around and gotten more education. But, on the other hand, I can't regret the career I've had so – but if I –

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had to do it all over again, I would have taken, if I could go back and talk to my 18-year-old self, I would tell that person, "Do what you have to do to get the journalism degree but really, you know, take a lot of interesting stuff as electives in college. You know, take psychology. Take anthropology. Take -- sample all of that stuff because it's interesting and not only is it interesting, some of it could be useful later when you're a reporter." And so a lot of stuff I've had to learn just on my own reading because I don't think I let myself get a diverse enough education while I was at KU. And certainly I took French for a couple of semesters just to get the language requirement.

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Again, if I had to do it all over again, I probably would concentrate on making myself fluent in Spanish. I wish I had done that. So, I don't know what – I mean we used to go, it was just fun being in journalism in the journalism school in those days. You know, we met every Friday for -- I don't know if you guys still do it, Press Club. We used to go to -- most of the time we went to Louise's downtown every Friday and that was fun and, you know, there were parties, newspaper parties and just stuff going on. And, and I really, I really liked being in the journalism school. And I thought I got a good, solid

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foundation that helped me when I got out in the working world.

*Kyle Miller:* Did you work anywhere else before entering the media industry, and, if so, where?

*John Hanna:* OK. Well, let's see. The first internship I had was the summer of 1984. It was the *Irving Daily News*, in Irving, Texas, just a little suburban newspaper in a chain of suburban newspapers, staff of about six with an editor, basically an editor and a sports editor and then like, you know, press people, and then there was an ad side that had maybe a half a dozen more people. That was the summer my grandmother [Emily Bernard] –

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put me up at her home. This was my -- this was right after my grandfather [Ted Bernard] had died. He died in the winter of 1984 and this was the summer of 1984. And, and so that was my first internship. About two-thirds of the way – and they had me move around and do sports and do city and do other stuff, and then about two-thirds of the way through the internship, the police reporter and the managing editor got in a huge, huge screaming match. The police reporter just walked out, and so I was the police reporter for six weeks. And I had no idea what I was doing. *[Laughs]* I'm pretty sure I wrote some of the worst police stories known to man, for the –

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*Irving Daily News*, not that there was a lot of crime to write. It was a suburb and it didn't have that much to do. I do -- one of the things I do remember about that internship was early on, one of my assignments was to write obituaries, and so I would get a name from the funeral home. I would call up the funeral home and get the details and then, you know, the editor and I would have a conversation about, well, do we need to do more with this? Who else do I need to call? But so I'm on the phone with the funeral home and it's an older gentleman. This is 1984, so this is a guy who was maybe 91 or 92 when he died and the, you know, the funeral home director in this very bland voice was saying, "And –

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Mr. So-and-so, was a veteran of World War I, he was a veteran of the V, he was a member of the VFW, he was a member of the International Order of the Cooties." And, and I'm like wait, wait, wait, stop. Stop right there. I said, "I have to ask. The International Order of the Cooties?" And he said, "Yes, yes." It was a World War – it was an international organization for World War I veterans. These were men who had served in the trenches and the phrase "cooties" comes from the trenches. You had all kinds of bugs in the trenches, he told me, and they didn't know, the soldiers didn't know what they were. They didn't care. They were just bugs, so they called them cooties.

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And so if you had served in the trenches, you could join this group called the International Order of the Cooties. And, and so that, that was like, you know, that was a memory – I like that memory. And then I was back at KU, and then in the summer of 1985 I had an internship at the *Parsons Sun* in Parsons and spent a summer there. Again, it was another one of those internships where I was the “hey, we're getting an intern, so schedule your summer vacations now.” And so I was like the sports editor for two weeks, which was great. Boris Becker won Wimbledon that year, so I got to edit stories about Boris Becker and, and write up – the best part was writing up Little League, *[laughs]* Little League things from –

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Little League games from the box scores and softball games from the box scores. And arrogantly chopping New York [Times] sports, sports columnists as if I knew more than they did. And, and I, there was this phrase that the sports editor had for baseball, the Little League baseball games and, and softball games. He used to write a lot of leads that began, "Dust flew on the base paths." That was what I always liked. I was the society editor for two weeks. That was an interesting experience. And I covered city hall for two weeks, and they were trying to pick a new city manager so that was a lot of fun, and I did some cops and court stuff for a week or two there. So that was a lot of fun. That – Bruce Buchanan was the publisher.

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And early on they'd had a spate of corrections, and in one of my first stories I misspelled a woman's last name and I'll never forget it. Bruce called me into his office and said, "You misspelled this woman's name. You're gonna correct it, but first you're gonna call this woman and apologize, and furthermore you're gonna do it in my office so I see you do it." *[Laughs]* So that's a good way to teach you to be careful with spellings of last names. And the woman was very gracious, "Oh, no, no, it's nothing. It's a difficult last name to spell," blah, blah, you know, and just which of course made me feel worse. So anyway, that was kind of a formative experience. Then in 1986, I was an intern at the *Wichita Eagle* for the summer, and that was kind of, that was kind of cool. So all my intern-, well, my –

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last two internships were in Kansas. And then of course I did the legislative relief stints with the AP in Topeka in 198-, in the spring of 1986 and the spring of 1987, and then I got on full time with the AP in June of 1987 and I've worked for the AP in Topeka ever since. And I formally became the correspondent on July 1, 1999. The correspondent is the person in charge of the office. In those days, we had three people in the office. Now it's basically me, although we did for -- we did in June bring on a Report for America staffer [Andy Tsubasa Field], so for 18 months, it will be two people.

*Kyle Miller:* OK. So like you said earlier when you, found that you worked at the *University Daily Kansan*, um –

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what did you do at the *Kansan*? Like what was your time like there, and do you think the *Kansan* had any impact on your, on you wanting to become a journalist?

*John Hanna:* The *Kansan*, the *Kansan* made my career, OK? I'm convinced of that and I'll explain why. I did some reporting before I guess the -- I think the class was called Reporting 2 [Advanced Reporting] if I'm remembering that correctly, where you were actually on staff, and it was the fall of 1984. Yeah, the fall of 1984 was when I was a reporter on the staff, and the fall staffs tended to be smaller than the spring staff, so you got more stories in the paper. And then after that, I think the semester after that –

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spring '85, I think I was, yeah, I was a layout editor. And then fall 1985, I think, I was the managing editor. And then fall 1986 I was the campus editor. Yeah. Anyway, so the reporting, my beat was student government, which is, you know, which was interesting 'cause it kinda got me started on covering politics, but it started my career because there was this deal going on and, and, boy, if I had known how this would presage my career with the AP in later years. There was a controversy –

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going on that had started in the spring before I was a reporter on the paper. There was a group -- I don't know if it still exists. It was called the Gay and Lesbian Services of Kansas, GLSOK, and the controversy was that, you know, the way student government worked, there was a certain amount of student fees that then this Student Senate allocated and decided which groups got it. And one of the groups they would give money to was the Gay and Lesbian Services of Kansas, and there was a student who I think later worked for the state Insurance Department as an attorney. There was a student and, and he was a member of a fraternity, who argued that there should be a student vote on whether this group –

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gets student fee money, that it should be up to the students as a whole to decide this. And his argument was, you know, “It's about student control of money. It has nothing to do with gays and lesbians. I'm not anti-gay and lesbian. It just -- students should have control of this decision.” Of course, this was the only decision he wanted students to have control of. Anyway, the fraternity that – and this was the summer that *Ghostbusters* came out, and so the fraternity was selling T-shirts and they were – and, pardon for the language, and you could not do this today, but they were selling ‘fag buster’ T-shirts. That's what they, that was the logo on it –

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the *Ghostbusters* logo was a picture of a ghost in a red circle with a slash through it. Well, this was a picture of a limp-wristed ghost with an earring with a circle and a slash. Very offensive. Also knowing what I know now, probably a gross violation of copyright law, and how they didn't get nailed for that, I'll never know. Maybe it was the parody exception. That issue actually never came up. So anyway, I – somebody saw one of these T-shirts, told me about it, and I went to a softball game that this fraternity was playing and several of the guys on the fraternity had the T-shirt on, and so I asked them where they got it and they wouldn't tell me. Well, the rumor I had heard was that this kid who was leading the petition drive was selling them. So – and I could never get him to talk to me –

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so we sent another staffer to the fraternity house and he bought one from this person, directly from this person. And he neither -- the phrase in the story was he neither confirmed nor denied that he was a member of the *Kansan* staff. So then of course we had absolute proof that this kid was selling these shirts, and so I wrote a story. You can, I'm sure it's somewhere in the archives. It's on the bottom half of the front page, I think the right corner, with a picture of the T-shirt, and Sept. 25, 1984. And, and immediately all hell broke loose. I mean a massive student political firestorm. The kid was, you know, hauled up –

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for some kind of discipline. Somewhere, Boog Highberger was a part of all this. I don't know -- I don't know if you know who Boog Highberger is, but Boog is a state representative. But at that time, he was, I think, student body vice president, had very long hair, looked like Jesus. They – he and his president – put a picture of Che Guevara on the wall. Not your typical student leaders, at least in those days. I guess maybe it might be a little more typical now. But, at any rate, massive, massive story for the campus. So big that the Journal-World had to take notice. I mean I think there was an Associated Press brief somewhere. So that, that really started my career. That got people to notice my work. And so I don't think –

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I really don't think that my career would have gotten as much of a kickstart had that story not happened. And, as I said, it kinda presaged my coverage of politics, my coverage of social issues. I mean, I cover a lot of abortion stuff, I've covered a lot of LGBT rights stuff. 2005, I was covering the state constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Also done a lot of writing about guns. So, all of that, all of that seems to have its root in that. You know, it's kinda my first story. Goes all the way back to the beginning of my career. And I just, the time at the University of Kansas, um –

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it kinda got me started as a reporter in terms of both what I learned just in basic reporting skills, just the ability to do it. Also, you know, John Bremner was this legendary editing professor and just instilled in students an interest in, a love of, and a care about language. And so all of those things kind of converged and made it so that when I went to work for the Associated Press initially as a legislative reliever, my brain was ready for basically a lot of spot news coverage all at once,

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constantly, and that was the second thing that was necessary was just, just having that daily laboratory. But the first place I got a taste of that and the first place I got to think about how to write a story and all of that was on the *University Daily Kansan*. And then I learned enough about laying out a paper, enough about managing other people to be dangerous. And also to make one or two pretty big mistakes early without – and to learn from those mistakes. So all of those things, all of those things were very helpful.

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*Kyle Miller:* Did you have any doubts or concerns about pursuing your career?

*John Hanna:* Never. I mean the last, see, I worked on my high school newspaper. What happened when I was in middle -- I've always been interested in telling stories. And what happened was, when I was in middle school, we had to do a project on, think it was on *Walden,* Henry David Thoreau, and so I did this newspaper front page, mock newspaper front page, you know, the *Walden Times*, Henry David Thoreau, what he's up to, and I kinda liked this and I kinda was like, well, that's kind of fun. It's kind of fun to do this. What do newspaper reporters do? Oh, that's interesting. And then when I got into high school, I was on the high school newspaper –

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and I had a really, really good high school journalism teacher. She's still alive. We're Facebook friends. Sarah Scott was her name. And, so I did that I think two years and got really interested and kinda decided, you know, that's what I wanted to do. And when I was in high school, I was very shy, and the previous episode talked about all the times I had moved around and so my analysis of that is that that kind of made it a little difficult for me to make attachments for a long time in my life and, and so I was a pretty shy kid by the time I was in high school. And so, I initially decided I wanted to do this because it was a way that I had to talk to people. I had a reason –

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to go up to, you know, the football players and people who were doing plays and, and other people who were frankly a lot more popular than me, and to talk to them and to find out – and then I, then I kinda discovered I liked talking to people and hearing their stories and writing stories, and so that kind of pulled me into journalism. And after that I never, I never questioned it while I was pursuing it. Now, there have been periods in my adult life when I have wondered whether I should be doing something different. There have been a few, a few rocky career moments where I've thought maybe I ought to do something different. And when I talk to other reporters about it, um –

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you know, their response is – I remember one time one young reporter told me, "No. Why? You were born to do this. It's like this is what you were fitted to do. I can't imagine you doing anything else." And so, no, when I was in college I never for a moment questioned it. And I was -- I mean to me, as I said, college was the means to the end, and by that last semester, it was like I just want to work. I want to get out. I want to cover something. I want to write stories. I want to be on, whatever organization I'm at, want to be on the front page. You know, Woodward and Bernstein, that's -- that's who I want to -- I want to be both of them at the same time, *[laughs]*. All of that. All the -- I mean it –

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it's a total cliché. My favorite all-time movie of all time is *All the President's Men*. If I ever start to get too dispirited about the profession, I watch that because it makes me feel good about it again. Also, *The Post* is a great movie and I love that movie, and *[Citizen Kane]* it's not really considered a journalism movie, but it is a lot about journalism. *Citizen Kane* is a great movie. So all of these, all of these movies are just like stuff I love because it's, you know, I – so other than a few rough periods, no. I've never questioned going into journalism. And I'm glad I did. I'm proud of the fact that I do this for a living. I believe it's an important thing to do. I believe, on the whole, journalists are honorable people doing important work. I think this –

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is a vital function for democracy. I mean all of that stuff, it is stuff I believe and it grieves me right now to see the industry so financially troubled because I think we need about four times as many journalists as we've got in the United States. I really do. And I would love to go back to the days of the mid-'80s when it seemed like, by today's standards, newspapers, radio stations, television stations, wire services just seemed to be profligate with staffing. You know? And I just think the more the better. But I suppose we'll be discussing the rise of social media and how all that has influenced all this and what's different. But –

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I just, no, I have always, I mean from the time I was 14 or 15, I wanted to do this, and when I was in college, you could have hit me with a 2-by-4 pretty hard and it would not have pulled me off this path.

*Kyle Miller:* How did your family and friends react to your decision to become a journalist?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think, well, when I was in high school, most of the people I hung around – and, as I said, I was pretty shy so I didn't have lots of friends – but most of the people, kids I hang out with had some connection with the newspaper. So I don't think they saw it as unusual, although most of them weren't particularly serious about it. My parents, I don't think they ever –

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conceived of this as a career for me or anybody else in the family. Nobody in my family, that I know of anyway, has ever done this for a living. OK? And so I think initially all the way, almost all the way through college, my parents were like, "That's great but, you know, then you can go to law school. You know? You could become a lawyer or something that we have a better handle on. We understand what it is. We understand what a good life and the important things you can do if, for your example, a lawyer. We understand that." And my twin brother is a lawyer by training. The more I did it and it became clear that this was going to be my career, the more they –

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adjusted to it and I think the prouder they got. I remember a couple of incidents. One of them, I can't give you the year. My dad was an insurance executive and, and what I like to say is he found, he brokered weird insurance for people with weird insurance needs. And the story I like to tell is that he went into a meeting where he's trying to do a deal and he didn't – something was wrong for him on one side of the deal and he didn't like one of the executives he was dealing with and he couldn't put his finger on it, but he knew something was off with the guy. And they're about to begin the last meeting that is supposed to close this deal, and this guy is sitting there grumbling about something he –

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read in the newspaper that morning, and he just blurts out, "You know, if I was in charge, the first thing I would do is shoot all the reporters." And my father looked at him and said, "You know, my son is a reporter," and that was it. The deal didn't happen. And I've always loved that moment. That told me that, you know, my dad came around to being proud of what I did. And my mother, there was a deal where when I was early in my career, like 1989, the state was handing out licenses for dog and horse tracks and it -- all of the decisions were controversial and the commissions, the commission that was doing this was headed by an ex-state Supreme Court chief justice (Alfred Schroeder) who hated the press.

**[Post-production addition:** He always seemed wary of dealing with reporters in general when I covered him, and older reporters had stories about encounters with him from his days as chief justice.]

And the communities that –

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didn't get the licenses hated him back, and so they had legislative hearings on basically what was going on and in some lawmakers' eyes what went wrong. And during that hearing, he made some outrageous statement like, "We've been told by reporters that they have to write negative stories about us." Totally ridiculous. And afterwards, you know, I went up to him and said, "Who told you that?" And he patted me on the head. He literally patted me on the head and said, "It was you." And so I reported this to my boss and, and he said *[makes sound]*. Well, what happened was the *Hutch News* in Hutchinson didn't get their track. Their state fair track did not get a license, and the editor there was out for blood.

**[Post-production addition:** He thought the local group had a great proposal that would boost the Fair and that it made sense, given the Fair’s visibility each fall; also, it already had a grandstand.]

And so he heard this incident and he wanted to know who the reporter was –

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and he wanted a story so he could write an editorial saying this guy who had said it was senile, so my boss [Lew Ferguson] had to write this story about how I was accused of saying this thing. And of course, none of the other members of this commission heard it and they all disavowed it. "Oh, no, John's been totally fair. No." And, and you know my -- the guy who hired me had a statement saying, "Oh, no, we would never" – anyway, much to my consternation, the *Topeka Capital Jour*- – it was a very slow news day the next day – put it on the front page of the *Capital Journal* under the headline "Newsman Becomes News." And it just happened to be a day my parents were visiting from Texas, and I just, you know, I was like – my mother saw the headline. She went immediately over to the *Topeka Capital Journal* and bought like 25 copies so she could –

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send them all to my, to relatives *[laughs]* and friends. “Look, look, my son.” And I said, "Mom, why are you doing that?" She said, "Because when you're infamous we'll know, we'll have the moment when it started." And then the other thing is, they eventually moved to East Texas, which is a very conservative place, and, and she likes to joke. There was some controversy in the early 2000s over abortion and involving officials here, and somehow Bill O'Reilly got ahold of it on his radio show. And at one point on his radio show – by name – he called me gutless and despicable, and my mother remembers him calling me a pinhead. I don't remember that, but I do remember gutless and despicable, and my mother just thought that was the greatest thing. *[Laughs]* She just -- she was thrilled. This famous person –

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is attacking my son. He must be doing something right. So, there you go. My parents became -- they became very proud. And so I can say, I now and have for a very long time had their full support. Now, my dad died in 2015, but my mother is still living. But I, yeah, I did, after they got used to the idea, I had their full support.

*Kyle Miller:* Were you single or married at the time?

*John Hanna:* Well, let's see. I got married in 1992 and I divorced in 2003, so they started being proud of me before then. I worked for the AP for a number of years before I got married. I was working for the AP when I got married. And then –

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my daughter was born in 1994. Actually, my daughter was born Nov. 23, 1994, which is my parents' wedding anniversary.

*Kyle Miller:* Oh, wow.

*John Hanna:* Yeah. And, in the first episode, I told the story about how my parents were married the day after Kennedy was shot in Dallas. They were in Dallas that day. And we don't need to repeat it 'cause it's in the first episode, but it's their big brush with history. And so yeah, that was kinda cool, and I give my daughter credit for making me a better reporter, better storyteller, more empathetic person all the way around. I think fatherhood does that.

*Kyle Miller:* OK. Well, this is the end of part two.

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*Emma Bascom:* This is Emma Bascom, today is October 10, 2020 and I'm interviewing John Hanna of the Associated Press for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalist Project. This is part three. This interview is taking place remotely due to the Covid pandemic. This interview is sponsored by the University of Kansas and the Kansas Press Association.

 What and where was your first journalism job?

*John Hanna:* Well, I was going to ask you which, I mean I can tell you first internship or my first real, full-time job. My first internship was with the *Irving* (Texas)  *Daily News* in the summer of 1984, but my first, you know, full-time journalism job was actually the legislative relief position with the Associated Press in the -- starting in January 1986 and it went until, oh, I think mid-May 1986, if I'm remembering correctly.

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I basically lasted the legislative session, some 20 or 22 weeks and that's really what I kind of count as my first real job because it wasn't a traditional internship in the same way that, that the other internships were, and those were very valuable but those were – it was very much, “OK, we're bringing this college kid in, do extra work and, you know, we'll see what he can do and,” and, you know, move him around and all that.

 This was no you're going to spend four months or so covering the Kansas Legislature. You got this title of Legislature relief staffer, but you're a full member of the staff and you're going to be covering the -- some of the same stuff we are.

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So, that's really the one I count as my first one. And, of course, part of what makes me, unfortunately for this, kind of boring is, is that I've just basically continued to work for the Associated Press in basically the same place with the exception of six weeks in Kansas City in 1987 and the same place since then. So however many years that is, 34, 35 years, that's what I've been doing.

*Emma Bascom:* So when you first started in journalism, what was the media environment like at that time?

*John Hanna:* Well, it was – I don't want to give the impression that it was slow, but it was a slower pace than it is today.

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In the sense that, on television, you had basically the three big networks and PBS. I mean, CNN had started, and so you did have on cable systems, you did have this news channel. And of course, there have always been round-the-clock news radio stations, so you did have those, but you did not have this hothouse environment where you had dozens and dozens and dozens of social media, internet-based media outlets, television stations broadcasting 24/7, along with radio stations doing that. And so it was a much narrower environment.

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And, of course, the technology was a lot different. We did – when I started – have word processing systems. There was no internet. And you did everything by phone and by mail or you got in a car and drove to an office and you didn't do things remotely and it was hard to share things across state lines or across the country. And you just -- you did not spend every waking moment of your life immersed in a news environment. You could if you wanted to, but it was not something that was just normal.

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This sense of information overload was just not as present as it is now. One of the funnier ways I would put it is, if you wrote a story, you had a period of grace. If people were going to call and start screaming at you, you had this period of grace between when you wrote the story and the morning it was published. Or if you were writing, since this is AP, you're writing in the morning for an afternoon newspaper, you would have a little bit of grace before the people who didn't like your work – it's not a common occurrence anymore because social media is kind of that outlet now.

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But if somebody was truly offended by your story or, you know, a source just wanted to call up and yell at you for what you had written, there was a gap of time, OK. You had time to collect yourself and that has disappeared. There's a much, yeah, I mean the moment it hits the internet, if a politician doesn’t like how you framed a story, if they – and they sometimes do – don't want to hear the conclusion you've come to, what your reporting shows, they, I mean it's instantaneous that they'll call up and complain at you. And this has been a phenomenon, I would say, for at least a decade. I remember a story I wrote maybe a couple of weeks out, maybe two weeks out in 2014 from the November race for governor.

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And I had been out interviewing voters and I had been out traveling and the race was shifting away from the Democrat Paul Davis. And, and it just -- it was apparent in talking to voters and, you know, what I was hearing and what I was seeing on the ground. And it was ahead of the polling because, of course, polling is a snapshot of a moment in time and there's always at least a couple of days gap between what, when a polling is, when a poll is taken and when it's released. Even the fastest polls, there's always at least a little gap.

And so I wrote a story because this was a race that was getting national attention, saying that the race is shifting away from the Democratic candidate, Paul Davis, at the last minute and why that was, what the issues were.

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Paul Davis' campaign spokesman as soon as it got on the wire, Paul Davis – and it was a national story – Paul Davis' spokeswoman, spokesman, I'm sorry, spokesman called me and yelled at me for, well, to me, it felt like 45 minutes. I don't -- I didn't record it so I can't tell you how long it is, how long it was he screamed at me, but it felt like 45 minutes.

Then his campaign manager [**Post-production addition:** I remember it as the campaign manager, but he may have had a different title] got on the phone and screamed at me equally long. And then Paul Davis got on the phone and I'm not going to be charitable here, but whined at me for about half as long.

[**Post-production addition:** It’s not unusual for someone in politics to complain, yell, or, whine about what you’ve written; they’re working long hours at the end of a race, and they’re also trying to raise money all the time. I remember this incident because it went on for what seemed quite a long time. Also, the context influences my memory here of how they reacted.]

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And so I had, to me, this experience what felt like two hours, I doubt it was actually anywhere near that long, but that’s what it felt like, where it was just this intense “you have to change that story, you have to pull it, you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong, you can't do this,” blah, blah, blah, blah. And, you know, I finally said, "Look, this is what I'm feeling on the ground. This is what I'm seeing. This is what voters are telling me." And what I ended up telling Mr. Davis was, "Look, if I, if, if I see more evidence of it swinging back toward you, I'll write that story, too, ‘cause that will be another national story." But that's not something you got in 1989 or 1990. It just -- it just wasn't – at least, not until the morning after.

The other thing that's really changed is social media. And it was just -- it's just a whole different level of noise that did not exist when I started my career.

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The concept that you would have to -- that you would be in an environment where a bunch of people who are not anywhere close to the event you are covering feel qualified to get out in public and ask what's going on, which just – that notion did not exist. And social media is valuable for kind of giving you a little sense of what some people are thinking and how various types of people react and what groups are out there. It's also -- it's also a way, you know, to catch up, to see things that, that you normally wouldn't see, you'd be blind to --

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because people go to events that you can't get to and then they get on social media and commentate on them. So, so you have all, you have a lot more things, noise you have to sort through than you ever did before.

Now, there are advantages and disadvantages to that. The advantage to that is it gives you four or five different avenues to try to reach different kinds of people. So if I'm trying to reach an advocate for police reform that I've never talked to before, there's the possibility of trying to get them by Facebook, trying to Twitter, get them through Twitter, plus text, plus cellphone, plus regular house phone – if you can find a regular house phone – plus e-mail.

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E-mail, text, Twitter and Facebook, and, of course, other platforms, Tik-Tok, Instagram, etc., just did not exist. And so, the media culture right now is just much more immersive.

The other thing was that it seemed a lot more unified back when I started. That there was an understanding that there was straight journalism, there was commentary, there were a set number of newspapers, there were a set number of television stations, there were a set number of radio stations.

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And these established media organizations provide information, and information flowed through them out to readers, viewers, listeners, whatever. And that, yes, politicians gave speeches, they put out press releases, that you could – if you wanted to hunt for them, you could. But, it's not like today where, for example, if the governor or the president or a U.S. senator or a congressman want to put out a press release, they put it up online. If they give a speech and they think it's a good speech, that speech appears all over the place: YouTube, their own Facebook page, various other places.

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So, on the one hand, if I'm just an ordinary voter person, member of society it's a lot easier for me to get the raw materials that reporters have. Whereas, back when I started, there was a much bigger sense of reporters and news organizations being gatekeepers. In addition to that, I would say we probably, at the time, viewed our jobs as more transcriptive as we view them today.

What I mean by that is early in my career I covered an awful lot of committee meetings in the Kansas Legislature. I mean, I covered hearings where lobbyists for various groups got up and said the things you expected lobbyists for this group, for example, to say.

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And you would write a story that would talk about what they said, even though it was entirely predictable. You wrote a lot of stories about Republicans rip Democratic governor over, you know, budget proposal, over transportation plan, over X, because that stuff wasn't readily available to everybody out in the voting public.

You ran out roll calls from the Legislature. You did charts on what was in the budget. You went into much greater detail about what was in a bill because those things weren't as readily accessible.

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So, for example, now, if I'm writing about a bill, I don't have to get into all the little details. I don't have to get as far down into the weeds because I can link to the bill online. So I think journalism has become now a lot less regurgitating what people said and transcribing what's in a bill and documenting every move in a legislative debate and it's become more focused, at least this is true of the Associate Press, it's become a lot more focused on the why and the context.

So when I'm writing now today, I'm thinking much more about telling readers what does this mean, why did it happen, and what is the much broader context that this is happening at?

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And those are things that I'm consciously thinking about rather than, frankly, in a tax bill, having a table of how every income group’s tax rates would change. I'm much more interested in the big arguments, the big politics and the national context behind everything that's happening here than I was when I was in my 20s.

And I kind of think I had a good model for a career because I spent the early part of my career going to a lot of meetings, reading a lot of bills, um, covering a lot of just routine events.

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And that's how I got to know how state government worked, how a budget got put together, what kind of things went into it, what legislation looks like. What, how, you know, how these issues play out. How do committees operate? What are -- what are some of the political forces at work?

I mean, I spent a lot of time writing stories that are probably not ever going to be remembered. I probably wrote stuff that people read and they don't mean very much; they certainly didn't mean very much a year later and now they mean almost nothing in the broad sweep of history. But they mean something to me because they help build my knowledge brick by brick.

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And, and I think, I think there's a lot more access for ordinary people. They don't really need us to be the gatekeeper for information anymore. I think journalism is now in a position where it's supposed to help people understand the why, the forces, and, and the context. And so, the role of journalism has kind of reversed itself in that previously it was to throw information at people and to find information that they didn't have and just give it to them with a firehose if you could and document twists and turns and legislative debates and all that.

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I think now the need in journalism, good journalism, is about telling people, helping people sort through the noise. Nate Silver, who does the FiveThirtyEight site, wrote a great book called *The Signal and the Noise* about how much noise there is and how do you figure out what's signal and what's noise? And I think that's what part of what journalism is supposed to do.

And then to, you know, help people see that what is going on in Kansas, for example, is similar to what's something that's going on in Wisconsin or New York or, or across the Midwest or all across the U.S. That seems to be the much more -- the importance of journalism now.

The other thing is, is in this environment, everybody's just drowning in commentary.

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Um and commentary, spin, opinion, whatever you want to call it, because, you know, you've got these 24/7 news stations that need content, so they can't just do a presidential speech, they have to -- they have to have, you know, five, six, 10 experts come on and bat it around for an hour and half. Or, sometimes on CNN [cable networks], eight hours.

And you have all these folks out there who are on Twitter and Facebook and wherever talking about all of this stuff, whether they actually really know that much or not. Some of them know a lot, some of them know very little. Celebrities feel free to weigh in, sports stars feel free to weigh in.

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You know, people who only recently got interested in politics and put the sign of a candidate in their yard feel free to weigh in. I mean, people grab conspiracy theories from all over the place and put them out there. And a lot of name calling, you have a lot more name calling than you used to because there's more venues for it.

So, it's just -- it's a lot more intense. And, you know, we've had -- the Associated Press does a lot of work with readership and studying readership. And what has almost entirely disappeared from my world and the media landscape in general is the concept of the third day story.

And what I mean by that is you'd have an event, a big event, a disaster, a tornado, a mass shooting, a triple murder, a key figure charged in a big crime or political scandal.

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And when I started in my career, there was a sense of pacing to, you know, what you got first, what you did, and then what you moved on to the next thing. What was the second day’s story? OK, now that you give, you know, now that you've given the basics of the four murders at once in this small town, you've gotten the details, who the victims were, where the bodies were found, all of that.

Then the second day was, you know, why? What can you find out about why this might have happened? And then, you know, there might have been a third day story if it was a big enough story. A third day story about, you know, I'll take it about more residents in this small-town buying guns.

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Or the funeral and, you know, the school shut down for a week, all of that stuff. And then there might even be a fourth day story.

Well, that doesn't happen anymore. You have, as a news organization, generally on big events, you have two days, OK, readers will move on after two days. So, all the work you used to put into maybe over the span of a week to 10 days, you have to fit into two days now.

Now the exceptions are, of course, a huge celebratory death: Michael Jackson or Prince or, like years ago, Tiger Woods and his problems, those are stories that people will keep reading, no matter how many days you write them. But generally, other stories, you have two days.

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So, for example, on the first day, you've got to find out what happened. You've gotta profile the victims. You've gotta get at the why. You've gotta talk to all the neighbors. You know, you've gotta put it in the national context. You've gotta talk about how this might or might not spur a call for a certain kind of legislation. You've got two days to do that, period.

I mean you will still cover some things on the tail end as events come up related to this story, but in terms of maximum paying attention, you have two days. And that's difficult. What news organizations tend to do now is they tend to -- they tend to put as many people as they can on the biggest stories to get as much as they can as quickly as they can.

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And it’s harder work to do because it has to be done more quickly and as thoroughly as before, but much more quickly. And that's --that's a big difference. I mean that's, and that's just something we have to live with as journalists, that the demand for speed is much greater than it was. It was never not there, the – you know, the sense of competition and urgency was never not there. It's just that the stuff you could put a lower priority on because you were telling the basics first, you now have to think about working on.

So, for example, unfortunately, there are consequences like victims' families don't get any time to breathe, to process their grief,

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to try to understand what happens before reporters are asking them questions. That's a new phenomenon. You have outsiders intruding like on social media and, and making comments, again, whether they know anything or not.

It's just -- it's just gotten faster and there's more noise. So you might be working on a story, interviewing people, getting material, and an editor might call on your cellphone or text you and say “Hey, there's this piece of it that's all over Twitter you really need to check this out.” I mean, in the old days it was, well, CNN is reporting, you know.

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And you'd have to chase something that -- because CNN needed content, they interviewed somebody who said something on the air and you'd have to chase it and you'd have to go back to your sources and, and talk about whether it was true or not. Well now, now Twitter does that and amplifies that much, much more.

And I don't mean to pick on CNN, it could be any national news organization. And you've worked all day and all of a sudden, they have some nugget and you have to chase it. I remember the Oklahoma City bombing, there was a link to Kansas in the town of Herington. I'd been covering what was going on in that town all day and literally I had to go and try to find the head U.S. marshal and talk to him at 3 in the morning because CNN was airing something.

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And I had to go see if I could get this confirmed or, you know, knock it down or whatever. And, and it's like, well, you're on the phone in that awkward space of saying it's 3 in the morning right now, I'm not sure I can get the head U.S. marshal, you know. And your boss saying, don't care, try, and, of course, you try.

So just the world is just a lot louder, faster, more opinionated, more divided. I just read a book by a *New York Times* columnist, Ross Douthat, who suggested that it -- there's also a lot more play-acting because of social media. That's not his term, but that's the sense of it. So you have people who are tweeting and Facebooking as if they're radicals and they're not really.

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They're not really as radical as their persona is online and they're just kind of playing at it. That, you know, their idea of protest is to tweet a couple of times to vent their anger and then that's it.

And, and but, on the other hand, you also have really serious movements that are ongoing. So, I mean, Twitter makes it harder to distinguish between the play actors and the real movement people, I guess is the point of that.

*Emma Bascom:* So jumping back to your first job briefly, how many women were in your newsroom?

*John Hanna: [Chuckling]* Well, let's see, if we're talking about the Associated Press, in our office, those first years, none. There were no women, but it was a small office. It was four people when I was there.

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Now there were in the Kansas City bureau, which was kind of the hub bureau. Oh, I'm thinking about the time, around the time I started, a staff of 10 or 11 journalists with maybe two or three women on it. Later, I mean if you look at the composition of the Associated Press now, I'll just run through the Kansas/Missouri staff because that's who I work with.

I'm the only person in Topeka. The correspondent in Wichita, a single person correspondent in Wichita [Roxana Hegeman], is a woman. The news editor [Julie Wright] and the two staffers in Kansas City are women [Heather Hollingsworth and Margaret Stafford]. Jefferson City has two staffers, [David Lieb and Summer Ballentine] and one of them is a woman.

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The St. Louis correspondent [Jim Salter] is a man. So, you know, much better, much better representation overall. And, and, of course, I would hasten to note that the top editor at the AP in terms of the news report is Sally Buzbee, who by the way, was a relief staffer at Topeka in 1988.

But no, there were fewer -- there were fewer women. There's no doubt about it. And the statehouse press corps was a very predominately male institution and, unfortunately, it still is. The number of women in the staff has waxed and waned over in the statehouse press corps -- has waxed and waned over time, but it has never ceased to be predominately male.

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*Emma Bascom:* Who was the most influential person to you during your first job in journalism?

*John Hanna:* That's easy, Lew Ferguson. Lew Ferguson, what can I say about the late, great Lew Ferguson? You know, he was this -- he was this big guy from Oklahoma. The thing that people found the most impressive about Lew, and I love this, is that he covered both a World Series and a Super Bowl. He had started as a sportswriter with the AP … he'd worked for a local newspaper in Oklahoma, he'd done a session in the South Dakota Legislature, and then he became a sportswriter in Oklahoma City, I think, when the Twins were really good, the baseball Twins were really good.

**[Post-production addition:** He did work in Oklahoma City, but he covered the Twins in Minneapolis.]

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So he covered the World Series in the '60s, knew Billy Martin, Ted Williams, all those people. And then he came to Kansas City in the late '60s, so he was there to be part of the Super Bowl coverage team in 19 – the four, Super Bowl IV, which I guess would have been 1970 maybe [correct]?

 And, and then he became the correspondent in Topeka in the fall of 1970, he would be the correspondent for 29 years. And so, he, within the AP, the Topeka Bureau became known as Lew Ferguson's school for girl and boy reporters. And a lot of folks came through here both as staffers and legislative relief staffers, as Sally Buzbee [See Appendix] was one of them.

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A ranking editor [top editor in AP’s West Region] in the AP system now, Traci Carl, [now director of partnerships, commercial and digital markets] was one of them. There were a couple of executives who came through Topeka, just a lot of people who came through Topeka. And so, Lew was very, very important, and he taught me about, you know, making sure everybody got, every side got represented. That, you know, his view of it was our job was to provide information, not spout our opinions. That hard work was a good thing, thoroughness was a good thing, and we had to, we had to match that with speed.

 I mean, if you weren't vigorous in writing he would say, "Hey, come on, we're not running a weekly here," and, and stuff like that. And he, but at the same time he was very, very supportive,

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very much a second father figure for me. 'Cause, you know, I started at AP when I was 21. I was not even out of college; I would be the next year. So, I mean, not only was I pretty green as a reporter, I was pretty green as a human being. And Lew was just this wonderful guy, very widely respected, knew a lot about state government, wasn't shy about sharing it. You know, would be willing – he didn't feel he could waste you, so if he didn't know what your skill level was, he was going to throw you in and see how you did. And then he was going to help you understand if you were confused.

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And he also was just a great personal mentor. I love telling -- I love telling this story. I bought a house here in Topeka when I was 25. And, I, you know, I was tired of paying rent and I'd heard you did better buying a house, so I bought this little two-bedroom, one-bath bungalow and one day I said to Lew, "Do you know the name of a good plumber?" And Lew was like, "Plumber, why do you need a plumber?" And, and I said, "Well there's this problem, you know, I only have one bathroom and there's a problem with the toilet, it won't stop running, and so I have to call somebody to get it fixed.” Lew was like, "Oh, you don't need to call a plumber. How can," and he had this kind of little comic way of doing it.

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"You don't need a plumber. How can the AP hire somebody who's so dumb that he'd spend 50 bucks on a plumber to fix a damn toilet, I can't believe that." He said, he said, "OK, over lunch we're going to go back to your house. We're going to go to the hardware store and we're going to go back to your house." And, and so we go to the hardware store and buy the flapper thing, right, you know, that goes in the toilet? And, and it was like a -- then, it was like a $4 part.

 And you know he takes me to my house, "Show me the toilet." He says, "Lift the lid on that toilet. Lift the top on the tank, put it aside. And see that, that's the flapper that's what you're going to replace." And five minutes later, we had replaced it and, and, and, he, and I said, "Boy, that was easy." He said, "You're damn right that's easy, you didn't need to spend $50 on a plumber." So the upshot is when my daughter turned 16, I showed her how to fix a toilet.

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I said, "This is something you need to know. This will be useful; this is what you do."

 So, I mean I just -- he was a great guy. He treated all of his staffers like, like both staffers and like family and you just – you learned a lot. I mean, I remember -- I remember he used to go to lunch with [former Kansas governor and presidential candidate] Alf Landon every week for literally 17 years. He was a pallbearer at Alf Landon's funeral, OK, and, he would interview Alf every year on his birthday and write a story about current events and what Alf was thinking and all of that.

 And, and so one day, and you know Alf was approaching 100 years old, he said, "You know, I'm going to take you to lunch, OK, I'm going to take you to lunch with Alf."

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So we went to lunch at the -- it was the restaurant of the Ramada Inn, out in west Topeka, there was like a holidome sort of set up, there was a Ramada Inn. And we went to the restaurant and I met Alf Landon and, you know, while they were bringing the car around to get him back to his big house in Topeka, he and I talked about how hot it was. The most strange, one of the stranger conversations I've had, the living legend of Kansas politics, we're talking about the weather.

And … Alf went on a little bit about, you know, what it meant for crops and all of that because he was sharp, really sharp until the end. But that's, that's my – but I, without Lew, I wouldn't have gotten an opportunity like that. And if you showed that you could do stuff, Lew would let you do stuff.

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He would let you go and, and OK, this kid can, has shown he can cover important stuff so, yeah, sure, I'm going to give him a statewide race to cover and see what he comes up with. I'm going to let him follow this important debate all the way through the Legislature. You know, if he comes to me with a story idea, sure. And if that story riles people up, I'll back him up, you know.

That was the other thing, Lew had your back. If he thought you did a good job on a story, you were fair, if, you know, he would totally back you up. But if he -- a source came to him and said, "You know, your reporter didn't do X, he didn't think of the X," Lew would come back to you and say, "Hey, I just had this conversation I think this guy's got a point. You know, what do we do about it? Do we do another story?

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You know, do we put this in our notebook and wait for an opportunity to write about this again?" I mean he was a very fair guy when it came to coverage, and he expected you to be. He expected you to go out and get everybody represented in a story.

And so he was just, I mean, he really was in terms of journalism -- I had – and I said this last week – I had a lot of great professors at KU. I mean a few, a few really key ones that I remember, but Lew was like getting a whole extra couple of degrees in journalism at the very beginning of my career. Like the first five years, it was like, I don't have a graduate degree, but I kind of feel I do because I worked under him.

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And, and he told some of the, I mean he told funny stories about being in college. He told funny stories about his early career. He told great, funny stories about stuff he'd seen in the Kansas Legislature. So, I feel like he had all this history of stuff he went through and he just, he shared it. He shared all the stories so that I feel like I have -- I literally have twice as much history as I deserve because I worked with him.

And so, I mean, I have some vague perspective on even stuff that happened like in the '60s and '70s because he talked about them. You know, he talked about Bob Docking and what his administration as governor in the late '60s and early to mid-'70s was like. He talked about previous governors and legislators and legislative leaders and what the big fights were and, and all of this stuff.

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So I just, I mean it was like getting, you know, it was like having a walking encyclopedia of Kansas government sitting 5 feet from you and that was very helpful. And I do, I do try to pass some of that along when I am working with younger staffers. I really do. I have a really important sense that part of my job is -- I don't get as much opportunity because of the state of the business -- but I really, I really do like working with younger reporters and helping them get established in their careers and moving on and doing bigger and better things.

It thrills me when I see a young person who's worked in Topeka or a young person with another news organization at the statehouse going on to much bigger and better things.

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It just thrills me because I see -- I've seen a lot of talent go through here. And that's kind of the important lesson I think I've learned working my whole life in Kansas, that there's a lot of really good journalism everywhere. That people tend to think of powerful journalism as, you know *The New York Times* wiring about Donald Trump’s taxes. Or, of course, the obvious defining thing of my generation, the Watergate scandal. But there's a lot of good journalism where small-town newspapers question what the mayor and city council are doing and dig into it.

You know I think I remember being at a Kansas Press Association awards ceremony a couple years ago,

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and I think it was Sterling, Kansas, and they gave the top award to this young man who was working on the paper, I think in Sterling, Kansas. And the city had fired its city manager and would not say why. They just wouldn't talk about it and he just decided “I want to know why. I want to know why this guy was not on the payroll. I want to know what happened.” And he stuck with it and he wrote a big story about why and it involved some conflicts and some problems and all of that.

And it was, you know, that's great journalism. Talking about what the school board is doing at the local level and the college and whether it's good for the taxpayers and, and that sort of thing. Covering the big criminal case and figuring out why it happened, that goes on everywhere. And it goes on even in little weekly papers.

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And yeah, sometimes the writing is a little rougher and the presentation isn't as sleek as it is because these folks don't have the same resources that, you know, a *New York Times* or a *Washington Post* has, but that doesn't mean the journalism is not as good. It doesn't mean that they're not hitting the highs.

And, and I think sometimes people think you have to end up with the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* or CNN or a national network to have a meaningful career and I don't think that's true at all. I think meaning is, I think meaning comes in documenting stuff that's important to readers even if your readership base is 2,000 people in a small town on the Kansas plains.

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Those folks deserve good journalism, everybody deserves good journalism. And it grieves me every time I see stories about news deserts because that tells me that somewhere in that news desert, something bad is going to happen in government because the local officials think they can get away with it.

So, sorry, I kind of rambled there.

*Emma Bascom:* That's all right. So why were you interested in being a legislative relief staffer in 1986 and what did that job involve?

*John Hanna:* Well, I had – in 1985, KU had this deal where they'd send me and a couple other kids over to the statehouse to kind of bump shoulders with Lew for maybe once or twice a week for not very long. And so, I kind of like looked around and this was cool

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and I'd always -- I'd always been a little interested in politics just because even on the University Daily Kansan, ‘cause we had to -- we made a thing of where we covered some races locally and stuff like that. So that was always interesting. And, and, the earliest big media story I remember was Watergate, and so that was always kind of interesting and fascinating to me and I had some contact.

 And you know, I wanted to be a reporter. And this sounded like a cool job and it, you know -- I take a semester off of school and try to do it. And, and so I applied and the folks at the KU School of Journalism, I guess, talked me up a little bit and, and I got it.

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And then I arrived here and it was in a different office than it is now, a much more crowded office up on the first floor of the Capitol. It's now -- it's now generally the office of the chairman of the Tax Committee in the House. And, they, what happened, what it entailed was I went in every moment and Lew would give me an assignment of – he'd have a legislative calendar in front of him, he'd have sometimes 12 different events marked and he'd divvy them up amongst himself and the three other staffers.

 And I would, I mean literally, the first, the legislative relief thing – and the next year and for the first couple years of my career, I would go to a lot of committee meetings. When the committee meetings tailed off, I would sit in the House and Senate and watch debates.

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Early in my career, after these stints when I was full time all the way through the year, I would cover like political debates, write about the issues where the candidates were talking about, all that, all that kind of stuff. And, and I got to the point where there were a few things I knew about more than the other people. One of them was, *[chuckling]* one of them was gambling, and in 1986, voters approved an amendment allowing a state lottery and it launched about a year later. And voters approved an amendment that allowed betting on dogs – dog and horse races.

In both cases, they needed legislation to flesh things out, the details: how many members on the lottery or the racing commission, what were their duties, what were the licensing requirements, all that kind of nitty-gritty.

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What were the tax rates on the gambling proceeds? All of that kind of nitty-gritty. And what I remember is that one of the committees in the Legislature was having its first briefing on the subject of betting on dogs and horse racing. And, you know, so Lew said go up and cover this hearing, go see what's going on. And I'm sure I wrote a short story about it and the next day, literally, it was like well, you go back, you're the expert now because I'd covered one meeting.

And you know, through that kind of stuff, I learned about stuff. So I became kind of our gambling person, eventually I became kind of the legislative -- when they had the constitutional amendment against gay marriage, I did that.

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I did a lot of political stuff. Did a lot of budget. I sat in a lot of really, really tedious budget negotiations. But that was valuable because you learned, you learned where the money was in terms of the spending and you learned where the increases and decreases [were]. And you got a sense for how the -- how legislators thought about a budget and how they were put together.

And so, yeah, a lot of the first two or three years, it was just showing up, being alert, and paying attention in meetings. And then trying to write things in as straightforward a way as possible.

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And I have to confess one of the things that mystifies me is this notion of live tweeting a meeting. Oh, I use it as my notes. OK, but if you're taking time to tweet, in my opinion, and this is an old guy's opinion, you're probably going to miss some nuance. I mean, when I was in a meeting, I was watching and thinking, my brain was constantly in motion in terms of OK, if I heard something and the meeting ended at that moment, was that the lede?

And so, it was a constant evaluation of what was going on and what was important and what the story would look like so that I could get back and write it in 45 minutes or less. And now, of course, now that I'm here and in a different place, I'm looking for different things.

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I'm thinking about that's interesting, what's the broader context here? Why is this person making this argument? How does this link up with what's going on in another state? How does this advance a political or policy goal that this person is doing? What does it -- what does this amendment mean the folks behind the bill have concluded about its ability to pass? That sort of thing.

So yeah, I was just basically showing up with a jacket and a tie every morning and, and being ready to go to a whole wide variety of meetings and keeping your mind flexible enough that you were ready for surprises if they came.

*Emma Bascom:* What other journalism jobs have you had, and can you tell me a little bit about what you did at each of those?

*John Hanna:* Well, I mean the only other really -- the only other journalism jobs I've really had were internships before I joined the AP.

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So there was the *Irving Daily News* where I was 19 and I was just a general assignment reporter until the police reporter got in a screaming match with the managing editor and quit with like two-thirds of a way through the internship. And then, oh, the police enjoyed me, I'm just -- because I grew up in the suburbs and I'm sure I struck them as hideously naïve about life in general. So I'm pretty sure I was pretty easy to shock with crime.

 So that was the *Irving Daily News* and my grandmother – in Irving, Texas, a suburb of Dallas – and my grandmother then lived in Irving, so I crashed with her the whole summer.

 Then the next job was the *Parsons,* the next internship was the *Parsons Sun* in Parsons, Kansas.

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And again, that was a deal where once I showed up, everybody got to take in turn their summer vacations. So, I mean I was the city hall [reporter] for two weeks, I was the cops reporter for two weeks, I was the sports editor for two weeks, I was the lifestyles editor for two weeks. That was the -- that was the weird, interesting one, to be the lifestyles editor.

 And that was fun ‘cause I got, you know, to get a little history of the community and get a little taste for the job, different kind of jobs on a small-town newspaper.

 And then in the summer of 1986, I was an intern at the *Wichita Eagle*,and I was kind of general assignment there and stayed general assignment. And they knew I had done the relief job in Topeka so they did feel comfortable throwing me some assignments.

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And but, you know, my assignments went far and wide, a lot of feature stories about, you know, some Army camp at Fort Riley where they were training new soldiers and what the boot camp was like. I covered the Miss Kansas Pageant – which, now that I think about it, was pretty funny – but the Miss Kansas Pageant in Pratt. So it was just this really, really wide variety of stuff.

 And then I did spend six weeks after my relief stint in Topeka ended in 1987, they knew really they were going to hire me back in mid-June, but they needed somebody to fill in in Kansas City for six weeks. So I lived in Kansas City for six weeks,

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and just did various – we call them desk tricks, you know, finding -- AP is a nonprofit member cooperative, so part of what people on a desk do is they look at what member newspapers and radio stations have and work them up as AP stories. I did some of that and I also -- this was back when we had an overnight shift, I think it was from 10 to 6 in the morning, from 10 at night till 6 in the morning, I did a couple of those shifts. And so then I came back to Topeka.

 So I mean really almost all of my experience has been as a state government reporter for the AP in Topeka. I mean, I have covered some national conventions,

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 have covered some disasters, tornadoes, some crime, but most of my work has been what I'm doing now. Only, I hope, a lot better than when I started my career.

*Emma Bascom:* Were you ever involved with the actual printing of the paper at any point?

*John Hanna:* No. You mean in terms of the press run?

*Emma Bascom:* Yes.

*John Hanna:* The only time I was really physically involved in that was back in college. And back in those – I was the managing editor of the University Daily Kansan for one semester, and in those days, either the editor or the managing editor had to be at the back shop at I think it was 5 in the morning for paste up.

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 And in those days, you literally spit out all the copy and columns, set column widths and lengths, and then you cut it up and pasted it down on a mock-up of the newspaper page. And you monitored these guys, they had these older guys at the shop who would do all this and you would look it over. And, you know, you had a little glue ball with you to make sure there [were] no glue blobs left on the page, I do remember that. You had an exacto knife ‘cause these guys never wanted to cut a story because, you know, they would just cut the most convenient place, so you had to do that. And then they took that page and they engraved a photograph, a reverse photograph of that page onto a metal plate,

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put the metal plate on the press, and that's how it was printed. The paper and ink would run over that metal plate, it was like an offset or something. And it would roll and, you know, all the clattering stuff. And so, yeah, that was the only time I was involved in the production side of it.

 And, and when I was an editor at the *Parsons Sun*, temporary editor for two weeks, especially sports, I would go into the back shop and make decisions about where to cut and what to do. And, and you know, they liked me ‘cause I was – if a *New York Times* column was two lines too long, I mean I'd cut it in the most convenient place. They loved that.

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And you know or, every photographer in America would throw a brick at me for saying that, but if the photographer had sized the photo wrong, you had to crop it again in the back shop. And, and I was -- I was not, I was not sensitive to aesthetics when I did that. *[Chuckling]* So, there you go.

 And I did, when I was at the *[University Daily]* *Kansan*, I did do layout and I did have to do just a little of that when I was in Parsons because of the sports page ‘cause he had his -- the sports editor had his own page that he had to fill.

 But those – very early in my career were the only times I was really, really tied into the back-shop end of the business. And I guess it's all now done with pagination and you don't really do the paste up anymore. It's all done by computer.

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And that, that started to happen well after I'd left college and the like. And now I would predict that at some point in the next 20 years, paper will be gone completely. I think sooner or later, we'll get to a point where all news is online ‘cause that's the way people consume things.

 That's also another one of the big changes since the start of my career is you have to start thinking about how things look on an iPhone. You know, you have to get your headline short enough, and your bulletin short enough, and your paragraph short enough that people who consume their news on iPhone -- it's friendly, it's reader-friendly for them, which is not particularly something you're worried about when I started ‘cause there, obviously, no iPhones.

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I mean, I guess there were these big, clunky bricks that were mobile phones and they were like, you know, they were like a foot long and 2 pounds of phone. And then it came with a battery that weighed, that was like the size of a huge purse and they weighed like 20 pounds. Those were just starting when I started my career.

And, of course, as an on-the-ground reporter, they were rare enough that you never used them, so, you know, you had to make sure you had lots of quarters in your car, so that if you were like at a police standoff – the first police thing you did at a police standoff was you found the nearest convenience store and pay phone, because you'd be using it [to] dictate copy to somebody somewhere else.

And then later you got a calling card that allowed you to call long distance without needing all the quarters, but you were still tied to whatever the nearest payphone was.

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So that's a big difference – big difference is editors can bug you every moment of the day *[chuckling]* if they want to. You can be waiting for an event -- sometimes I'm waiting for an event to begin and it's two minutes late, and I'll get a text from my news editor saying, "Well?" You know, ‘cause we're waiting for the announcement to get the story out. And that's the other thing, the other thing is you do a lot more prep than you used to. If you know a court decision is coming in, it's a limited range of possibilities; an election, somebody wins, somebody loses, any big event now, you prep it in advance so that, you know, you can get as many words on the wire as quickly as possible. And God help you if you prep three possibilities for a court decision and the court flakes out with you and goes with weird number four.

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*[Chuckling]* Then you're in real trouble. Then you're doing it in real time. But, you know, that's another difference -- you spend a lot more time planning than you used to, it's a lot less go with the flow. And, and I think in some ways that's better because it forces you to think about the story further out than just totally in the moment. So anyway.

*Emma Bascom:* What is the proudest moment of your career?

*John Hanna:* The proudest moment of my career. Well, I suppose I should say, I should say it was this fall – was it the fall? – when I was inducted into the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame

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because that was really a strange and humbling experience to be brought into a group that includes both people who were important in my career, including Lew Ferguson, Paul Stevens, the guy who hired me in AP. I mean, you know, William Allen White's in that group and I went to the J-school named after him. A couple of the professors I had are in the Hall of Fame. I met some of the editors who are in the Hall of Fame, so, I mean that was really a proud moment for me, I think.

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I've had some moments in my career when I've felt like I had an impact and step back and felt really proud of the work I've done. I did a lot of work early in my career in the late '80s about ethics and lobbyist laws and what lobbyists were up to. And I really feel like not any one story in particular, but just sort of a whole career really shed a light on some of that stuff in the statehouse.

 In 2001, 2000-2001, I wrote a story, a very long story about a couple in north central Kansas – Marysville – who had had their two daughters taken away from them by the state.

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And the doctor who had participated in all of this thought they were underfed and neglected. One of the girls had had an injury like a broken leg and, and it really kind of demonstrated how difficult it is to do the job of assessing whether there's been child abuse and then deciding whether to take the kids out of the family.

 And it also was a very good look at how something like that stresses a family, how it can cost them a lot of money if they want to fight back. And also how fighting back can increase your problems when you're dealing with government. So, it was all of those, it was this big, and it was the AP, the AP listed it as one of the 20 best stories of the year that year. So, I was really proud of that story.

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I was proud of my coverage of the 2002 governor's race, and, and subsequent political races. That one, that was the first time I won the Fred Moen Staffer of the Year Award, and just – and then there have been moments when, you know, there was this moment in 2015 when I wandered into a private caucus of Republican lawmakers about the budget in the middle of probably the worst budget fight in state history up to that point.

And one of the legislators said to me, "This is a private meeting." The budget director was there and giving them the details of what would happen if they didn't pass a budget.

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And, and the budget director was there and this legislator said, "You weren't in – this is a private meeting." And, and I said, "I know, but I want to hear what he has to say." And I folded my arms and I just decided not to leave. And, and the leader of the group said, "It's OK, he can stay." And that was a moment when I just felt like I'm, you know, was like, I'm just -- I'm not gonna leave. I'm just gonna stand up, do this little thing, and stand up for open access. And, and so that was a, I think, I was proud of that moment. And, and I've had a couple of good stories on the coronavirus. I did one earlier this year about a doctor in Rooks County who had watched as it came closer and closer.

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The epidemic started in Kansas City and moved across the state kind of sporadically. And she was out in Rooks County where she was having trouble getting people taking it seriously. And then around Easter she thought her husband had it. He's also a physician. And so that was a pretty good story.

And, so it's -- it's stuff like that that I feel good about.

*Emma Bascom:* What were some of the most difficult moments in your career?

*John Hanna:* Difficult moments. Hmmm. Well, you mean personally difficult or professionally difficult? Because I did have a period 2004-ish, second half of the year when it wasn't a good time for me.

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I was a little more than a year after I'd gotten divorced. The AP had hired a new bureau chief in Kansas City that I didn't seem to understand or get along that well with. She subsequently left and, and went somewhere else. And so that was a pretty -- that was a pretty bleak time. But that was more of a -- that was really more of a personal time, personal bleak time.

There were moments in various administrations where I felt it was difficult to get information out of state agencies and to pull things out of state agencies over the years.

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I mean the 2010 U.S. Senate primary between Todd Tiahrt and Jerry Moran was a bit of a difficult period because it was such a tough, tough campaign between these two relatively conservative Republicans. And both campaigns were really on edge and not shy about calling up and either trying to get you not to do something or trying to get you to do something. Or, frankly, in the case of Moran's campaign, just calling you up to yell at you sometimes.

**[Post-production addition:** It wasn’t Moran himself, but a staffer, and perhaps it sticks in my memory because he won, and because it was in sharp contrast to the aw-shucks amiability that I’ve most often seen in dealings with Moran.]

And so that was a pretty -- that was a pretty difficult three months just because every day you knew you were covering this huge race,

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 and, and you knew you were going to be dealing with people who were very stressed and, and not -- not very hesitant to take out their stress on you.

And, but, in terms of, you know, in terms of having wild stories about being threatened or anything like that, physically, I've had a lot of times when I've been frustrated trying to get information, get people on the phone, going to the scene of a crime and nobody wanting to talk to you, that sort of thing, I've had a lot of that, but nobody's ever, for example, nobody's ever waved a gun in my face, so I can't claim to have some of the experiences that war correspondents have had, for example. I mean I guess I've been pretty lucky in that regard.

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*Emma Bascom:* Yeah. So, what were some memorable moments that you had as the AP correspondent in the Kansas Legislature, and do you think you learned anything valuable from watching politicians work?

*John Hanna:* Yeah, actually I did. Some memorable moments, wow. Well -- there are quite a few. I mean, the funny thing -- the funny thing is that a lot of them occurred during the Brownback administration. Sam Brownback, who was governor 2011 to early 2018, that's right, he resigned in early 2018.

 And a lot of memories of that. You know, just covering some pretty difficult debates over taxes, over tax cuts and how they worked out.

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You know, and, and particularly 2015 when – well, for example, during the 2014 campaign, it was the day after the primary and the Republicans were having kind of an event where Brownback and other Republican candidates were there. And we [a group of reporters] were waiting for the event and one of the rating agencies downgraded Kansas' credit rating because its finances were shaky. And, you know, we had to corner Brownback and talk to him about it. It was clear he didn't want to.

[**Post-production addition:** Yet, he did, and he raised questions about the rating agencies’ priorities.]

There was another event later that year where we were told that he was only going to talk about, I think it was the economy. And it was like at a business and you know, it was a rah-rah thing [an event to showcase what he felt to be a positive announcement.]

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And he was only going to talk about the economy and, and, of course, the state revenues were tanking and the credit rating was – some other rating agency was considering downgrading it. And, and we were told by the press secretary that he was only going to talk about the economy. And it's afterwards and we're standing around and, and what I remember is I got my question in because I prefaced it, "Now, speaking of the economy," and then I asked the question I wanted. That was -- that was fun.

**[Post-production addition:** But it was also useful for readers, because the governor gave a defense of his policies that explained his thinking.]

I remember -- I remember the Challenger explosion. That wasn't an event that affected me directly, but I just remember, in those days you had a printer that clacked off the wire, the national wire.

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And I remember pulling the story about that and, you know, it said the Challenger exploded on liftoff. And my first thought was, well, that's kind of an inappropriate verb to use. And then, of course, you know, wait, wait, put on the television and then they played the video over and over and that was right.

I remember 9/11. What I remember about 9/11 is thinking as I was driving my daughter to school, you know, this was kind of like the thing in the '30s where a plane hit the Empire State Building. And then I got to school, my daughter was in first grade at the time, and everybody is out in the halls because they had televisions all hanging down in the halls, right, because they would put up song lyrics and stuff like that.

And while the kids were waiting to get into class, they played -- they played *Between the Lions.* I don’t know if you ever saw *Between the Lions* on PBS, the kids show. But that's what they would do, that's what the TVs were there for.

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But every TV was on CNN and, and that was kind of when you knew this was something huge and you were going to go to work. And then I got a call from Pat Roberts, the senator for Kansas, asking me why I was still in the Statehouse.

And then later in the day, here's what I remember: We had a kid -- we were all sent out to talk to everybody, find out what is going on. What is America feeling at this moment? Who's, who's changed their traveling path, patterns? What's going on? And we had this, this kid who was going to be our legislative reliever – his name was Josh Akers. They brought him over to help a little bit in September, October, and November, and this was his first day, 9/11.

And he gets this quote from this woman.

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And I'll preface this by saying AP has sometimes had a reputation for being fairly conservative about language in stories. And this woman said, blah, blah, blah, "those damn terrorists." And so, he gets his notes together, puts it together, feeds it to whoever it needs to go to, and the editor said, "This is," told him, "this is really good work, but we can't use the word damn on the wire."

And I heard his end of the conversation, which was, "Let me get this straight, the networks are playing the same footage of these two planes slamming into the Twin Towers and exploding over and over and over again. They're zooming their cameras in on people who are jumping, who are jumping live to their deaths because they would rather die that way than in a fire. But we can't put ‘damn’ on the wire because it might offend somebody?"

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And the editor, there was a pause and the editor was like, "Yeah, that's about it." So, no, no damn on the AP wire in those days. How, you know, how quaint does that sound nowadays?

But, so, I do remember that. I remember in 2007, the Democrats and the governor were trying to pass a bill to allow state-owned casinos. The leading opponent in the Senate tried to filibuster it, called for a vote thinking he'd kill it and there was some arcane movement, and it was filibuster and, and it passed. So, the guy who hated gambling the most got it passed, all in the space of a week.

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And I just -- I just remember the sheer – on election night in 2016 – the sheer unexpectedness of just the – well, there are two presidential elections I remember really well. The first one was 2000 because you know Florida was called by some people and then uncalled and it was close. And then it turned out into a long mess.

 What I remember about 2016 is just, just at some point around 11 [p.m.] realizing that, against all expectations, Donald Trump might actually win this. Everything that the polling had suggested in terms of, well, was an outside possibility, everything was gonna -- was starting to line up for Trump to win.

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And it was just the sheer unexpectedness of that that I remember. It was just -- it was like wow, *[Laughing]* you know, my God, this is -- this is actually going to happen. The thing that was supposed to be the, you know, whatever, 15-percent possibility is actually going to happen.

 In politics, covering politics, when you wonder whether the big upset was ever going to happen, this was it. I mean and you're just -- you're just sitting there with your mouth open because it's -- this historic thing is happening right in front of you. Um, and then you have to get on writing about what you're writing about, and, and that sort of thing.

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And then I remember -- I remember being in the House when they overrode, the Kansas House, when they overrode Sam Brownback's veto of the bill that repealed his tax cuts and just kind of that, that moment of silence when everybody in the room understood it was going to happen. That, that was a really interesting, interesting moment.

 So those are some of the things that are the most memorable. And I, actually, I do think I've learned something from covering politics. I have learned more about how difficult it is. It's not as easy as it looks and it's more complicated than people generally understand.

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And that's -- that's what I've learned from watching. I've actually -- I'm a regular churchgoer. I belong to a church -- I was the president of my church council. And, and what I tell people is that's where I learned a lot about politics, too. Not, obviously, partisan politics, not party politics, but just the politics of getting people together to do something collectively. That's where I gained even more insights about how difficult that is.

And, and so what I've learned in covering people in politics is that -- is that people bring different ideas and motivations, some of them noble, some of them not, and everybody is a mix of all those things.

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And it's much more complicated and good leadership and getting things, getting a goal accomplished in the political process is a lot more work than people give it -- people in politics credit for.

And that generally, and, and I have told groups I've spoken to this: Generally, everybody in politics has had to convince at least one other person that they should be in office. Even if it's just, you know, the key ward boss in Chicago or a city or, you know, the key machine guy, but, usually, it's thousands and thousands of people. And that is a lot of work and, and I think people underestimate how much work that is in some ways because the most gifted people in politics make it look easy.

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For example, Laura Kelly winning the governor's race, I mean you saw her out on the campaign trail, you saw her in debate, what you didn't see was her spending five, six, eight hours a day early in the campaign in a room calling people, basically asking them for money and making the case that she was an investment worth making.

And, you know, the people on the campaign trail right now, Roger Marshall, Barbara Bollier, people running for Congress, that’s a lot of what they have to do. They have to get out and convince other people that they're worth the investment. And that's just – that's a lot of work and if you, you know, if you don't like calling up people and asking them for things, it's three times as tough.

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So, you know, that's what I -- I think people have this idea that politics is a really easy thing to do and anybody can do it. And it's like anything else, it's like journalism, it's like farming, it's like being a lawyer, it's like being an engineer; no, not everybody can do it. So that, that's what I've learned, I think.

*Emma Bascom:* Yeah. So, the politicians and the Legislature that you interacted with – how did they treat you as a member of the press and what they were like in general?

*John Hanna:* Well, it, of course, varies. The general rule of thumb is, I mean, most of them treat me pretty respectively. And I've gotten treated more respectively as time has gone on, as I've become longer and longer lasting. They have put up more and more with my tough questions.

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I think I had a reputation when I was younger for being pretty aggressive and pretty tough. I don't think I'm any less aggressive or any less tough, I think, I think the fact was I wasn't as well-established so some -- that probably rubbed people the wrong way, whereas now, they're more likely to say, well, that's who he is and that's, you know, that's how reporters are.

 I mean, there's always -- there's always a group of folks who want to be your friend and act, and, and you can get into a relationship where the two of you fool yourselves into thinking you’re friends. OK? And then, generally what happens is you come across a good story or something that emphasizes that you cannot be in the real sense of a friend, a friend.

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You have to maintain the source/reporter relationship.

 So, there are a lot of folks that I would say are pretty friendly, pretty approachable, and are just easy to deal with. They'll call me back. And, and, you know, I don't -- a lot of people don't believe that reporters don't care what a person's political views are, and I don't. I mean, if they'll call me back quickly, I, you know, I don't care how liberal or conservative they are if they'll call me back. The important thing is they're calling me back.

 But there are, I think there are a growing number, there have always been legislators who are wary of the press.

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They're shy. They're worried about being misconstrued. They've had one or two bad experiences with the local newspaper, so they're, you know, they're a little shy about dealing with the press. What has kind of grown over the years are dealing with more and more people who just -- who don't respect the job we do, don't think it's important, and don't – who do really believe that we're enemies of the people,

if they don't use that terminology. I have heard more frequently from people in politics, the sense that they look at somebody like me in mainstream news organizations as the problem.

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There is now a greater, -- there is now a greater tendency for some people in politics just not to accept facts. Just to say something is true when it's not and never have that belief shaken – and, and that's -- that's harder to deal with. I mean, literally people who don't believe climate change is a thing despite all the scientific evidence built up to the contrary. People who think reporters are deliberately overstating the coronavirus problem over some sense of political agenda. It's really not that bad,

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you know, or the classic example right now is the idea that there's rampant voter fraud in the United States. There's isn't. There's no evidence that there is, and, and yet that idea keeps coming out.

And the other interesting thing is it's not just on the right, it's also on the left where, where really, really liberal activists view you as some sort of extension of corporate America. And that -- that you're not -- you're not dedicated to bringing down, you're not dedicated to a progressive society. And, of course, my job isn't about to bring about a progressive society.

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My job is to tell people what's going on and to give them context about why and what and, and explain the world.

And I'm not -- I'm not in a position to think about that I could bring about a progressive society or bring the United States back to a conservative society. Those are not things I or other reporters can do. Those – what we're supposed to do is provide information.

So, I think -- I think the hostility towards the press, it's always been there, but I think it’s grown and it's more open, and I think social media, I think social media has given people opportunities to do things akin to journalism, approaching journalism, and even some journalism, but often without any training at all.

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And so, the problem is, is that people are starting to equate opinion with news reporting and they're not the same thing. They're both important, but they're not the same thing. And I think there's more access to the means of publication to getting ideas and stuff out there, and a lot more people doing it. And, in some ways, that's good in the sense that if you don't have a local newspaper in your town, there are ways to hold public official accountable. But you've got -- you've got some folks who think they are doing news reporting and are not. You've got some folks who don't want to do news reporting, but spin, and are getting themselves into the mix.

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And you've got a whole lot of people who are just talking a lot and that kind of makes all of this more complicated.

And this -- the other thing that's grown is the sense that people in politics have that they don't -- that in some, some of them, and to an increasing degree, you know, give off the attitude of, well, I don't need you. I've got Twitter, I've got Facebook, I've got other methods for reaching voters, I don't need you. So, you know, maybe my candidate, maybe I'm not going to be accessible to reporters. I can still win; I don't need to get interviews. There's a little more of that in politics.

And also, also the other thing that's kind of happened is, is that there's more of a tendency on the part of elected officials to want to talk by text and e-mail than there used to be.

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Of course, because way back in the day, there was no text and e-mail. And you might very occasionally have a politician say, well, I'll give you a statement. Here … wait 10 minutes and I'll type something up and give it to you. That was fairly rare, and now you get the equivalent of that, you know, with e-mail. Well, he doesn't have time for an interview, or she doesn't have time for an interview, but can you e-mail me the questions?

You know, why don't you just send me, put your question in a text and I'll answer it that way. Or you call somebody's cellphone and they'll send you a message saying I'm in a meeting, just text me your question and I'll get you something. So, there's a lot more of that kind of communication than there used to be.

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And that allows officials to be more guarded in their comments. Also, unfortunately, they tend to try to sound like Walter Cronkite, when they issue their releases. They don't like ordinary people, they, you know, they're talking like they're writing for a museum or something. Um and then, in addition, they usually add an extra couple of sentences of boilerplate. I usually call it the liturgy.

You know, Sam Brownback, for example, his liturgy was and this is part of Sam Brownback's, "This is part of my plan to make Kansas a better place to live, work, and raise a family." Laura Kelly's liturgy is "and this is part of what I've done to help Kansas recover from the disastrous Brownback tax policies."

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I mean, you get that stuff tacked on the end of sentences and it's like you would not speak that way at a barbecue, so stop.

*[Laughing]*

If I had -- if I have one thing that frustrates me more than anything else is, is people who I know who are witty and funny and, and, and good at answering questions cranking out statements that make them sound like the most tedious history professor you've ever had. And it's like, why? This is not you at all, so, I mean, why are you doing this? But I don't -- I don't think I'm going to change that in my lifetime, so, anyway.

But I get along, I think I get along with most people in politics because what they want -- they'll respect you if you’re tough but fair.

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If they think you're willing to listen with, to them, hear their side, try to get it into print, will consider it, and not closeminded about anything, I think you can have a pretty good relationship with people across the political spectrum.

*Emma Bascom:* So, why did you choose to cover state government instead of national government? And do you think there are any major differences in covering state versus national government?

*John Hanna:* Yeah, there are some huge differences. My decision to cover state government was having exposure to the statehouse, getting a job in Topeka, and then getting married and, and having a child, my daughter. And then deciding I didn't want to move for a variety of financial and personal reasons. You know, I got divorced in 2003 and then, if I, obviously, took another job and moved away, I wouldn't see my daughter, which would crush me.

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I would be a basket case if that happened. And so, it was just a series of life decisions that kept me in Topeka. And, and that's fine, I mean, what I liked when I started was the more manageable scale of state government compared to the federal government.

As complicated as state government and the Legislature can seem, Congress seems a lot more arcane and weird and just different. Now I'm assuming that if I had, as a 23-year-old, gone to Washington and spent my life covering Congress and the presidency and all that, I'm assuming I'd feel differently. I'd be more comfortable with all that. But I think there are a couple of really big differences.

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In state government, you have much more access to people. The elected people – and this is true of Kansas versus even Missouri or, or more populous states like, you know, Pennsylvania or California or, or, whatnot. You just have much more access to people who are elected and their top aides. As a matter of fact, in the Legislature, there aren't really very many top aides. *[Chuckling]* So, I mean, you're dealing directly most of the time with Legislature leaders, some of them you can just call them up. And the one or two that insisted on, you know, you going through a press secretary, that press secretary is very accessible.

The governor's office, I can usually get their attention by just going into the press office and, and speaking with the press secretary; there aren't three or four layers.

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The other thing is, in state government, they don't do a lot of this crap of having on background or off-the-record briefings, where, you know, some high-ranking official will get up and give a briefing, tell you everything you need to know, but you can't use their name. It has to be “according to a high-ranking official who knows the president’s thinking,” garbage like that, that kind of nonsense.

You know, I'm struck by how the *New York Times* recently reported something on the president and coronavirus, and named his chief of staff, Mark Meadows, as the source. And had a paragraph in there that said, you know, this was originally a background briefing meeting that reporters were free to use the information with as attributing it anonymously,

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but Mr. Meadows was seen on video after the president's remarks approaching reporters to tell them, you know, so he could tell them something. So they were, so they were basically like, hey, everybody knows who it is, so we're not going to give him the cloak of anonymity.

And you just – in Washington, it appears to me from afar in the dealings I've had with people in Washington, you just, that they -- there's just much more of that game, and infinite amount more of that game than there ever is in Topeka. And, and as you can probably tell, I just -- I just loathe that kind of nonsense because I don’t think it builds trust in institutions. It doesn't build trust in journalism.

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It's people who, you know, for whatever reasons want to remain cloaked and they want to throw opinions and influence what you're doing, but they don't have the guts to have their names attached to it for whatever reason. And I think it would drive me up the wall if I were a Washington reporter. I know it drives Washington reporters up the wall. But I think I would -- I think I would lose it and be like one of those guys who gets tossed out of the White House for objecting too loudly. I don’t know, maybe not.

But so, that, to me, is the big, the big difference is, is it's much easier to get to people in state government. And then, you know, that's part of the fun of doing it is, is that you're covering politics and, and stuff, but you're getting closer to the real person.

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And, and that's, you know, that's better than having to go through two or three aides to get something that reads like, like a bad term paper. So that's, that's why I'm doing it.

And after awhile -- I was having a beer with a couple of reporters last night and they did ask this question, you know, why did you stay? You know, after awhile you've been doing it long enough and it's like, well, why should I go somewhere else and do the same thing and have to learn new faces and a new system?

But there's also a sense of, I kind of want to see how this turns out in the long run.

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I mean, I think the cool thing is that, I mean, I now have a sense of how Kansas politics has shifted and changed over 30 plus years. I have a perspective that's a little different than even a lot of people in politics. I have the joy of being able to say somebody who's throwing out a proposal, 'you know, this didn't work in 1992, it didn't work in 1997, it didn't work in 2005, what makes you think, what are you doing differently so that it will work now when it didn't work these three other times?" I mean, I have the ability to do that ‘cause I've been around long enough. And I think that's a valuable thing. I think you need -- this is going to sound egotistical, but I think you need people like me who stick around, and you also need people who come through and move on so that people like me get poked constantly and not get complacent.

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I mean that's part of, I think, what has kept me – with some energy is, is that I'm frequently around reporters who are young enough to be my kids and they have all this energy and enthusiasm and they're looking at everything with fresh eyes, and it's the energy and the enthusiasm is catching. I mean, there's a -- I mean, I remember, there are a couple of really good reporters who have been at the Statehouse – Bryan Lowry with McClatchy D.C., Jonathan Shorman with *The Eagle,* and *The Star*. Hunter Woodall who now works with *The* *Daily Beast.* Allie Kite who was here working for us and she went and, and is now the city hall reporter in Kansas City.

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You know, all of them are good, young reporters who give me a lot of hope for the future. I mean, Bryan Lowry came here in 2013 to work for *The Eagle* and he was this big, loud, energetic guy. He, you know, journalism wasn't his first career choice. I think he was an English major and he'd done some teaching in the Bay area in one of those programs where you teach underprivileged youth. And, and he just had a -- and so, he was just … he was like a puppy, just bouncing and full of energy and loving everything he saw, and he did. And everything was a good story and, and every good story was fun to do.

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And wow, this legislator said this crazy thing and gosh, this is a really good story, I can't believe how good a story this is. And, and it's just how can you not be in an office suite with something like that and not come away with more energy and enthusiasm for what you're doing? You can't.

And so, that's, that's the good thing, I feel like I'm grounded in history, but then I'm around all these younger people who keep me younger and fresher. And, and you know, and they'll have good stories and I'll go, "Wow, that's a good story, I wish I'd done it." And, and think about how they did it. And so they learn from me, I learn from them and it's just a lot of fun.

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It makes it a lot more fun and I think that's part of – and, and it’s – part of the fun of sticking around is seeing people come through that -- at the start of their careers and then watch them go on to bigger and better things.

So, I know that's kind of a long-winded answer, but I kind of settled in Topeka. I grew to like the place. I grew to like northeast Kansas. I now feel like I'm more of a Kansan than anything else. And I just, I love the place. I love its, you know, I love the rolling prairie, I love the Flint Hills, you know, Monument Rocks, I love all of it. And it's just -- it's this really strange and interesting and wonderful place.

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And it's not like any other place in the United States, just like every other place in the United States is not like Kansas. And, so, there you go.

*Emma Bascom:* Yeah, absolutely. So, I also, we noticed in our research that you've interviewed some really fascinating figures, so the next couple of questions are going to be specific toward a few of them.

*John Hanna:* Sure.

*Emma Bascom:* Can you tell me what it was like to interview Bill Nye the Science Guy?

*John Hanna:* Oh, that was a lot of fun. His people contacted me and that was during – I just looked at that story the other day because I was looking for an old story – Bill Nye is one mad science guy. Um, yeah, that was when, that was right at the start of kind of this decade-long debate in the State Board of Education over evolution.

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And I got this notice from his press guy who said Bill Nye is – I can't remember the wording, but the sense of it was he was just horrified that Kansas was having this, this debate over evolution, and that's what he talked about. And he was really frustrated because, you know, his point of view was that the State Board of Education was just going to be doing what it was doing; underplaying, you know, devaluing the teaching of evolution in academic standards. His point was it's just going to make kids stupider, that was his point.

And he was just really – yeah, I had seen a couple of episodes of his show because my daughter was really little at the time, and, and it was just kind of cool and weird just because he really is like the guy you used to see on Bill Nye the Science Guy, kind of this really energetic, geeky, scientist-y guy. He really is like that. I mean, and I'm sure he was wearing the bowtie while he was talking to me.

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But it was -- a lot of the more interesting things, people I've talked to, have been because of evolution and that whole weird, wonderful, deep debate. And that just -- he was a lot of fun to talk to and, and very much very passionate about, “We gotta teach kids science, we gotta teach them important concepts, you know, if we're – why are people in charge of education not wanting to actually educate people?” And so that, that really was, that was a lot of fun, yeah.

*Emma Bascom:* Yeah. So next up is Senator Bob Dole.

*John Hanna: [Bob Dole voice]* Bob Dole.

**[Post-production addition:** A couple of people did pretty classic takes on Dole’s prairie inflections, and the one I remember most and probably imitated was Dan Akroyd’s, circa 1988, on “Saturday Night Live.”]

*Emma Bascom: [Giggling]*

*John Hanna:* Bob Dole. I have talked to Bob Dole quite a few times. Here's, here's what I – and all of them were fairly friendly.

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Dole, earlier in his career, had a reputation for being rough and, and antagonistic towards some reporters, including my mentor. But with me he was always, you know, it was always at least polite and friendly. And I remember a couple of things. He wrote, you know, he wrote his biography about “One Soldier's Story.” And so, I remember talking to him about that, and I can't say I have great rapport with him, but it's gotten stronger over the years as I've gotten more established.

And he -- the strangest thing was he called me on the eve of the 2014 election to ask me how I thought it was looking for Pat Roberts 'cause he was concerned because Roberts was in a tough race against the independent Greg Orman.

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And I'm like, wow, Bob Dole’s calling me – not completely out of the blue because I'd been, you know, touching base with his people and, and trying to get him. And then he called me and we talked about the race. And, you know, I said, "Well, you know, it's that," I gave him what I thought the assessment of the race was, which was certainly, Roberts had some advantages being a Republican and Republicans tended to go home.

**[Post-production addition:** Which has been a regular trend in U.S. Senate and sometimes governor’s races in Kansas.]

I didn't know how much that would happen. And he kind of agreed he thought Roberts would pull it out. And so that was an interesting conversation.

And it was interesting to talk to him about him being a soldier and, and that experience. What I like about Bob Dole is there is a tendency when somebody becomes an elder statesman to give him a halo

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and put a warm glow around him and like he's a saint now, OK. It happened with Alf Landon, you know, people treated him like he was a saint. And people do that to Bob Dole. And there'd been a couple of events with Dole when I'm at – where there's very much of that aura of, you know, I'm approaching this statue of Lincoln and I'm not worthy, and that's how people react to Bob Dole now. Because, I mean, he has led this incredible life, and you read about the hardships he went through the war and right after the war; it's a very, very, very inspiring story,

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and a -- and a real story of resilience and, and toughness, whatever you think of his politics. But the great thing about Bob Dole is, is that he's still -- he's still peppery. He's still – I mean, I remember I was at an event and I had asked him something about some policy, I think in the Ukraine that President Obama was doing. And, you know, he basically ripped into it, criticized it pretty strongly, and explained why he thought it was the wrong policy. And I thought that's -- I like that because that was, I mean, here was a guy who was still thinking about policy, and, and willing, you know, not to retreat from the public debate and to offer a forceful opinion.

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And so, it was like he was still – he was still the same Bob Dole he had been 20 years ago, but just, just older. And, and frankly, you know, not as physically vigorous as he had been because, at that point, he, I think he was in his 90s. And, and that's, that's the great thing about Dole is, is that he's still very sharp and still very engaged.

And, and, you know, I'm sure there are lots of people who don't like, for example, his most recent comment about the presidential debate commission and Trump and all that. But I think it's so totally Bob Dole that he's willing to offer a forceful opinion. That's who the guy is.

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And I'm so glad to see that he's still sharp and with it and, and willing to engage. And that's always the sense you got with him was that he was always sharp and engaged and not afraid, not afraid to offer a really blunt opinion about anything. And so that, that was my experience with Dole.

I like to say I've interviewed four presidents for a total of five minutes. And Clinton and Obama were interesting in that you could feel the charisma oozing off of them, the rock star thing, where Obama came to Topeka to speak at a Democratic thing [annual Washington Days convention] in 2006.

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And, I mean, you, when he entered a room, you could feel it. When he spoke to reporters, I mean just the charisma was just flowing out of him like mad. And Clinton had the same thing; Clinton has that really larger-than-life thing. And, the interesting thing was George W. [Bush] had a completely different kind of charisma. It was much -- it felt much more personal with him. More one-on-one, it wasn't, you know -- here was a guy who was good in one-on-one settings, that was the impression I came away with.

And then there was, then there was his father who, you know, was his father, I mean just kind of that WASP-y guy and, and interesting and stuff.

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So, I don’t know, I think the list of questions mentioned Jerry Falwell and, and Fred Phelps.

*Emma Bascom:* Yep, they're up next, *[giggle]* so you can jump right into that if you want.

*John Hanna:* Well, Jerry, you know, Jerry Falwell was interesting because I talked to him at the 2000 convention for about seven or eight minutes because I ran into him just by chance on the floor and he saw that I was from Kansas and he wanted to know what was going to happen in the State Board of Education races because of the whole evolution thing.

 And, of course, he had that really nice Southern accent and I had seen him on television and had -- and kind of, you know, on television he was kind of that caricature of the really aggressive evangelical. But he was really -- he was really very gracious.

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And he was really seeking me out for information and wanting to know what was going on and so that, that was kind of interesting.

And I don’t know, I don’t know what to say about Fred Phelps Sr. I mean, I had some really nice interactions with him, friendly, and I had some really contentious ones. And … the way he ended up was kind of in the end sad, but, I mean, he was a provocateur. And, I mean, it was clear he was seeking attention. And his church’s thing is that they're literally the center of the universe. In God's cosmic creation, they're the center of that.

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They're the one true church on earth. And they're definitely saved and the rest of us are going to hell. And he was not shy about telling you that.

[**Post-production addition:** They have described themselves as essentially God’s elect; the congregation could vote people out and declare they are no longer recipients of God’s grace.]

And I mean he – I asked him pretty tough questions once and he called me a sodomite and kept yelling insults at me as I was walking away from the event I did that at. You know, I've had his family both treat me respectfully and with utter contempt, so it's a really mixed bag. In the end, I think the sense is that he lost control of his church and was kind of ousted right before he died and there's really no explanation as to why, and you're not -- you're not ever going to get one.

[**Post-production addition:** An estranged son, Nate Phelps, told reporters that the senior Phelps had been voted out of his church some months before his death in March 2014, but the church would not discuss it.]

But, you know, he could be funny and smart, but the fact is he enjoyed being mean to people.

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He enjoyed finding somebody's weakness and publicly hitting it over and over and over again to cause pain. And that's just -- that's, you know, and that's something you can feel when, you could feel when you were dealing with him. If he could figure out a way to needle you for something you write, wrote, and stick you, he would do it.

And so, there was always a tension and a little bit of unpleasantness under the surface when you were dealing with him, even if he was gracious. And that was -- there was a day when he sent out scathing faxes about a lot of people every day. Every day.

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You know, and just saying some of the meanest, most bullying stuff about public officials, or even ordinary people.

**[Post-production addition:** For example, he called the late Gov. Joan Finney “dim bulb” in faxes.]

And the fact that he wanted to make a spectacle of soldiers’ funerals, I mean, picking these family's ultimate moment of grief tells you about kind of what his thinking was. I have this moment where they're vulnerable and instead of showing compassion, I'm going to hit them. I'm going to make their lives a little more miserable, and then I'm going to act like that's what God told me to do.

**[Post-production addition:** He, in fact, argued that it was required of him by God, saying in one 2006 interview, "Can you preach the Bible without preaching the hatred of God? The answer is absolutely not.” Also, I’m certainly not a theologian, but there is an Old Testament tradition of harsh prophecies – read the Books of Amos, Micah or Zephaniah, or even Jonathan Edwards’ classic “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”]

You know, and that's just -- you can tell I'm not -- you can tell I'm not a fan of Fred Phelps Sr. I mean, he was in some ways brilliant, some ways not, some ways really mean. But he could be charming when he really wanted to be. But often, he didn't want to be.

**[Post-production addition:** Nor did he or his church profess to care what others thought. One of his daughters told legislators once that if people didn’t like the church’s pickets, “They need to drink a frosty mug of shut-the-hell-up and avert their eyes."]

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*Emma Bascom:* Yeah. So, you also won the Missouri-Kansas Staffer of the Year Award. What was it like to receive that honor not once, but twice?

*John Hanna:* Oh, I don’t know. I mean, I like it because it means -- I mean it was an honor because I work with some really good people in AP, even in just this region. And so, from that standpoint, it was -- it felt really good. And it, you know, it was an acknowledgement that in those years my work stood out in a really good crew. And, and, so I feel like -- I feel like it's an acknowledgement that I haven't gotten stale yet. And, and I also like that idea. But it's a bit, you know, it's a bit humbling.

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*Emma Bascom:* So, what do you see as the biggest moments in Kansas journalism history?

*John Hanna:* Well, the biggest moments in Kansas journalism history. Well, let's see. Well, I would have to say, one of the things, one of the biggest moments in Kansa journalism history is, obviously, early on, you know, obviously, the 1896 editorial from William Allen White, What's the Matter with Kansas. Although White was later embarrassed by its strident tone, it kind of put the idea of the small-town editor on the – as a national figure on a map.

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So that, that was, I think that was a very important moment.

In the 1960s, you had some crusading editors who did a lot of work on making sure that redistricting in Kansas was fair. And, and even to the point of filing lawsuits to make sure that it was fair. So, there is that sense of journalists trying to get out and doing the public good.

I think later '70s, early '80s journalists, probably more the press association working to get open letters and open meetings laws in the state.

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Those were very important. I think one of … there's been a whole trend of over the last 20 years of newspapers coming under more chain ownership than individual ownership. I think those are big moments in Kansas journalism history. I would say the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 because that brought a lot of national reporters to Kansas to see the place but also had everybody here involved in a national story that Kansas was at the center of it. I don’t know if you remember, but Timothy McVeigh and, and Terry Nichols, they were in Kansas, and they bought the materials for the Oklahoma City bomb here.

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And, they stayed in the Junction City area briefly, so that was, that was a huge deal.

I'm thinking in terms of big stories that got a lot of national attention as kind of high points in journalism. I mean, I'm thinking of the 2007 Greensburg tornado, for example, that kind of focused the entire nation on that rural section of Kansas.

Yeah, those are some of the big ones. I'm trying to think, I'm trying to think what else. Those are the big ones. Oh, and the coverage in 1991 of the Summer of Mercy, the big anti-abortion protest. I think those, that was an important moment for Kansas journalism, in particular for *The Wichita Eagle.*

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 *The Eagle* really told that story very well.

And then the other, the other moment was here in the last couple of years, I'm gonna look it up here to see if I can remember the year. I think it was 2016 or 2017, maybe? Maybe a little later. There was a project of stories [Why So Secret, Kansas] called -- where *The Kansas City Star* did a whole series of stories on the lack of transparency in Kansas government. I think it was 2017 [correct].

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And that was a really, really big moment in Kansas journalism as well, I think.

You know, obviously, William Allen White won a Pulitzer in the '20s for his editorials, so that was also an important event,

and I don’t know when somebody decided to have a formal School of Journalism at the University of Kansas, but whenever they formed it, that was also an important event, as well. Because that's -- that college and not, not to downplay K State but I'm a KU grad so I'll tout KU, that doing that has trained a lot, a lot of good journalists over the decades.

So those are my -- those are kind of my big moments in journalism.

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*Emma Bascom:* So, speaking of William Allen White, who do you think were the most influential people in Kansas journalism history?

*John Hanna:* Well, he's probably right at the top of the list. I think it would be hard to find somebody quite as influential as William Allen White. There was also Clyde, the Reeds, Clyde Sr. and Clyde Jr. – they were very influential.

 The Harris family that owned a series of newspapers in Kansas and I think Iowa, they were very important and influential.

 In terms of later, I think, I'm thinking of figures like the Seton family, Ed in Manhattan and Dave in Winfield and Ark City.

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I'm also thinking of Emerson Lynn in Iola, *The Iola Register*, he was a pretty big figure in journalism.

A lesser known one, but a guy who influenced a lot of reporters and editors was John Bremner, who was a professor for years at the University of Kansas, a nationally known expert in language. So, a lot of us who came through that school and learned to love the language learned it because of him.

Who else? I mean, *The Eagle* had this long-time editor named Buzz Merritt; he's also in the Hall of Fame. And of course, I would put my mentor Lew Ferguson somewhere on that list because he was a very important figure in the coverage of Kansas government for nearly three decades

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and, and really shaped a lot of careers, including mine. So, I think those are the people I would put on my list. I'm sure I've forgotten one or two really big ones, but those are the ones that came to mind immediately.

*Emma Bascom:* Do you belong to any other professional news organizations? Which ones and why?

*John Hanna:* Oh, I really, I have, you know, I was on the board of the William Allen White Foundation a long time ago and did that. And, really, really not – and I can't explain why, but … I mean other than -- maybe it's because my church takes up a lot of my time, but no … I've never really been much of a joiner in my life and I can't explain why.

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*Emma Bascom:* Sure. Was there a particular moment early in your career where you sort of realized “I'm a real journalist now?”

*John Hanna:* Let's see, early in my career, I'm a real journalist now. You know, I'm thinking back to the '80s. I'm thinking back to the '80s and, and those years.

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I'm sure there were other moments, but maybe it was – there was this professor at KU named Burdett Loomis, political scientist. And, and I had had him in a couple of classes and he, for years, ran the intern program at the Legislature. And he wrote a book about how legislatures work, and I got a copy somewhere in my library, read it.

 And I was mentioned, and he let me -- he asked me to read the draft of the book before its publication and he mentioned me once or twice in the footnotes. And that was probably when I first – that was like 1989 or 1990 – and I think that may have been the time when I said, "OK, I've arrived. I'm established. I'm a real journalist now."

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I think that might have been it. But, you know, I covered a lot of the 1990 governor's race between Joan Finney and, and Mike Hayden and that was when I really felt I'd started to get a handle on political coverage and wrote some interesting stories, especially about Joan Finney and her history and, and all of that. And so kind of all that year was the year I kind of felt like I was finally a real journalist. And I wasn't on probation, but I was no longer on probation in a mental sense.

*Emma Bascom:* Have you ever considered quitting journalism to do something else at any point?

*John Hanna:* Oh, it depends on, you know, the next thing how seriously, I mean, I never seriously, really seriously considered going into PR.

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I have in the back of my head thought about, you know, what if I, what if I quit this and became a writer: novels, plays, that sort of thing. I mean, that has occurred to me. But when I've had – over the years on and off, when I've had, you know, too much stress, too much work, a change in bosses and it takes a little while to get used to how a new editor or a new bureau chief or, or somebody like that -- and, and you know, you're working through the relationship and there's tension and friction until you figure each other out and figure out how to work best together. I mean, there have been moments when I thought, why am I doing this?

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Here's – I could probably do PR somewhere. And then it's, then, you stop and you think, “Ohh, I'm not built for that.” And I'm not -- I don't think I can. So, I think, other than thinking about and maybe wanting to be a writer outside of journalism, I don’t think I've ever really seriously considered moving on and doing something else.

And certainly not a career in public relations and oh God, certainly not politics. So, I mean … I think I've remained pretty, pretty deeply hard core about being a reporter. And I've never -- I've never really – other than becoming, going from being a newsman to the correspondent, I've never really wanted to be an editor or a manager.

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*Emma Bascom:* So, what significant events or turning points in your personal life occurred during your years as a journalist and did these impact your career at all?

*John Hanna:* I got married and divorced. I was married in 1992 and divorced in 2003 and so, yeah, … there was a midlife crisis right after the divorce, where I grew a ponytail and wore collarless shirts, and worried the hell out of my 8-year-old daughter. Well, she would have been, yeah, she would have been 8 at the time, not 9. She would have turned 9 at the end of the year. And, you know, just kind of a -- a kind of a rough period, where maybe I was a little unfocused in my work.

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My daughter was born in 1994 and I think of all the events in my personal life, I think having a daughter, raising a daughter was the most influential. I think you learn a lot about life, being a parent. You learn a lot about patience. You learn a lot about what's important. You learn about what's important to other people. You come into a lot more and closer contact – that's the word I was searching for. You come into a much closer contact with schools. You see how they operate much more closely, so that's a whole world that you're enmeshed in.

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You’re around people who -- your whole view of culture and what's in the culture and, and the popular media just shifts 180 degrees because you're not talking about Martin Scorsese movies anymore, you're talking about the latest, in my daughter's case, Disney princess movie. So, you're a lot more aware of stuff like, you know, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* and *Pocahontas,* and stuff like that. There's a whole block of movies in the '90s, in the early 2000s that I just completely missed because I was a parent.

And, you know, that's OK, that's OK. I much more, I mean, my daughter, and I have said this before, my daughter made me a better person, much more empathetic.

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But she also made me a better storyteller because when she was little and even later, I told her stories and read stories to her. One of our favorite books, series of books was *A Series of Unfortunate Events*,Lemony Snicket*.* Thirteen volumes in the Baudelaire family, three kids and their horrid adventures through life. They're terribly misfortunate in broadly comic ways. And we loved the books.

And, and I started when she was little, reading them out loud to her just because they're better when they're read out loud. And then, when we got to the end, she was a little older and so she could read the last book or two to me, and that was cool.

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I had a sort of religious revival in the mid-2000s, where I, when I got married [in 1992], I had started going to church again because my wife was interested in that. And it was important for a while and then we kind of fell away. And then in the middle of that decade after my divorce and some other things, you know, I mentioned a boss that I didn't seem to get and she didn't seem to get me. And that kind of brought me back to the church and now I'm really active in church. And that's been an important thing.

I think it's given me a window on -- it's allowed me to meet different kinds of people. It's given me a different cultural window that I think is useful for journalism, I think, in terms of being able to understand blocks of voters to get references.

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And, and to have the same kind of, you know, the same kind of base of knowledge has been very helpful. As I said earlier, it also showed me how difficult it can be, even in -- under good, friendly conditions to bring people along to do a common goal. And that was very important.

So I would say, you know, marriage, divorce, child, and, and church are the big personal things in my life. Oh, well, and the loss of my father in 2015. He died at the age of 81; he'd had dementia and Alzheimer's and … my mother, one of my brothers, we were all in the room when he died.

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And that was just not an experience I'd had before of being around somebody when they actually died. And it was a lot tougher experience because it was my dad. And, but I also think that made me understand grief and loss a lot more. A lot better. It's a lot – when I run into people who have lost loved ones, it's a lot less abstract for me now than it was.

And when I see or even have to cover horrible events, I feel them now more because of that, and it can be uncomfortable because I have this – when, you lose somebody close to you, a parent especially, I think, I think it's even worse with a child. There's something, it never goes away.

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And you, you just learn to accept whatever grief is there and you live with it, but it's still, in my case, it still flares up occasionally. And so, it's most likely to flare up when I'm having to cover some tragic event, but I think that's OK, I think that helps me be a better reporter. I mean, I have a little understanding of what people are going through better than I used to because I've had that experience.

So those are the -- I guess [television therapist] Dr. Phil talks about five major moments in your life or whatever, those are my five.

*Emma Bascom:* This is the end of part three.

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*Nicole Asbury:* This is Nicole Asbury. Today is Oct. 10, 2020. I'm interviewing John Hanna of the Associated Press for the Inside Stories: Oral History of Kansas Journalists Project. This is Part 4. This interview is taking place remotely due to the COVID pandemic. This interview is sponsored by the University of Kansas and the Kansas Press Association.

So, this part is going to focus on gender and obstacles and opportunities in the newsroom. So, the first question is what was the newsroom environment like at the places that you worked, and how did men in the newsroom treat women journalists throughout your career, and how did men outside of the newsroom, based off of what you saw, treat women journalists throughout your career?

*John Hanna:* Well, I mean, I mostly – and I was discussing this earlier, I have mostly worked at the Associated Press, and I almost –

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all of that time have worked in the Topeka bureau. I mean, I did – I did work as an intern way, way, way back in the early-'80s, in the Irving – at the *Irving Daily News* in Irving, Texas. The managing editor [Kathy Williams, I believe] was a woman there, and there were a couple of women in the newsroom, maybe half – in a newsroom of about a half dozen and, in that, what I remember is not thinking one way or the other that women were limited in their ability to advance. The *Parsons Sun*, I worked in the summer of 1985, again as an intern; *Wichita Eagle* in the summer of 1986. I didn't really have any sense because I was just an intern about the prospects for advancement. There was no vibe in either newsroom that women were –

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restricted in their ability to move up and to go places. The Associated Press, as I explained previously, the Topeka bureau was, except for legislative relief staffers, coming in every year for a number of years. The permanent staff was almost exclusively male and that was not a good thing, but we did have, a number of legislative relievers who were women. Sally – she's now Sally Buzbee. She's actually the head editor of news report at the Associated Press. Libby Quaid, who worked for us in Washington. Rochelle Olson, who worked for us in Minnesota and I think is still

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reporting up there. Let's see, who else? Traci Carl, who became our Wichita correspondent later and then a regional editor with us in the Associated Press. And, and then Allison Kite, who went on to work with the – she's the *Kansas City Star* city reporter now.

So – and the news editor in Kansas City in charge of the staff in Kansas and Missouri is Julie Wright and the two other staffers in the Kansas City bureau both are – are veteran women reporters, Heather Hollingsworth and Margaret Stafford. Margaret actually joined the AP a year or two before I did, and Roxana Hegeman, our Wichita correspondent, been there a number of years. And then, three staff – other staffers in

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Missouri, one of them is a woman. That would be Summer Ballentine and I think she's been there for five years.

So there's no – there's no real sense now in the AP that women can't move up or that they face – I'm saying this as a man, and so this is my perspective. I can't tell you what female employees would tell you. I need to preface it that way. But, from my perspective, it does not seem like there are the kind of institutional barriers that maybe there used to be in journalism to women rising in the Associated Press. Now, I think it's – it seems more natural and more obvious that, that is the case now than maybe when I joined 30 years ago, and I'm –

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pretty certain that if we were to look at the Associated Press 50 years ago, it would – it would be a far different story. But I think the Associated Press in particular, and a number of news organizations I've encountered in Kansas, I think the opportunities for women are greater and – and they're treated more seriously as reporters, editors and executives than they – than they probably were even 25 or 30 years ago.

But, you know, you had some examples of publishers in Kansas over the years – Ann Charles in Parsons, Vivian Sadowski in Abilene, Susan Lynn now in Iola. Her father had been in charge of –

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the newspaper there for years before his death. So, I think we're starting to see and have been seeing maybe for a little while women rising to -- running newspapers, being top editors at newspapers, and really, really being some really good reporters at newspapers. I mean, there are a couple of really good *Star* reporters, Judy Lundstrom Thomas and – and, Katie Bernard and Laura Bauer, who are just really great reporters at the *Star*. So, yeah, I think … like any sphere in society, I think women have more opportunities in journalism now than they did, and they're taken more seriously.

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You know, when I – I don't know how well you know Allie Kite, otherwise this story's not gonna make that much sense, but, when I started and – and you had women in or around the AP office, my mentor, Lew Ferguson, would not swear. He absolutely would not swear in front of them. And I have to admit that I still – there's still a little attitude of that in me – which is funny because I have no problem swearing in front of my daughter, and she has – I mean, she has no problem swearing in front of me, and, and Allie, who was our relief staffer in 2017, –

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delightfully was not offended by swearing at all and actually could teach me a couple of creative ways to string phrases together. I raise all this because I think the tendency early in my career was to treat women reporters and journalists as somehow more fragile than male journalists, that you couldn't – you respected them, they were good reporters, they could do the work, but you know, you couldn't loosen up in front of them, that sort of thing. And, of course, there are all kinds of issues about how men and women relate in the workplace, that we're all having to think about and reconsider in the –

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wake of #MeToo and – and, you know, and realize what was never acceptable. And I don't think – again, this is a male perspective, and that – and it's limited. I don't think I saw instances of where -- that I was aware of where women in the AP had to constantly put up with, like, comments about how they were dressing or, you know, comments focused on their appearance or, you know, unacceptable stuff like that, but I also think, early in my career, there was a tendency to be a little standoffish just in terms of –

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just, more careful, like you're dealing with someone who you need – you know, that kind of sexist attitude that women are more sensitive or gonna be more offended by language and –and that sort of thing. I don't know. That's kinda my perspective of – of how things have changed.

And I think women are more accepted as colleagues, as opposed to their male colleagues having to feel like, you know, you have to – the room doesn't go quiet as much when women are around, I guess, their male colleagues as it used to. That's –

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I guess that's what – the sense I'm trying to get at.

*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And I know you kind of touched on this earlier, but would you mind kind of talking more about what were the career advancement options like for women through the tenure of your career so far?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think at the start … what I started to see at the beginning of my career was the sense that women could rise, they could rise to important editing and executive jobs. When I started, it – the notion that you'd have female reporters was not strange. The notion that you'd have female copy editors was not strange. You would have female desk editors.

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And, you know, these were – and they were all good, cracker-jack journalists who would help you shape a story in a really good way.

What I think I saw as my career advanced, I started to see, for example, in the Associated Press, more women being news editors, so, in charge of staffs in a state or now multiple states. There are now, from my perspective, more women in, you know, directing the news report in the AP than ever before. And I think just the sense that –

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women cannot only be reporters and editors, line editors and copy editors, but they can also be the executives running the newspaper itself or the newsroom or, in the case of Sally Buzbee, in charge of the entire news report, and – and that's going to seem natural and right and not unusual or novel.

And, you know, I think there's just – it feels, at least, in the Associated Press and some of the newspaper scenes, it seems like the days of saying “and there's a new editor” and adding “and she's a woman,” I think that second part – I think that's not happening …

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You're getting over the idea that it is or could be something unusual to have a woman in charge of a newsroom; that, you know, they're gonna bring -- they're journalists, and you're thinking of them as executives and leaders and not seeing that as something novel and different or unexpected.

*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And the next question is, you know, based off of what you were able to perceive and gauge, what were the advantages of being a woman journalist throughout your career that you'd notice from your framework?

*John Hanna:* Hmm. I don't – I don't –

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– I'm thinking through. I don't know – I don't know that there were any special advantages to being a woman. And – and again, this is from a male perspective. I don't know that that's – I have to say I don't know that that's an inherent advantage … if you're a female journalist and you're a mother, for example, you've had – or you've had a set of life experiences that a lot of people have had that connect you with other people, but the same is – is true of being a father in a different way.

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I don't buy the idea that women in journalism – there's some way that they think or act differently, inherently, that gives them an advantage or disadvantage. I'm sure there are instances in which, you know, maybe initially, for example, with #MeToo, if there's a woman who's a victim of harassment, abuse or worse, I'm sure there are situations when – where they're more comfortable speaking with a female reporter. But I don't know that to be the case, and – and maybe I shouldn't – and maybe that's not something we should assume, but, um –

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you know, I think some of the possible advantages just might come from having a different life perspective.

I think maybe women see things – I think women journalists may see things that I don't see, just as I think journalists of color may see things that I don't see, that – about, you know, just in terms of being able to pick up on how, for example, people in politics, catching --

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more of how people in politics interact with women and how they treat women and all of that. Things that I may initially miss, they may not. I don't know, and it's kinda hard for me to want to speculate, because I'm, as a reporter, I'm taught to go with what I know and what I've divined from facts. I mean … for example, in talking with Allie about her experiences covering the Legislature, I know legislators tend to treat female reporters differently.

I remember an incident early when Allie was here. This was 2017 –

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and she was in her – she was doing a story on guns and she was interviewing a legislator, and that legislator came up to me later and said, "That new reporter of yours." And I said, "Yeah, Allie." And she said, "Well, she's – she's really aggressive, isn't she?" and I said, "Yeah, and I kinda like it." But I don't think male reporters get that, that notion that she's really aggressive. That doesn't happen to men, you know, and – and Allie has this funny story about this retired legislator, big gun advocate, she was working for the *Capitol Journal* the next year, and he came in and was talkin' to the head of the bureau there, a man about gun issues, and he was, like, looking at her saying, "Hey, you know, you can get a gun and you can get a pink one."

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*[Laughs]* You know? And Allie's – Allie's comment to me was, "Well, what's wrong with black or – or steel?" you know, "I need a pink one 'cause I'm a woman?" So, there is stuff like that, and I don't know that … I can't give you a catalog of whether female reporters in the statehouse, how much harassment they faced or how many comments they get from political figures about their appearance or – or anything like that. I mean, I know there is, in some quarters, a more negative view of women reporters who ask tough questions. You know, it's the same thing that women in politics face if they're suddenly tagged with being ambitious or, you know,

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they're tagged as being strident or – or bitchy because they're willing to ask tough questions and confront people in public, whereas if men did that, nobody would think about it. There is still a little bit of that double standard. I don't think it's exclusive to politics. But I do – I do think that's still out there. I don't think we've – I don't think American society or maybe world society has quite gotten over it. And, you know … my daughter talks about some of those issues with me on a regular basis because she still sometimes encounters them, so I feel like I'm talking around your question because I don't

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have a really good base of personal experience.

*Nicole Asbury:* No, I think you're – you're doing great with your lens and framework of what you were able to perceive, which brings us to the next question of, and you noted this a little bit, but what were kind of – the disadvantages of being a woman journalist throughout your career that you were able to kind of pick up on potentially?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think, early in my career, I think there was more – more of a tendency – I think women reporters faced a lot of being condescended to, and I think that still sometimes goes on, especially when the reporter is young and female. There's a real tendency –

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for people in politics and – and my guess is probably in some newsrooms to be like, oh, you know, this is – I mean, and I mean it to sound as horrible as it does – oh, you don't understand, dear. There is that kind of – that tendency is still out there. I think we've gotten past the point where – well past the point where, you know, women are pigeonholed into being, for example, feature writers instead of investigative writers, or that women can't cover politics and – and in the same way that men can or, you know, probably in the '50s and '60s, there was probably a tendency to have, uh –

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I'm guessing women cover, you know, more feature type subjects and arts and – and for lack of a better way to put it, things that were perceived as softer rather than the police beat.

And, for example, Edna Buchanan at the Miami Herald probably shattered all that by being a really great police reporter down there. And NPR has had some great female reporters covering politics in the Supreme Court. I mentioned at the start Judy Lundstrom Thomas, who's a really, really good investigative journalist, and so I think the idea, it's kind of dissipating that – that, you know, the idea that women can't cover politics or the police beat or something like that perceived as rough and tumble …

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I mean, I'm sure there are still older politicians out there who, you know, kind of expect women to be a little softer and deferential and are kind of taken aback when they get a – when they don't get a softball question. And so, I think that's kind of a disadvantage.

And again, I mean … I'm sure there are instances where women reporters get hit on and, and that's – and that's a disadvantage. I mean, that's – I'm here to talk to you as a journalist to do a job and you're gonna devalue my work and my person in a couple of instances, so I don't know. I mean …

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that's kinda my perspective that there – that women are still fighting stereotypes, still fighting societal forces, you know, still trying to deal with folks who want – trying to fit them into traditional gender roles, old traditional gender roles, that sort of thing.

And, so … it strikes me that that's got to be a disadvantage both in terms of getting information, but also just in terms of the extra energy it takes to put up with it and deal with it and to figure out how to counter it and get past it as an obstacle to your reporting –

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That, you know, I'm struck by a line, and it's not – the observation is not original with her, but in Michelle Obama's memoir, *Becoming*, she talks about how she had this acute sense that as an African American woman, she had to be twice as good to be perceived in the same way as, say, a – a white man. And I think there's still some of that, so I think that's probably the disadvantage is having to fight that and the energy that takes and the stress of that plus the extra effort, that, you know, for example, somebody like me doesn't – you know, that I don't have to deal with that.

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And it's, you know, it's quite unfair that a woman reporter has to deal with it and I don't. And then that is, in some ways, one of my advantages in a competitive environment.

*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And for the next question, what was it like trying to balance home and work during your career?

*John Hanna:* I'm sad to say that I didn't do a very good job of it early in my career, which is why I'm divorced, one of the reasons. There are many reasons, and a divorce is a complicated thing. It's a growing apart of two people who thought they were compatible and then find out they're not and there are conflicts and, um –

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all of that. But I think the work-life balance was one of the key reasons. I still – I still to this day, I don't know how I describe the feeling. I have this really sense of burning regret that, for the first six or seven years of my daughter's life, I was not more present in it. I was a much better father after I got a divorce 'cause that was kind of a wakeup call that she – I mean, we shared custody and she came over to my house two to three times a week and then Sundays, and – and that was kinda the moment when I realized that there wasn't gonna be somebody else in the house to take on those parental duties.

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And so I had to do it and I had to give my full attention to my daughter.

And so, early in my career, I tended to tilt the balance toward work and, you know, things would go late, I would get caught up, I'd be covering a campaign and I'd put my whole heart into it. And when you're married to a person – in my ex-wife's defense, when you're married to a person who's putting their whole heart into their work, you understand that and you understand you're number two, and that probably hurts a lot. And so yeah, I – from that period, I got married in 1992 and divorced in 2003, so I was –

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28 to almost 40, and I don't think I had the work-life balance well. And I know I didn't have – I would love to go back in time to my 28-year-old self the day before the wedding and – and shake me and – and, you know, talk about how the stories you think are so hot circa 2000, 2001, 1995, 2001, nobody's going to remember them in six months or a year or two years. I mean, that's the nature of journalism. It's often described as the rough draft of history. But you are gonna be shaping your infant and toddler and – and preschool daughter.

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You know, you are going to make her more confident or more anxious by how much you're around. And so I think I got a little better at it after the divorce and after, you know, my daughter and I got a lot closer because I spent more time with her and I – in terms of a personal life, it was really focused on her. And – but I still – I'm still struggling with that. I mean, I still – my news editor still has to, more than occasionally, tell me that it's 5 or 5:15 and I need to stop because, I mean, I do love what I do. I do love journalism; I am interested in it. I am interested in what I'm covering and I'm one of those people who likes to get things finished.

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So you know, yeah, I remember during the 2002 campaign I had a lot of late nights, and that was very frustrating and – and, you know, my then-wife, then ex-wife, she would, I remember one incident when she came and sat in my lap and said, "I'm glad to have you home," and I was just like, “That's great, but give me five minutes and I'll finish this.” That does not help a marriage. And, you know, it was just difficult. Journalism – journalism can be a difficult profession to be married in, and so you really – it's like anything, you have to work at it very hard, and I have this real –

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sense that, again, in that kind of 10-, 11-year stretch, I never put as much work into the career-life balance as I should have, and maybe things would have turned out differently, maybe not.

I know my daughter and I are, as I said, we're much closer and we have a really good – I think we have a really good relationship. And we have, I think since about the second grade on, it wasn't terrible before, but I think I was – I seemed more distant to her. And, boy, if there's anything in my life I wish I had back, it was that. And I – it's – it's hard, and actually I think younger reporters by and large are doing a better job of it. I think they're actually demanding a work-life balance more than people of my generation.

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And the funny thing is, you know, people of my generation sometimes complain about that. Who are these young people who are demanding these concessions from their employers? Well, they're a lot smarter than we were. They understand that this is something that's necessary to be effective at work, and this is – when my news editor talks to me about this, that's one of the things she says is, you know, you've got to remember this is a marathon, not a sprint. You can't – you can't burn yourself out and expect to be as effective later on election day when we need you. So, that sorta thing.

And the other thing, the other problem with journalism in general, and this is not the Associated Press so much, but just journalism in general, there's a whole mythos around journalism of – of –

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you know, the late-night call, the off hours meeting with the undercover source, the … when I started in AP, there were stories about John King, who's on CNN. He worked for us in Rhode Island, I think, at one point and Boston, and he got his big break because he scooped everybody on who Michael Dukakis' running mate was gonna be in 1988, right. He was the first one to report that, and he had great sources, and if I'm recalling the story correctly, they called him very late at night and told him, and he could, you know, go with it.

I mean, journalism celebrates people who stay up all hours and screw up their weekends, you know, to get the story or who -- they were on vacation

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when the volcano, you know, the next island over exploded, and instead of getting the hell out of there, they ran to where the fire was or the volcano or whatever. I mean, journalism celebrates that. You know, there's a tornado in your town, you get out and you report on it. And – and so that also makes life-work balance difficult and it's also the sense that, as somebody who covers politics, I have to be up on politics every moment of the day. So even after I get home, I'm supposed to be reading stuff about politics and watching news about politics and talking about politics with my neighbors to see what they're thinking, and it's – it's like, you're not supposed to ever be off.

And cellphones make that harder. Social media makes that harder 'cause it's –

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the people I know who are in theater, talk about it as being on all the time, that if you go, for example, you're part of a touring company and you go to a town, you're in your role all the time. You go out to a restaurant, you have to act a certain way because you're in a town and everybody's watching you. Oh, they're the actors in the touring company. And – and television anchors or television -- people who do television shows locally, they're in the same boat. They go to the grocery store, they have to be that person that they are on television. You know, if you're the host, the friendly upbeat host of the local morning show, you have to be that friendly upbeat host in every interaction you have

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out in public because the minute you're tired and cranky and get a little short with a sales clerk, the sales clerk is gonna tell all his or her friends, and, you know, well, that's the way they are on TV, but really – and you know, the ratings slide.

And that's a burden, and sometimes it feels like, as a reporter, you're kind of expected to be a reporter at all hours. And all the time every day, and – and in politics what's interesting is people don't think anything of picking up – now it's texting; it used to be the phone – and just calling you as if you're gonna drop everything in your life or what you're doing and just jump on this because I've given you this tip. I know it's 8 on a Saturday night, but I'm giving you something hot. And that is – and if it's a good tip, you know,

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there's a big piece of you that's like, I don't wanna wait until Monday. Who else might know about this? And so that's the constant pressure of the work-life balance.

But the thing is, is if you have – if you don't have any balance, you get tired, you miss things … some of the things that make you a better reporter are having the experiences that millions of other people have, and the lessons that they get through things like being a spouse or being a parent or being a member of a church or joining a book club or all of those things of life that lots of people do.

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Doing those things make you a better journalist because it connects you to the experience of other people, and I have said this previously, I said in the last chapter, if you're a parent, you suddenly are gonna have a whole closer contact to the school system that non-parents don't have. You're suddenly aware of how kids interact, how teachers and kids interact, how school works, the things that schools do that parents love, the things that schools do that annoy the hell out of parents, why suddenly, you know, what's in the classroom, the textbook, why people can get so upset about that. I mean, I remember distinctly when my daughter was about to enter kindergarten and,

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you know, her mother toured a bunch of schools and I toured – we toured a private school – couple of private schools, actually, and the nearest elementary school, which was frankly a bit of a mess, and – and some other options in Topeka. And I remember this really hard sense of her coming back from the tour of the nearest elementary school and saying, "Well, it wouldn't be awful." You know, it's not ideal, but it wouldn't be awful. And I just remember looking at her and saying, "This is my daughter. We've got one shot at this. I don't want ‘wouldn't be awful.’ That's not what I want." And eventually she ended up – the school was called Williams.

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It's a magnet school that Topeka set up because the original *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was decided in 1954. In the following year, the U.S. Supreme Court said famously, you have to desegregate schools with all deliberate speed, and nobody knew what that meant. Well, in Topeka, it turned out, it meant they were gonna try neighborhood schools and that, over 25 years or so, the [result] was that they were as segregated as ever.

**[Post-production addition:** That ultimately was, as I recall, the federal appeals court’s conclusion; the district had disputed it.]

And so there was – there was another iteration of a Brown lawsuit. It took seven or eight years to win its way to federal court and then through the appeals court, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the result was to rebalance the diversity of the schools, they built –

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three magnet schools, and one of them was the Williams Fine Arts and Science magnet school. It's, like, literally a two-minute walk from the Brown v. Board historic site.

And it was a wonderful school. It had a desert lab, it had great teachers, and so we got our daughter into the kindergarten there, and – and everything worked out. But it's that kind of thing you live that kind of stresses a parent that gets you to understand the bond between parents and children, the desire for a good education, the forces that shape education, the forces that make educational decisions of any kind controversial, you know, you run into – you run into different

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parents, your whole cultural frame of reference shifts because now as – you're not talking about, as I said in the previous episode, you're not talking about Martin Scorsese movies. You're talking about, in my daughter's case, first it was Barney. I don't think Barney's around anymore, but any parent of the early- to mid-'90s could tell you about Barney and debate which kids were singing their hearts out and which ones were faking it. And God help us, we watched the 10th anniversary special just to see how the kids grew up. You know, *Sesame Street*. How many hours of *Sesame Street* did I watch? Which was great 'cause I watched it as a little kid myself, you know, *Between the Lions*, that's one, which was really cool. You know, *Beauty and the Beast*, my daughter's favorite, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King*, uh –

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*Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *Hercules*, all those Disney movies, and *The Wizard of Oz*. If you are a parent, *The Wizard of Oz* is not the movie to hate. My daughter when she was, like, 7, she watched that movie every day for three months until the tape broke. Literally. And that's the other thing you learn, that kids get fixated on one particular piece of things and watch it over and over and over again.

But the point is, all those life lessons make you a better reporter. Going to church and being active in a church gives you a different cultural frame of reference that connects you to various different people and suddenly, you know, my church is -- in the Christianity spectrum is more on –

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on the mainstream to left side of things. But I still have a common language with conservative evangelicals because at least I get the references because I'm going to church and so we have a little bit of a common language, that sort of thing. And, of course, I served as president of my church council, and boy, if you wanna learn about politics, lead a small group. Lead a community organization. Lead a church, lead a civic club. That will teach you a lot about politics. Not the partisan kind, necessarily, but just how difficult it is to get even likeminded people together to do a common goal.

So those are all – this is a longwinded way of saying that's –

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why the life-work balance is so much more important. And, you know, frankly, if you take a vacation and go to national parks, you see different parts of the country and you understand hiking and nature a little more and – and that's some insight maybe into why environmentalists care so much about it, that sort of thing. And the more things you're kinda doin' out in the regular life, the more, you know, if you're interacting with your neighbor and your neighbor is having trouble with medical bills, for example, then you – I think you get more insight into the issues in health care than listening to the political debates because suddenly it's real to you. And I think that's helpful. The more life experiences you have and the more you can see other people's experiences as real and can feel just a little bit of it, I think that's very helpful.

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*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And the next question is, kind of bouncing back a little bit, but how do you view the state of women in journalism today in the present sense?

*John Hanna:* I think women are visible and an important part of journalism, but I also think there are not enough in charge of it yet. That while I see a lot of -- see a lot of women in management and editing positions, particularly my own organization, I'm not – I don't think that's true entirely across the industry, and I think we need more of them.

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But I do think – I do think there are a lot of really good women reporters out there, with major news organizations, and I think they're advancing and doing really great work. I just, you know, it's also like journalists of color, we just – we need more. We've got more than we had, and they're more visible, but we need more of that, and – and I'm hoping that keeps going and –

*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And then, for the next question here, you're still a working reporter today. How do you think journalism has changed since

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you've been a part of it, and what has been the most difficult change?

*John Hanna:* Well, there have been a lot of changes … I don't think you can ignore the fact that it's – particularly for newspapers, but all across the media landscape, the financial environment has gotten a lot tougher. There are – you know, the local newspaper is not the money machine it used to be, if it ever was. In some places it was. You could do it well and – and make a significant amount of money. But you know, now we're starting to raise questions about news deserts in not tiny places, and there – I mean, I know, for example, the AP has not been immune from these pressures.

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I mean, I know when I started, this bureau in Topeka has three full-time staffers, and we would bring in somebody for legislative relief staff temporarily, and it was a full-time job, but it was 20, 21, 22 weeks and there was when I started just the perception of more money, more staff, and I think this important job has been narrowed in terms of the reporters doing it into fewer and fewer hands.

In addition to that, one of the – even in the 1990s, Molly Ivins, the great columnist, made a point of discussing at one of the great, in that time, she argued, unwritten stories was the concentration of –

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newspaper ownership in fewer and fewer hands. There were more chains and fewer family owners. And I think we're seeing a lot of discussion right now about the idea that, you know, major newspapers may ultimately be owned and accountable to hedge funds, and that the same economic forces that people have decried across corporate America, the focus on the short-term dividend and the profit as opposed to the long game, and all of that may be affecting the industry. And so that's a really significant change.

The sense that we're living – I think we're now living with the sense that we are never going to have enough resources and people to do everything that we wanna do.

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And the choices for coverage and what we're doing get tougher and have gotten a lot tougher, and we really have to think about what a core mission is in a way that we didn't have to think about 20 or even 30 years ago. So that's the first thing. This is a time of scarcity, financially, and – it's because the industry is in transition from paper to digital, for example, or a big TV station to, you know, digital, from everything to digital. So that's – that's part of it.

The second thing is the world has a lot more noise in it, a lot more background static –

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and that's because of the proliferation of 24-7 television cable networks, that's because of social media, you know, TikTok, Instagram, of course Facebook and – and Twitter, especially Twitter. You just have a lot more noise that fewer people have to sort through. And, you know, when I started, the notion that, for example, somebody 100 miles away would be saying stuff about what's going on in your locality and driving public opinion to a degree that people were getting stirred up in that moment, not tomorrow, not a week from now, not three weeks from now, but in that moment, that was just not a concept.

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The notion of something going viral and hundreds, thousands, even millions of people commenting and creating a furor, that was not a thing. You just – you didn't have it. I mean, maybe you would have somebody – I mean, you had random instances of, for example, somebody giving a speech and saying something, well, let's take an example. You know, Barry Goldwater's speech to the '64 convention where, I think the line was “extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice,” and there was a corresponding – and he made a couple of other really –

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stark statements that really got people in politics going and slowly over time, it ended up in the famous Daisy ad that Lyndon Johnson aired once, I think, to kinda paint Goldwater in a certain way, and make him look possibly far less thoughtful, arguably, than he actually was.

But – or you had, for example, Edmund Muskie appearing to cry outside the Manchester Union Leader in 1972, being perceived instantly as weak and having to drop out of the presidential race. And of course, everybody has the example of Watergate.

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But that's magnified now, you know, that's much more magnified now, and it involves very many more people and it unfolds much more quickly than it used to. And, you know, you can – so the sense of it is – is that you've got social media as this force that can both connect you to people, give you a window into what some people are thinking, tell you about what groups are out there, but then also it can – it seems at times that there's a negative and destructive side to it. And the one thing that it's been doing for journalism is that it's been speeding it up and making it more intense.

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And in the last chapter, I had a pretty extended discussion about how that has happened, so that just – generally the thinking is other than just the biggest stories, you know, Michael Jackson dying, Tiger Woods and his problems – those are the two. I don't know why they stick with me, but they do. But most other big – seemingly big stories, generally the idea is you have two days because something else is gonna come along and – and catch everybody's attention. So, if you're gonna do really good, in-depth journalism and do a really complete storytelling, you now have two days as opposed to when I started, if it was a really big story, you might have a week.

And – and I have to admit, I don't like that. I don't. But I mean, it's –

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you know, it's – it's not liking the car replacing the horse-drawn carriages, you know, in 1910. It’s – each new technology solves a problem and creates the next one. And so the thing that has made us able to connect more quickly and more – and across more distance with each other has also created far more noise and makes it difficult to sort out, the noise, and to – and to figure out what's, you know, what's important and true. And now it's starting to – it has, I think, for a little while, the primacy of video, I think people are starting to question that. I mean, in terms of the definitive –

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answer to anything being video, and somebody, for example, speaking on video. I think we're coming to the understanding that videos can be faked, that they – and even if they're not faked, it often depends on how much video you're seeing and from what angle it's been shot. And so those are – those are other things.

And those were all considerations, but the thing was, when I started in my career, it seemed like there was the control of the video and who produced it, there were gatekeepers, you know, in that classic term because not everybody – if they had access to video, they didn't have instant access to publish, basically. And now you have not only the technology to produce video, but a way of publishing it. And so that makes things much more crowded, things move faster –

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and – and it's also changed the function of journalists from, you know, transcribing things and transcribing speeches and votes and all of that to putting them in a broader context and explaining the why and the how as opposed to just this happened. And – and that has been – in some ways, that's been, you know, an adjustment because it means you have to think about stories differently and in terms of telling people accurately what was going on because people now have – the good thing is people now have access and more documents, more records, more bits and pieces of information that they didn't have as much access to before.

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You don't, you know, you wanna find what's in a bill in the Legislature, it's easier to find the text of the bill than it used to be. I mean, when I started, you literally had to come down to the statehouse, go to the bill room and geta paper copy. And, you know, if you – if you were out in, you know, Goodland or Colby, you had to call somebody and get them to mail it to you, OK. It was not like – you couldn't just go online and pull it up and look at it. And that is a good change. I mean, it's much easier to get court records now than it used to be. It's much easier to get property tax records than it used to be. You know, all of that is much easier. But, um –

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there is also a lot more noise out there, and that makes sifting through it harder because you've also got to do it faster.

So, I mean, maybe, maybe all these kids who've grown up playing video games will be able to do that much better than somebody of my generation. I mean, I think I do a pretty good job, but, you know, it can be pretty difficult to do that, and that is the biggest change. I mean, the reliance on computer technology, I mean, when I – I didn't get my first personal computer until I – out of college. I mean –

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I mean, I had a typewriter and all that, but I didn't own a personal computer until I was outta college and, at the University Daily Kansan, you know, they had this – it was called Microtech, and it was white letters on greenish-black screens and, I'm sure it was a monster system with, you know, 100K of memory and absolutely no – I mean, you had to initialize it every day or else bad things would happen and, and you could look at every – there was no privacy. You could look at everybody's work, and if you knew the right three-letter code to write in, top of a form, and if you kicked the cord of the computer, you lost everything. And we had these things called ghost files where bits and pieces of past stories would just –

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rattle around in the system.

Very primitive, and the first AP system I used was, we had this dehumidifier. We were upstairs on the first floor of the statehouse, and it's an office that now a legislator has, and we had this big vent. We had a big – we had a dehumidifier on it to cut down on the static electricity because if you touched the machine and there was static electricity, it would blink and – and you'd lose the whole story and you'd have to start over. There was no autosave because autosave, you know, was the next technology beyond. And it was like green screen, darker green letters, and we only had two big computers and we had – and you couldn't use 'em – you couldn't save stuff both at once. You had a key, there was a key that you flipped one way –

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or the other and – and my first laptop was a Radio Shack TRS80. We used to call it a Trash 80. And big keyboard, little screen, and the screen was, like – like 3 inches by 5 inches and the letters were probably 15 point. So, you could, like, get three lines of text at a time on this thing, and you had these big rubber couplers that you would find a pay phone and stick the couplers into and hope, you know, and it made the dial-up noise while you sent it, and the personal computer I had – they had the 5.25-inch floppy disks. They called them floppy disks 'cause they – you could wiggle 'em and they flopped. And you had 128K of program and 128K of memory, 'cause that was all you were ever gonna need.

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So, that was kind of – it was just – when I started, we were just one step above typing stories on typewriters on carbon paper and handing them to – what I'm told, this [was] before I got there, they had a special weird kind of AP machine, a coding machine where you would print your stories out on – on, like, type them out and hand them to somebody who would code them and it would go in a certain place and get on the wire eventually after it was edited. And then that changed with the computer system, and – but you know, there was no Excel. There were no spreadsheets or stuff like that, and certainly no internet.

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I mean, if you needed a court document in – if you needed a federal court document, and you had to go down to the courthouse and get it, and you might have to wait three days to get it. And if you needed something from a far-flung county, far away from Topeka, you'd have to wait on the mail. And you just – it was tougher. It was a lot tougher. And now there's whole libraries of stuff online and – and, you know, all of that. So that's – you know, archives of press releases. If you wanna go find out what Pat Roberts said about [Supreme Court nominee] Merrick Garland and compare it to what he's saying about [Supreme Court nominee] Amy Coney Barrett, both releases are online on his web site. And –you can talk to him about that because you have the record.

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So, I mean, there's a lot – it's a lot more electronic than – and a lot less file cabinet than it was. And, in some ways, it's a lot better, but again, you've got all the social media stuff that you – you have to sort through, and you – one of the key questions in journalism, I think in recent years – it was never not a key question, but it's even more compelling now – is how does this person know? When you're reading stuff on Twitter and you see something that looks interesting and you're gonna try to find this person, the first question you have to ask is how does this person know? Were they in the room? Did they talk to the person they're writing about? Are they there? Did they help form the policy? Or are they, um –

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somebody not in any of those positions who's just expressing an opinion? Which is different, maybe valuable, maybe helpful, but it's different.

So those are – those are some of the things. Also, I, you know, being a grumpy old guy, I like to think that – I like to say that people today have shorter attention spans. My joke is I blame that damn MTV. When I was in my 20s, that was what – MTV was the – that was back when MTV actually played lots of music videos and people had a tendency to blame it for everything, you know, the decline in – decline of American culture, violence, loosening of morals, and how bad music once all at once. It was all MTV's fault.

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Well, I guess we're 35 years beyond that. Anyway, I'm sorry, I kind of rambled again.

*Nicole Asbury:* No, you're all good. This question actually focuses on – it's a little bit of a pivot but focuses on covering COVID-19 since you've been a large part of that in the statehouse. So how challenging, I mean, has it been still, to shift to being kind of online and, you know, what kind of has this experience been like covering a global pandemic?

*John Hanna:* Well, it's interesting because the Associated Press is really, in some ways amongst news organizations, is really well positioned because it's in a position to take information globally around the world from various places and pull it all together into a whole.

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And the actual – one of the actual issues that the Associated Press faces is that it's got so much material that there's no way we can throw everything at readers every day because it's – it's so overwhelming and – and so that's one of the things you have to think about as you're covering COVID, just this overwhelming issue of, OK, I've gotta find some meaning in this and – and give somebody a story that they will read as opposed to being the 21st thing that they don't read because they don't have time.

The second thing is –

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it is challenging to go online completely. I am old-fashioned. I like face-to-face interviews. I like them because you can see what's in people's eyes, you can see how they react, all of that kind of thing. And – and you can hear tone of voice and inflection. Although, Malcolm Gladwell just wrote a book about how bad humans are, generally, at judging each other in face-to-face stuff. But I like that personal interaction, and that's much harder to do. It does feel harder to track people down because you're doing it online. It's … I've never liked the idea of mixing home – now, before maybe I was not –

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good with it, but over time I've wanted to mix home and office less and – and so working from home is a bit of a challenge for me.

And it's just – it's just, for example, the idea that if I've written a story, for example, about Rooks County and, you know, a doctor out there who watched the pandemic move closer to her, and at one point over Easter as she has been spending weeks telling people this is serious, we need to deal with it, at one point right before Easter, I think – it was Good Friday I think, actually. She thought her husband had gotten it. He's also a doctor. And so, you know, he had to isolate at a rental house they had and – and all of this, and they have four kids, all very young, and it was very scary to the kids –

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you know, when is Daddy coming home, that sorta thing. And, but that's a story I had to do entirely by phone. And so, I was calling people and – and talking to them by phone and you just – you can do that. You have to ask a lot more detailed questions because you're not there to physically see and you kinda have to ask people to send you photos and -- both for the visual and all that, so it's a – you know, it's a different environment and all of that. And so, it feels like it's a little harder to get information out of people because you can't go to their offices and stand there and talk to them and – and be a physical presence.

And the other thing is – and I think the question was headed in this direction –

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I mean, this has become a politically charged pandemic, where a view of how the United States is doing with it is often very much colored by your politics. And – and so, you know, that's the other thing you have to keep in mind, in the back of your head. You know, one of the stories in Kansas, and I – it's a story elsewhere -- is that these numbers of cases that we've been seeing in September and now October, sometimes are the highest we've seen of the entire pandemic, the state when I say we. And, you know, the question is why is that? And you know –

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the public health answer is, well, people aren't using masks. And so, there's this whole discussion over masks and why people aren't wearing masks, and that implicates questions of individual freedom, and, you know, is – people are feeling – some folks are feeling pretty upset or – about mask mandates, and so those all add to – are another layer of stuff to cover on top of just the public health of it. I mean, this is – obviously this is a bigger and more serious pandemic than I remember West Nile virus in, like, 2000, 2001, 2002, and there wasn't a debate over West Nile virus was a serious thing to get. It was. I mean, it was not –

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as deadly as this, but – and there's a debate over how deadly this is, how you look at that.

And – it's more difficult because the debate – part of the politically charged debate is, you know, is there, as some candidates would argue, a big ray of hope and we see – the U.S. is gonna see the light at the end of the tunnel, a vaccine is coming fairly quickly. Is that the proper perspective or is it – is the more pessimistic one the more proper perspective? Is that closer to what's happening and will happen, or is it some mix of those or neither? And what do these numbers mean?

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Lots of cases, and – and, you know, deaths that accompany them, but the deaths in Kansas seem to be remaining 1.1, 1.2 percent of the reported cases, so what does that mean? And just the uncertainty – still, the scientific uncertainty of not how – so much how it spreads but – or the efficacy of masks, but, you know, how far apart do people have to be in social distancing? Six feet? Is it greater than 6 feet? If you've got an air conditioner, can that pick it up and spread it? How – why does it ruin the lungs of some people and not others? All of those open questions.

And it is difficult because –

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it's that old adage – when I was in journalism school, we had a reporter, I think with the *New York Times,* come and talk to us and tell us the great – great principle of covering a riot. You can't write your story if you're in jail or dead. Stay safe. And – and that applies here. I'm not gonna be much use to my news organization if I get this virus and I end up in the hospital. I'm not gonna be able to cover it if – if that's what happens, so that that extra layer of – I've gotta stay safe, but not only that, but I have to keep my brother who lives with me safe, because if he gets it, I get it, and – and so that just adds a whole extra – whole extra layer to this.

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I want to talk to the governor, but I certainly don't want to get within 6 feet of her, you know. I need to be wearing a mask when I do. I don't want to be wandering into the middle of an unmasked crowd maybe, but is that making – as a journalist, is that making a political statement? Some of the people you talk to, if you're wearing a mask, they view it as a political statement. You just – you know, you have to understand that, as you're writing about it, and it makes it more difficult, because you're – I mean, my job is not to stop. I'm not a public health official. My job is not to stop and lecture somebody, why aren't you wearing a mask? On the other hand, you know, I don't wanna put myself in a situation where I might catch the coronavirus.

And I don't – it is the struggle – it is the same struggle we've –

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had – and I say we, journalists – had in Kansas covering the evolution debate. It's the same struggle journalists have worldwide covering climate change. It's the same struggle political reporters have covering the notion of election fraud. All of those subjects have some political dimension. All of those subjects have some frame that is influenced by partisan politics. And – and, you know, for example, election fraud. There is not evidence in modern America of rampant election fraud. There just isn't. It is – by all the studies we've seen, it's generally fairly rare, not zero, but not – in the context of how –

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many votes are cast, not huge. Yet, in the public debate about elections, there continues to be this discussion of election fraud. So, you're stuck – stuck or you're in the position of dealing with it, but – but having to also deal with its base of fact, the lack of evidence of fraud, OK. And so that's something you have to deal with.

On climate change, you have a political end of the debate that, you know, about manmade climate change and what to do about it, but you have a generally broad, not completely unanimous, but pretty overwhelming scientific consensus that human activity is causing climate change. It's a compelling –

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issue, and it's gonna have serious consequences if it's not addressed. And, you know – there's plenty of literature out there that it may already be too late, that the more catastrophic changes, some of them, the globe is going to see. But then on the other hand, there are all these political and – and economic questions that come into it that imply it, and they shape people's views of the science, whatever the science says. So that's another tough one.

And coronavirus has kind of gotten to be in that same boat because not only does it talk about medicine and health and the American health system and how robust it is and preparation and arguments about who was prepared and who wasn't, and all of –

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those things that are part of journalists' accountability. There also is at bottom an argument about how serious it is, and there, you know, there are people in my extended family who believe this is a hoax. A few of them are online suggesting that it will be over as soon as the election is over. And – and so how do you report on it – the issue is reporting on that political element while staying true to what the science is, of course, in an environment where the virus is still being studied.

And so, you know, it's – the job is to tell people what's going on with coronavirus –

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and how many cases there are, why there are that many cases, how it's being spread here, there, actually everywhere in Kansas, what does it mean, all of that, and, you know, there's a pretty debate over does a statewide mandate work, more than a series of local decisions based on local conditions? That's – that's a pretty robust debate right now, and, one that deserves – that is getting attention and will continue to get attention, even as you're reporting on the numbers and where the cases are,

and explaining to people, for example, that the governor –

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of Missouri [Mike Parson], contracted the coronavirus, he and the first lady did. They – I think they're recovered now. And you know, it didn't change – it's not changed his approach. And the job is to explain why that is, what his thinking is, what he experienced, what other people who agree with him have experienced about that – that has – has led him to the place where he's concluded he's still on the right track, as opposed to his opponent in a governor's race who doesn't and what experiences she has that tell her something differently. Because that's information that voters and residents of that state need to evaluate who they're gonna vote for and why and all that. And, you know, the trick is –

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is you've got to – you've got to accurately represent the science, but you also actually accurately got to represent what public officials, candidates, others, people are saying and why they're saying it and what their thinking is and – and, you know, what data they're citing to come to the conclusions they do.

So that's – that is all part of it, and you're doing it as a journalist, as you're trying to keep up on as much science as you can and learn as much about the virus as you can and understand where your state, your locality, everything fits in the broader, even global context. And, you know, the one thing you learn working for the Associated Press is that your state's problems, for the most part, are not unique.

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So anyway, but yeah, just – it just feels like it adds an extra layer of – it adds an extra wall you have to climb to get good information and get it out to people – you're having to do all this work remotely. Wall is probably too – too strong a word, but it just feels like it's an extra thing you have to do and think about and, you know, I mean, you're conducting a phone interview and the neighbor decides to mow the lawn. I mean, it's stupid stuff like that. If you're a radio person, you're getting good audio and all of a sudden somebody starts up a –

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lawnmower or the ambulance goes by and ruins your tape and you have to do it again. Or you have to ask somebody to repeat themselves. Or your neighbor, being a very helpful person, remembers to drop by the tool he borrowed or is willing to let you borrow and – and knocks on the door in the middle of your interview. That sorta thing. This kinda stuff – or you know, the toddler wanders through the Zoom meeting or the dog barks. That kinda thing, all those funny, weird, strange things that – that happen that just throw you off.

*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And then the next question is, you know, how have you handled the current environment of fake news accusation from figures in government, and how do you navigate that as a professional?

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*John Hanna:* You know, that's – that's a tough one. I have – throughout my career, more lately than ever, I have not been shy about simply saying to somebody, "That's not true." You know, somebody throws out a statistic, I'm in a news conference, somebody throws – a government official throws out a statistic, I've gotten less reluctant to say, "That's not true. The actual statistic is X," if I have the statistic. And – or it's more typical for a government official to throw out a statistic that's countered by another statistic, and so you say, "Well, what about this other statistic?" You know, and then – then maybe you get a conversation started. But –

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if I get somebody calling what I'm writing fake news, I'm gonna – I think the best thing to do is to pull them aside afterwards and say, "What do you mean it's fake news?" I mean, you have to try not to be too confrontational about it, but it's like, well, what do you mean fake news? What – what was fake? What was – I mean, you're alleging that – you're alleging either that I made it up or something's wrong in the story. What's factually wrong? What – what are you saying is factually wrong about that story?

You know, if your argument is I shouldn't have reported it, it's fake, you know, in the sense that it's not really news. The old thing political figures used to say to you as a reporter is, "Oh, it must have been a really slow news day for you to do that –

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that story. It's not really a story, is it?" And, you just have – in that case, it's a difference of opinion over what's important and why you're telling the story, and you might – if the person is a valued source, you might have a conversation about, well, here's the thinking. This deals with this important issue and blah, blah, and you – but if they're meaning – if the argument is you made it up, I wanna know if – when somebody says fake news, I wanna know whether they mean they're just claiming I made it up and they're just gonna pretend the story doesn't exist, which is one thing, everybody's prerogative, or whether they're saying I got something wrong in the story. 'Cause if they saying I got something wrong in the story, I need to know about that, right? I need to fix it.

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I need to correct it. If I said something cost $40 million and it's not $40 million but, I don't know, $25 million or $55 million, I want to know that. And I want to understand why the number in my story isn't the number they're citing and which one is the correct number and why. I want to know all that and I want to be upfront and correct it for readers if there's something wrong.

And that's hard for journalists. That's – actually it's hard for anybody to want to correct something, but if somebody is alleging I got facts wrong, then I – you know, I want an honest conversation about what the facts that are supposed to be wrong are, because that's a matter for me to discuss with an editor about –

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how to respond and all of that. But too often I think fake news is just kind of a shorthand dismissal, and – and I don't know – if I'm talking to a voter and he says, "Well, you're just part of the fake news media," I mean, there's really – there's not – I'm not gonna argue. I'm not gonna get into a confrontation. I'm gonna say, "Well, I – OK, you feel that way, but let me ask my question unless you don't want to talk to me." Sometimes it's a defense by ordinary people who don't want to talk to you. That's fine. That's their privilege. They don't want to talk to you– they're not compelled to. But sometimes –

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it's – sometimes it seems like it's a dismissal of the importance of what you're written about. OK, you don't think that story was important enough to be written about. I think there are reasons why it is, and maybe we can talk about it, maybe we can't.

But if somebody – if it's on social media, I'm not gonna respond. Even if it's a source on social media, if it's a persistent enough comment, I may call that source up and say, OK, you're saying this on social media; why are you saying this? But I'm not gonna get on Twitter and argue with 'em on Twitter, 'cause that's just a black hole and it – we're in an environment where you don't

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say anything, you don't put anything in an e-mail, you don't put anything on social media that you wouldn't want on a billboard. Right? I mean, and that – in some sense, for reporters, that's always been true. When you're dealing with the public, when you're dealing with sources, that's always been, to some degree, true. It's just more intense than it used to be.

I mean, I have to stop and think about anything I post on Facebook, even on my personal page. You know, it's why on my personal page, I don't discuss politics. I don't respond to people who get on there and – unless they're asking for a piece of information that I can –

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give straightforward and neutrally, which I can't remember the last time I did that. But, you know, if somebody starts getting on my Facebook page and touting a candidate or tearing down a candidate, I'm not gonna respond to that. And generally on my personal page, people don't do that anyway. Because I think my job is to inform people about why things are happening and to put things in the context of broader movements. It's not to – it is not to give people opinions –

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about newsmakers. It's not to make assessments of which policy is best, but to explain to them why the policy is being debated and what the implications are and why debates are being framed in a certain way. It's not useful to readers for me to layer in opinions that are other than those – opinions. I mean, I layer in plenty of opinions from other people on all sides of the debate, of course, in the quotes and the mode, but it doesn't inform people necessarily, to have any statement in the story that smacks of, I think –

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and – there are plenty of other places for them to get commentary, anyway.

So, that's what makes the fake news thing so difficult because the one thing that's true about my work, even people who might have problems with it should understand is I'm not making it up. I'm not. I'm not making up the quotes, I'm not making up the incidents, I'm not making up, you know, I'm not making stuff up. I'm not pulling it out of the air and putting it in a wire story. I mean, not that the Associated Press would even let me

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in an instant get close to that. So, I'm assuming whoever says fake news understands that going in, that I'm not just making it up. So, when that phrase is used and it's directed at me, I wanna know what it means. And – and sometimes you get an answer that essentially says, well, you know, I'm just sayin' it. I mean, that kind of answer where you come to understand they don't really mean it, but they think it plays with the crowd, that sorta thing. I don't know.

I will say I don't –

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It's not like a constant thing for me, where it's directed at me, so I don't know. I mean, it's one of the more interesting conundrums now at this stage in my career is how do you deal with it because, yeah, I mean, we're not. No journalist is just making stuff up. I mean, OK, I'm sure now that I've said that, I'm sure – I can hunt for one or two examples of people who managed to get into journalism and create things, but, for the most part, almost entirely, we don't make it up. And so when you get that, you have to kind of wonder what they're talking about.

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I don't – sometimes it means they think you're selecting the wrong topics or taking the wrong frame for a story or highlighting things that aren't that important or you've got flaws in the story or any of that, but the phrase just seems like, you know, you're making it up, so anyway.

*Nicole Asbury:* And, one of the next questions is, if you could change one thing about journalism today, what would it be?

*John Hanna:* Let's see. What would it be? Well, I think if I could change one thing about journalism, you just wave a magic wand and fix something, I would make it a lot more financially stable.

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I would wave a wand and get us to the other side of the digital divide where the industry has figured out how this is gonna work in an online environment and it – the journalism as a whole, organizations across the board are financially healthy enough and prosperous enough that they can start hiring more people back. That's what I would do. So –

*Nicole Asbury:* And the next kind of topic area that we have here is newsroom socialization and the conception of success. And so, our first question for the section is how did you gain confidence in your ability to be a journalist and work in the media industry?

*John Hanna:* I just had to keep doing it over and over again. As I have said in a previous iteration, I had –

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a great mentor in Lew Ferguson, and he was a great teacher. I've worked with great people in the Associated Press, but it's just – it just is doing the work and doing good stories and getting it finished and over and over and over again. It's – the thing about 10,000 hours of practice making you proficient, that sort of thing.

So, I mean, just at some point, I felt like I was a good working reporter and had confidence in my abilities, and it was just doing the work over and over again, and having a lot of people in and around talking about what I was and helping me and support.

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*Nicole Asbury:* And then, what kind of journalism awards did you win throughout your career and, you know, I recognize that you're still working as well, but, you know, what impact has that had on you so far?

*John Hanna:* Well, you know, when I was younger, I was incredibly jealous of my colleagues who won awards. Locally, AP Kansas and Missouri, I've been the Staffer of the Year twice, and now I'm in the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame. But in terms of individual awards for stories, I actually have not entered very many contests over the course of my career, and I may have won a few small Kansas City SPJ awards, and I did have a story around 2000-2001, a major story about the child welfare system and the –

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a family caught up in it. I did have that recognized by the AP as one of the 20 best stories written by AP that year. But, in terms of, like, the big award from KU or big Kansas Press Association awards, I can't think of the last time I entered and certainly, of course, not a Pulitzer. And that's fine. I just – the importance of those kind of awards, to me, have kind of diminished over the years. And, and it's nice to see colleagues who are friends get, like, for example –

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be finalists for the Pulitzer or get the George K. Polk Award or – or something like that. But I've never had very many individual awards and – other than, you know, my not really paying much attention and getting entries in and spending a lot of time on that, I can't explain it.

I just – maybe I just got to the point where, oh, you know, working with good people and knowing that a story is good and then being a father –

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and also having your parents tell you they're proud of you, I think that's really – I mean, I think that's all the validation I need. That's not to say that, for example, journalists doing fabulously important work that wins the Pulitzer, that's what they're seeking. I don't really think that, but, I don't know. I'm just – I saw that question on the list and – and I just thought, well, that's really interesting 'cause I can't really describe myself as – in the traditional sense, as award-winning because I've never really – at some point I just stopped entering competitions and contests and all of that. And, of course, with the Pulitzers, and rightly so, the Associated Press steps back and looks at –

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its work and decides what photos and journalism and all that to submit, and that's not something I would just do on my own … And so – it's just not a big part.

I mean, I do look at people who win awards and look at what they win awards for, and that usually gets me to thinking, but I mean, I have – I will say I have a couple of times won a weekly award that AP does for the best state story across the country. I have won that a couple of times, and that's gratifying and it makes me wanna do more. And they roll out a –

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an internal memo every week that talks about who won and why and what they did, and that's enormously helpful to think about stories and to say, OK, well, they did that. What kinda story have I got? But, yeah, it's not been a big part of my life.

*Nicole Asbury:* And how would you define a "successful career" in journalism?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think a successful career in journalism is consistently writing interesting stories that inform the general public and help them make decisions. A good, successful career in journalism is you're telling a significant number of –

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people on a regular basis, things they didn't know and are glad to know now that they know them. And – I think a successful career doing what I'm doing is consistently explaining to people the context in which state government decisions are being made and – and giving them the information so that they can make decisions about how they want their state government to be run.

And I realize that's a very hard thing to measure. There's nobody out there saying, you know, we'll say at the end of my career when I retire, hey, John Hanna, you did this exactly 1,545 times.The only person who did that more was Bryan Lowry with McClatchy, and he had three more of these times than you did.

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Nobody – nobody compiles statistics like that for journalists like they do for sports, and that's kinda the frustrating thing, right. With baseball, I mean, you know. You know who the greatest homerun hitter of all time is, you know, 'cause that person's at the top of the list, has the most homeruns. And you can argue about whether the next guy woulda done better had he, you know, all of that. But the fact is you have statistics. We don't really have that, but I just – I feel like that's what a successful career is, is telling people – giving people interesting stories that they're glad they've read them and have found them useful after it’s been done. And so –

*Nicole Asbury:* And what qualities do you kind of think are the most important ones for career advancement in journalism?

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*John Hanna:* Curiosity. You have to be curious about everything. You have to find – you have to be able to find the interesting story in everything, because, you know, an arc of a career has -- there are different arcs of different careers, and so, for example, if you're a young reporter and you're starting off as in the old days most young reporters did, on the obit desk or the – as a night cops reporter, you've gotta be curious about what you're writing about and you've got to want to find the good story in everything.

Bob Green, the columnist, the Florida columnist – I think *Miami Herald* – writes a story about his first published story about how –

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he was a kid, teenager literally doing obituaries. And he came across, you know, kind of a routine obituary except for the cause of death, and the cause of death was a guy who had stored his golf balls out in the garage, and it was cold and they froze. And he wanted to warm them up, so that they would fly farther when he could get back on the golf course. So he puts a bunch of golf balls in the oven and heats them up. And he opens the oven and they fly out and hit him and that's how he dies. And so he's an obit writer, and that was his first published story about how this guy died of flying golf balls because he heated them in the oven. And what struck me about that is – is how –

*[1:57:00]*

he could have just written a standard obituary with a line about how the guy died, but he was curious about the details and he went after them and wrote a story and then that's the start of his journalism career. And reporters have got to have that curiosity and interest in everything. That's the key – one of the key things for advancement in journalism.

Another one is persistence. It's a deal where, metaphorically, you're gonna get smacked in the face a lot by people who don't want to give you information, and instead of running away and – and burying your head, you have to want to – you have to be willing to get smacked again and to keep trying, so that – curiosity, persistence. You have to be a good reader. You have to wanna read a lot of stuff, a lot of different stuff.

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You have to want to keep learning because you're gonna have to pick up a lot of new subjects and learn things quickly and in detail. And I think you have to realize – the other thing that's important is you realize that journalism is collaborative, that it's not all about a single reporter standing tall against the world, that you're gonna be working with other reporters and other editors and, and they're going to be looking at what you do and offering suggestions and raising questions and you have to be open to that. So, I think those are the things that are important in journalism. And, of course, you know, of course, you want to get a good education at a good college and all that, and it helps if you –

*[1:59:00]*

know people in key places, you meet people, and all that, but you really – you just have to be curious, you have to be able to find the interesting story, you have to be persistent, and you have to want to collaborate with other people. Those are the key things, I think.

*Nicole Asbury:* And then, what are your thoughts on the state of journalism today from both a national and state perspective?

*John Hanna:* Well, I would see the appetite for good information is as strong as ever, if not stronger. I think there are – the technology, the social media platforms, all that have the potential to make it – to make it easier to get information to people more quickly, in more depth, um –

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with more links to raw data, raw documents, all of that. Those are all the good things. The bad things are the financial state of the industry, that it seems like the industry is under a lot and a lot of financial stress for whatever reason, and I'm not an expert on any of that, so I couldn't tell you whether it's the shift from paper to digital, whether it's corporate ownership versus an individual ownership, certain kinds of ownership, whether it's newspaper chains ran up too much debt and then, you know, before the economy changed or whether Walmart has killed all local advertising. I can't tell you any of that stuff because I don't know.

I mean, I have a sense that all of those things are factors somewhere in the mix, but the --

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financial state of journalism seems pretty tough right now. I mean, I know the *New York Times* seems to be doing pretty well, and – and maybe the *Washington Post*, and some other big organizations. I've read some commentary that it's possible that the United States is moving toward a model where there are a bunch of big national papers with – and news organizations with a broad reach and then, you know, it's much tougher for others. But I do worry about loss of local coverage. I do worry about the financial problems of newspapers like the *Star* or the *Wichita Eagle*, and being pressed and – and losing staff. And I do worry about news deserts because I think that's troubling going forward.

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I think we want to have robust news organizations everywhere, and in cities large and small, to inform people and to hold public officials accountable. I do, and I just worry about how much financial stress there is.

*Nicole Asbury:* And, you know, what do you think the mission of the media should be today and, you know, what is exactly the newspaper's role in democracy?

*John Hanna:* Well, I think the role – I think the media role today is to keep people informed. I think the way you keep people informed is a little different than it used to be. I think what you're doing is you're giving people links to raw information, that they can get electronically, reminding them where they are, and –

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you're helping people make some sense of what's happening, why it's happening, the context in which it's happening, the broader national and even global trends at work, and the things that are happening. So, I think it's still giving people good stories they can use and that keep them informed, just as I said, a shift more toward the context and the why than journalism used to be known for. I think in a democracy, part of our function is fact checking. I think part of our function is discussing – allowing the candidates to discuss issues and explaining the context in which they're discussing them, and –

*[2:04:00]*

monitoring what government does so that it's held accountable. So, those are the big roles, I think. I think a robust news media is vital for democracy. I think when you get to a situation where most or all of the information is coming only from the government, you've lost. You've lost a republic.

*Nicole Asbury:* Right. And then, you know, what do you see kind of being the future for media and how long do you think newspapers will kind of be around?

*John Hanna:* You know, I go back and forth on that second question. I think the future of media is clearly digital, for a number of reasons. I think that's just the way – I mean, I think that's just the way people are –

*[2:05:00]*

consuming news right now and are going to consume it into the future. I mean, I could see thin electronic, portable electronic devices that are as small as a book, you know, like my tablet at home. You know, Bill Gates 10 years ago was predicting a pen-sized something that you would open up and you'd read news on it. I think cellphones have pretty much taken on that role.

I don't see – I don't see a robust future for paper except as a niche product. I have a hard time seeing that. I have a hard time seeing that in 20 years that – that –

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all but the biggest newspapers will be around as newspapers. I think there are a number of reasons for that. And – and please, I am not an expert. This is just me guessing based on what I'm seeing now, but, I mean, part of it is gonna be cost, the cost of presses and ink, the cost of paper, all of that. Part of it is gonna be cost. Part of it is gonna be the limitations of those things, the limitations of paper, space on paper, especially when you can get news faster, more complete, more in-depth online. I think that's the problem paper is facing.

And I think part of it is actually might – may be environmental –

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and, you know, cutting down all those trees to make paper and – the whatever waste and environmental stuff that goes with making paper and collecting it and recycling it and all that. I mean, I think it's that deal – it's a deal of technology shift and, you know, then 50 years from now, there will be something different that will phase out digital and will go some other direction. I won't be around to see it, but I do think the idea of a newspaper, a news organization, an electronic version of the paper, a collection of trained people in a building, collecting, gathering, talking to people, I think that will still be around.

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I just – I'm skeptical that the actual broadsheet or tabloid printed thing will still be around. And, you know, that – that bothers me more than a little bit. I'm a freak about hardcover books, and I know in this collection of hundreds of books that I've got at home, I know that, in theory, it would be much more convenient for me and I could store them all electronically somewhere and not take up so much space, but I just like books.

So there is something about a newspaper, the tactile feel of it, the –the ripple of the page as you open it, the stunning importance of seeing a story cover two full pages. So, I get that, but I just –

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I don't know, I just don't see that being around – might disappear before I retire. It might stick around a little while longer, but I don't think my daughter and her grandchildren will be reading physical paper. My daughter already isn't. She doesn't. She reads her stuff online. And, actually, that's how I'm reading newspapers now is mostly online, and I'm – like I said, I'm a book guy. So, I'm the guy in the newsroom that ruins the printer because I have to print out anything more than four pages online. So, I like – in theory, I like paper, but I'm doing a lot online now and I just – I can't see that it won't go that way. So –

*Nicole Asbury:* And what advice do you have for people who are interested in going into political reporting?

*[2:10:00]*

*John Hanna:* A bunch. Get as broad an education as you can within a journalism context. Read a lot about politics and read a lot about history. Those are two very important subjects. Of course, you should read about economics and everything, but those are some very important subjects. Read good political reporting. Read good long-form political journalism. I'm thinking, of course, the classic *All the President's Men*; I'm thinking Robert Caro's bio – multi-part biography of Lyndon Johnson or Robert Moses, the great New York builder – public official builder, his great biography of him.

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Both of those were a lot of reporting.

And the other thing is, join a church or a civic organization and get involved and learn how it operates and try to lead it if you can because that will give you a really good education in the practical politics of getting people to move toward a common goal, and you will learn what that requires without having to do something partisan and political in a candidate sense. You know –

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just those kinds of things will give you insight into how people who have to make collective decisions, the struggles they face, you know. In addition, being a parent helps in the sense that that gives you a whole new feel for life and, the complexity of life and what's important to people and – and that sort of thing. It just a whole new base of knowledge, you know, and it will also help you understand why politics is important in the long run because then you'll –– the thing is – when you become a parent, you're forced to think about –

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the future of the country and the great discussions about what that looks like. And even if you're not going to take sides officially, publicly in those debates, you still come in contact with them and – and that's helpful knowledge to have.

*Nicole Asbury:* What would you want your media – what do you want your media outlet to be known for?

*John Hanna:* I want the Associated Press to be known as a news organization that gave people essential information in compelling stories and in a fair way, that gave them a comprehensive look at why things –

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happened and what people were thinking as they were happening. That's what I would like my news organization to be known for.

*Nicole Asbury:* And then this is our last question: How do you want to be remembered?

*John Hanna:* How do I wanna be remembered? I want to be remembered as a reporter who told compelling stories that helped readers understand the politics of their state so that they could take the actions they wanted to take. I'd like to be remembered as somebody who was thoughtful and fair, aggressive and – aggressive, but not –

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belligerent, and tough and skeptical without being cynical and mean. And I'd also like to be remembered as somebody who helped shape young journalists and left the world with a really good person as a daughter. I guess that's too much to try to squeeze onto a tombstone, but I'll probably be cremated anyway.

*Nicole Asbury:* Well, with that, that concludes Part 4 in our series of interviews with John Hanna from the Associated Press for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists Project.

*[End of Audio]*

Appendix

<https://kspress.com/ferguson-lew>

**Ferguson, Lew**



Lew Ferguson spent most of his 42-year journalism career directing news coverage of Kansas government and politics for The Associated Press. As statehouse correspondent in Topeka for 29 years, he was a reporter, editor and supervisor who trained some 50 young writers for AP and member newspapers.

Lewis LeRoy “Lew” Ferguson was born Jan. 9, 1934, on a farm in rural Kay County, Okla., that his grandfather, John S. Ferguson, claimed in the Cherokee Strip land rush of 1893. Both sets of his grandparents came to Oklahoma from Kansas.

He attended the University of Oklahoma on McMahon Foundation scholarships, earning a bachelor’s degree in 1956 and a master’s degree in 1964, both in journalism. He was named OU’s outstanding graduate of 1956 by Sigma Delta Chi, the professional journalism society. He also was named a distinguished alumnus of OU’s Herbert School of Journalism (now the Gaylord College) in 1996.

Lew returned to Ponca City, after graduate school and a stint in the Army as an officer commissioned out of OU’s ROTC, to work two years (1958-60) as sports and wire editor of his hometown Ponca City News. In June 1958 he married Sue Thomson, an OU graduate and Ponca City native. They observed their 50th anniversary in 2008.

He joined the AP in Oklahoma City in June 1960, then was sent to Sioux Falls, S.D., as his first permanent duty station. He covered the 1961 session of the South Dakota Legislature, piquing his interest in government and political reporting.

Ferguson transferred in 1962 to AP’s Minneapolis bureau to become its sports writer. In 1968, he was named the bureau’s first fulltime sports writer. After covering the baseball Twins, pro football Vikings and University of Minnesota sports for seven years, Ferguson transferred in October 1968 to the Kansas City bureau as Big 8 Conference sports editor. He was on AP’s coverage teams for the 1965, 1980 and 1985 World Series and the 1970 Super Bowl.

Declining a transfer to AP’s New York sports staff, Ferguson chose to accept appointment as correspondent in charge of AP’s Kansas Statehouse bureau in June 1970. He spent nearly three decades directing AP coverage of the Legislature, state government and courts, including 29 legislative sessions, six governors, 16 election cycles and nine national political conventions, five Republican and four Democratic.

He received the Kansas City Star’s first Fred Moen award as outstanding AP staffer in Kansas and Missouri in 1992, and was recipient of the Kansas Supreme Court’s prestigious Justice Award in 1993 for his coverage of the Kansas courts, the only working reporter ever so honored.

Ferguson retired June 30, 1999. In retirement he served a four-year term on the Kansas Board of Regents (2001-05) as an appointee of then-Gov. Bill Graves and two years on the Washburn University Board of Regents. He also wrote a biography of the late U.S. District Judge Tom VanBebber for the federal courts.

Ferguson was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 2009.

Lew and his wife, Sue, a reading teacher for 21 years in Topeka, moved back to their native Ponca City in 2005 after having lived 37 years in Kansas. They are parents of Dr. Diane M. Ferguson, an internist practicing medicine in Torrance, Calif., and Dr. John M. “Mike” Ferguson, a professor of organic chemistry at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. Diane is a graduate of the KU Medical School. They are grandparents of Abby and Todd Ferguson and Helena DuGard.

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# Sally Buzbee named Associated Press executive editor

Nov. 17, 2016

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NEW YORK (AP) — Sally Buzbee, a veteran journalist with deep experience leading both international and U.S. news coverage, has been named executive editor and senior vice president of The Associated Press.

Buzbee's appointment is effective Jan. 1. She will oversee a global news operation that includes journalists working in more than 260 locations in 106 countries to deliver text, video and photo coverage.

Washington Bureau Chief Sally Buzbee is named AP Senior Vice President and Executive Editor, effective Jan. 1, 2017. (AP Photo)

"The AP's mission of strong, impartial, fact-based journalism has never been more important," Buzbee said. "My colleagues are the most talented and committed journalists in the world, rededicating themselves to that mission each day. It is a privilege to be a part of this team as we dive into the future."

Buzbee replaces Kathleen Carroll, AP's top editor since 2002, who announced her plans to leave the job earlier this year.

Buzbee has led the AP's Washington bureau for the past six years, responsible for guiding coverage of national politics and foreign affairs.

She previously spent five years as the AP's Middle East editor, based in Cairo, overseeing coverage of the Iraq war and other stories in one of the globe's most challenging regions for newsgathering.

"Sally's leadership and extensive history with the AP make her the perfect candidate to take the helm as executive editor," said AP President and CEO Gary Pruitt. "Sally's focused vision will guide our news content in all formats well into the future."

Buzbee, originally from Olathe, Kansas, joined the AP in 1988 as a reporter in Topeka. She moved to San Diego as the news agency's correspondent before relocating to the Washington bureau in 1995. Buzbee reported on education and politics in Washington, and was eventually promoted to assistant chief of bureau, responsible for overseeing coverage of foreign affairs and national security.

In 2004, Buzbee was named AP's Middle East editor, in charge of news reporting, staffing and logistics for a region covering 16 countries. In addition to Iraq, she led coverage of the conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah, the Darfur crisis and the growth of terrorist cells in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and elsewhere.

In early 2010, she was promoted to deputy managing editor in charge of building out AP's Nerve Center, a hub created at the agency's New York headquarters to work with regional and department leaders around the world to ensure comprehensive coverage. Later that year, she was named chief of the Washington bureau, where she continued efforts to accelerate delivery of news for readers on mobile and social platforms.

In Washington, Buzbee oversaw coverage of the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections, the White House, Congress, the Pentagon and the bureau's polling and investigative teams.

Buzbee earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Kansas and a Master of Business Administration from Georgetown University.