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*Nicholas Egea:* This is Nicholas Egea. Today is Oct. 5, 2020. I’m interviewing Tom Throne for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists Project. This is part one. 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, we’re just going to go ahead and start off with kind of like your background. So, what and where were you born?

*Tom Throne:* I was born Dec. 22, 1949, in – well, at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And, who were your parents, and what did they do for a living?

*Tom Throne:* My mother Marcella was a housewife, and she was a native Kansan born and raised in Newton. And she met my dad, who was

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at the time a corporal in the Army during World War II, and my mother was a lieutenant and was a nurse and they -- though it was illegal, they started seeing each other because officers couldn’t date enlisted people.

But after the war, my dad stayed with the Army, who put him through his undergraduate work at the University of Iowa. And then he got his doctor in medicine from the University of Kansas in 1948 and stayed in the Army until 1971. So we traveled, crossing out of states and had three years in Europe in the early ‘60s. And my dad also had a one-year unaccompanied -

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tour to Korea.

So, we got a fairly broad-based education. We lived in San Francisco, Denver, Washington D.C., Bad Kreuznach, Germany;

[**Post-production addition:** My dad was the commander of the 14th Field Hospital in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, which is 30 minutes from Mainz, Germany. We were stationed there from August 1960 to June 1963.]

San Antonio for a year, Indianapolis for four, including the one year my dad was in Korea. And he finished his Army tour in San Antonio, again, as deputy commander of the hospital there in Brooke Army Medical Center, and he was a colonel in the Army when he retired and moved to Kansas City and went to work at Research Hospital. [Research Medical Center]

*Nicholas Egea:* Wow, that, um – you must have seen a lot growing up.

*Tom Throne:* Ah, I had. I did. I don’t remember a lot up until I got to D.C. when I was in first grade. But you know, I do remember bits of San Francisco and some – some -

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things in Denver, but after – when we got to D.C. onwards, it was -- it was pretty interesting. Yeah, particularly Germany was interesting because we were there when the Berlin Wall went up and the Cuban Missile Crisis was taking place and all the military personnel were on full alert. And we were there when John Glenn circled the moon or circled the earth. And back in those days, that was big stuff.

**[Post-production addition:** Was it hard moving around?

Using the cliché -- It Is What It Is -- our moves were what we knew were coming. They were hard because generally the friends you made during your time at each duty station you would never see again. The only exception was high school, where I still maintain contact with a couple of people. When I talk with my wife, Pam, who lived in the same town, Washington, KS, her entire life, we talk about all the things she did in that one town and how everyone knew each other.

My tradeoff is that I lived in San Francisco and Denver, of which I remember little, Washington, D.C., San Antonio, Texas (twice), and Indianapolis, Ind., where I went to high school. And our traveling prepared me well for my adult life, and thankfully, my wife adapted, as we moved around Kansas for my work. We've met and maintain friendships in Junction City, McPherson and Leavenworth, in Kansas, and Maryville, Mo. A quick story -- we travel occasionally with friends from Leavenworth. We always seem to run into someone we know. As we drove into Sheridan, Wyo., my friend Scott said. "Well, I bet you don't know anyone here." I told him probably not. When just then, the county clerk from McPherson County and her husband walked across the street. We had a nice talk -- their son lives there. My friend just laughed and shook his head. So there are tradeoffs. I would have loved to have had a hometown, but I wouldn't trade my life experiences for anything.]

*Nicholas Egea:* And, and how old were you while you were living in Germany?

*Tom Throne:* Ah, I was – ah, let’s see, 10, 11, 12. I was in 5th, 6th, 7th grade.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And what were the largest influences that your parents and your – and your upbringing had on your life?

*Tom Throne:* Well, my mom played a major role

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in my life because my dad was gone quite a bit even though he was stationed, you know, where we were when he was in charge of field hospitals and medical centers and stuff like that as an Army physician -- during Vietnam in particular -- he was gone quite a bit.

So [like] most military families, the mom is the bulwark of the family. And so, I think both my parents provided a strong ethical background: do the right thing, be honest, you know. And frankly, that’s part of the military stuff, too.

They – back then – I can’t speak to it now, but back when my dad was in -- your attitude and how you conducted yourself directly -- respect –

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went back to your parents. So if you were a troublemaker, your dad generally knew about it, and that you were expected to be taken care of so that you weren’t a problem.

And that’s not to say that people didn’t get in trouble because they did, but that sense of responsibility that you reflect back on your family was established in my early years, and, and I think that that continued through my adult life.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay, thank you. And were there, um – do you have any brothers or sisters?

*Tom Throne:* I have two sisters who are both – well, I can’t speak to what they do now, but one is a retired school administrator and the other one teaches at Shawnee Mission Northwest.

[**Post-production addition:** My sister, Carol LeVar, was an administrator in Kansas City, KS and Olathe school districts. She is the middle child of the three of us. My younger sister is Beth Jantsch, who taught government and history at Shawnee Mission Northwest.]

*Nicholas Egea:* And were there any other, any other family,

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extended family or immediate family that worked, worked within the journalism industry?

*Tom Throne:* No. I was the first and only one.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And, and what was that like being the first one in your family to work in the industry?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I should go back and say that I was originally a physical therapy major at KU. But I didn’t have the grades to get into the program because of the – you know, they only admitted 25 people at the time and only four slots were available for men, so if you weren’t one of those four, you weren’t getting in.

And so in the middle of my junior year, I switched over to journalism because I needed a degree so I wouldn’t get drafted and having been involved in

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photography on the newspaper and yearbook in high school that was a natural draw for me because I could get that done in short order.

[**Post-production addition:** Can you tell me a little bit more about being in your newspaper and yearbook in high school? Some memories from those experiences?

When we lived in Germany, there was a photo darkroom at the Teen Center at the Bad Kreuznach Army Base. So during my fifth through seventh grades, I shot pics and then developed the film and made prints in the dark room. It was a great learning experience. So after a year in San Antonio, where my dad went to school for hospital administration, we moved to Fort Benjamin Harrison outside Indianapolis. When I enrolled at Lawrence Central High School, the counselor, Mr. Montgomery, asked me what my hobbies were. I told him I like photography and he set me up with the yearbook and paper advisers. I was enrolled in journalism classes for four years. I worked on the newspaper and yearbook all four years as a staff photographer and head photographer, my senior year. Our yearbook was an award-winning product.]

And I was able to make that switch [from physical therapy to journalism] though I didn’t graduate in May. I graduated -- I finished my degree in August of ’72 and then immediately went to work. I was, however, in November of ’72 called up for my physical because I was graduating late and the draft board didn’t like that. And so I took my physical and Nixon declared the moratorium on the draft and I did not – I sat out my 90 days and was classified 1H. [not subject to processing for induction]

And so, unbeknownst to me until after I finished school in May – well, when I finished spring of ’72, I went and saw my draft board to -

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find out what their plans were and that’s when I found out I was 1H. But I still went ahead and went to summer school, got the eight hours that I needed to graduate, and then I went to work in Junction City, Kansas.

My roommate and I were both photographers during summer school breaks. Greg Sorber was his name. And there were two photojournalist openings. One was in Leavenworth and one was in Junction City. And so Greg and I flipped a coin that he won, and he took an interview at Leavenworth and I did Junction City, so that’s where I ended up.

My dad’s feelings on my career in journalism initially weren’t great because he didn’t like the salary I was getting when I got out. He said, “You know, you went to school four years and that’s all you’re going to make.” And I said, “But I’m happy.” And I was a pretty good photojournalist and -

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I didn’t really – I stuck with that for about four and a half years and then got promoted over to the news side and did reporting and became assistant managing editor and then a managing editor of Junction City before I left in December of 1980. So from ’72 to ’80, I was in Junction City working various positions there.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And what, what drew you to becoming a photographer and practicing like visual storytelling?

*Tom Throne:* Yeah. Well, basically I knew what I was doing behind a camera because of my experiences in high school. And so for me, that was a more natural fit than going into the writing side because I could get it done faster to keep the draft board off my tail. And, but I liked -

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taking pictures so that worked real good, which is why, Nicholas, I’m having trouble finding pictures of me in the newsroom because I never shot pictures of myself.

So, but, I liked being behind the camera. You know, at the time I was a -- fairly shy would probably be a good word. I wasn’t overly outgoing, and it pushed me to get out and, pushed myself to do the things that I wasn’t comfortable with doing, like going to police crime scenes and stuff like that.

And I won some awards both at KU and through the Associated Press Photo Contest. And so, I was pretty happy with that, too.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And what was your experience like -

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winning those awards?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I take contests with a grain of salt in some respects because it’s -- having judged a number of these, it’s one man’s view or one person’s view at a particular spot in time and how they feel, and if they’re rushing through the judging and stuff like that. So I always thought, if I win I win and if I don’t, I don’t and be happy with the – what you get.

Now there are other awards that I’ve won if you want me to talk about those that are to be fairly significant. You know, there – there’s, um – look at my wall here. There are four awards that I received that I’m pretty excited about. First was – would be being named to the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame in 2016,

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and that’s voted by your peers in the industry. And so I’m really so pleased to be amongst a lot of my friends that are also in the Hall, some of them which were my mentors.

I was very active in community activities in 1988. I was named a Boyd Community Service Award to the Kansas Press Association for my work inside the community of the boards that I’d served on, and for the activities I did when I worked in McPherson, Kansas.

And then I also won the Mildred Clodfelter Award for Volunteer Service to the KU Alumni Association because I worked for almost 30 years on the Kansas Honors Program as a site chairman or a site coordinator and I – and I felt pretty honored about that.

But one of the ones that really -

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hit me pretty close was the Golden Scroll Award from the high school journalism class in Maryville, Missouri, in 1983 where I was named an honorary member of their chapter because of my involvement with them when they worked on their newspaper through The Maryville Daily Forum.

And to me, I liked that one a lot because I was recognized for my work with youth in promoting newspapers and writing and, and teaching them the skills involved with journalism more on a practical basis than a classroom basis.

*Nicholas Egea:* Interesting. Thank you. And so going back to your childhood and growing up, what were – what were your family’s expectations for you while you were growing up?

*Tom Throne:*

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My expectations from my parents were probably a lot higher than I performed. I can’t say that I was a great student, but I was a good learner and I picked stuff up quickly. The – I don’t think my dad expected me to follow in his footsteps, though I would have liked to have been a physical therapist.

And, and, over the years, I always say, “Well, you know, if I could go back and do things over again, I probably would have gone to nursing school after not getting into physical therapy.” But I had a great career in journalism and it worked pretty well for me.

You know, I was in the newsroom for 20 years and I was a publisher for 20 years, so I can’t complain. I had a really great career and the only thing I miss in it right now -- because I don’t miss deadlines --

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is I’d sure liked to write a couple of editorials every once in a while.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And, so looking at the kind of, like, the media environment, in general, I guess in the broad sense, what was – what was the media environment like when you were growing up?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I – my first trip to a newspaper [was] when I was 8 years old and my dad was stationed in Washington, D.C., and we lived in Silver Spring and my Cub troop – Cub Scout troop went to the newspaper there. And I don’t know if that’s where I got infected by ink, but the walking through that plant and seeing how they worked that – the letterpress operation was pretty cool and that kind of stuck in my mind.

So when I was in high – you know, I shot pictures. Particularly when we lived in Germany we -

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had access to a photo studio and stuff like that. And so we would – we would go down and shoot pictures, and I would go down and develop them and do the printing and stuff like that so, so I got a good background in that.

And then, and while we lived in Germany – we got Stars and Stripes, which I read pretty much every day. But my folks also got the Newton Kansan, and I would look at that and see what was going on in my mom’s hometown. And so we always looked forward to that paper coming in, you know, because it was always a month late because it was shipped over by boat. And -- and you might [get] two or three in one day, but we always looked through it to see what was happening.

And I’ve always -

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read newspapers. I continue to read them though our paper here in Northwest Arkansas is digital six days a week and we have a print edition on Sunday. But I still look at the newspaper every day. And I watch TV and I read stories. I look at Yahoo News every day and follow the stories on those.

So the state -- back prior to my retirement was actually -- we were in pretty good shape. Just when the internet came in and became more acceptable that newspapers couldn’t figure out a way to compete, though I do think that they’ll, you know, see newspapers online, I don’t think you’re going to see print editions for much longer.

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Did that answer -

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. Yeah. No, yeah, that was a great answer.

*Tom Throne:* No – and I have to say that back in 2000 – let’s see, 1995, when I still lived in McPherson, we did a – I saw this tape on paradigm shifts that the school district was using to talk to their teachers about changes in education and using as a starting point. And at the newspaper, we talked about that as well, you know, “Hey, guys, online could be something that we could utilize.”

But -- but the company that I worked for didn’t really get into how we’re going to make money, and that – that was big – the big bugaboo, how we’re going to make money. And so the industry did talk about it, it’s just -

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we couldn’t make the shift, not like some of the things that are going on now. Sorry, that – go ahead. I interrupted you.

*Nicholas Egea:* No worries, no worries. but – no, thank you. That was a great answer. But, so going back to you, you spoke a little bit about how you received the local newspaper from here in Kansas while you were overseas, but how, how did you keep up with the international news, especially during the time I feel – I feel like there were a lot of larger *[crosstalk]*?

*Tom Throne:* Stars and Stripes – ah, Stars and Stripes came out every day and we got it delivered to our house and that had everything. I mean and it still continues today though the funding is being talked about being cut back.

But you know, for military families, for us at least, we – in the town we -

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lived in in Germany, we had Armed Forces radio, we had no television service and because we lived in the valley, and so you relied on newspapers and Armed Forces radio to get your information. So you pretty much had to read the newspaper to figure out what was going on.

And I was at the age and a lot of my friends read the newspaper then, too. And we didn’t read it cover to cover, but we definitely read the first page. And when the Berlin Wall was going up and the Cuban Missile Crisis was going on, you were fairly worried about what was going on with your – with your parents and what was going to happen to you.

You know, my folks took a trip right after the – they moved there in 1960. My mom had to go to Surbourg, France, Cherbourg, France, as the evacuation route and with my dad.

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She had to drive it so that if, if something came up through the Cold War and Russia decided to invade Europe they had – we had an escape plan. Not, not that any of this stuff – we’re going to escape, but the plan was there. And so, those two events were -- were pretty stark.

And we went to Berlin in 1963 right after that wall went up, and, you know, and it gave you great pause when you saw that how a country put a wall up to keep people from seeing each other. So families were divided. Because up to that point, there were crossings across the border where people could see each other and after that, there was a no go.

And, you know, the buildings, the windows right along the border were bricked up and, and -

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double walls, and Checkpoint Charlie and stuff like that. And if you’re a military person – or I had a – the assistant principal at our elementary school, he took a trip over to the East side and talked to the – our sixth-grade class about that and talked about the stark difference between what was there and what we had. And it’s fairly sobering.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And what, what was the feeling like when you I guess read the news that was going on back in Kansas, and comparing that back to what you were hearing about overseas?

*Tom Throne:* I have to tell you, Nicholas, I never gave that much thought. You know, we read what was going on in real-time in Stars and Stripes and the stuff coming -

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from Kansas was a month old. So, we read the local stuff going on, but we didn’t read the national or the international stuff because that was old news.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay, thank you. Okay. What, ah – did you have any career aspirations when you were a kid when you were growing up?

*Tom Throne:* I really wanted to be a physical therapist. My aunt [Judy Cox] was a – became a paraplegic in childbirth in 1963. And after I saw her when we came back from Germany, I would say that that to me was an inspiration to try to help people. And, you know, I did fairly well in -

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high school in sciences and stuff, but it was a struggle in college.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. And so it sounds like your aunt had a lot of – a lot of influence on at least your early thought, but did you have any other role models when you were growing up?

*Tom Throne:* My dad was one of my role models. Some of the soldiers that we were interacting with and like church and baseball teams and stuff like that taught you a good work ethic, and I think that really helped me later on that you go above and beyond. You just don’t do what it takes to get by.

*Nicholas Egea:* And, talking about the kind of, like, large historical events that happened, do you, um – what, what were your memories of the media coverage -

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of the Kennedy assassination?

*Tom Throne:* Yeah. I’ll tell you an interesting story. We were in San Antonio. My dad was going to school to get his master’s in hospital administration and we lived off base, so I went to an off-base junior high in 8th grade. And our school was a block from Broadway, which was the main north/south street in San Antonio, and we were on the north side.

And President Kennedy on Nov. 21 came to San Antonio to speak, and his motorcade went by our school a block away and they let us out. And so we were standing on the street corner probably 15 feet from his car when he drove by. And -

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of course, he waved right at us, you know. He saw us and waved at us.

And at 1 the next day the principal [name not remembered] gets on the loudspeaker and says, “Students, I have very bad news for you. Ah, the president has been shot and killed. And we will be continuing school for today, but I can’t speak to what’s going to happen in the future, but we know the president would like you to stay in school for the rest of today.”

So we -- the teacher left the classroom and cried out in the hall. And most of us were fairly miserable because, “Hey, we just saw the president the day before. How can this be happening?” You know, and the news coverage –

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because you only had three channels. You had ABC, CBS, NBC, and if you’re lucky you had a UHF channel that didn’t play the news.

And so by the time we got home from school, you know, 3 or 3:30, that’s all that was on for the next two or three days until after the funeral. So the newspapers covered it, the TV stations covered it wall-to-wall, and, and we didn’t have any school for a couple of days.

But -- but back when you’re in 8th grade sitting in front of the TV station – the TV set for three days was not what I would call a great day, so my friends and I would try to get together and do other things. But

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it was an interesting time to see how that was covered. And of course, you know, we tuned in to CBS and Walter Cronkite and, because that was – that was my dad’s station. He liked Walter, so.

So I have a little bit different perspective on the Kennedy assignation than most kids because I saw the president the day before he was shot and it was a sad time. Sorry.

*Nicholas Egea:* No worries. Sorry to hear about that. What memories do you have regarding the media coverage of the Vietnam War?

*Tom Throne:* Well, what do you want to know? I reread about it. We were getting – we didn’t have Stars and Stripes there because that was -

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basically, what you got internationally if you were stationed overseas. So, we subscribed to Indianapolis Star News, [these were two different papers: The Indianapolis Star and Indianapolis News] and you got two of them because one was morning and one was afternoon. And – but I would say – well, I read those.

Most of the stuff that I got on it was in the evening news at 5:30 because they didn’t have the 24-hour news like that until the 1980s when Ted Turner started CNN. But you know, so you saw what you saw at 5:30 and what your friends talked about when they came back after being drafted.

So, at the time, my dad was as a military physician. We stayed in bases generally

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three years. So we were in Indianapolis for three years and then my dad went overseas for one. And -- but my friends were shipping out every 18 months to 2 years, so, um – or they would move off post because their dad was stationed overseas because they didn’t have enough quarters on post to house a military family.

So like when my dad went to Korea, then we moved off base, but my friend – excuse me, my friends whose dads would be gone to Vietnam, they would move off the post, or they would move back home to, you know, either their parents’ – their father’s house, parents’ house or the mother’s.

And frankly, my folks thought about that when my dad went to Korea, but I have this – my sister, my middle sister, she’s 18 –

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15 months younger than I am. And so, it was decided that we would stay in Indianapolis because there were fewer moves. My sister would have had to go to two high schools – or three high schools in three years, where is it – if we stayed in Indianapolis, then she’d only have to go to two high schools. She’d have three years at one and one in one, one her senior year in another one. And so I got to stay all four years in high school in one place, which is fairly unusual.

So, but Vietnam was, you know, on your mind because I turned 18 in the middle of my senior year and I got to go sign up for the draft with the Indianapolis Draft Board. So, it -- you worried about it, and I covered it in my 1S [Selective Service System student deferment], you know, when I got my student deferment, and I got four of those

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because they’re issued one year at a time. And you just plug away in college to keep from going to war.

I didn’t find out until after Vietnam was over with that my dad wasn’t very supportive of the war, but, you know, when you’re in the military you do what the commander says. And he did his duty to his country and the soldiers he served with, but he didn’t think too much of the war.

And I’ll give you one other experience. My sister her – she and her roommate, who was a nursing student, Shelly, came down to visit my sister during one of our vacations from KU. My sister went to KU as well and, they wanted to go take a tour of the hospital. And so they went to the –

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Brooke Army Medical Center has the burn unit for the military, so if there’s a burn victim, they’re going to Brooke Army Medical Center.

And so part of the tour was my sister and her roommate went to the burn ward. And the story goes that my sister was told that if you -- if you can’t handle this, we’re not taking you in because you have to smile and be happy, and you can’t look in terror at the – at the soldiers who are injured because they’re in different forms of bandaging and burns and stuff like that.

And my sister said it was the hardest thing she ever did, and, you know, to smile and keep a stiff upper lip, so to speak,

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going through those units. And I have friends who served and I can’t say that I know anybody that died, but it wasn’t a good war.

*Nicholas Egea:* Thank you. And, I guess what – one more, um – sorry about the historical context questions but there’s *[crosstalk].*

*Tom Throne:* Oh, no problem. You – hey, I – journalism is about history. That’s my philosophy. We’re the tellers of history and, you know, for your communities. And so, hey, I don’t mind the history questions so fire away.

*Nicholas Egea:* Okay. So what – is there anything that you remember about Nixon resigning as president?

*Tom Throne:* Yes, because I was – I was actually working in Junction City at the time.

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I thought it was a tragic time for the country. I mean for me it didn’t affect me in my journalism thing because we didn’t – we might have done local stories on it, but I was a photographer at the time and so I really didn’t have anything to do, shoot pictures of, but I do remember him resigning.

You know, and the cool thing about working at the Daily Union was John D. Montgomery who’s also – he and his son both have been inducted into the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame. And John D. was a Democratic National Committeeman for Kansas, and his philosophy was that you’re a Republican or a Democrat up until you’re elected, and then after that, you represent the people.

But he had people from all persuasions that would come into his office. Governor [Robert] Docking was in -

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quite a bit. Ah, we had the, of course, [Senator Bob] Dole and Senator [James] Pearson, or Congressman Pearson was in. And we had the Office of Management and Budget, the head of that one came in. I think he was during the Carter administration.

And so we had all forms of politicians that came in and, you know, Mr. Montgomery and I talked a little bit about the Nixon resignation and, and that it was a sad time for the country. I think that ah, I don’t know how to say this nicely. You know, he screwed up. Just, just like a recent president had screwed up and got impeached.

And,

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I don’t like – I don’t like cheats, so I didn’t feel sorry for Nixon. But I do think Ford did the right thing in pardoning him. Even though that was a hard thing and it created a lot of turmoil in the country, I do think that it soothed out some of the hurt from his resigning. It healed the country in some respects.

*Nicholas Egea:* And, I guess, looking back on some of the larger events, were there any other memorable ones?

*Tom Throne:* In my career?

*Nicholas Egea:* Or in your career or just events that, you remember and ones that stand out to you, I guess.

*Tom Throne:* Well, let’s talk – I can talk a little -

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bit, you know, about my career. Probably the biggest story I covered was in [the] early 1980[s]. I was the managing editor for the Maryville Daily Forum up in northwest Missouri, and I had gone from Junction City to there.

And we had a man who was shot in broad daylight in front of anywhere from 25 to 60 people because nobody really knows the crowd size, and it made national news. His name was Ken Rex McElroy, and there’s been several – there’s been a movie made of it, there was a recent six-part series, I can’t remember what channel that was on that aired earlier this summer.

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But we had – and by the way, that case is – the murder itself has never been solved and never will be. You know, that town was – felt threatened by this guy and who had been charged on 21 felonies and only convicted once and that was the final one.

[**Post-production addition:** McElroy was charged 21 times over a number of years and only the last one in 1982 resulted in a conviction.]

And when they thought he was going to be out of jail on a bond and he drove into town to talk to him, they decided to take justice into their own hands.

And we covered that from start to finish. Ah, and, you know, we had 60 Minutes in town, we had the New York Times, we had the Chicago Tribune, we had the London Daily Telegraph. Playboy had a reporter in there for three months writing a freelance piece. It was awful.

Ah,

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but I think in some respects we had -- the paper didn’t have a really good reputation before that event, and I had only been on the job a year up there when it occurred. And we took kind of a low-key approach, that we weren’t printing rumors, that we were really -- handled this story straight.

We had good – we were able, because of that, to create good relationships with the police department and the Northwest Missouri Taskforce that was developed to look into the case so that we could get information sometimes that other news sources couldn’t get. And so we did gain a lot of respect doing it that way.

And

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you know, that’s probably one of the bigger stories that I worked on in my career. The other one would have been we had a sheriff in McPherson County [Jim Bryant] who was taunting prisoners, particularly if they were a minority. He was stopping people when he shouldn’t be and, you know, just using old – good old boy sheriff tactics.

And we did a story – we did several stories, but the first one we did on him was 129 inches, which was over a page by the time you putthe pictures and the headlines and stuff on it. So that was a fairly significant dedication of space. You just don’t give up over a page of news -

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space to run a story and we did two days of that, that length. And then we had another one that was in a 60-inch range.

My managing editor who wrote the story won the Victor Murdock Award from the Kansas Press Association for her work on that. And she did a terrific job, but that was one of the few times when Kathy [Hackleman] and I both felt – she was my managing editor, and we did feel threatened in our jobs.

My wife [Pam] is a schoolteacher and the sheriff’s wife worked in the same school building. And the sheriff’s wife told my wife, “Don’t worry, nothing is going to happen to your daughter.” And we’d already talked with our daughter [Sara] about being very careful when you walk up to the car. If anything looks disturbed in the front -

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or the back seat don’t get in. Call me so that I can call friendly cops that will go out and make sure nothing is going on that’s strange.

And, you know, and at one point we thought about sending her up to my in-law’s house up in north-central Kansas just to get her out of town. We know that there were – because it divided the police – the sheriff’s department between supports and non-supporters and we know that we had supporters and the sheriff’s driving by our house, and we also know that we had non-supporters driving by our house, both houses, both Kathy and mine.

And in the middle of the night making sure we were safe. And the Kansas Bureau of Investigation was brought in by the attorney general to investigate the sheriff, and the conclusion to that was -

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that he either resigned or there would be an inquisition for his removal from office, so he resigned.

And, so that, that was a fairly dramatic turn of events. you know. We at times thought our office was bugged. We did have a guy there across the street that was watching Kathy and me when we were working. Our office had huge plate-glass windows across the front and so you could see in through there because we kept them open.

And the – I spotted him across the street, and I said, “Kathy, that guy is watching us. Let’s go play around.” And so we got in her car, and it was parked in the back of the building and drove up and pulled up behind him, and he took off like a bat out of hell through -

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down Main Street.

And we eventually tailed him over to his house and then called the assistant police chief, who is a friend of ours, and who went over and talked to the guy. He said, “Oh, there wasn’t a problem,” but I don’t believe that. I think that something was going on. Because you don’t just sit out in front of the – across the street from the newspaper office for nothing.

But of course, you know the sheriff blamed the -- blamed us for him losing his job, but that was a good thing for the community. And it’s sad because I was a supporter of his. I – because I had connections through a couple friends that had connections with the governor’s office. I helped get him appointed to that job.

And so, it’s a major disappointment when you’ve got to go in and investigate him and then you turn to that, that he’s no good.

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And so it was a sad day. And we knew his kids and, you know, his daughter called up and pleaded with me one night not to run the story. And I just told her I couldn’t do that. And the -- and part of my philosophy is you may not be the first with the story, but you’re going to have the best story.

And the Hutchinson News broke the story actually the same day we did, but they were in the morning and we were in the afternoon. Their story was at 30 inches and mine was 129. And the sheriff’s attorney called up and said, “Well,” he said, “I sure hope you’re not going to run any piece of crap like what the Hutchinson News ran today.” And I said, “Well, you should brace your client because I’m going to run that and a lot more later this afternoon.”

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And it was – it was a bad deal, you know? And, and my wife who sometimes would not – and when you’re a small-town journalist everybody knows who you are. And she would get stopped in the grocery store and said, “Hey, you know, you need to tell your husband to do this.” And her reply was, “Well, you know what his phone number is, why don’t you call?”

But -- and the school secretary, the sheriff’s wife, said to my wife, “Don’t worry. Your daughter won’t get hurt.” I went and talked to the sheriff that day. I took my managing editor with us. This is before we ran any stories. This is when we were in the – he had gotten word that we were investigating.

Ah, he and I had quite a conversation, let’s just put it that way. And,

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you know, we had words that if anything happens to my daughter the KBI will know, and when I got back to the office, I called the KBI. So yeah, I mean it was – it was an interesting time, but it worked itself out. Those are probably the two biggies.

*Nicholas Egea:* All right, I think that’s going to conclude part 1 of the interviews.

*[End of Audio]*

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*Kate Malone:* Hi. This is Kate Malone. Today is Oct. 6, 2020. I am interviewing Tom Throne for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists Project. This is part two. 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 why don’t we go ahead and get started with some of your career aspirations? Both of your parents had ties to Kansas, but what made you want to attend college in Kansas?

*Tom Throne:* Well, actually, my dad was from Bronx, New York, but he did go to KU Med courtesy of the U.S. Army, so after World War II. But my mom is a native New Yorker – or a native Kansan, I’m sorry, from Newton. And, I could tell you, KU is the only school I wanted to go to. And I did put an application at -

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Wichita State and Ball State University in Indiana because I went to high school in Indiana when my dad was stationed in the military outside Indianapolis.

And so I applied to KU and I got accepted and that would have been in the winter of 1968. In the spring of ’68, we made a trip to Kansas to see my grandparents, and, on the way back to Indianapolis my dad said, “Hey, want to stop and see KU?” I had never seen the campus up to that point. I just knew I wanted to go to KU because that’s where my dad went.

And so it was like a nice April afternoon and we swung through – drove through campus. I liked what I saw and went on back to Indi and I came back on campus --

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ah, it would have been late summer because school started later then. It started after Labor Day. And so we had an orientation in early August, late July/early August and I stayed at GSP [dorm] for a weekend and did an orientation, signed up for classes and then the rest is history.

I stayed all four years at KU and lived in Ellsworth [Hall] all four years. We had about a 66-percent return rate so a lot of the guys – guys and girls lived there, women, knew each other so that was, was nice as one big happy family so to speak.

*Kate Malone:* That’s awesome. So you originally planned to become a -

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physical therapist. What interested you in that field?

*Tom Throne:* I was interested in that through my aunt who was a paraplegic, and I thought that that would be interesting to work with paralyzed people.

*Kate Malone:* Okay. After you didn’t make it in the physical therapy school, you had to find something else to major in, but I want to talk about the Vietnam War and why you wanted to avoid that.

*Tom Throne:* Well, actually I wanted to get my college education finished. I thought about afterward joining the service and then I got a job and I said, “No, I don’t think so.” But -- and it is for me one of my regrets that I didn’t go back and, and volunteer for four years in the Army or Air Force.

So,

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I thought about it, but I didn’t, didn’t do it. I didn’t – I was at ROTC for two years at KU when in my freshman year I doubled up because I wanted to -- I’d get through four years of ROTC in three years because if I was going to – my fourth year if I made it to PT School, I would have been off-campus so I had to complete it before then.

And so, I did two years. My freshman year I did basically four semesters in two – in inside one year. And, while I enjoyed it, I decided that wasn’t my cup of tea. And you got to wear your uniform on campus and -

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got to be called a baby killer. And, you know, I was – sometimes you had to sit right there so – and it wasn’t a lot of fun.

*Kate Malone:* Okay, interesting. Why did you ultimately choose photojournalism?

*Tom Throne:* Because, hey, I needed to get a degree so that I wouldn’t be drafted right away. I needed to complete my degree in four years. It took me four years and a summer school to do it, but my draft number when they did the draft lottery -- I think it was in ’71, ’70 or ’71.

I – my number was 22, so it was a forgone conclusion that if I didn’t keep my [student] status that I would be drafted into the Army, and I wanted it. So I particularly wanted to keep -

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my status get my degree and then figure out what I wanted to do from there. So, that’s why I went into photojournalism because I had a background in photography from high school where I was a yearbook and newspaper photographer.

*Kate Malone:* Okay. And then moving on from that question, did you work for the Daily Kansan while you were here, and then if so what memories do you have of that?

*Tom Throne:* Ah, I worked on the Daily Kansan my senior year through photography classes. I was a staff photographer in the second semester of my senior year. We had a great time. And I learned a lot because I had Dr. Bremner as my editing teacher, and he wasn’t real fond of photographers and sportswriters. He thought we were pretty much worthless.

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And because of that, I got to sit next to him with my dictionary, and every big word he threw out he expected that I would have the definition of that word so that when he turned to me when somebody didn’t know what the word meant that I would have to identify it. Learned a lot about using a dictionary that semester.

[**Post-production addition: What other memories do you have of Dr. Bremner?**

I was very fortunate to be taught by some of the legends at the School of Journalism -- Del Brinkman, who was the adviser for the UDK at the time and later dean of the school; Calder Pickett, who taught us about William Allen White and many other Kansas journalists; Mel Adams, who taught advertising; and John Bremner. Dr. Bremner was one of my favorite teachers at KU. He was great. We all got the white handkerchief out the classroom window saying he was trapped with a class of idiots. Dr. Bremner said he disliked sports writers and photographers, but I'm not convinced of that.

As a photo major, he picked me to sit next to him with my dictionary in hand. We were expected to have our dictionaries ready because he would use words that were foreign to many of us, and he expected us to know what they meant. As his right-hand man, I was expected to know the definitions in case no one else knew what it meant. It kept me on my toes, and it made me learn how to use the dictionary. And think fast.

He also liked trivia because every good editor had to know trivia in order to check the facts in a story. As his right-hand man, I was expected to know trivia as well. While it was a hot seat sometimes, I learned so much that helped me later in life as an editor. My wife used to ask me how I could remember all that trivia, and I said I had a great teacher. Dr. Bremner and I remained friends throughout his time at KU. As a publisher later in my career, I had an opportunity to take an editing refresher seminar that he taught for the Kansas Press Association. He spend the entire morning picking on me, but it was with fondness and we had a great time.]

But on the Kansan staff, it was kind of neat because once you got your work done, if they needed help editing copy and stuff like that, you could sit on the rim and be a copy editor, would give you stories straight to look at. And got to remember, those are typewriter days. There were no computers.

And so you typed out your stories. Sometimes you would forget, would use any carbon paper, sometimes not. And, so, you know, it was a lot of fun. We worked until 1 or 2 in the morning putting -

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the paper together. There was a bakery on Ninth Street called Joe’s Bakery, and we would make nightly runs to the bakery to get sandwiches and doughnut – fresh doughnuts right out of the fryer, and cookies were there, three baked things.

So you could go there I think six days a week and get doughnuts, fresh doughnuts. And they were better than Krispy Kreme.

*Kate Malone:* That’s awesome. So moving on to your occupational choices.

*Tom Throne:* Mm-hmm.

*Kate Malone:* Ah, what, what made you stay in Kansas after graduating?

*Tom Throne:* I love Kansas. I – except for two and a half years when I was in northwest Missouri, I worked in Kansas. And I was -- I worked from 2000 and, um –

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or 1972 to 2010 in Kansas except for two and a half years when I was in northwest Missouri. And I love Kansas. I always have, and I always will. Even though I live in Arkansas now, I watch Kansas and Kansas State sports, and I keep up on a couple news websites on what’s going on in the state and try to keep apprised in politics and, um – so I wasn’t a – it was a no-brainer when I graduated and I was going to stay in the state.

*Kate Malone:* Awesome. I do want to hear the story about flipping a coin with your roommate about where to apply.

*Tom Throne:* Yeah, well my roommate Greg Sorber, we were – went to summer school together after our senior semester in order to graduate.

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He had to pick up one class, and I picked up two classes. And so, when we were getting closer to the end of our stay at KU and we needed jobs, there were two photojournalism jobs. One at Leavenworth and one in Junction City.

And so we flipped a coin to see who would go where. Greg won so he chose to go to the Leavenworth. And as would happen we both ended up working at our respective papers: Junction City for me and Leavenworth for him. And, so it was, it was kind of cool.

I mean, I enjoyed working in Junction City. I was there twice. First time for almost nine years from ’72 to ’80. And

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I worked my way up from photographer to reporter/sportswriter, assistant managing editor and managing editor. And then we decided it was time to move, and so we went up to northwest Missouri for a couple years and then moved back to McPherson.

*Kate Malone:* Oh wow. So did you work anywhere else before entering the media – the media industry, and if so where did you work?

*Tom Throne:* If you count working in the cafeteria at the dorm, I guess I did work not in the media field.

[**Post-production addition:** I went to summer school in the summer of 1969 and worked as a dishwasher at Oliver Hall. I knew I didn't want to do that again so when I returned in the fall, I applied as a checker, who had to check off residents as they came through the line so we knew they didn't go through the line twice or we had to charge them extra. We had to remember 700 names and faces, and we had about a week to do it. After that, people didn't like giving their names. It was a lot of fun. I worked in the cafeteria as a checker for my sophomore through senior years, working 12-15 hours a week. The extra cash was handy for going out on dates. I usually worked Monday through Friday at dinner and sometimes on Saturday. The best part was we could have as much as we wanted to eat, which was great on steak night.]

I didn’t do any freelancing, you know, internships weren’t a really big deal when I was going to school. If you’re one of the top students then, yeah, maybe you’d get an internship, but most – most people didn’t have internship opportunities.

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And so, after the semester was over in the spring, usually we all went home and found a job. I worked in the summer camp teaching swimming and arts and crafts to kids on a military post at Fort Sam Houston, Texas outside of San Antonio. So I did that for two years.

You know, so, so I didn’t really have a lot of media experience other than what I got in the classroom, and when I got into the real world I learned a whole lot more in about the first month.

*Kate Malone:* That’s awesome. Did you have any doubts or concerns about pursuing a career in journalism?

*Tom Throne:* I – I didn’t think that a photographer is -

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where I wanted to be. And, and so, I ended up doing photography for four years, but I knew at the end of those years that I had to find something different. And so at the time, I still – I liked living in Junction. I had a – I was married and had a young daughter, and so I thought it was best to stay there.

And I had the opportunity to go switch over to the writing side, which wasn’t a real farfetched thing because on a small paper like that you end up doing the writing, so, you know, you do obituaries. And as a photographer, I also filled in for vacations when somebody was gone.

I got to do reporting in – I was a lifestyles editor for like a couple weeks every year when we -- society editors we -

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called it then -- went on vacation, and I would spot in and write this society column and type up weddings and stuff like that. So, when I got the opportunity to do, I took it. And so I worked basically 25 hours a week as a courthouse and county reporter, and 15 hours a week as a sports writer.

*Kate Malone:* Okay. And how did your family and friends react to your decision to become a journalist?

*Tom Throne:* You know, it was a lot different than it is today because even if –when I – we lived in the dorm we got the Topeka Daily Capitol and the Kansas City Star. The dorm had a subscription to it and so there were papers always there. So, back then -

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it wasn’t a hard switch to make when -- when I became a photojournalism major. All my friends thought that was pretty cool maybe because they thought they’d get their picture in the paper, but most of them didn’t.

But that wasn’t the something that anybody looked down on or anything like that. We, you know, newspaper work was pretty strong and there was a strong sense of community from a lot of people because they’d grown up reading newspapers.

It would have been a bigger switch I think for my friends if I were to go into TV or radio. So no, I hadn’t – there were guys in the dorm that did radio. Not too many TV people. You know, we were pretty well respected.

My second semester when I worked on the Kansan,

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most of my evenings after I got my homework done were spent down at the Kansan office, working on putting the paper out either with photos or were helping on the copy desk. And I liked doing that because I learned a little bit more about the business that way.

*Kate Malone:* Okay. That’s really interesting. Well, I think that concludes part 2 of the interviews.

*[End of Audio]*

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*William Wilk:* This is William Wilk. Today is Oct. 7, 2020. I am interviewing Tom Throne for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists Project. This is Part 3. This interview is taking place remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This interview is sponsored by the University of Kansas and Kansas Press Association.  
  
So Tom, the questions today are gonna kinda cover your career path, so we have several questions. But first off, your first job was at the *Daily Union* in Junction City, and what are your memories with this job?

*Tom Throne:* Well, my first job was, like you said, in Junction City at the *Daily Union,* and I – it was a great job because I started as a photographer and left as the managing editor. And so I got a lot of experience in my almost nine years there.

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As a photographer, I did that for four years and then I was a reporter for a couple of years and then was an assistant managing editor and then was promoted to managing editor. And I worked there from August of '72 to December of '80.

*William Wilk:* Okay. What was the media environment like at the time?

*Tom Throne:* Well, in Junction it's interesting and it's still somewhat the same today 'cause some of the same people are working at the radio station. But it was a fairly competitive environment from the standpoint that the local radio station, their AM side was, had a lot of news on it and, they had two good news folks, Bruce [Karnes] and then Dewey [Terrill] took over –

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after him and, you know, they were out on the beat covering the same things we were.  
  
We listened to 'em at noon to make sure we had our ducks in a row when our paper came out at 1, which generally we did. And we know they look at ours in the afternoon and worked on stories for the next day. So, it was a pretty competitive environment.  
  
And, you know, and then you also had the *Kansas City Star* and the *Topeka Daily Capital*, and in some respects, the *Manhattan Mercury* would infiltrate into that area. But the *Daily Union* was by far the strongest paper in the area, in our city at least.

*William Wilk:* Interesting. What was the journalism technology like during this time period?

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*Tom Throne:* A Royal typewriter. We had no computers. We got our first computer in I think 1978. Up until that point, for the first six years, it was pretty much a typewriter. And then it was even a little bit of both for the next years while I was there because working the desk you had to use the typewriter to type headlines, though you could send the story to the typesetter. We used perforation tape because then they would run the tape through the typesetting computer. But the headlines had to be set by hand. You didn't have like you have now –

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where you write your head[line] and you put your story in and it's all edited and everything like this.  
  
Our first computer would – I can't remember how many characters, but it was basically eight inches of type. So if you wrote a long story, which several of our reporters would be pretty in-depth with their stuff, it might be three to four takes of the computer to complete one story. And so it was your job when you were putting your paper together to make sure that the takes were in sequence so that the story flowed correctly

*William Wilk:* Uh-huh. So you previously talked about the media environment, but what was it like to be a journalist during this time period?

*Tom Throne:* Yeah, it was great because there was a lot of respect in the community –

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for the work you were doing. You know, there's kind of contentious times a little bit now, where people think your news may be slanted. I think that back then the circulations in newspapers were pretty strong and so that helped create a pretty good work environment, too. My – the staff in Junction City, we followed one person for every thousand circulations, so we had a seven-person newsroom, you know. And so the respect in the community was pretty good from the standpoint that they knew you were out there hustling, working on covering the news in the community. And having the radio station out there –

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kinda kept you on your toes.

*William Wilk:* Interesting. How many women were in the newsroom and do you know what it was like being a woman in journalism at the time?

*Tom Throne:* Yeah, well, there weren't as many women in journalism when I was going to school, and there were fewer in the newsroom. You know, we had one woman and she was the society editor [Sally Skinner] when I started. Now, when I was managing editor, I think I had the society editor and maybe one of my reporters was a woman.  
  
It wasn't a female-dominated newsroom, but I will say that as we went later into my career as a newspaper publisher, our – well, managing editor and newspaper publisher –

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both in McPherson and Leavenworth, we probably had – in McPherson in particular 'cause we had trouble with attracting college students to a small town of 13,000, so we pretty much built our own. We would hire women who were interested in writing and train 'em up to be reporters. So, I had a five-person staff, and sometimes the sports editor and I were the only two males on the staff.  
  
So there were some more opportunities. Later on, you know, in Leavenworth we ran probably 50-50 men and women but probably the fewest number of women working on the staff was in Junction City when I first started. We had a society editor and when she went on vacation as –

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as I was a photographer, I didn't have a beat to cover so a lot of times I was the society editor for two weeks while she took a vacation. So I got to do a little bit of reporting that way as well.

[**Post-production addition:** Sally Skinner was the long-time society editor at The Daily Union. When she went on vacation, I would fill in for her. Society pages or Lifestyle as we call them now, we usually had marriages, births and club news. There was a column that contained news about who visited whom -- we called it chicken dinner news because many times the item would tell who went to someone's house for dinner. When my aunt from New York would come to visit with my parents, we would put a short item in the column that she came to visit us. She thought that was a hoot -- only in small town America. We also had a column of what the "high society" people did in town. There also was a column on the arts.]

*William Wilk:* Interesting. So how did this first journalism job affect your career in the long term and affect your understanding of journalism work?

*Tom Throne:* Well, it's a beginning. When I had my two years basically of journalism training at KU and then went to the field and, the first couple months, you're kind of immersed into what the real world's like, and so it was just a lot more than just shooting pictures. I got involved with writing stories and if I was out shooting photos, let's say of a crime scene, then I had to collect details –

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that would – I would take back to the city editor who would incorporate some of that into his stories. So it provided a fairly well-rounded education, you know.  
  
And the other things is when you work in a smaller newsroom, seven or eight people, or were as low as three, 'cause I've worked on – I worked on – my last job was at a weekly in Bella Vista, Arkansas, and we had myself and three others. So you know, you get to do a lot more than just what your job entails. And so, even as an editor, sometimes you would work on writing stories or shooting photos and stuff like that.  
  
So, being able to work on a small paper, you got a really well-rounded experience in how a newspaper's supposed to work. Now, I think it's a lot different now –

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depending on whether you work at an independently owned paper or whether you work on a corporate-run paper because the independents may have more latitude on how many people they have working in their newsroom as opposed to corporate.

*William Wilk:* Interesting. So who was the most influential person to you during your first journalism job in Junction City?

*Tom Throne:* I'd say there were a couple people. Probably the one that I learned a lot from was a guy named Jim Hale. He was brought in as managing editor when I was a reporter and he promoted me to assistant managing editor and taught me a lot about editing and page design. And, you know, under his tutelage, one year with him and one year with me, we won the –

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Inland Newspaper Design contest and we were a paper of 7,000. So for the small dailies, which a lot of times is small and is subjective because it may be 30 or 50,000 [circulation], I don't know what the category size was, but we were one of the smaller entries, and then to win that was pretty good.  
  
The city editor and the – or the city reporter and the county reporter [Harold Taylor and Bob Honeyman] both took me under their wings and taught me how to get out and ask questions and really how to dig for stories. And so in that operation, they were the main ones.

*William Wilk:* So, if I understand correctly, you met your wife, Pam, there. How did you meet her?

*Tom Throne:* My wife is a K-State graduate –

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and we met through mutual friends. And so she was in finishing up her senior year and graduated with a degree -- at the time it was called home economics, now it's called human ecology. And so she worked at a bank and an optometrist and then did some substitute teaching. And when we moved to Missouri then she went and got her bachelor's in elementary education and was a schoolteacher for 20 years in McPherson and Leavenworth. And our daughter, who is now a poultry veterinarian here in northwest Arkansas, she works for Simmons Foods –

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was born in Junction City. Well, she was born in Manhattan, but we lived in Junction.

*William Wilk:* Awesome. You note that you wanted Junction City “to go from a crime-ridden city to a relatively sedate community.” Can you speak a little more about that?

*Tom Throne:* Well, when we first moved there, when I first moved there, it was a community that was in the midst of the waning years of the Vietnam War. The soldiers were basically single. The marriage rate among the military wasn't very high. There was, uh – you know, there were prostitutes that roamed the streets on payday weekends, and they knew when the soldiers were getting paid.

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And they ran kind of a cycle where they would go to Fort Carson, Fort Leonard Wood, Fort Riley, Fort Hood. And so they would kind of mix it up in the areas. But it was pretty wild and wooly on Main Street on payday weekend. Girls would walk the streets and talk to soldiers when they came out of the bank from cashing their paychecks because there wasn't a direct deposit back then.  
  
And, so my – I made – I was used to being able to just walk wherever I wanted and I told my boss one time that I was down walking on Main Street and looking in the storefronts in the night and he chastised me for that and said, “Don't do that because I don't want to have to call your mom or your dad.”

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And so, you know, I learned when and where you could go.  
  
But when we moved back there, that was in 1980 when we left and when we moved back there in 2005, it was a lot different, 'cause the makeup of the military was different in an all-volunteer Army, 40 percent of the soldiers were married. you didn't see, um – I'm sure there was prostitution there, but you didn't see it. And so it was a lot tamer. You felt a lot safer, I thought.

*William Wilk:* Interesting. Going with that, you also noted major stories were the return of the First Infantry Division in Fort Riley and the murder of the park ranger at Milford Lake. Could you tell us a little bit more about those stories?

*Tom Throne:* Mm-hmm. How'd you find out about that? I don't remember talking about that.

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But I can tell you a little bit about those. The park ranger, in particular, hit home because my wife and – was friends with, oh gosh, I can't remember her name, were friends in college, and so it hit home for her when that murder took place out at the lake and that was – would have been, I don't know, '73, '74, something like that. And we had just gotten married, so -- and I knew her mom was the head nurse at the hospital, so I knew her and, you know, Norma would come back into town to bring a letter to the editor whenever the convicted murderer was up for parole and she was fairly active in making sure he stayed there.

*William Wilk:* So you weren't content to keep doing the same job forever.

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Did your childhood on the move influence your feelings on that?

*Tom Throne:* Well, in order to get promoted at the time in the newspaper business, you pretty well had to make a move. The – I was lucky from the standpoint that I became managing editor then transferred to be a managing editor in Maryville, Missouri. And then I had a friend who was the managing editor in McPherson and he was leaving the newspaper business to be going to sales and called me and said, “Hey, you need to apply for this.”  
  
And we were wanting to get back into Kansas, so we moved to McPherson in 1983 and in 1988 –

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at the end of '88, our paper was bought out. It was privately owned and, nine months later, they let my boss go and they said you're the new publisher. So, you know, I happened to be in the right place at the right time for that. And then in 1996, my regional manager said, “Hey, I want you to go up and run the paper in Leavenworth, Kansas,” 'cause they had just acquired it and they had gone through a couple of publishers in a couple of months and they wanted to stabilize the situation.  
  
So, I went up there and worked on that paper and got it squared up. I was kinda known as the guy that could do troubleshooting, go in and correct the problems, get the papers back into profitable mode.

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So, I had – I moved, but they were almost strategic moves in some respects.

*William Wilk:* Yeah, definitely. So what are some of your memories of being a managing editor and what was it like for you to move from reporting to managing?

*Tom Throne:* You know, that was – that first one, going from – well, going from reporter to assistant managing editor was fairly smooth. But going to be the boss and not having ever really been a boss before that, it was fairly nerve-racking for a while. And then I did that for about a year and a half in Junction 'til I moved to Maryville. And I had gotten a – I felt like I had a firmer grasp –

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of the job when I moved to Maryville. I had a fairly supportive publisher who came off the news side, and so he kinda helped me a lot in learning management and stuff like that. I had a lot of support from him and his name was Joe Sullivan and provided a lot of support for me in that direction.  
  
And also, I didn't always agree with Joe, but we came to accommodations on stuff and, you know, I thought that was a pretty good learning experience. I think it helped me for when I went to McPherson. I was the managing editor for six years and it sure helped me work with reporters and stuff a lot easier, I guess, in managing.  
  
And then when I became a publisher –

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now that was a real experience -- experience and change in your attitude because you had to protect the whole building and make sure you were making money and keeping your boss happy, keeping your employees happy, moving the newspaper forward because the websites were coming into existence and how the internet was gonna affect your operations and, you know, we had talks about paradigm shifts when I was in McPherson and what we were gonna do to combat 'em. But when you work for a corporation, you flow how they flow.  
  
So, you could do a lot of talking, but they allowed you to decide how far you could go with what your thoughts were.

*William Wilk:* So where did you go next in your career and why?

*[0:22:00]*

*Tom Throne:* From Junction City?

*William Wilk:* Yes.

*Tom Throne:* I went to Maryville, Missouri, and I was the managing editor there from December of 1980 to May of '83. I went there because I needed a change and that seemed like a fairly good opportunity. Maryville is an interesting town because it's got a lot of old-timers, it's got a lot of college folks 'cause Northwest Missouri State's there. And then it has a lot of newcomers, and sometimes they don't mix really well, and so it can be a fairly closed community, but I felt like I, in my job, was able to work in all three groups.  
  
And towards the end of my stay there, I felt like I was making really good progress because the county clerk [John Zimmerman] –

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who was one of the old-timers, been around – he, you know, born and raised in the area, invited me to his birthday party at the American Legion. And, so that, to me, was a big, big triumph because I was making inroads and gaining trust. And I covered – the news editor [Jim Taylor] and I kinda split the county beat because he covered city and county and sometimes he couldn't cover everything. So I would cover the county commission sometimes even as a managing editor. I also covered the school board and the Board of Regents as managing editor.  
  
So I wasn't just behind the desk, I was out doing reporting and – and so that gained, for me, a lot of knowledge in how you can multitask because we did a lot of multitasking and I worked a lot of hours there.

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And that's part of the reason why I wanted to get back to Kansas. I was getting burned out even after two and a half years.

*William Wilk:* Yeah, I bet, a lot of work. So one of your biggest stories in Maryville was covering the murder in broad daylight of the Skidmore, Missouri, town bully.

*Tom Throne:* Yeah, correct.

*William Wilk:* *[Crosstalk]* could you tell us a little more about that?

*Tom Throne:* Well, you know, that's a fairly interesting case. Took place I think in February of '82, January, February of 1982, and that involved Ken Rex McElroy, who was shot down in broad daylight in Skidmore, Missouri, which is a town of about 600 people and it was located about 20 minutes from Maryville to the southwest. Ken Rex was known as a bully.

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Somebody told me once when I was at a bar that he either liked you or he didn't like you and if he didn't like you, heaven help you. And I never met the man so I wouldn't know. I knew what he looked like, but I wouldn't know him if he, you know, walked by me, he wouldn't know who I was. But he was arrested on 21 felonies [at differents times] and got convicted on the 21st. He had really good attorneys. Richard McFadden out of – well, he's out of Kansas City, Missouri.  
  
And the – when that occurred, his death, he was out on bail. The town didn't like the fact that the judge didn't put him in jail while he appealed and they had a meeting – were having a meeting in town. The sheriff came and talked to 'em.

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He left town. Ken Rex rolled into town a little bit later and he was sitting in his car with his wife with the engine running and the townspeople, some -- depending on who you talk to -- 25 to 60 people witnessed what occurred. Our sources said there were probably three gunmen and nobody saw anything. And, and it's still unsolved today and it probably will remain unsolved because the townspeople think that they did the right thing.  
  
And frankly, knowing the stories and stuff that we had heard, he probably did deserve that. Though vigilante-style isn't my kinda thing, that's what the townspeople decided they thought was gonna take place.

[**Post-production addition:** His wife Trina survived the shooting.]

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And so we had a lot of media coverage. We had – 60 Minutes was there. The *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *London Times* were in. *Playboy* had a guy that stuck around for a couple of months and wrote a really bad story for their publication. And, so it was interesting. You know, it was so time-consuming talking to news agencies when you have a staff of five people and you got people coming into the office wanting to talk to you.  
  
My boss decided to start charging to talk to us or look through our files. We raised about $1,200 just doing that, and we used that for a couple of big office parties and dinners for people in the office because they were busy working on stuff –

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they need photocopies and stuff. Our whole office was basically consumed by that for a couple of months.  
  
You know, but it generated a TV movie with Brian Dennehy as Ken Rex McElroy and, City Confidentials did a story on it and A&E has City Confidentials and they were in town in 2001 when I was the publisher in Leavenworth at the time and we had just bought the Maryville paper and my boss said you're gonna be kind of the district manager in charge of that operation and working with the publisher on getting stuff squared up as a new publication. And they found out I was there during the Ken Rex shooting, so they told the City Confidential guy.

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So I did a 40-minute interview with them and I have 30 seconds of fame on the 30-minute show.  
  
And then last year or I guess earlier this year but we were – I was contacted a year ago, a company did a six-part series on the murder and then also other killings that took place in Skidmore and tried to tie those all together, like a jinxed town kinda story, and they used portions of my A&E interview for that as well. Stuff that hadn't been in the original one.  
  
So, so, you know, and we did get a little notoriety on that, but our crew, particularly Jim Taylor who was the news editor, really did a lot of good reporting on that.

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And I told folks earlier in another interview that, you know, that the paper itself had a fairly low reputation with the police and sheriff's office, and I think, when that was over with, we had a really good reputation because we weren't printing rumors and not printing stuff that we couldn't verify and I can't say that for other publications.

*William Wilk:* Yeah. So the next question, I mean you touched a little bit on it. But you've mentioned that it attracted large media attention from around the country, some of which was too sensational. What did you take away from that experience, seeing how other media covered the same thing as you but in a much different way?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I'm more of a lowkey kinda guy and my basic philosophy is that oh, it's okay sometimes –

*[0:31:00]*

to get scooped as long as what you're running is truthful and more in-depth and you do a better job. So, like the *Chicago Tribune* reporter didn't get very many names spelled correctly. The *London Times* story sounded like it was Dodge City, two people facing off on a dirt street. *Playboy's* just was, you know, the facts weren't really great in it. They pretty well sensationalized the story.  
  
So, you know, my big takeaway was getting stuff correct. You don't have to be first, but when you run your story for your community that you've got the information correct. And that came into play later in McPherson when we had a sheriff –

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who was doing some racially motivated things, pulling kids over and threatening 'em and generally doing a pretty bad job as sheriff. And the *Hutchinson News* worked on a story, they ran one that was 25 inches the same day we ran ours, that it was an okay story, but it didn't go as in-depth enough, and the sheriff's attorney called us and said, “Boy,” he said, “I saw that story, and I hope you're not gonna do a number on the sheriff like what the *Hutch News* did.” And basically, I told the attorney, who was a friend of mine, I said, “You know, you better brace your client because our story is coming out and it's a lot more in-depth than what the *Hutch News* ran.”

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And we ran a 129-inch story plus a headline and photos. And when you're in a small paper and you got 10 pages, that's a lot of coverage. So we started it out front and jumped it inside. And a couple of days later, we followed it up with about a 60-inch story and a couple of days after that we ran 129-inches again.  
  
And, and by then, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation came in and started working on that, too. But a lesson learned there that was – came out of Maryville and we may not be the first but we're gonna be the best, and we made sure that our story was accurate and that we did a better job. And yeah, we were upset that the *Hutch* paper came out first, but we knew that ours was better and more accurate, and it was.

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*William Wilk:* Yeah, definitely. So what other jobs in Kansas have you had and what did you do at each?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I moved to McPherson in '83 and worked there 'til '96 as – six years as the managing editor. And then I was promoted to publisher and I did that for seven years. And then my boss told me that he wanted me to go up to Leavenworth, as I said earlier, that he needed somebody to stabilize that operation up there. And so, I went up there and I told him when I left that I would – I'd give 'em two years, but I was interested in moving to Texas because the company owned papers in Texas at the time and the – and I liked Texas because my dad was stationed in San Antonio and they had some papers around that area that –

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I thought would be fun to go to.  
  
But that didn't pan out and I ended up staying in Leavenworth for nine years as the publisher and we went through three ownership changes in those nine years.

[**Post-production addition:** When I got there American Publishing owned it, then Liberty Group Publishing bought it and finally, Gatehouse Media.]

And I thought the last ownership change when we were sold to Gatehouse, I was there for a year or so and then decided that there was gonna be some major changes. And [if] I had stayed there, I would have lost my job because they eliminated three out of every four publisher positions and I would have been on the outs on that one. So it was a good move.  
  
And so I moved in 2005 to Junction City as the general manager, but I handled the day-to-day operations for the owner of the paper, [Montgomery Publications], and I did that for four and a half years.

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And then I told my wife, I said, you know, I want to be closer – we had talked about this and we wanted to be closer to our grandson [Cole Steinlage] and our daughter. And so we moved to Northwest Arkansas in 2010 and – with no jobs. And we struggled along, you know, okay. And for a year and a half, I was – I worked at Men's Warehouse in clothing, which I had done in college when my grandparents [Henry and Betty Toevs] owned a [Toevs Mens Wear] clothing store in Newton, and so I was work there on weekends when I was down to visit them.  
  
And so I got a job at Men's Warehouse and I had friends who worked for the *Arkansas Democratic Gazette* and they told me about a job opening up in Bella Vista, Arkansas, which is on the Arkansas-Missouri border. It's 11 miles from my house and a 20-minute drive through traffic.

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And it was a nice little 3,000 circulation weekly newspaper and there were four of us that worked there, and we had a great time. And three out of the four years that I was there, we were the best medium-sized weekly in the state, according to the Arkansas Press Association Better Newspaper Contest. So I was pretty proud of winning that. And it still continues to be a well-respected weekly paper.

*William Wilk:* Awesome. So after working in McPherson and Leavenworth, you moved back to Junction City.

*Tom Throne:* Mm-hmm.

*William Wilk:* *[Crosstalk]* do that?

*Tom Throne:* Why do that? Well, I moved back to Junction because I wanted – well, first of all, my old boss called and said, “Hey, I'm looking for a general manager, are you interested?”

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And originally I wasn't. My wife was a little reluctant 'cause she wanted to go to Arkansas then, and I said, no, we need to – I need to get a couple more years under my belt. And so we moved to Junction partially because I wasn't happy with the direction of our corporation because of three sales in nine years, and, you know, it was just time for a change.  
  
So we did that for four and a half years and then that was during the midst of the Great Recession 2008 to 2010, and I just got tired of trying to make payroll and keeping the operation going and I was burned out so we moved to Northwest Arkansas.

*William Wilk:* So could you talk about the opportunities and challenges –

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of being a newspaper publisher and why you wanted to have that role?

*Tom Throne:* You know – and in some respects, I didn't realize this 'til I listened to the publisher of the *Arkansas Democratic Gazette* talk to our Rotary Club, oh, about two months ago. They were, uh – the *Democratic Gazette* has switched to online publishing except for Sundays. We get a Sunday paper and the rest of the time you're provided an iPad and you can read the paper online and it looks like a newspaper only it's online and you can click and pull up stories and stuff.  
  
And he was talking about the shift in advertising when – you know, –

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which the old rule of thumb was 75 to 80 percent advertising, 20 to 25 percent circulation, as far as revenue goes. And the advertising revenue is starting to drop, according to him, and I'd say it's true in 2006-2007 you saw the big drop. And then when the recession hit, it just got worse. And it was a real struggle as a publisher in that time period to make ends meet and get your employees paid and to take care of capital improvements and to make a return on the investors' money.  
  
But I will tell you that when I started out as a publisher in October – let's see, October of '89, that was a great job. It was so much fun –

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because the McPherson paper wasn't doing all that well. I was able to hire a McPherson -- a man named Gary Mehl, who is now also in the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame, as my ad manager. He had worked basically 20 something years as an ad salesman, left the paper when we got bought out in '88 and I hired him back in early 1990 as my ad manager.  
  
And between the two of us, I took – he took care of the advertising and I took care of the rest of the operation, and we increased our sales and revenue probably – let's see, particularly on the bottom line number.

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We went from a 17-percent [profit] paper to a 32- to 33-percent [profit] paper. We were considered the bellwether paper for American publishing for their small paper division. If we made money, the rest of the papers generally made money, and we did really well and so it was a lot of fun. And moving to Leavenworth, the – from '96 to 2005, it was pretty good then, too, and we had steady revenue from our print operation. We printed a lot of weekly papers, and we had good ad revenue. But boy, when that Great Recession hit in 2008, it tanked and it tanked big and it became a real struggle to make ends meet.

*William Wilk:* So you talked about it a little earlier briefly –

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but from 2011 to 2015 you were a managing editor of the Bella Vista Weekly in *[crosstalk]* –?

*Tom Throne:* Bella Vista and I – from December of 2011 until January of 2016, I was the managing editor for the Bella Vista weekly paper, and in that regard, I did a lot of different, had a lot of different hats. I was the managing editor but – and I took care of building pages on Fridays and Mondays. But during the rest of the week, I did reporting, too. I did sports features and I did a little sports news. The good thing about Bella Vista is they don't have a high school, so we didn't have to worry about covering any high school sports. We covered senior citizens golf –

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and, you know, some golf tournaments and stuff like that, but we didn't have many sports.  
  
And so we dealt with a lot -- with feature stories and news stories and it was a fairly nice pace. It was a good end for my career as far as I was concerned. I thoroughly enjoyed those four and a half years doing that or four years doing that.

*William Wilk:* Awesome. So can you talk about how journalism technology evolved throughout your career?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I started in typewriters. A Royal typewriter was – I can't remember what I used at KU, it might have been either Olivet or Royal, one of the two, and –. But we had Royal typewriters that were probably 20 years old and, uh –

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you'd do your stories in duplicate by putting a piece of carbon paper between the two sheets. But what is interesting to me as part of it is the process because we were – Junction City was the last letterpress daily newspaper in the state. We didn't switch over to offset until 1976.

[**Post-production addition:** Why did the paper delay go into offset?

I'm not sure, since I was a lowly photographer at the time, but my best guess is that the owner and publisher, John D. Montgomery, was succeeded by his son, John Grey Montgomery, and John Grey probably made the decision to go offset.]

So I worked in a hot press environment as a photographer and a reporter.  
  
And so that was interesting because you would type the – type your story up, you'd submit it to the editor. The editor would look it over, then he would give it to a news editor who would proof it again. He would give it to a typesetter who would type it. And then the typesetter would take the perforation tape that they had set and they'd take the tape out to the –

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linotype machines to be cast in lead. And so your linotypes were fairly mechanical from the standpoint that you ran a perforation tape through 'em to get your letters to drop, where you didn't have to handset the newspaper type. That was only done for advertising.  
  
But they would run the lead type then and form that into a cast. Then we would run proofs on the stories as it came off the linotype machine. And then when we put the page together, they would run another full-page proof and you would proof the pages. So there was a lot of proofreading involved in the times and fairly labor-intensive. You know, you started 7 or 7:30 in the morning. The paper would be done somewhere –

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around 1or 1:30 and be out on the street by 3.  
  
And then when it came to computers, then it was -- the reporter would type it on the computer. The assisting managing editor would look at it and sometimes the managing editor would look at it. Then it would be sent upstairs to be set in type, and some – well, I don't even think we proofed that. It would be set onto the page and then the page was proofed and corrections were made on that and then it was shipped to the -- to the pressroom and they would print the paper.  
  
So you went from three to five people, six people looking at the paper down to two or three, and so you had to be pretty accurate when you sent your stuff upstairs –

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because, if you weren't, things probably weren't gonna get caught or you might not have time to catch 'em, mistakes, I mean.  
  
And the other thing was that those were done in strips of type. So you were – and when it went to offset, they would run it out in strips of paper and then it would be – you'd put hot wax on the back and then you would build your pages by sticking the copy onto the markup pages. And then when we got – we were just starting to get that in McPherson when I left, but in Leavenworth, they built all their pages on the computer. They had the big Macs, and we were doing full-age designs on the computer and then that went straight to plate.

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So, you definitely had one or two people looking at it. You would build the – edit the copy, build the page, run a proof. One person would look at the proof. You would make your corrections and off it went. So you went from three to six people in hot type down to two people in the final process. And that would go over from – well, basically from 1972 to – well, in '96 that's how we did it, so it was basically 25 years that's how that process changed. Because when I – even in Bella Vista, we ran pretty much like what we were doing in 1996.

*William Wilk:* Interesting. So what is the proudest moment of your career?

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*Tom Throne:* Well, I would say when I got selected into the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame in 2018. You know, because that's a culmination of your career, your achievements and it's recognized by your peers. But I will also tell you that I am equally proud of the Boyd Community Service Award that I got in 1988 for work on various organizations and committees in McPherson and that was a nomination through members of the community.  
  
And I was involved with the Kansas Honors Program as a site coordinator and, and reservations chairman for different – for McPherson, Leavenworth, and Geary counties. So it was a 30-year –

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span, doing that. I worked with – the first ones were in the mid-'70s in Junction City, and then when I went to McPherson, I worked there, and then when I left Leavenworth -- I went to Leavenworth, I worked on the Honors Program there. And then back again in Junction City, so –. And for that work, I received the Mildred Clodfelter KU Volunteer Alumni Award back in 2010.  
  
And the other cool one that I got was from the Marianne Stoddard Chapter Quill and Scroll, which was in Maryville, Missouri, and I worked with a lot of the high school kids. They would come and do one or two pages that we published in our paper, The High School Reviews, and those kids would write their stories and lay everything out and things like that.

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And so it was very rewarding when the kids gave me that award because they are the ones that – the instructor told me later that the kids were the ones that were behind my nomination for that and receiving that honor. And they surprised me and they wanted me to come up to their school before I left and for their end of the year meeting and I went up there and then they presented that award and that was a complete surprise.  
  
And so, I've been pretty lucky in my career. I've done a lot of really cool things and as a military brat I experienced a lot of cool things, and it's been a pretty great life.

*William Wilk:* That's an awesome story there. So what are some of your more favorite stories or moments within your career?

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*Tom Throne:* Well, probably Ken Rex McElroy and the sheriff in McPherson County are the ones that come to mind. But, you know, I interviewed a guy in -- he was from Wichita, but he had retired to Bella Vista, and he walked the Appalachian Trail from its beginnings in Georgia all the way up to Maine. And I did a pretty in-depth sports story on that and took first place in sports features in medium weeklies with that story. And I really enjoyed that.  
  
And the other thing that I liked was – and I started it in McPherson and then kinda continued – most of the papers that I worked at, we did Veterans Day special sections where we interviewed veterans from -- at the time, you know, there were a lot of World War II vets. So we could talk about World War II, Korean, Vietnam.

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Later on, we could incorporate the wars in Iraq. And, you know, and Bella Vista had a large contingent of World War II retirees when I first moved up there and worked there in 2011. So I got to do some really cool stories. There was a guy who was a ball turret gunner on a B-17 during World War II, and he – and that's – you're talking about sitting in like a desk chair slung underneath a bomber with two 50-caliber machine guns and protecting your plane. And you know, the – some of those guys came – I came away with a lot of really good stories, talking to vets.

*William Wilk:* So what was –.

*Tom Throne:* And I will also say the other thing is -- what I found rewarding was working with young journalists either out of college or –

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people that had had a good writing background who wanted to learn the business. And I enjoyed training people to be newspaper reporters and photographers because a lot of our papers, when they're small like that, you're a reporter and a photographer. And so having a photo background, I did a lot of training with the reporters on how to shoot pictures because they had to go out and do their own work and, and I really enjoyed that.

*William Wilk:* Interesting. So what were some of the more difficult moments within your career?

*Tom Throne:* Having to let people go. They always say, hey, you know, it gets easier when you fire people. That's a lie. Even people that –

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probably deserved to be fired, that's still hard. And when you had cutbacks it's even harder. When I was a district manager, we bought a newspaper [Kansas City Kansan] and it was really overstaffed and we ended up cutting a third of the employees and that's probably the hardest thing I ever did in my life is have to sit there and tell 'em you didn't have a job and, you know, that's really hard.  
  
And we – you kinda make light of it before you have to go in. You've got to have a little bit of levity, but getting in there and talking to people and knowing that's their lives, that's hard and, you know, I like to say that I've got a human side, too, I try to do the best I can.

*William Wilk:* Yeah, of course.

*[0:57:00]*

So what colleague or editor had the biggest influence on you?

*Tom Throne:* I would say Carter Zerbe, who was my boss when I was publisher, was my boss in McPherson because I – we changed back and forth regional managers, but he was my regional. And when I was named district manager in McPherson, I handled -- Carter and I did -- worked newspapers in eastern Colorado, we did that for almost a year. We would go in and try to improve their profitability.  
  
And so we would fly into Denver once a month for three days and he stayed basically in one area and worked with a daily and a weekly, and then I had that weekly plus two other weeklies and then I would get in my car and go and do that. And I learned so much from Carter, not just, –

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you know, by how he operated talking to fellow publishers and employees but how he handled the business. And he had owned a paper [The Augusta Gazette] and then sold it to American Publishing, got out of the business for a couple of years, then came back in as a regional manager and that's when he became my boss. And we became lifelong friends 'til he died a couple years ago from lung cancer.  
  
And he, too, was a member of the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame [See Appendix]. So, he was probably my strongest mentor. And my other one would have been Gene Hall, who was regional manager and vice president for American Publishing, Liberty Group Publishing, later Gatehouse.

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He was out of Iowa, and he was my boss in Leavenworth. And we spent a lot of time talking to newspapers and hunting and fishing.

*William Wilk:* Gotta get some fun in there, too.

*Tom Throne:* Yeah.

*William Wilk:* So what are your memories of attending the KPA conventions?

*Tom Throne:* I was really active in KPA. As a managing editor I was active on the legislative committee and then, when I was a publisher, then I worked my way up the ladder as secretary and treasurer and vice president and then president of the association. So I have very fond memories of the association, going to the meetings and meeting fellow publishers. And I met some of the greats in those meetings, Webster “Web” Hawkins, Richard “Dick” Clasen, Emerson Lynn Jr. [See Appendix]. You know, all those guys, –

*[1:00:00]*

are members of the Hall of Fame as well, and you're talking the heydays of weeklies and daily papers in Kansas and I was amongst the greats. And so that was really cool, you know, talking to those guys about what they did and about their communities and their influence in their communities.

*William Wilk:* Awesome. And then, what do you see as the biggest moment in Kansas journalism history?

*Tom Throne:* Oh man, that – I don't know if I can name that. Nothing really comes to mind, as you know, that just jumps right out at me as a memory. I think that the thing I will say is that just knowing from my days as president of the association –

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all these people, all of the journalists, whether you were a community newspaper or a daily, all those guys put their heart and soul into – and by guys, I mean men and women -- put their heart and soul into their communities to do what they think is right and to keep their readers informed as to what's happening.  
  
I was – my mother-in-law [Bonnie Tegethoff] recently moved in with us, moved out from Washington, Kansas, up in the north-central area, and she got her hometown paper the other day 'cause they did a story on her and some of the work she did in the community. And you know, you just look at that and they've got one or two people working for 'em for the paper and they're going out and working all kinds of stories –

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and working stuff on the COVID and city and county and, you know, just general information as to what's going on in their communities and that's –.  
  
when I was talking the other day, newspapers are recorders of history. You know, we're historians whether we want to be or not. We record the daily or weekly activities of what's going on in our community. And one of the things that reallyscares me about where we're headed in the information age is that people are uninformed and so they don't trust the media because they're not sure what's accurate.  
  
And when I started in the business and really up until the computer age, you knew where you could get accurate information and –

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generally, it was from newspapers. And with the decline in newspaper readership, whether it's in large cities like Kansas City or whether it's small papers like McPherson, people aren't getting the news of their community or the national and the international news that they really need that's vital.  
  
And when you look at the internet, what do you believe? Who is your trusted source? And I think we're in a lot of -- a lot of troubled times ahead because we don't know what's true and that's not to say that newspapers were perfect because they weren't, but we made sure we corrected it and people knew when it was and wasn't.

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But 99 percent or higher was fair and accurate and when I look at – I look at Yahoo News a lot now. I mean I read the *Arkansas Democratic Gazette* every day and I love it, getting it on the internet as it looks like a newspaper. But when I look at Yahoo, you've got a whole list of different reporting, different news sources and you've got to kind of filter which ones are true and which ones are fake and which ones go too much to the left and goes too much to the right. And, you know, I generally trust the Associated Press and Reuters and I'm kind of leery of the other ones, and so I read a bunch of 'em and try to figure out what's good and what's bad.

*William Wilk:* Yeah, definitely.

*[1:05:00]*

*Tom Throne:* That gets a little heavy, but that's how I look at it. I am very concerned about our nation, that we're not getting true news.

*William Wilk:* Yeah, *[crosstalk].*

*Tom Throne:* Stuff that people can trust because you can't be a newspaper or a TV station or radio or anything if the people don't trust you, and there are a lot of trust issues going on right now.

*William Wilk:* So you were honored with the 2003 Award for Excellence, a downtown supporter from the Kansas Main Street program for your work in Leavenworth.

*Tom Throne:* *[Crosstalk]* You're picking all that stuff out of my resume. I forgot I sent you that. Then – yeah, you know, I was very active in the Main Street Community program both in McPherson and Leavenworth, and I just thought, as a newspaper guy, you needed to be –

*[1:06:00]*

active in your community. Some of the best people working in communities are on your newspaper staff, and I always thought that it was really important to get to know other businesspeople and one of those ways is to be active in the Chamber. Main Street was a great program.  
  
And then off of that, particularly in Leavenworth, the National Main Street Program started a program, I can't remember what the title of it was, but basically, it paired newspapers or communities with the military communities that were nearby. So, like, Junction City had a similar program. But I was the co-chairman of the one in Leavenworth –

*[1:07:00]*

to try to get a better understanding between Main Street and the business community in Leavenworth with the military that were at Fort Leavenworth.  
  
And so we – I got to travel to several different military bases to see how those communities interacted, you know, particularly Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia. But some good things came out of that program. One of the most notable was the moving, uh – having higher-end apartments downtown in some of the buildings, old buildings in Leavenworth, which are historic factories that were converted into apartment living was an outcome of part of that work. It didn't come to fruition 'til after I left Leavenworth, but I felt like I was on the ground floor when it started. Yeah.

*[1:08:00]*

*William Wilk:* So you were president of the Leavenworth Chamber in 2004?

*Tom Throne:* Yeah.

*William Wilk:* Why did you want to do that and what were some of your initiatives?

*Tom Throne:* Well, we had a little problem with one of the secretaries stealing money in Leavenworth Chamber, so my year wasn't quite as illustrious as I wanted it to be. But the -- but we did get it stabilized and the Chamber is pretty active in there. And I enjoyed my year as president of the organization. We had a strong executive director [Charlie Gregor] that helped us. But I like being – like I said, I like being involved with the community and as a community leader, it was important to be active in the Chamber. I was active in the Chamber in McPherson and Junction City.

*[1:09:00]*

*William Wilk:* Awesome. So, what made you become a strong supporter in the Kansas Press Association?

*Tom Throne:* Well, you gotta believe in yourself, and the Press Association is the backbone of the newspaper industry in Kansas. That's the central clearinghouse of what's going on, particularly in lobbying on -- lobbying with the Legislature on issues that affect newspapers, such as open records. One thing that hasn't passed yet in Kansas is open affidavits so that you can find out more about the arrest information and background and why somebody was arrested. It was open and then it got closed.

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And it's been a struggle to try to get it back again.  
  
You know, and, and public notice laws to make sure that public notices are published in papers that are independent of the government because you don't know what's gonna make it onto a government website. They can say that they're gonna post it there but geez, it just didn't happen to make it in and it was a crucial item that was going on somewhere in town and, it could be anything from laws that are passed by the city council or it could be zoning regulations that are changing. And if there isn't free access to that through the newspapers and we're relying on websites that are run by the government you don't know really what's gonna be on 'em.

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And so that's been a real struggle with newspapers, especially as some of the stronger daily newspapers decline in their influence with legislators.

*William Wilk:* Awesome. So did you ever consider quitting journalism and doing something else?

*Tom Throne:* Yes. I interviewed several times for other jobs. One with Southwestern Bell and another one with – and that would have been a public relations job. And I looked at a Chamber of Commerce position in McPherson. But the Southwestern Bell job just – I just wasn't sure. My dad told me I was nuts for not taking it, but –

*[1:12:00]*

I became a publisher a couple of years later in McPherson. But I also looked at – when I was looking at the Chamber of Commerce job in McPherson, I was promoted the day before they made their decision on who was gonna get the job, and, I pulled myself out of the running because I knew I was about ready to get promoted. And so things worked out for the best and, you know, I've had a rewarding career doing what I did. But yeah, I did think about it.  
  
I actually, even when I was in Junction City, I – the first time, well, I thought about going into insurance and selling insurance. Took the tests and all that stuff and then decided not to do it.

[**Post-production addition:** I looked at a number of different options to further my goal of earning a good living to provide for my family.]

*[1:13:00]*

*William Wilk:* Was there a particular moment early in your career where you realized I am a real journalist now?

*Tom Throne:* Yeah, when I was out covering, shooting pictures of accidents and I covered a couple of dead bodies that were – one was found on the hillside and we beat the police department there or beat the sheriff's office. So, you had to stay away 'cause it was a crime scene, and we didn't shoot pictures of the bodies, so you had to be fairly creative on how you shot 'em, you know, they –.  
  
We had one in Junction in particular where the helicopter went down and five people died and it lost power and fell into Milford Lake, and I spent a couple of days out there when they brought –

*[1:14:00]*

helicopters out, Skyhook helicopters that could lift a Huey up out of the water, and while they were trying to do that, the line would snap. And so I was out a couple days doing that. And I had one where they found a dead body on a county road and, you know, going out and working the investigations of those, and that's when it hits home who you are and what you're doing and your responsibility to the community.

*William Wilk:* Yeah. So last question here, why did you decide to retire in 2016?

*Tom Throne:* It was time. I was feeling the burnout, and they were doing some cutbacks on the *Democratic Gazette* and I wasn't getting cut back, but I just –

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I didn't want to work that hard, to tell you the truth, so I decided it was my time to retire. And I don't regret retiring except I would sure like to write some editorials now, and that's the one thing I do miss is writing editorials or columns.

*William Wilk:* Yeah, definitely. Tom, that's all I have.

*Tom Throne:* Okay.

*William Wilk:* Thank you for taking the time. I really appreciate it.

*William Wilk:* This is the end of Part 3.

*[End of Audio]*

*[0:00:00]*

*Connor Brennan:* Today is Oct. 8, 2020. I am interviewing Tom Throne for the Inside Stories: Oral Histories of Kansas Journalists project. This is part four. This interview is taking place remotely during the Covid pandemic. This interview is sponsored by the University of Kansas and the Kansas Press Association.

All right, Tom, the first topic we're going to talk about today is gender obstacles and opportunities in the newsroom.

*Tom Throne:* Okay.

*Connor Brennan:* Ready for the first question?

*Tom Throne:* Yep. Well, I guess I will be. You know, we'll see.

*[Laughter]*

*Connor Brennan:* All right. What was the newsroom environment like at places that you've worked at?

*Tom Throne:* As it relates to gender or just in general?

*Connor Brennan:* In general.

*Tom Throne:* I'd say that on the most part our newsrooms were pretty congenial. There wasn't a lot of tension in them.

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We had a -- like, the first newsroom I worked in in Junction City was a good mixture of old and new. We had – our city editor [Harold Taylor] had been there for 30 or 40 years. We had another reporter who had been there 20. The rest of us were fairly new. We had a lifestyle editor who was probably in her 50s, but she had only been there a short time. The sports editor, myself, and – were younger people. The general manager was an older gentleman about ready to retire and our news editor was probably in his 60s.

*Connor Brennan:* Very good. How were the men in the newsroom –?

*Tom Throne:* I will tell you my other newsrooms were quite a bit younger and, in most cases, I was the oldest one.

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*Connor Brennan:* Okay. How did men in the newsroom treat women journalists throughout your career?

*Tom Throne:* My – the early days in Junction, we had one woman on our staff and she was a general interest society editor. And it wasn't until I was managing editor that we hired a couple of women to work as a reporter and one as the society editor. Everybody got along pretty well, I think. When I was in Northwest Missouri, we had women reporters and, well, and – as well as men -- and, you know, we all got along pretty well. The only time we probably had a little bit of conflict, was in -- we first – when we were working on a pretty heavy story about the sheriff.

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And I've talked about it in previous interviews, but we had a couple of people that didn't believe the sheriff had done anything wrong and, you know, I would say that they were in the sheriff's camp, which created some tensions as we were working on the stories because we really couldn't talk around this -- this individual about what we were working on because we were afraid it would get back to the sheriff's office.

So, but other than that, we were pretty spirited in Leavenworth. The staff was some conservatives and some liberals and we had a good time, jostling with each other about political approaches, but, but it was always in good fun.

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It wasn't nasty.

*Connor Brennan:* Do you by chance remember the specific case that created that slight conflict with law enforcement?

*Tom Throne:* Oh, absolutely. We had a sheriff who was doing racist things, arresting kids for no reason or pulling them over for no reason, harassing them. And we ran a pretty extensive set of stories on it – three of them in fact. Two of them were over 120 inches long and one was 60-something inches long. And we covered the case in quite a lot of detail, and it led to an attorney general's inquisition and – or, it turned into, I don't know, an investigation in which he told the sheriff "Resign or there will be an inquisition." He resigned and blamed it on the -- on the newspaper.

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But it's easy to blame the newspaper, but when the attorney general is saying, "You know, I'm going to have an inquisition," which is pretty serious, then there's more to it than just what the newspaper did.

*Connor Brennan:* I understand. Yep. All right. How did men outside of the newsroom treat women journalists throughout your career?

*Tom Throne:* Mmm… I would say that there were cases where, um – I can't think of any specific ones, but I know that we had discussions in the newsroom sometimes about watching out for certain people. They would try to put the moves on the women. So, you know, we just worked on what we should do. We didn't want to – frankly, at the time didn't want to create a lot of waves, but the situations were –

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were handled, if the reporter came and talked to us about it. If they didn't, then there's not much I could do. But we – in small towns you know who the bad folks are and the ones that are going to cause some problems and the ones that are going to make people's lives miserable and you just try to figure out how to deal with them.

*Connor Brennan:* I understand. All right. What was your career advancement –?

*[Crosstalk]*

*Tom Throne:* Personally, for me, I felt like I treated women reporters as equals. You know, particularly when I was a publisher, they were paid the same as what a male was. And we tried to treat everybody with respect. And, and I think that over the years, I earned a lot of respect from my employees.

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They would -- they would tell others that I was a good guy to work for. So, I'm assuming by that that they respected me. If there were problems that they couldn't – they could come and talk because we had an open – I had an open-door policy and if there were problems, then I expected to hear about them.

*Connor Brennan:* I like that. Very interesting. Okay. What were career advancement options like for women during your career?

*Tom Throne:* Not many to start with, you know, the lifestyles editor. And as more women came into the business then those opportunities opened up. And I had -- in McPherson, when I was promoted to managing editor, I had a lady [Kathy Hackleman] in – who had worked for me a couple of years prior part time and – as a city reporter – and she was, was pretty good.

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And when I moved up to the publisher, I hired Kathy as my managing editor. Her background was not in journalism; it was in social welfare. And she did a great job. And she did that for a long time, then she moved back to – moved out to Pennsylvania to be close to her only son. And so she's working in public relations for the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Cooperative. But I can't tell you where a lot of my reporters are. I have one out at -- who was a reporter for me who is now a minister in Pennsylvania. There was one another -- another gal named Charla [Gatz] who – her aspiration in life was to be a romantic novelist and –

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sometimes when she would write her feature stories it would sound just like a romantic novel, so we would make her rewrite some of them. But she is now a noticed – a noted novelist but she refuses to tell anybody what her name is, so I can't tell you what her books are.

But, you know, and there – I've had women who have been ad managers that worked for me, circulation managers, managing editors, and, you know, I felt like if they could handle the job they got promoted. Or they got hired. One of the two. To me, it didn't really matter. I just – I needed somebody that could make the bottom line or could get the newspaper out.

*Connor Brennan:* I completely understand. All right. What were the advantages of being a woman journalist throughout your career that you noticed?

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*Tom Throne:* Early on there weren't probably any. The opportunities weren't there until later on. I knew women who were publishers that got moved up to regional managers and vice presidents. A friend of mine [Gloria Fletcher] was the president of a newspaper company in Washington and later became the publisher in Tulsa [World], and I think that if you could do the job, the opportunities were there.

Now, that's me speaking. I'm sure that if you talked to a woman they would have a different perspective on it than I would.

*Connor Brennan:* Of course.

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Similar question here: What were the disadvantages of being a woman journalist throughout your career?

*Tom Throne:* That's a hard one. I think part of it is being a woman and people worried about whether you could do the job, whether you could stand up to the bullying sometimes from people. And, you know, I'll say this nicely. I always told my reporters whether they were male or female if you wanted to be in the business you had to develop an "F you" attitude. And that didn't mean that you told people off and told them what – where to go. That meant that you had an attitude that "I'm here to do a job and you're not going to stop me from doing it. So, F you if you think you can." And if you couldn't develop that attitude, you needed to get out of the business because you had to be able to, –

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to stand up to the pressures whether you're a man or a woman to do it. And I think in some respects, that can be a hindrance for women, if they can't develop a tough skin.

But I will tell you, once you talked, most people toughened up and, and proceeded with the job. Whether they made that a career or not was a different story, but when they worked for me, they did their job the way they needed to.

*Connor Brennan:* I hear you. You just had to have that level of confidence.

*Tom Throne:* Yep. Yeah.

*Connor Brennan:* I understand. Switching up the genre here a little bit, what was it like trying to balance home and work during your career?

*Tom Throne:* Well, that -- that was a pretty good chore. I'm -- I'm a controlled workaholic.

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My dad was a workaholic, but I tried to be home in the evenings. And sometimes I left early in the mornings. There were some evenings where I would come home and then go back to work. When I worked in Northwest Missouri in Maryville, I basically went in at 7 and came home at 7. That -- that was hard on -- on my family because my wife was going to school, and we had a daughter who was in kindergarten. And, you know, that -- that puts a strain on a marriage when the people around you can't count on you sometimes because you're putting work first, but I've also had pretty easy jobs and it's – and I –

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was able to take a little more time off when I moved to McPherson. But once you become a publisher, sometimes that becomes a 24/7 kind of job. I ran two press crews in Leavenworth when I worked — when I was a publisher there. And one of them would work from 7 to 3 or 4 in the morning and it wasn't unusual to get a call from the head press unit at 3 in the morning saying, "Hey, we've got a problem. What do you want me to do?" And, you know, it wakes your wife up who was getting ready to get up at 5:30 to go teach school and she wasn't too happy. *[Laughs]*

But, and, and sometimes you put your friendships in jeopardy. I lost a really good friend in Leavenworth over a story that I feel needed to run on the front page, and he didn't think it was any big deal.

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But when you're a veterinarian and you shoot at deer inside the city limits with a gun and, and you – which is against the law – and you do a story about it because he's a veterinarian protecting animals, he didn't -- he felt it was a minor story because he was trying to protect his property from the deer, as in eating plants and flowers. And so that -- that cost me my friendship.

And, you know, and I've had some times where it's put some strains on friendships. You know? When you're dealing with friends who are advertisers and you're getting ads from the out-of-town competition and they're wanting to run ads in your competition you've got to –

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to do some, some pretty heavy talking with guys to calm them down a little bit. I had one instance where there was an advertiser from Hutchinson when I worked at McPherson who wanted to run ads in our paper only because he was mad at the – our competing shopper and he wanted to show the shopper that he could do it. Well, I had ads from the three car dealerships in town and they were running on a fairly regular basis, and they got wind that I was thinking about running these ads. And so, I talked to my friend who was a car dealer and I said, "Hey, you're just going to have to bear with me. I'll protect you as long as I can by not running these ads." And I told the guy I wasn't going to run his ads.

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And he went to my boss and to my boss' boss and all the way up to the president of the company and I had the home office calling me wanting to know what I was doing. And I just told him they were going to have to bear with me, that I had a plan. And finally, after about six weeks, my boss called and said, "Tom, you've got to run those ads." And I said, "Okay, Randy, you tell me I have to run those ads and I'll run the ads." And he said, "Well, I'm telling you you have to run the ads." And I said, "Okay."

That gave me the cover because then I could tell my friends that my boss ordered me to do it. But when the advertiser called me up and said, "Hey, I heard you're going to have to run my ads now," I told him, "Yeah, I – you are going to have to – I am going to have to run your ads. But here's the deal. That's a cash-only ad because I know you're only going to run them for two or three weeks till you and Jerry –" who was the –

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owned the competing shopper, uh – "reach some kind of accommodation and then I won't see you again and it will cost me this." And I said to him, "So, you're a cash-only customer." He wasn't too happy about it, but there's nothing he could do because I set the rules on that. And he paid his money and he advertised for two or three weeks and he quit. But I kept my auto dealers and I kept them happy. And, you know, those are some things you've got to do.

I had another one where a really good friend of mine – we had a policy in court records that if you were arrested – we ran arrests, but we never ran the name. So, we would say, "A 28-year-old male or female was arrested at such-and-such doing such-and-such." And I had a friend whose daughter was involved in a domestic disturbance at a bar and –

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I felt that he needed to know because we were good friends. And so, I went to see him, and I said, "So-and-so, I'm showing you this article. And now I'm going to show you the police report that details what's going on." And I said, "That's your daughter." And I said, "You do what you want, but you should know." And he said, "Okay, thank you," and I never heard another thing. But I think the problem was rectified.

So, you know, when you work on smaller paper as we do – as I did in my career -- everybody knows everybody. And so you -- there's some times you have to do what you think is right, and you also have to protect your advertisers, and, and sometimes it's going to cost you friendships.

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*Connor Brennan:* I understand. All right. Last question here about gender. How do you view the state of women in journalism today?

*Tom Throne:* Oh, I think it's in a lot better place. And, and, and better for it for our industry and, our country. I mean, I think they provide a totally different viewpoint on stories. They're – the kids that are coming out of school are a lot more confident about what they're doing. And, you know, and that's not to say that I don't think there's probably some sexism still out there, but I think we're better equipped to handle it that than we were.

*Connor Brennan:* I agree. I agree. All right. We're going to completely change up the genre here to newsroom socialization.

*Tom Throne:* Okay.

*[0:21:00]*

*Connor Brennan:* All right. The first question here: How do you -- how did you gain your confidence in your ability to be a journalist in the media industry?

*Tom Throne:* *[Laughs]* Boy. I didn't have any problems shooting pictures. When I started, I was a photojournalist. But it was hard making that transition for me through journalism school to being a writer. And it took, oh, a long time, for me to feel comfortable as a writer. And there were times even in the waning years of my career that I didn't totally feel comfortable doing what I was doing. But I think over the years as you did, as I did more and more stories that I became a lot more competent – confident.

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And I think moving over, being an assistant managing editor or a managing editor gave me a good perspective on what we needed to do when we were writers. I had never written editorials until I was a managing editor. I'd been in the business for almost 10 years when I wrote my first one. When I worked in Northwest Missouri, I was a managing editor, but I also covered the school board, board of regents. I wrote two editorials and four columns a week, plus I edited the paper. That's why I worked 12-hour days.

And so, you gain a certain amount of confidence that you can whip those things out. And I – and my first one, I wrote a column on Monday and I would go in on Sunday night about 7:30 and I would crank it out.

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And as the years went by, I could sit down and crank it out that morning if I had to. So, you know, I think it's just experience and that gains you the confidence you have to have to do the job.

And, and I also looked on, I looked on myself in two ways: As a -- as a reporter, I'm a historian, and as an editor, I'm a teacher. And so, I think that you've got to have the confidence to do both those jobs. And, and it just takes time sometimes to do it. I always told my reporters that they should stick in the – stick with the paper, in that job that you were hired for, for one or two years just so you had confidence that no matter what you did after that you could do it. And I -- and I think that was a pretty good rule.

*Connor Brennan:* I agree. I agree.

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I've always believed in once you put your mind to something you can achieve that. All right. What kinds of journalism awards did you win in your career? And what impact did they have on you?

*Tom Throne:* Oh, I've – well, let's see. I've won numerous editorial and writing awards at McPherson, Leavenworth, and, um – well, in Junction City the second time I've won some. And, and also at Bella Vista. We competed in the medium category there, and we were the top medium-size weekly three out of the four years I worked there. So,I was really happy with that. That was a really fun experience as a managing editor. Um…

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But I was pretty involved in the communities I lived in. I've worked in Main Street, in the Chamber, in the Red Cross, and United Way. And I was an Optimist and then a Rotarian. And so, in 1988, living in – when I lived in McPherson, I won the Boyd Community Service Award through the Press Association and that -- as members of the McPherson community who nominated me for that award, and so that was very satisfying. Being named to the Kansas Press Association Hall of Fame in 2018 was a huge honor for me. You know, that's a culmination of my career and, and what I -- what I did in Kansas journalism for almost 40 years.

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I was recognized by students at Maryville Missouri High School, with the Quill and Scroll Award for being – I was named an honorary member of their chapter for the work I did with the students on their student newspaper.

So, I've won a lot of – well, I shouldn't say "a lot" – numerous photojournalism awards, over the years and, you know, I've been pretty blessed with my work accomplishments.

*Connor Brennan:* Yes. All right. You answered the next two questions there, which were regarding your Boyd Community Service Award in 1988 and also the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame.

*Tom Throne:* Yep, and, and I also received a volunteer award –

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when I lived in Leavenworth working with the Kansas Main Street program. And, and I – that was a statewide award and I was pretty happy with that. I was very active in the Main Street programs in both McPherson and Leavenworth and also was a – the chairman of the Army Community Partnership Program, and that was run by the national Main Street program when we were working on that in cooperation with Fort Leavenworth when I lived in Leavenworth. And, you know, I think that community service is something that's a terrific thing to do, and I encourage people to belong to a civic organization of some kind and be involved, whether it's a church or whether it's community service, to be involved in a community because that's how you learn about the community you live in and give something back to it.

*[0:28:00]*

*Connor Brennan:* Very good. By chance, do you have a favorite award that you've received?

*Tom Throne:* I have four favorites.

*Connor Brennan:* All right.

*Tom Throne:* Well, we covered some of them. The KPA Hall of Fame. The Boyd Community Service. The Quill and Scroll. And then, I also had -- I was a site chairman for some kind of involvement for 30 years in the Kansas Honors Program run through the KU Alumni Association. And in 2010 I received the Mildred Clodfelter Award for volunteer involvement in the Alumni Association. And I found that to be pretty gratifying because we went and I – do you know much about the Kansas Honors Program?

*Connor Brennan:* I do not.

*Tom Throne:* Okay. Well, they changed it somewhat, but back when I worked with it, –

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we honored the top 10 percent of the senior class at every high school in the state. And we would operate banquets or meetings, depending on the size of the county. Like, when I worked in McPherson and Junction City, we were paired with two or three other counties and we would hold a dinner because it was small. When I worked in Leavenworth, we would do it and Leavenworth and Douglas County – Lawrence – were put together in one. Well, that was a pretty big -- pretty big group and so we held that at the auditorium on the KU campus. I'm – my mind fails me, but we would have that as a big, bigger ceremony.

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But all the kids, you know, that were graduating seniors that were in the top 10 percent were honored with a certificate and a dictionary. And – well, I liked it because it recognized academics, not just athletics. And so, I was happy to be involved with that one. And those are my big four.

[**Post-production addition:** How long were involved with the Kansas Honors Program?

I was involved with the Kansas Honors Program, sponsored by the University of Kansas, for approximately 30 years, when I lived in Junction City, both times, McPherson and Leavenworth. I started in 1976 in Junction City and the program was one of the first programs in the state. It was headed by retired Brig. Gen. Andy Seitz and I was his assistant. I eventually took over as chairman for Geary County from Andy.]

*Connor Brennan:* All right. Thank you. I like that. How would you define a "successful career" in journalism?

*Tom Throne:* I didn't really think that – about success until you all started working on this thing. And, and I've talked over four days now about the different things in my life and, and how journalism has -- has brought me such great rewards and the ability to do things outside my comfort zone.

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And I have to say that I had a pretty damn good life. I'm almost 71, and I've seen and done things that I never really imagined I would do. You know, back in the late '70s, I applied for a job in Newton as a news editor and the publisher interviewed me. And he was -- he was talking and he said, "Well, have you ever thought about being a publisher?" And I said, "No, not really, Mr. Anderson." And – his name was Bob Anderson. And I said, "I haven't really thought about it." He said, "Well –" he said, "You ought to." He said, "That would be a good thing."

Well, it took me another 10 years before I could think about it, but it changed my life when I did.

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I became, I think, a lot more comfortable in the business. And I had never worked on the business side of it; I was always on the news side. So, I got to learn how to operate on the business side as well as the news side and what it took to put a paper out. When I became – the regional manager had talked to me in 1989 that in a couple months they were going to move me. And I told him, "You know, if you're going to move me somewhere outside of McPherson, I want to do it before my daughter gets to high school." She was an eighth-grader. And I said, "Because it's unfair once she gets to high school to move" because I had been – my sister had gone through that, when my dad was in the military and she got to change to two high schools. And I got to stay with mine and – for all four years. And so, it's a problem.

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So, I was lucky enough when – unlucky for my boss, but they let my boss go and they said, "You're the new publisher." And that was in October, the second week of October of 1989. And three weeks later, I had to have a budget ready and I didn't know squat about doing a budget. And I had a good friend who guided me through that, the publisher in El Dorado – we were owned by the same company – his name was Gene Austin, and he said, "Come on down, and we'll -- we'll put it together." And that was before we had it on a computer spreadsheet, and we had to do all the additions across the board for the months and down for the totals in each month and you calculated those all by hand.

And so, that was a real chore and a real experience. And having to go to my first budget hearing was the worst thing I –

*[0:34:00]*

had ever been through in my entire life because I had never been through it. And so that kind of stuff – you get through the first couple of those and you've got -- you've got it made after that because it gives you a lot of confidence that you can do the job.

[**Post-production addition:** We both worked for American Publishing Co., headquartered in West Frankfort, Ill., which owned the McPherson and El Dorado papers. It was later sold to Liberty Group Publishing and then to Gatehouse Media. I worked for all three companies during stints in McPherson and Leavenworth.]

*Connor Brennan:* I hear you. All right. A little follow-up question: What qualities do you think are most important for one's career advancement in journalism?

*Tom Throne:* I think you've got to have integrity, trustworthiness. Your word is your bond. When you tell somebody that, particularly an anonymous source, that you'll go to jail before you deliver, you know, give up the source -- fortunately, I never had to do that, never had to get pressured like that. But you've got to be willing to go to the very end to protect your sources.

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And those sources have to know that -- that your word is your bond and that you're not going to screw around with the story and slant it. I always tried to stay middle of the road. I think I was pretty successful in that, and my sources rewarded me for that by talking to me about other things and that they could talk to me in confidence and know that I wasn't going to spill the beans.

*Connor Brennan:* I feel like those are all very, very good qualities.

*Tom Throne:* I mean, your – the only thing you really have in life is your integrity. And if you -- if you surrender it by telling lies and doing unethical things, then you really have nothing because in the -- in the end when you're done with work, if it hasn't been built on integrity, then what have you had for yourself?

*[0:36:00]*

Your peers and everybody else already know what an awful person you are. How do you feel about yourself?

*Connor Brennan:* I agree. I think integrity, carrying it with you, goes even deeper than just journalism.

*Tom Throne:* Mm-hmm. It transforms into any job you have, as your integrity is -- is what's the most important thing. And I came close to quitting a couple times when bosses would put me into impossible situations that we had to figure out how to do it to our satisfaction.

*Connor Brennan:* I understand. Very interesting. How do you think that journalism has changed since you've entered the field, both in terms of technology and content?

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You've noted journalism isn't what it used to be. What do you -- what do you mean by that?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I started with a typewriter and worked my way up to a Mac computer. So – and I started in – on a letterpress newspaper, which was the last one in the state. We didn't convert until 1976 to offset. Of course, the newspaper industry has really changed, particularly in the last – well, since – I would say since the Great Recession in 2008. It was starting to – revenues were starting to turn southward before that. But boy, when – 2008, 2009, 2010 and onwards revenue became scarce.

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And so that – between that and corporate buyouts of newspapers and pretty well raping the communities of their ability to find out news ... you know, some communities have alternative papers that have started up, online news services.

But -- but my biggest thing that I see is that people aren't informed and they don't trust. And, and one of the things that I always felt when I was in the -- in the business was that readers trusted what they read in our newspaper and knew that we were putting out facts, not -- not falsehoods –

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because my feelings are when we talk now about alternative facts, alternative facts are generally lies. They're facts to fit the scenario that that person wants it to -- wants it to be even though it's probably not. And I think that communities and, and readers don't know what's going on in their communities.

And I'll give you an example. I live in the little town of Centerton. I have a Bentonville address, but we're in Centerton and I'm on a Bentonville rural route. Centerton has gone from 7,000 people to 15,000 people. We have zero coverage. My only sources for news are what the mayor puts out on his Facebook page if I want to know about what's going on about the city.

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If I want to know who to vote for in – for city council, good luck. I voted for the incumbents, but I know none of them. And I think that we're operating as a nation on limited amounts of news. And then, if you think Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or Yahoo News is providing you the news you need to have in an unbiased way, you're sorely mistaken. I'm very careful when I read Yahoo News quite a bit, but I'm very careful about which ones I read and I don't – I try to stay away from the far left and the far right.

We're lucky in respects that we have a statewide paper, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette,* that has an issue called the *Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* –

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that is a fairly good newspaper providing lots of content. But the content comes at a price. … we used to pay $12 a month; we're paying $34. It's online – well, it's online seven days a week, but the only print edition we receive is on Sundays and that's so they can distribute inserts. I read the paper all online and I look at the inserts. I've found it to be really interesting when you can say they add extra pages on in finance and local area news and state and statewide and international news on extra pages -- it's set up to look just like a newspaper.

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You can flip the pages and, and it's laid out like a newspaper so it's easy to read. You touch a story, and it expands out so you can read the whole story. You don't have to read it in the columns.

And, and for that, our area and our state are extremely lucky because I look at what McPherson and Leavenworth and to some extent Junction City because they're privately owned, but the rest of them are corporate. And they're a disservice to the community and that's why no one subscribes to them because there's nothing in them. And, so I think the transition is going to be how do you make money online and how do you rebuild your community trust in news? Some communities are lucky. Like, McPherson's got two online newspapers that go into that: *McPherson Now* and then there's another one. I can't remember the name of it.

[**Post-production addition:** I checked the internet for online papers in McPherson and two in McPherson are the McPherson Buzz and the McPherson News Ledger, which I think used to be McPherson Now.]

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But they provide local news that the newspaper doesn't anymore. And it's a sad state. You know, I understand things are all going to go online, and people aren't going to read newspapers, but they can't expect them to be free. You're going to have to pay something to get the news. And – because those news providers are having to pay something for their employees to go do it. So, it's not a freebie thing.

And trying to figure out – well, figuring out a way to make money is the bad part because that's hard. And the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette's* publisher said, "I can make this a go if people are willing to pay $34 a month." When he came and talked to our Rotary Club over a Zoom meeting in August, he said that at the time they were running about 75-percent subscription rate.

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I don't know whether that's higher or lower, but, um – now – but, but he said, "I can make it if 75 percent are willing to pay $34 a month." If we didn't have that operation, we'd be in a really sad state trying to figure out what's true and what's not and what's gossip and what isn't.

*Connor Brennan:* I understand. What are your thoughts on the state of journalism today from both a national and state perspective?

*Tom Throne:* Well, I think that there are some cases it's too partisan. I think … that people are – have got to figure out a way to find a middle ground. You know? I'm a moderate.

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I could be a moderate Republican; I could be a moderate Democrat. It doesn't matter to me because the moderates are the ones that -- that hold the left and the right together. We're the compromisers. We're the – actually the ones who get stuff done. And part of the problem with the country today and the media today is camps have to be left and right. And they don't have to be that way, and they can report news the old-fashioned way, which is just straightforward. Now, whether people will buy that or not is another story. They say they will. I'm not convinced. Because people who watch – and I'll use the TV for example – people that watch MSNBC or CNN are not the same people that watch Fox. And so, people have already divided themselves in "This is how I feel because I'm comfortable with looking at this set of news." Me, I try to watch all three of them.

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And I worry about some of the lies that are being put out by the left and the right and people having a tough time grasping what's true and what's reality and figuring out what they're -- what they're going to believe.

I think that statewide, you know, I can speak to Kansas a little bit because I keep in touch with some of my friends and I see what's going on with the corporate papers and on most of the dailies that they're turning into weeklies. It's a sad state because I don't think people are finding out what's going on. I think that the communities that have good, strong weekly newspapers are getting the facts of what's going on in their communities.

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Nationally, um – it's never been easy nationally to -- to get the news out. And that was what was cool back in the day when the *Kansas City Star* and the *Topeka Capital* and the *Wichita Eagle* were sources for national and international news. One of the things that I think nobody covers well enough is international news. Not, not TV. Not print. Some news magazines do in some respects. But, you know, we don't know enough about what's going on in the world today so that we can see what others are going through.

And, you know, I – one of the cool programs I worked with in Leavenworth was, they had 100 international officers that came in every year, –

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and we had on the local level the opportunity to sponsor one of those for a year and you got to know them. You socialized with them. You'd get them settled into the community. You attended parties with them. You had them over for dinner. And, and one of the things that I found striking is that they – several of them would say, "You know, you Americans think you have the only way of doing things. And you don't. And you need to see how other people are doing things because you can improve some stuff." You know? And I'll give you the one good one is, to me, is national health insurance. You go to Europe and people can say, "Oh, you know, it's not very good" and that they have to come to the United States. And yeah, some of them do if you've got the money. But most of them don't.

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And, and they're pretty happy with their health care. And they call us archaic because we're not taking care of our people.

Now, I don't know whether Medicare for All is the answer, but the Europeans may have it right. But because we always like to think we're the best at -- at everything, we don't look around to see how other people are doing it. That's -- that's how I feel.

*Connor Brennan:* What do you think the mission of the media should be today?

*Tom Throne:* The truth. And cut this BS about left and right and put the stories out as they're meant to be put out.

*Connor Brennan:* I agree.

*Tom Throne:* You know? That, um – honestly, it used to be… You know, and, and the news has become 24 hours and so you've got to have content on –

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Headline News, Fox, CNN, MSNBC. They've got to have stuff 24 hours a day. You know? And when Headline News used to be on, it ran the same stories every hour until something new came along. Well, now they run cop shows. *[Laughs]* And so, it'll be interesting to see how the news cycle goes when the current president [Donald Trump] leaves office now or in four years because I want to see what they're doing for content because right now it's either you love him or you hate him and, and it's that way 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And that -- that to me has been one of the sad moments –

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is that we're not getting good, good information and that people are confusing opinion with the news.

And, and I was starting to see it when I worked at the Bella Vista paper because people would confuse opinion with what was going on as a column or in an editorial or a news page. They wanted to see it like Fox News or MSNBC had it. And that's not how we operate. And, and it becomes a conundrum for people to figure out what's -- what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad because it's all melted together between opinion and news and people can't tell the difference.

Sean Hannity – and I'll give you a good example. I used to listen to Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh a lot.

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And then I read articles about how they did things in order to increase their ratings. And so, the further right they went, the better their ratings went. And so people look on Hannity and Rachel Maddow and Laura Ingraham and Tucker Carlson and Chris Hayes and Lawrence O'Donnell, and I can't tell you the ones on CNN. I like Chris Cuomo because I think he tries to stay neutral. But, but a lot of them are opinion guys that people take for news. And that's not news. That's opinion. And you've got to be able to separate what they're saying from what's really fact. And the problem is that too many people take what they're saying for fact and not for news – or opinion, rather.

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*Connor Brennan:* I agree. There's quite a bit of bias in news today.

*Tom Throne:* Yep. Yep. And, and it's hard, I mean, because they've got to be that way in order to draw up the ratings because, if people aren't listening to them, they're gone. So, they're going to move further to the left or further to the right and the -- and the truth gets screwed, gets screwed and skewed.

*Connor Brennan:* I agree. All right. A few more questions here for you, Tom.

*Tom Throne:* Okay. I've got plenty of time.

*Connor Brennan:* Beautiful. As do I. What do you see as the future for media? And how long do you think newspapers will be around, for example?

*Tom Throne:* You know, I can't say. I think that newspapers are going to go the way that the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* is, and that's online. And they've just got to figure out a model to make money. And, and I – and hope that people subscribe because I think that in communities, a good newspaper is -- is important.

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You know? Warren Buffet bought a chain of newspapers till he recently sold them. He bought the *Omaha World Herald* and then the *Herald* subsidiaries and, and – because he felt like he had to have a newspaper, that every American should be out there reading newspapers. Well, the problem was that advertisers weren't -- weren't buying and people weren't subscribing. And he made a bad investment and, and got rid of them. [USA Today. Jan. 29, 2020. “Warren Buffett and Berkshire Hathaway to sell its newspapers to Lee Enterprises for $140 million.”]

And so, I think we'll see the news holes continued strength because we can't -- we haven't made the transition to subscriber-based. You know, the European model for newspapers is subscribers pay most of the load and advertisers are the supplement while we used to be advertisers carried the load and subscribers benefited from that.

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Well, they've got to figure out a way to make that paper work, $34 to $100 a month, in order to make a go of it. And that's the problem.

So, I'm really not sure how that's gonna work. But I think those communities that have good strong weeklies – and there's a lot of them in Kansas – those guys will probably survive because they've got some advertising base that will help them. But the bigger dailies are going to be weeklies. They're -- they're just not going to survive as dailies. And, and that's a philosophy, I have to tell you, that I've had since the late '90s when the internet started coming around. I talked to our department heads about -- how aboutchanging strategies?

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But when you work for a corporation, you're at their beck and call as to what those strategies are going to be. You can't just strike out on your own. But, but some of us could see that we were going to be in trouble, and when the Great Recession came, that's when things struck home, and it really got bad.

So, I hope that newspapers survive for the sake of their communities, but I'm not holding my breath.

*Connor Brennan:* I agree. If you could change one thing about the media today, what would you change?

*Tom Throne:* All the bias because it's now created amongst citizens left and right and, and you can't be a middle person like me, you know, that -- that, uh – you either have to fall in one of those two camps. I used to – well, I still am a Republican, but, you know, as far as Republicans are concerned, I'm a RINO because –

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I'm a Republican in name only because I don't subscribe to the -- some of the right-wing philosophies. And I don't. And I probably never will. But, but I think that there's good on both sides, and they've got to figure out how they're going to split it down the middle. And the bias that's been developed, left and right, is going to divide the country. I fear for us.

*Connor Brennan:* I agree. I agree. All right. Last question here.

*Tom Throne:* Okay.

*Connor Brennan:* How do you want to be remembered?

*Tom Throne:* I would like to be remembered as a good person of integrity, a good boss, a good father, a good husband, and just an overall good guy. And I've tried to live my life like that. And I think for the most part, I've succeeded.

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*Connor Brennan:* I understand. That's -- that's a tough question, but you pretty much hit all the good points there.

*Tom Throne:* I think it's really important, as a family person – you know, I've -- I've put God up there and, and church, but I also think it's important to be a good husband and a good father and a good grandfather. And, um – because if you're good at all that, then good things are going to come your way.

*Connor Brennan:* This is the conclusion of this oral history.

*[End of Audio]*

Appendix

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# Zerbe, Carter

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Carter J. Zerbe was born Oct. 5, 1939 in Burlington, Iowa.

He moved with his family to Augusta in 1958, where his father, Daniel "Jack" Zerbe, was publisher of the Augusta Daily Gazette. He later graduated with honors from Wichita State University.

He was married to Lolita Buffington for 54 years. The Zerbes had a son, Brian Zerbe, and a daughter, Brenda Rodda, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Carter worked in the publishing business for 46 years. He succeeded his father as publisher of the Gazette in 1979 and served in that capacity until his retirement in 2004.

Carter also served as regional manager for the Liberty Publishing Group and mentored 18 current or retired publishers in Kansas, including two Kansas Press Association past presidents, Gary Mehl and Tom Throne.

For a number of years, he sold advertising for KPA in the Wichita area.

He sold the Gazette to American Publishing Co., which later became the Liberty Publishing Group. He remained as publisher of The Gazette and served as regional manager for several newspapers in Kansas, Colorado and Arizona.

Those he mentored said Carter loved to share his knowledge of the industry and delighted in telling stories about the "old days" when he was just a kid selling newspaper ads and job printing on the streets of Augusta with his father.

One of his protégé's said: "If you were one of his employees, he would do everything in his power to make you successful. I can't tell you the number of times after a long conversation with Carter that he would say to me: 'You knew the answer all the time; it was just a matter of thinking it through'."

His love for Augusta led him to be heavily involved in the community during his career. He served on the board of trustees for Butler Community College, where he was board president for two terms, and also served on the board of directors at the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University and the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas.

Carter also served as a board member of the Augusta Chamber of Commerce and the Augusta United Way. He was a charter member of the Augusta Optimist Club and was a member of the former Elks Lodge and the Augusta Jaycees.

He served eight years on the Augusta Unified School District 402 Board of Education and one term as BOE president.

Carter died in 2012 after a hard-fought battle with cancer. He was preceded in death by his son, Brian.

https://kspress.com/hawkins-webster-web

# Hawkins, Webster 'Web'



Webster Hawkins was born in 1925 in Advance, Mo. He began his journalism career as a high school sophomore at the St. Francois County Journal where he worked as a printer’s devil. After graduating from Flat River Junior College in 1944, Hawkins accepted a teaching position in De Soto, Mo. He taught seventh and eighth grade mathematics and coached high school football and track for two years before entering the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Hawkins worked his way through school operating a Linotype for the Columbia Daily Tribune. He completed his bachelor’s degree in journalism in 1947.

The day after graduation, Hawkins left for Great Bend where he had accepted a position from Russell Townsley to work at the Russell County News. The weekly newspaper was scheduled to become a daily that September.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Hawkins was drafted into the Army. He served two years, first at Fort Sam Houston, Tex., then at Camp Pickett, Va., before returning to his job in Russell.

In 1956, he married Russell-native Gladys Ann Schmitt. She would later become actively involved in the newspapers the couple owned.

In 1959, Hawkins took over management of the Osawatomie Graphic from Nelson S. Reppert. Two years later, Hawkins and his wife purchased the newspaper. They later owned the Linn County News (Pleasanton), Louisburg Herald and Emporia Times, and they owned partial interest in the Hillsboro Star-Journal.

Hawkins served as president of the Kansas Press Association in 1970; and as president of the National Newspaper Association in 1988. Hawkins earned the Robert M. Bailey Award from NNA in 1988, the University of Missouri School of Journalism Honor Medal in 1989 and the Clyde M. Reed Jr. Master Editor Award from KPA in 1996.

In 1998, Hawkins and his wife retired from the newspaper business and sold their remaining two newspapers, the Osawatomie Graphic and Louisburg Herald.

Hawkins is a member of the Masonic Lodge, Scottish Rite and Shrine and Elks Lodge. He is a past patron of the Order of the Eastern Star, served on the board of First Federal Savings and Loan Association in Osawatomie for 25 years; and served on the board of the Columbia Missourian for several years. Hawkins currently serves on the board of the Kansas Newspaper Foundation and is an honorary chairman of the Foundation’s Cornerstone Campaign.

His wife, "Schmitty," died in 2009. He died April 8, 2016.

[https://kspress.com/clasen-richard-w-dick](about:blank)

# Clasen, Richard W. 'Dick'

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Richard “Dick” West Clasen was born Nov. 17, 1942 at Norborne, Mo., just east of Kansas City.

The family relocated to Florence in 1948. He graduated from Florence High  School in 1959, then attended Emporia State University. He married Linnie Ann Hicks in 1962, and they had three children, Robert Alan, Katherine Ann and Sharon Anita.

Clasen began his newspaper career as editor of the Florence Bulletin in 1964. The family relocated to Yates Center where he was co-publisher and editor of the Yates Center News. Richard and Linnie later divorced.

Dick married B. Rachel Smith in 1974 and they had two children, Rebecca Arlene and Robin Amanda.

In June of 1976, the Greenwood County Publishing Co., was organized and the Clasens purchased The Eureka Herald. Rachel was named president of the corporation and Dick was named secretary/treasurer of the corporation. He also served as the editor and publisher of the newspaper until his death.

His popular weekly column was dubbed "Poor Richard."

He followed in the footsteps of his father, George H. Clasen, who was editor of a newspaper in Missouri and two newspapers in Kansas during his career. Both served as president of the Kansas Press Association. George was inducted into the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame in 2007.

He served a term on the board of directors of the Eureka Area Chamber of Commerce, was on the Eureka USD 389 Steering Committee for the planning of both the new Eureka Junior/Senior High School and Marshall Elementary School and served on a variety of other committees over the years.

Clasen was also an active member of the National Newspaper Association, Sigma Delta Chi, Babson Midwest Memorial Foundation, Greenwood County Fair Association, the Eureka Downs Management Committee, the Board of Greenwood County Fair Association, the Kansas Quarter Horse Racing Association and was a former Republican county chairman in Woodson County. He also served as president for the Eureka Country Club and Kiwanis Club.

Dick was an avid golfer, serving as the golf chairman for KPA for several years.

He died Dec. 9, 2007.

His daughter, Robin Clasen Wunderlich, took over as editor of the Eureka Herald soon after his death. Robin bought the newspaper from her mother earlier this year.

Dick's family has since grown to include 14 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

[https://kspress.com/lynn-emerson-jr](about:blank)

# Lynn, Emerson Jr.



Emerson Lynn, Jr. served as the editor and publisher of the Humboldt Union from 1951-1958; editor and publisher of The Bowie (Texas) News from 1958-65; and editor and publisher The Iola Register from 1965-2001.

The Register was founded in 1867. Emerson's grandfather, Charles F. Scott, bought it as a weekly in 1882 and took it daily in 1896. Charles Scott was publisher until 1938 when he handed it over to his son, Angelo Scott, who sold it to Emerson, his nephew, in 1965. The Register has had only three editor and publishers in 118 years.

In 1950, Emerson married Mickey in Australia where he was a Rotary Fellow at Melbourne University. He graduated from the University of Chicago after serving in the Air Force duringWorld War II. He and Mickey had four children, three of whom are in the newspaper business. Their daughter, Susan, succeeded him as editor and publisher of the Iola Register.

He was honored as the first recipient of the Clyde Reed Master Editor Award and the first recipient of the Karl and Dorothy Gaston Outstanding Mentor award. Emerson was the president of the Kansas Press Association in 1977.

He has been active leader in economic development issues on the local, regional and state levels the past 35 years.