That Kid from Maceo
The Life and Times of a Kentucky Journalist and Historian
Volume Two

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Prologue

This writing project and its subsequent manuscript have been on my mind since 1968 when I finished my active duty in the Navy. After I arrived home at Maceo, I knew that I had to write about what I had seen, thought and experienced in the 1960s. I had to finally express how that turbulent period in our country's history shaped many of my generation's lives. And since I was a boy in elementary school, I have felt the need to study and write the history of my great family. It has been my goal to make this finished work a sequel to my second book, *Daybreak on Old Fortification Creek*, the early history of my great-great grandfather John Lewis's family which was published in 1989. The two books are meant to tell the complete story of all the branches of my family.

This book is about the love of family and friends, integrity, poverty, war, patriotism, brotherhood, courage, death and dying, happiness, mental illness and despair, perserverance, tenacity, resilience, victory, defeat, compassion and redemption.

When I finished my 30-plus years at the Messenger-Inquirer on April 1, 2009, I also wanted to write about my experiences there as a writer and reporter and profile the lives and talents of my closest and most inspiring colleagues at the newspaper. I wanted to describe my memories of the working atmosphere while I was employed there. Another task that I found appealing and challenging was to chronicle the history of Owensboro and Daviess County during my years as a journalist and historian and reprise most of the best news reports, features and profiles that I wrote during my career. I have tried to tell the stories of all the public figures and unforgettable ordinary people I have known in a manner that I hope, in most cases, honors their memory. I was blessed to have been acquainted with all of those folks, and still hold precious thoughts of them close to my heart.

This book was inspired and influenced by the relationships I had with my great friends and mentors, the late George Kerler, Ann Whittinghill, Jack and Mildred Foster, and Dorothy Thrawley. I dedicate it to my late parents, my sister and late brother-in-law, each of my relatives in the Hatfield and Hodges families, all my former colleagues at the Messenger-Inquirer, and everyone with whom I served in the U.S. Navy. Most of them are gone now, but I will never forget them. Until we meet again, they are always in my heart.

*I began writing this on Sunday, Aug. 31, 2008, while living in Owensboro, Kentucky, at 3315 Allen St. on the southside of the city. Finished first draft on Aug. 26, 2010.

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Working My Way Back

In the spring of 1976, after I was released from the hospital in Evansville and came home to Maceo, important news was being made in Frankfort that answered a lot of questions for me. I had been away from the Department of Corrections for almost three years, but some of what I would read in the newspapers seemed to confirm my earlier suspicions and gut feelings about that department when I left it in October 1973.

John Filiatreau of the Courier-Journal reported that Gov. Carroll had accepted the resignation of state commissioner of corrections Charles Holmes on May 6, according to the C-J. Holmes' resignation was submitted at Carroll's request after months of controversy concerning the Kentucky prison system, and completion of an investigation by the Governor's Select Commission on Prisons appointed by Carroll on April 11, 1975.

Carroll held a news conference at which he said that 12 other officials and employees in the Frankfort central office of the corrections department were given administrative leaves of absence, Filiatreu reported. The governor also said he had "personal respect" for Holmes, calling him a "delightful individual." "I have not lost confidence in Commissioner Holmes as such," Carroll said, though adding that he thought at that time Holmes "is well qualified for work in another correctional system."

Gov. Carroll appointed John L. Smith, secretary of the Kentucky Department of Justice, to serve as acting commissioner of corrections and head a task force to evaluate the programs and policies of the Department of Corrections and upgrade what the Courier-Journal called "the state's beleaguered prison system." The governor's commission had been formed following a series of articles by Filiatreau and the Courier-Journal that included several allegations of corruption and mismanagement, the C-J noted.

The newspaper had alleged specifically that Department of Corrections personnel were involved in "conspiracies to commit murder, that a system of inmate informers had been developed, that government property had been misused and stolen, and that there had been mismanagement of drugs."

At that same time, the Kentucky prison system was being investigated by a state legislative committee, the Kentucky State Police and the FBI which was probing possible civil rights violations.

After his resignation, Holmes told a Associated Press reporter: "A new day dawns every four years. I feel like we've accomplished much." Holmes told the news wire service that the single biggest problem he faced as corrections commissioner was "obviously" overcrowding in the prisons. He also said lawsuits filed by inmates made his job difficult keeping home occupied constantly and preventing him from attending to more important matters, the Courier-Journal reported.

The governor's commission made its final 80-page report public on Thursday, May 19, 1976.

It was bluntly critical of the past leadership of the Department of Corrections, focusing particularly on the operation of the Kentucky State Penitentiary and its warden Henry Cowan, who was fired two days before the report's release. According to the Louisville paper, the commission prefaced its report with a letter to the governor that said that Kentucky "has very little of which to be proud in its state prison system" which it described as "inadequate, overcrowded, understaffed, dehumanizing, dangerous and archaic."

"The most depressing fact is that extensive information about its faults, and methods to correct them, has always been available but past administrations and the legislative branch of government have chosen basically to give the correctional system low priority," the report further noted. The commission said its investigation had uncovered drug control problems at the state penitentiary, saying that Holmes and Cowan had "failed to correct the dispensation and use of drugs there, though they were informed over a two-year period that such action was necessary and thought federal drug laws were being violated.

A decision had been apparently made that "the drug problems could not be solved until a doctor and other qualified professionals were hired to handle and dispense drugs," the commission report concluded.The commission said that Cowan had rejected efforts by an aide who had inventoried the prison drugs and tried to come up with more efficient ways of dispensation.

Another associate superintendent went to a local hospital to learn how drugs were handled there in order to institute changes at KSP, the report stated. But soon afterward, the aide was encouraged to leave as an employee of KSP and the associate superintendent was removed from his job, according to the report. When the commission members inquired about why Holmes and Cowan took those actions, they failed to provide "adequate answers."

At that point, the report added: "We find totally inexplicable the reaction of the Bureau of Corrections and especially Commissioner Holmes after an article on the missing drugs appeared in the Courier-Journal on March 17, 1974. From our investigation, we have learned that the allegations printed in this article were substantially correct. Yet on March 19 in a speech at Mayfield, Commissioner Holmes tried to deny virtually every allegation and was quoted as saying, 'Some things are just flat lies, seems to me like.' After the drug problems became public, they (Bureau of Corrections officials) denied them with illogic, misdirection and obvious misstatements."

Then the report noted that drug records at the penitentiary were missing for an 18-month period between April 1971 and October 1972. It was impossible to determine whether the records were lost, destroyed or never existed, the report noted. The commission said it thought "the efforts by the commissioner and warden to explain and excuse the missing records after the Courier-Journal story broke were lame and confusing and made both individuals appear guilty....We feel their actions were motivated not by guilt but by confusion due to factionalism and buck-passing."

Also, an unusually number of violent deaths at the penitentiary occurred between April 1972 and 1975, the commissioners noticed. The deaths included 10 suicides, nine murders, five accidental deaths and six natural deaths. That number was substantially up from the record between 1968 and 1971 when the Bureau of Corrections reported seven or eight murders, no suicides, and 28 or 29 natural deaths, the report said. The commission report admitted that it was "especially difficult, if not impossible" to know the real cause of many of the deaths at the penitentiary.

In comparison, the number of deaths by violence at the Kentucky State Reformatory in the same period was relatively low, the report said. In the Courier-Journal reported, it was noted that the commission commended the administration of the reformatory on the lack of violence there in "the past couple of years." (The operation of the Reformatory was spared much direct criticism in the report.)

The commission report, according to the C-J, also exposed the existence of the "rat system" of inmates informers which may have contributed to the murders at the Eddyville prison. "Some poor decisions regarding segregation" were made at the penitentiary between 1972 and 1974, creating situations that led to the deaths of at least two inmates by murder and three by suicide, the report stated.

The report pointed to one specific case that demonstrated the routine danger of living in the prison population: "An inmate had been in administrative segregation at his own request for about three years and had previously been involved in five killings. The Parole Board told him they could not parole him until he proved he could make it on the yard. Six months later, he was scheduled to be let out, but when the request was granted, he refused to leave his cell. For whatever reasons, he did come out a few hours later and was killed the next day."

The commision also admitted there was no way to determine the reason for murders inside KSP or any other prison: "The whole web of inmate interpersonal relationships of hatred and love are often so abnormal that it is difficult to pinpoint the motivation in any specific case."

The commission uncovered a memorandum that included a statement by Cowan indicating he may have had a "callous attitude" about the deaths of prisoners. A part of the memo quoting Cowan in the report said: "There is a survey being made on suicides at the institution and if you have any knowledge of anyone attempting suicide, who did not do a good job, please notify this office."

Cowan told the commission investigators that he had regretted "this unfortunate use of words," according to the report. "Indeed, it was unfortunate and a poor example to set for his subordinates," the report stated.

The commission report also singled out other incidents of alleged corruption at KSP, the Courier-Journal related, charging that Cowan had coerced prisoners to make statements in his behalf, promising rewards or threatening punishment. In another case, a prison employee stole a large quantity of eggs from the prison farm. The commission report said that when informed of the theft, Cowan failed to report the theft to state police. The report added that the suspected employee "was granted three extensions to his normal time of retirement."

"A significant number of hams produced on the prison farm were misappropriated and distributed on a liberal basis to prison officials at KSP," the report added. "At one time, the warden at KSP was receiving hundreds of dollars worth of hams yearly by virtue of his position, even though no one else in the bureau had the same privilege."

In its story about the commission report, the Courier-Journal stated that a prison guard "repeatedly used excessive force to subdue a violent and mentally disturbed inmate. "The guard is a huge man and his use of such force either in self-defense or to quiet the prisoner was questionable under these circumstances," according to the report. ""We wonder if punches and mace do not constitute an excessive use of force when a prisoner is handcuffed." Among its suggestions to the governor, the report added: "Better procedures are needed to insure punishments are never unfair, excessive or harmful."

The commission also recommended that a "special facility be built for mentally retarded

prisoners, and a citizens committee be established to supervise the state's correctional operations," Filiatreau wrote May 21.

In its series of articles, the Courier-Journal reported that the commission's seven members listened to or read the testimony of 115 hours of testimony from 52 witnesses in the 13 months the investigation was conducted. The members also read thousands of pages of court transcripts and other documentary material, the C-J noted. Ken Kennedy, a former Army lawyer and the commission's legal counsel, also interviewed 100 other witnesses.

After receiving the report, Gov. Carroll sent it to Attorney General Robert Stephens for study to determine if any criminal laws had been violated. The commonwealth's attorneys of Oldham, Franklin, Lyon and other counties mentioned in the report.

No criminal charges were filed against Cowan. After resigning, he told Filiatreau: "If my resignation is what the governor wants, then they have it... and I have no regrets.... I wish to thank most of my staff at the prison for their cooperation during the last four years. I also want to express appreciation to the prisoners... there had been no major troubles with the inmate group since I became superintendent."

Cowan said he was "shocked" when he was asked to resign, he told Filiatreau, since according to the Courier-Journal article, "he had been led to believe that he would remain as superintendent."

After release of the commission's report, seven of the 12 Department of Corrections employees placed on leaves of absence by acting commissioner Smith were reinstated and returned to their jobs, the Courier-Journal reported. One of these seven was Deputy Commissioner Luckett.

Smith said all of the employees were all given "acting" positions that would not be final until he and Gov. Carroll were satisfied that the operations of the Department of Corrections had stabilized and were working properly, the C-J noted.

The five persons not allowed to return to their previous jobs or given new positions were John Rees and Jack Leslie, former executive assistants to Commissioner Holmes; Michael Jones, former grants administrator; Charles Patrick, former director of medical services; and John Shaffer, former coordinator of custody services.

Before the commission gave its report in 1976, there were 3,500 men and women in Kentucky correctional facilities, an occupancy rate of 135 percent, Filiatreau reported in a separate article. The Eddyville penitentiary had 1,200 men and was at 150 percent of capacity; the La Grange reformatory had 1,700 inmates, operating at more than 140 percent capacity. The women's correctional facility at Pewee Valley had 136 residents, which was 112 percent capacity. The correctional institutions in Menifee County and near Lexington were also operating at more than 100 percent capacity, Filatreau reported.

The total number of prisoners incarcerated was expected to continue increasing until 1985. By 1980, a daily average of 3,719 inmates were serving time in Kentucky correctional facilities.

After the commission report was released, Commissioner Smith said he and his staff would look into ways of reducing prison capacities, including constructing new facilities, and using Kentucky jails to house prisoners who were well-behaved, not security risks and serving terms of one year or shorter. The Probation and Parole Board would also be asked to consider release of nonviolent, first-time offenders who could readjust to society and not be a threat to the security of the civilian society.

In September 1976, Kentucky inmates brought a federal class action under 42 U.S.C. 1983

that challenged conditions of confinement in the Kentucky State Penitentiary at Eddyville. Other cases, one of them relating to the Kentucky State Reformatory at La Grange, were consolidated with the one concerning the penitentiary.

The litigation would be settled by a consent decree dated May 28, 1980, and supplemented July 22, 1980, containing provisions governing a broad range of prison conditions. The settlement included provisions for de-population of both major prisons in Kentucky, pay raise raises for staff, extensive construction and renovation, and changes in the classification system. The cost of the mandated improvements was expected to be $40 million.

One of the new facilities would be a 600-person facility designed to treat sex offenders, inmates convicted of alcohol and substance abuse, and mentally disturbed prisoners. Opened in March 1981, it had been built near La Grange in Oldham County and named the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex, as a tribute to deputy commissioner Luckett for his dedication and commitment to duty and excellence in 22 years of correctional management. Luckett was a member of the commission which programmed and designed the new penal facility, the first new institution built in Kentucky since 1937. He would retire from the Department of Corrections in 1983 and then serve an additonal three years as a consultatnt for the department.

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Near the end of my hospitalization in Evansville, the staff at Deaconess permitted me to go home on weekends. I remember seeing the movie "All the President's Men" with Daddy one Saturday night at a theater in Owensboro. That was a first for us; he and I had never attended a movie together since I was in elementary school. Still in a daze and murky state of depression, I remember the UK Wildcats winning the National Invitational Tournament, finishing their season with a 15-10 record after compiling a disappointing 10-10 regular season record. That summer the United States commemorated its 200th anniversary as a nation, and I photographed the Freedom Train as it made its way across the country and passed on the railroad in front of 7543 U.S. 60. I was still following the daily play of the Cincinnati Reds and I remember them beating the Yankees in four straight games that October.

Once back home at Maceo in the summer of 1976, I tried to relax and develop a rehabilitation routine that would help me recover from my mental depression. I could still think clearly despite the medication I was taking. So I soon took over handling Daddy's financial matters, depositing his monthly plumbers pension and Social Security checks, and writing checks for his monthly expenses which were minor.

I felt like I was in exile, as I tried to find work so I could pay my bills, and somehow resurrect my career. To utilize one phrase Daddy used to describe himself or anyone going through hard times, I was "up against it." As in, my back was against the wall. Though I should have taken more time off to recover, I could not afford it. I had to find a job while recovering from a major mentall illness. It was a tough order. I had to find a way to survive financially, even though I was tired and did not feel like working. Unbeknownst to me, another obstacle I would face was the economic recession developing in the nation at that time and the unemployment rate started to rise.

Daddy and I were thrown together by necessity after Mom's death and my having to resign my job in Frankfort. Just looking at us, we were a very odd couple, but still a father and son alliance. We had to get to know each finally and rely on each other. We had to learn how to

survive together. Daddy was totally lost without Mom. To my knowledge he never wrote a check himself while Mom was alive. She paid all the bills. He had always made the monthly mortgage payment with his pay check from his work at Owensboro Plumbing and Heating. After his retirement in 1972, he supplemented his pension and government income by raising pigs and a yearly tobacco crop. He swapped labor with my brother-in-law Billy Bivins, who also raised burley.

Billy and Shirley looked after Daddy in the year after Mom died, and made sure that all of Mom's hospital expenses were paid. So Daddy was not overwhelmed with any major financial expenses after she died. But he was very lonely. In 1976, Daddy was 65 years old, healthy, still very muscular, in good physical shape, and able to do heavy labor easier than a man 20 years younger than he. I pitched in during the summer, working in the fields with both Daddy and Billy in exchange for living at home until I recovered and found a new job in Daviess County. I received a check for the money that I had coming to me from my state employees pension fund which I used to pay my personal expenses and part of my hospital bills.

It had been a long time since Daddy and I had been together on a daily basis, and we used the summer of 1976 to begin what was really our first real father and son relationship. In the next 12 years I would get my "graduate degree" in how to raise burley tobacco. Daddy gassed and seeded the tobacco plant beds, but I became his executive officer and chief laborer, working side by side with him, setting the plants, hoeing, suckering, cutting, housing, stripping the crop, and hauling it to market at tobacco warehouses in Owensboro. The sweaty hard labor helped me more than anything else to flush the tension and emotional depression from my nervous system.

In December 1976, as I began my work at WVJS Radio and Cablevision Channel 2, it was a daily personal struggle for me, battling insomnia and depression but no one at the station detected it. I was assigned coverage of Daviess County government, the sheriff's department and the new district court system. My job included writing news reports and providing actuality reports for radio, and producing daily videotape reports for the cable television station's evening news program. I was assigned work shooting news video tape and filing 90-second or three-minute news reports for Owensboro Cable News Channel 2. The production work including shooting my own videotape for the television reports, doing at the scene standups, and editing the tape for airing. I also did live weekend newscasts for the radio station. During the 1978 Kentucky General Assembly session, I was moderator of a weekly television program with the state representatives from the local area. The 30-minute live program aired on Sundays and featured a review and examination of legislative issues of special interest to Owensboro residents. I interviewed Daviess County state representatives David Boswell, Don Blandford, Louis Johnson and state Sen. Delbert Murphy.

In the two years I was employed at WVJS-Cablevision Channel 2, I worked with news director Utley, day and evening news anchor Jim Parr, city government and police reporter Al Gendek, news reporters Bill Hollander, Karen Horseman, Mike Whitsett and Marie Mitchell, sports editor Sid Jenkins and the AM station disc jockeys Kirk Kirkpatrick and Joe Lowe.

I had to make many other personal adjustments when I signed on with WVJS. I took a substantial pay cut from my jobs at the Messenger-Inquirer and state government in order to have a job, try to pay off my hospital bills and continue payments for my healthcare insurance similar to the plan I had as a state employee.

I had to alter my writing style in my news reports for radio and television. Thank God I had been taught in broadcast class at DINFOS how to write shorter stories, use tighter direct

sentences and be conversational. I had to write like I was telling my listeners and viewers a more concise story no more than three minutes long. I adapted to the new form of wriiting stories very quickly. In a way, it was much easier than writing a 15-20 inch report for a newspaper. I have to admit that talking on the radio or doing standups for television news story was a challenge for me. I also served as an analyst alongside Joel at Kentucky Wesleyan home basketball games when Sid Jenkins was doing other work.

Two of the biggest news events in the next two years in Daviess County and Kentucky were the snow and record cold spell of January 1977 and the blizzard of January 1978.

The first 10 days of January 1977 were the coldest on record in Kentucky, surpassing the previous mark set in 1917-18. Snow started falling on Dec. 29, 1976, and by Jan. 24, 1977, a new 30-day snowfall record of 21.5 inches was set, the Messenger-Inquirer reported. Snow remained on the ground from Dec. 29 to Feb. 11, a total of 46 days. It was the longest period of snow cover in Owensboro since 1918. Residents of Daviess County woke up each morning to temperatures of zero or below for 15 straight days. The coldest temp recorded in that period was 17 below zero on Jan. 11, 1977. It was so cold that the Ohio River froze over for the first time in 29 years and was clogged with ice from Jan. 11 to mid-February, the M-I reported.

But the worst was still to come. The blizzard of 1978 would set new records, paralyze Kentucky and force officials of Daviess County to declare a state of emergency for the first time in 25 years. Daddy and I lived through the snow and cold together, and would never forget those hard times.

My most memorable work at WVJS and Cablevision Channel 2 included reporting the opening of the Executive Inn Rivermont on Oct. 14, 1977, interviewing Rivermont owner Bob Green and Jefferson County Judge-Executive Mitch McConnell, covering the United Mine Workers strike at the Green Coal Co. mine at Pleasant Ridge in December 1977 and witnessing the end of Pat Tanner's tenure as Daviess County Judge.

However, the most personally moving and spiritually awakening interview I ever conducted was with Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in 1977 at Brescia College. She was the Swiss-born psychiatrist who in 1969 published the "groundbreaking" book *On Death and Dying.*

Dr. Kubler-Ross was "credited with helping end centuries-old taboos in Western culture against openly discussing and studying death," the New York Times wrote after her death in August 2004. "She also helped change the care of many terminally ill patients to make death less psychologically painful, not only for the dying, but also for their doctors and nurses -- and not least for the survivors.

"She profoundly changed the way the medical profession is asked to look at death," according to the Times. "Her greatest influence came through her writings, especially her best-seller book which remains in print around the world. She also gave many lectures and distributed tape recordings of them, conducted extensive research into what she described as the five stages of death based on thousands of interviews with patients and health care professionals and did groundbreaking work in counseling dying patients."

When Dr. Kubler-Ross came to Owensboro, I was eager to interview her. I had read her book. Despite what I was taught in church all my life, I thought death would be like what I believe animals experience. The children in our family got early exposures to death, were accustomed to going to funerals and seeing bodies in caskets. When a dog or cat died, or when we found a dead bird, Josephine, Shirley and I would conduct funerals for our dead pets, wrapping them in a cloth and burying them under the trees or grape harbors in our yards. We

buried dead birds in match boxes.

Death was a great mystery to us, even as kids. It had become a fixation for me in 1975, after taking from me the dearest soul in my life. I wanted to believe that there is a spiritual life after death, that we go to Heaven, as the church teaches. But I always had doubts and fought with the questions: What is death? Is it nothingness? Is the process like turning off a light switch? First bright light, then sudden darkness. Should we be afraid? In the midst of battling my severe depression, I received an answer about what it would be like to die. That came when I talked with Dr. Kubler-Ross.

Our interview was in the afternoon before she presented a lecture on the night of April 13, 1977, at Brescia College. After listening to her soft, serene account of her conversations with people who had had near-death experiences, I felt like she was almost an angel who had seen the face of God. It somehow caused me to experience a psychic transformation. It was the closest to a real religious experience that I ever had in my life. It seemed to answer a question about the fear of dying that I had compartmentalized since I was 4 years old. I asked her what her interviewees had told her, and a great feeling of assurance came into my heart. I don't think I was ever afraid of death after that few minutes in which she answered my questions.

I asked her about the near death experiences that her patients had revealed to her. She said: "Many of the people we have interviewed, and they include 2-year-old children and old people from different culture and religious backgrounds, say they are fully aware of the shaping of the physical body (during these experiences) and when they leave the physical body. And that can be an acute death from accident or a very slow death. There is no pain, no fear, no anxiety.

"They also are very fully aware of the environment in which this happens. They see the scene of the accident or they can describe the resuscitation team. They also have a physical wholeness. That means that people who are blind can see, people who are paralyzed or in wheel chairs can dance and sing again. And that is mostly responsible for why people are not grateful for the resuscitation attempts.

"All the people who have had the experience are no longer afraid of death, and to me the most moving part of it is you cannot die alone. I think it is important that people know that. Because many families have feelings that the mother of a child died alone and were not there when it happened. At the moment of death, you are always met by someone who helps in the transition and the someone is always someone you loved deeply and has preceded you in death. It can be, for example, a religious figure. It is very often a mother or a father or a child who has died before. Sometimes it is your own guide, your guardian angel who helps you in transition.That is especially for children who have not had the death experience in their short life. Nobody dies alone."

Dr. Kubler-Ross became a major intellectual force behind creating a hospice system in the United States through which palliative care and psychological support are provided for many terminally ill people.

"In the later part of her career, she embarked on research to verify the existence of life after death, conducting, with others, thousands of interviews with people who recounted near-death experiences, particularly of those declared clinically dead by medical authorities but later revived," the New York Times reported. "Her prestige generated widespread interest and devoted followers. The work aroused deep skepticism in medical and scientific circles. Her assertions that she had evidence of an afterlife saddened many colleagues, some of whom said she had abandoned rigorous science and had, perhaps, succumbed to her own fears of death."

Scientists did not always agree with Kubler-Ross's views of life after death, but they continued to be influenced by her methods of caring for the terminally ill. Before the publication of *On Death and Dying,* those terminally ill patients were routinely left to face death in a miasma of loneliness and fear, because doctors, nurses and families were generally ill equipped to deal with death. By the 1980s, the study of dying became part of medical and health-care education in United States.*Death and Dying* became an indispensable manual, both for professionals and family members, according to the New York Times.

Before her own death in August 2004, she appeared to accept it, as she had tried to help so many others to do, the Times noted. "I always say that death can be one of the greatest experiences ever," she wrote in her autobiography in 1997. "If you live each day of your life right, then you have nothing to fear."

Her words that day in April 1977 touched me deeply and gave me great peace and comfort. I kept the audio tape of that interview for the rest of my life, and have cherished it.

As a news reporter, I also observed and was nearly a participant in the bituminous coal strike of 1977 when it affected mining operations in Daviess County. The 110-day strike was led by the United Mine Workers of America, beginning Dec. 6, 1977, and ending March 19, 1978. It was generally considered a successful union strike although the contract was not beneficial to union workers, news services later noted.

Since the 1940s, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) had negotiated a nationwide National Coal Wage Agreement with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA), a group of large coal mine operators, according to press reports. The three-year agreements covered national bargaining issues such as wages, health and pension benefits, workplace health and safety, and work rules. Local agreements, far more limited in scope, were negotiated by each individual local affiliate of the United Mine Workers of America. Arnold Miller, president of the UMWA, therefore insisted on changing the national collective bargaining agreement to give each UMWA affiliate the limited right to strike over local issues.

Miller turned the "labor peace" argument on its head by arguing that the only way to suppress wildcat strikes was to regulate the process and give local unions the right to strike, historians have written. With the power that the ability to strike could give local unions, local mine operators would no longer create the conditions which led to strikes, it was reported. But the owners rejected Miller's demand. They had seen how he was unable to bring wildcat strikers back to the bargaining table and they had little faith that his proposal would work. Instead, they demanded the right to fire wildcat strikers and fine any miner who refused to cross wildcat picket lines.

But the UMWA's negotiating position was weak. Power utilities had built up a 120-day supply of coal, while iron and steel producers had a 75-day supply. Both were more than sufficient to weather a miners' strike. Additionally, the number of coal mines controlled by UMWA had fallen from 67 percent to 50 percent since 1974, leaving more mines in operation to supply national needs during a strike.

As the bargaining talks continued in December, sporadic violence broke out. Newspapers reported a coal auger was blown up at a mine near Saint Charles, Ga.; a coal train was stopped and delayed in Cambria County, Pa.; a state judge in Utah issued a 10-day restraining order against the union and 1,100 summonses issued after replacement miners complained of being harassed by picketers.

Four weeks into the strike, five union miners were indicted on federal charges for conspiracy in dynamiting of a section of Norfolk and Western Railway on which non-union coal was being carried. In Indiana, Gov. Otis Bowen called out the National Guard on Feb. 14 to protect coal truck convoys. In Virginia, Gov. John Dalton declared a state of emergency March 7 and ordered the state police to begin patrolling coal-producing areas. But Pennyslvania Gov. Milton Shapp and West Virginia Gov. Jay Rockefeller refused to call out the National Guard in their states. and Illinois Gov. James Thompson agreed to let his state police officers to accompany federal marshals but refused to have them enforce federal labor law.

The strike occurred locally at the Green Coal Co. non-union mine at Pleasant Ridge along U.S. 231 near the Ohio County boundary line. I covered the event for WVJS Radio and Cable 2 Television News in Owensboro. On Monday, Dec. 12, 1977, a restraining order was issued by Judge Robert Short in Daviess Circuit Court, limiting the number of pickets to two at the Pleasant Ridge and Pather mines of Green Coal Co.

When I arrived alone at Pleasant Ridge, I reported that the situation at the mine entrance was tense but there had been no violence. "State police officers have a police dog, and a helicopter is flying over head. It's been raining here but no one is leaving, and it looks like it's going to stay that way. This is Glenn Hodges at Pleasant Ridge," according to the tape of my first voice report.

I gave a more detailed update later in the morning: "We are at the Green Coal Company strip mine in Pleasant Ridge where UMW sympathizers began massing near the main entrance of the mine on U.S. 231 about 5 o'clock this morning. One sheriff's department official estimated as many as 370 cars and trucks were lining the highway there at one time. About 10 sheriff's units and as many state police vehicles remained there throughout the day. The protesters were orderly and there was only one report during the day of threatened violence. A television newsman was surrounded by a group of the UMW supporters and rocks and bottles were thrown at him, but he escaped injury when sheriff's deputies stepped in. Traffic moved by the area in an orderly fashion. No trucks entered or exited the mine. Throughout the midday, there was virtually no work going on but several Green Coal employees were reportedly on the mine site. At the other protest site, there was virtually no activity. Fifteen union pickets were assembled at the Green Coal mine at Panther and law enforcement officials reported no trouble there. This is Glenn Hodges reporting."

But on Tuesday, Dec. 13, the peaceful scene at the U.S. 231 mine entrance changed: "We're at the site of the Green Coal at Pleasant Ridge and we've had some violence this morning," I said. "The Green Coal people came into work this morning. The UMW supporters gathered on a hill near a cemetery across from the entrance and began throwing rocks (and other objects) at everything that came in, including the police. Police then gathered and charged the hill using gas and night sticks, and there have been some injuries so far. A man seen with a bleeding head; one maybe unconscious. An ambulance has been on the scene and has already returned to Owensboro. There are 35 state police cars here and two Owensboro police units and all of the county sheriff's department. And we'll have a later report as we get new facts. This is Glenn Hodges at Pleasant Ridge."

The melee between strikers and law enforcement officers lasted was short in duration, about a score of strikers were arrested, and several handguns and blackjacks were confiscated. Most of the men arrested were from Beechmont, Horse Branch, Central City and Cromwell, I learned. The most serious charge, attempted murder, was filed against Billy Arnold of Drakesboro for trying to run down police officers with a car. Ten of the strikers were soon released on their own

recognizance and nine went to jail in Owensboro.

When calm was restored, I ad-libbed another report to WVJS: "The action has pretty much ended out here at Pleasant Ridge at the Green Coal Co. mine. Police have dispersed the miners and traffic is moving through pretty well now. Nineteen people were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct, assault, inciting to riot, carrying weapons which included clubs and some automatic pistols. There were several injuries, and from the hospital, we will have a good report on that later I'm sure. Two deputies of the county sheriff's department were injured. One got a broken elbow and another a broken nose. There were several minor injuries to state police. There are no reports yet on how many miners were hurt. It all happened around 7:30 this morning, when the, uh, restraining order was served at the entrance, the miners were given 15 minutes to move to the hill on the other side of the mine entrance.The two pickets, uh, were posted at the mine entrance but when Green Coal Co. people started to move into the mine, the miners across the road started to throw clubs, rocks and bottles. At that time several police were hit, and when the, uh, the miners were asked, then ordered to stop and did not. Tear gas was thrown and about 60 state police and deputies marched up the hill with nightsticks and they were met by bats, bottles. That's about the report here for now; we'll try to wrap up the details as they come in. This is Glenn Hodges at Pleasant Ridge."

After noon, I reported new details."Twenty or 30 state police and county sheriff's deputies remain at the scene. Work is under way and trucks are moving in and out..... Six injuries were reported by law enforcement officials, four of those were to miners...The men arrested after the incident will be arraigned in Daviess Quarterly Court this afternoon The arrests came after 65 state troopers and deputy sheriffs dispersed a contingent of UMW miners and supporters who had gathered at the mine. When a restraining order to limit the number of pickets at the mine site was served at about 7:30 the miners estimated about 450 in number were asked to disperse by police. They moved across the road to a hillside cemetery. It was then that trouble began. A state police captain who commanded the troopers talked about what happened: (sound bite) 'The employees of the company and other persons traveling the state highway were trying to get back and forth through this area here, they were throwing rocks and pieces of tombstone monuments, that they were breaking off the tombstone up in the graveyard and even the graveyard markers throwing them at cars as they were coming by.' "

I filed a fourth report from my news van radio: "Most of the original state police and county deputy forces remained at the mine entrance throughout the afternoon as the two UMW pickets continued their march and work went on at the mine. With rain coming down in the late afternoon, the situation appeared stable but law officials said they are remaining alert for any further trouble. Reporting for Update I'm Glenn Hodges."

Once the strike area was secured, I was able to update the details of the incident with more precise numbers."Nineteen UMW strikers were arrested and several persons injured during a rock and bottle throwing incident at UMW protests at the non-union Green Coal Co. mine at Pleasant Ridge," I reported. "The protest turned violent Tuesday morning at the main entrance as about 70 riot-geared policement clashed with 400 UMW members in an attempt to enforce a restraining order which limits union pickets at the non-union mine..... Six men were injured in the melee, including Daviess County sheriff's deputy Earl Jackson who suffered a broken arm and deputy Keith Cain. who got a broken nose when hit with a baseball bat. Cain, Jackson and three other men were treated and released at Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital."

The violence started about one hour after the deputies served the restraining order on

picketing miners. As ordered, two strike pickets were posted at the entrance on Old Pleasant Ridge Road. The rest of the protesters crossed U.S. 231 and assembled on a hill at Mount Carmel Cemetery. That crowd of strikers turned into a mob, a state trooper told me. From the high ground in the cemetery, the striking miners threw rocks, glass, coal, bricks and pieces of tombstones at law enforcement officers. The projectiles thrown at the officers also hit motorists passing by, police said. Green Coal Co. miners then crossed the picket line entering the mine property in a caravan. After 30 minutes, officers wearing helmets and brandishing riot sticks went slipping, sliding and digging their way up the hill toward the miners, I reported. It took 10 minutes before the law enforcement officer gained control. The KSP force included 20 troopers from the Henderson Post, 12 from Madisonville and 22, Elizabethtown

Afterwards, I interviewed a state police officer who led the troopers and county deputies as they stormed the hillside. When the debris started to hit the troopers, tear gas canisters were thrown, and the lawmen advanced, how was it charging up the hill, I asked? 'It was rough, we met rocks and pieces of wood, and anything they could find up there to throw at us," he said. "Like I said, when we got a couple (projectiles) in the chest, we used tear gas to break, but we met a lot of rocks as we went up there to try to get in a position to put the gas in." No shots were fired during the entire disturbance, he said.

In an interview Dec. 16, 2009, deputy Cain, now sheriff of Daviess County, gave me a detailed account of his memory of that day in December 1977. He remembers the force of Kentucky State Police troopers and three Daviess County deputy sheriff's lining up on the west side of U.S. 231, facing the much bigger contingent of UMW sympathizers who were about 50 yards away gathered in the cemetery on the hill across the road. He and Daviess County Sheriff's deputies Earl Jackson and deputy Ron Durbin were at the center of the line and led the frontal assault against the UMW miners.

Deputy Cain had been on the sheriff's force for about four years in 1977. He had combat experience as a young Marine sergeant who fought in the A Shau and Elephant valleys of South Vietnam in 1969-70. Cain, who had survived enemy booby traps, rocket and mortar attacks in the war, said the outnumbered force of sheriff's deputies and state troopers facing a mob of UMW striking miners that day in 1977 were both ill trained and under equipped to quell a riot.

"On Monday, we had picked up a conversation by one of the miners on CB radio that tomorrow (Tuesday) is going to be a 'day of reckoning', so we expected a problem," Cain told me. He said that KSP Capt. Richard Norsworthy was leading the law enforcement in the action Dec. 13, 1977. "We're going up the hill and disarm these people,"Cain said Norsworthy told the lawmen who did not have gas masks and were using only crude wooden riot batons and brute force.

As a school bus passed in front of the line, the protesters threw rocks and other objects that hit the bus, Cain said. Tear gas canisters were thrown and the line of troopers and deputies advanced. "One of the people on the hill shouted 'we pay your salaries'," Cain said. "Norsworthy then said 'you're fixing to get your goddam money's worth."

"My last recollection of what happened there, was that 'this is not going to be good,' " Cain said. When the protesters and officers collided and the fight started, all hell broke loose.

Cain said he was told later that, "One miner swung a bat or stick at me and I swung (my baton), and hit him in the shoulder with it, snapping my baton. Another man who had a (baseball) bat then swung like Mickey Mantle hitting a homerun and hit me in the face. I don't remember any of it, but was told that a group of the miners started kicking me while I was down.

Earl (Jackson) said I came out of that mass of people swinging, shouting and screaming at the top of my lungs."

Jackson, who himself had a broken arm, managed to get Cain into a sheriff's cruiser and drove both of them to the hospital in Owensboro. "When my dad (the late Laymond Cain) saw me at the hospital, he didn't recognize me," Keith said Dec. 16, 2009. Cain's face was bloodied after the battle with the strikers. His nose was shattered, two cheekbones broken, lower teeth knocked out and his lower jaw was broken. "It was by the grace of the Lord that I was not killed," he said, adding he was so emotionally charged during the fight that he didn't realize the extent of his injuries until afterward.

Cain said the sheriff's department learned a big lesson that day dispersing the mob of strikers at Mount Carmel Cemetery. It needed anti-riot equipment. Sheriff Boots Norris and chief deputy Harold Taylor within 24 hours purchased riot batons and helmets with shields at Louisville, Cain said. The incident at Pleasant Ridge was also the first time the Kentucky State Police had used its special response team, he added.

My return to reporting news for WVJS led to me renewing my professional relationship and friendship with County Judge Pat Tanner. It was a joy to see him joust with the county commissioners as he presided at Daviess Fiscal Court meetings. I had known Tanner since George Kerler introduced me to him when I was starting in government reporting in the 1970s.

Pat was the most colorful, candid and unique government official I encountered as a journalist. He was enigmatic, totally unpredictable, profane but still deeply religious. a very shy man but engaging and friendly in one on one conversations and in public meetings. An infantry captain during World War II, he was the only GI I ever interviewed or knew in Daviess County that passionately admired, almost idolized, Gen. George S. Patton. Tanner adopted what he said was Patton's creed: Never apologize, always be on the offensive, never on the defensive.

Tanner was very personable, compassionate and gentle with his constituents, but fiercely combative, even devious, with anyone on the fiscal court or in the county who opposed his position on issues. He seemed to take their disagreements with him personally and always struck back quickly. It was always fun waiting to see when the verbal fireworks would begin in his fiscal court meetings.

In our discussions, I sometimes found Tanner to be suspicious and fearful to the point of paranoia. He was ever vigilant of what he thought could be reprisals against him. A very secretive man and camera shy, Tanner once told another M-I reporter that he feared assassins or kidnapping, and that he tried to keep private his home address and phone number. He once told me he ran an unexpected, armed assailant out of his office one night, brandishing a letter opener. Numerous times when I asked to talk with him after a meeting in the hallway at the courthouse, he would draw me aside, look over his shoulder and whisper to me like he was afraid our conversation was being overheard. Even in the days before he developed throat problems, Pat would phone me at my office about what he thought would be a good news story, speaking to me in a very soft tones as if he were Deep Throat and our conversation was being recorded. It was not.

All his eccentricities aside, Tanner was a genuine treat to interview. I knew he was speaking honestly, and I could always count on him for good quotes. I knew he liked to get his name and viewpoint in the paper. Our readers loved it.

Tanner was a loner who dismissed talk that he was a politician. He thought of himself as

more of a populist, a champion who fought for the little man who had little representation in government matters.

A genuine maverick, Tanner avoided active participation in Democrat politics and never was active in the county party organization. He prided himself in being an outsider in the Daviess County Democratic Party. "Pat is the only politician we have ever run into that carried deeper suspicions of political motives than the press," the Messenger-Inquirer mused in a 1961 editorial. He was just too honest to mingle in the company of the average Kentucky politician of his era.

Tanner was born in 1917 in Livia south of Owensboro. He played on the Owensboro High School football team for four years, was student body president at OHS, and an honor graduate there in 1937. He graduated from the University of Kentucky with a bachelor of arts degree in political science and business administration before fighting in World War II. In combat in Europe, he was wounded and received the Purple Heart, earned the Bronze Star for meritorious service, and proudly wore the Combat Infantry Badge.

After the war, Tanner worked for the Veterans Administration for seven years, and then in 1953, started a carpet and paint business in Owensboro. He was elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1955 as one of the state's "young rebel" Democrats. Tanner was credited with playing a major role in passing the state's first ethics law. At home in Daviess County, he served four years on the fiscal court as a county commissioner then three successive terms as county judge.

During Tanner's regime as head of county government, the county judge also ruled in cases in all the lower courts ---- hearing juvenile, probate, traffic violations and misdemeanors. The county judge's role in Kentucky would change in 1978 when the state courts were reorganized and the title of county judge became county judge-executive. In his attempt for re-election for a fourth term as county judge, Tanner was defeated by commissioner William Froehlich in November 1977.

After that political loss, Courier-Journal reporter Bill Powell wrote in a Jan. 15, 1978 article: "Tanner won three terms in the state legislature (1956-62), advocating a merit system for state employees, a strong conflict of interest law, statewide use of voting machines, barring of legislators from state jobs, reorganization of the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission and periodic purging of the states voter rolls. All were accomplished."

In his interview with Powell, Tanner admitted he had made enemies by taking tough positions on several controversial issues he faced as county judge. He opposed rezoning for more Daviess County surface mining and fought against establishing loading docks that he said would bring a flow of coal trucks to Daviess County roads, Powell noted. Tanner told Powell that he believed the coal mining interests played a hand in defeating him in 1977. Tanner had also opposed a $13 million electrical generating plant to be built at Rockport, Ind. Some thought that led to his defeat, Tanner had read a white paper on strip mining at a Fiscal Court meeting attended by more than 300 strip mine employees and their wives, Powell continued. Tanner warned that "a dangerous precedent would be set by approving a proposal to rezone a large area for strip mining." The rezoning was approved. His second biggest disappointment, he told Powell, was "the failure of Owensboro to attract a Caterpillar plant that would have employed 3,500 people. Tanner blamed 'local kingmakers' who opposed the company's union, the United Automobile Makers, for blocking the plant and causing it to locate elsewhere," Powell wrote.

Powell also pointed out: "Tanner's county record also shows unusual progress in volunteer fire protection (200 trained volunteer firefighters at 12 stations), an improved jail, major drainage

developments on county streams, an economical ambulance arrangement, a contract with the state for services of 17 state troopers in Daviess County, two county parks and a year-round recreation program at county schools."

Tanner would sound off in Fiscal Court meetings or in his office on any political topic of the day. In the times I reported county government news, I heard him oppose the Vietnam War, the federal bureaucracy, all federal regulations, and socialized medicine which he would later tell Bill Powell would give "too much federal control over hospitals." Before the U.S. farmers' strike of January 1978, Tanner "publicly urged farmers to 'organize, rise up and fight or you will be driven off the farm," Powell wrote.

In a profile of Tanner that the Messenger-Inquirer published Dec. 28, 1977, Jack Lyness, who covered Tanner's fiscal court for five years, said Pat was considered by some voters as a saint and a madman by others. During his run as county judge, Tanner was never afraid to stand up as the biblical David did against Goliath. "The bigger the enemy, the quicker Tanner seemed to join the fight.," Lyness wrote. "Bad television, the federal bureaucracy, northeastern power companies, injustice, red tape. All were his frequent targets. The size of his adversaries and the impossibility of his causes gave a quixotic flair to his character."

"His idealism may have given Tanner more than his share of frustration," Lyness declared. "During a series of angry flareups at fiscal court meetings, Tanner occasionally said he should be commited to an insane asylum if he were to run for re-election. But he always ran. And until this year (1977), always won."

I was there in the fiscal courtroom on the first floor of the courthouse when Tanner presided at his last meeting of the county commission, and then signed off as county judge. I interviewed him afterward outside the courtroom, and filed a report for the noon radio newscast: "Today's goodbye was the apparent end to a political career that began in 1955 when Pat Tanner was elected Owensboro's state representative. After three terms in the state house he was elected to the county commission in 1961 and four years later became county judge. Looking back today he singled out the county court system for praise and particularly applauded the work of the judicial system's unsung court clerks. Tanner said the court system has been a model for others across the state over the years. It has been award winning and been run efficiently, and without favoritism." Tanner was most proud of the volunteer fire department he helped create and equip during his time as leader of the Fiscal Court, I added.

In a moment of rare emotion, Tanner reflected on his years of public service in Daviess County as he departed. In the sound bite he gave me, he said: "I love the people of Daviess County now, That happens to be down at the bottom of my will. I loved them in the legislature and I love them now."

Tanner left office with a $500,000 surplus in Daviess County coffers. He became a real estate agent, never served in political office again, but continued to voice his views on current issues in the Readers Write section of the Messenger-Inquirer. He died Friday, May 3, 1996, at the age of 78. I went to his funeral.

Rain then changing to an 80 percent chance of light snow was forecast for the night of Jan. 25-26, 1978, in Daviess County. Unlike today, the meteorologists at that time did not have the technology to forecast a catalysmic weather event. At the end of that day, it was raining, but then the rain turned to sleet, and after 10 p.m. snow was falling and a monstrous wind began to blow.

A cold front moving in from the Northwest collided in the Ohio Valley with a low pressure

system. Together the merging fronts created the perfect winter storm, and Mother Nature delivered a knockout punch of a blizzard bigger than any recorded in the region in more than 20 years. The blizzard moved on to the north, cold air flowed in behind the Arctic front, affecting the whole northeastern third of the United States.

The ensuing snowstorm became a blizzard with winds of 50 miles per hour at the height of the weather event on Wednesday night that tapered off to 35-40 mph on Thursday.

Since Jan. 8, 1978, 24 inches had already fallen on Owensboro and Daviess County. That was on top of eight inches of snow that fell since Nov. 27. The winter of 1977-78 would easily break the previous record of 28 inches of snowfall set in the winter of 1917-18.. Fourteen inches fell Jan. 16-17 in the fourth worst snowstorm in Daviess County's recorded history, and seven inches were still on the ground when the blizzard struck. The devastating winds blew snow into four- to five -foot drifts, made streets and roads in Daviess County impassable, knocked out some telephone lines and caused one power outage in a large section of southern Owensboro.

"Most Owensboroans had power Thursday except for isolated cases where service wires were down, according to Marshall Bruner, public relations director of Owensboro Municipal Utilities," Messenger-Inquirer reporter Sheila Garin wrote in the Jan. 27, 1978, paper.

"Bruner said a malfunctioning transformer on Tamarack Road shut down power to a large section of southern Owensboro for nearly three hours beginning at 9:45 p.m. Wednesday," Garin added.

"At the height of the storm, Owensboro was a no man's land of abandoned vehicles, darkened homes and deserted streets," she wrote.

Snow drifted up to the windows on abandoned cars, and blocked Carter Road from U.S. 60 to Parrish Avenue. "Most drifting occurred on north-south streets, " Garin wrote. Drifts closed South Frederica Street Thursday morning in the southbound lane from 25th Street to the Owensboro beltline. "Drivers in the northbound lane of Frederica Street were startled to find southbound vehicles heading toward them on the same side of the median," she reported.

By Thursday morning, the highest winds of the blizzard had subsided, but roads and streets were impassable. Schools and businesses were closed and a state of emergency in Daviess County had been declared by County Judge Froehlich. People were advised to stayed in their homes. Only emergency vehicles were permitted to be on the streets and highways. Green River Steel, Texas Gas, Pinkerton Tobacco, W.R. Grace and Field Packing were shut down that Thursday. National Southwire Aluminum at Hawesville was the only major industry in the area that was operating, Garin reported. Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital and Our Lady of Mercy Hospital had staff shortages Thursday, and personnel at both hospitals worked double shifts. But no scheduled operations were canceled. Ambulance service continued despite the weather conditions.

City streets were closed to virtually all traffic, unless you had a four-wheel drive vehicle. Cars were abandoned on roads as CB radio operators and farmers on tractors set out to rescue stranded motoriests.

Civil Defense Director Robert Roberts had a crew of 60 volunteers transporting doctors, nurses and patients to hospitals, and delivering food and medicine to snowbound residents of the county. National Guardsmen manning the armory on Parrish Avenue assisted the Civil Defense team with emergency transportation. Vehicles with four-wheel drive were used for the first time by emergency responders in Daviess County.

It was reportedly the first time since 1964 that roads in the county had been blocked so badly

that helicopters were needed, the Messenger-Inquirer stated. Main roads in the county were considered passable by the sheriff's department but still coated with a slick layer of ice. Motorists were being warn to avoid on county roads unless they had tire chains, studded snow tires or four-wheel drive vehicles.

The five counties bordering Daviess County and Owensboro were also paralyzed by the snowstorm and county judges also had to declare states of emergency for residents.

The Owensboro Chamber of Commerce estimated that more than 25 percent of the city's businesses were open in the city and many were operating on reduced hours with only a few employees. Most service stations and groceries were open.

No snow-related injuries were reported, Garin said in her article. "But two pilots and three passengers had a close call about 6:30 p.m. Wednesday when their private jet skidded into a snow bank after landing. No injuries were reported." Schools and many businesses remained closed Friday, but City Hall was opened and most banks were doing business. Mailmen waded through heavy snow drifts getting to mail boxes at residences. The streets were covered with thick layers of snow and were icy but passable, especially in the downtown business district.

At our residence on U.S. 60 two miles west of Maceo, the heavy snow drifts surrounded the house and covered our 90-foot-long driveway to the highway. After the winter storm subsided, Daddy and I waded through the snowdrifts and began clearing the driveway. The temperature was bearable and our bodies heated up once we started the shoveling. But for two days, I could not drive to Owensboro and Daddy couldn't get up U.S 60 to the grocery store in Maceo. We were stuck and had to wait until we could drive again. U.S. 60 was covered with ice and snow for many days before state road department graders were able to clear it. Daddy and I handled the unfortunately brutal weather with our usual determination and perseverance. We did not lose electric power. We had food and water in the house, and the wall furnace provided enough natural gas heat for us. My car and his truck were in the garage and out of the weather. The vehicles were both running well, but we started them each morning so we would have them ready to roll when snow was cleared from the highway.

Our major worry was that Daddy's sows could not live through the cold spell in their hoghouses. Daddy put down hay in their stalls so they could get a little more warmth from their body heat. It was not a cozy, comfortable situation for Daddy and I by any means, but we managed. It was another test of our resiliency. But we had been through tougher times. We also had the Country Kitchen diner just down the road, about a third of a mile from our house. He and I walked down there to eat breakfast once the restaurant reopened. Both of us had been through the cold winters of 1951 and 1960, and the 1945 and 1964 floods. We were tough enough to brave the blizzard and its aftermath. So had the residents of Maceo and the farmers who lived in eastern Daviess County. To all of us, the high winds, the numbing cold and snowdrifts were a temporary inconvenience.

When I was finally able to drive to Owensboro, huge drifts of packed snow and ice still covered the downtown streets. Despite that, the courthouse was open and I was able to check with my news contacts there and attend a rape trial that I was covering. I also remember wading through knee-high snow and braving the frigid temperatures to shoot video tape of the blizzard's beauty in the neighborhoods of Lexington Avenue and Littlewood Drive.

When the blizzard winds had stopped and snow cleared off the roads, life resumed in a normal fashion within a few days. By March 1, 1978, there had been snow on the ground for 63 days, only four short of the 1918 record, as the temperature rose to an relatively balmy 53

degrees.

By late February 41 inches of snow had fallen in the county since Nov. 27, establishing the new local record for a winter snowfall. After dodging the 1974 tornado in Frankfort, and going through the winters of 1976-77 and 1977-78, I remember thinking that they were once in a lifetime experiences, and the worst was over. But there would be more vicious, life threatening weather events to come in the future for me and all the residents of Owensboro and Daviess County.

In the late 1970s and most the 1980s, my Sunday morning routine was to drive to Owensboro, go through the breakfast buffet in the ground floor dining room at the Executive Inn Rivermont, attend the 11 a.m. worship service at Settle Memorial United Methodist, then drop by the Elite Cigar Store on Frederica Street to buy the Sunday edition of the Louisville Courier-Journal. I know the snow and ice from the blizzard that previous Wednesday night must have still covered U.S. 60 from Maceo to Owensboro and it probably it was still too hazardous to travel. It would have been too difficult to get to town.

Thirty two years later, I do not think I could have possibly driven to Owensboro on Sunday, Jan. 29, 1978, but somehow I bought that day's edition of the C-J. I always liked to check the front page news stories first, then the Sports pages, and finally turn to the Lively Arts section. On page 1 of that page, I got one of the biggest surprises I experienced in the 1970s. It was a story about Cynthia, written by Tom Dorsey, the Courier-Journal television and radio critic. Headlined "A Miss Kentucky Is a 'Bad Girl' in a New Soap." I was flabbergasted because I had never heard anything from her or read anything about her since 1972, when I vowed not to think about her again.

Dorsey's one-sentence lead paragraph asked: "Whatever happened to Cynthia Bostick?

"All of you may not remember her but a lot of people in Owensboro do. And so did a soap opera producer for whom she once auditioned," Dorsey wrote. "When the producer was casting a show last year he called her agent and asked, "Whatever happened to Cynthia Bostick?

"The answer is a 'lot, not all good,' (Dorsey quoted Cynthia) since that June Saturday night in 1970 when she was crowned Miss Kentucky on the stage of Louisville's old Brown Theatre."

Dorsey continued, reporting that Bostick was portraying a role in the NBC daytime drama "For Richer, For Poorer," Monday through Friday at WAVE Television in Louisville.

Dorsey added: "Cynthia Bostick had the unquestioning confidence that only the young enjoy that evening eight years ago when she told the audience , 'I'm going to be a big Broadway star, and you can tell your children and your grandchildren that you've seen a star.

"There was a nervous laugh when that quote was read to her over the phone the other day," Dorsey noted. " 'Did I really say that?' she asked."

Cynthia then told Dorsey that since the boast she made in 1970, "making it big on Broadway was no longer her ambition."

"No, I just want to get through the next day --- literally --- now, but I'm happy and satisfied. I think I've matured a bit, and I don't have any real driving ambition, although I'm still a determined person," Cynthia said.

"She's determined to be content now because the years between Miss Kentucky and the conniving Connie Ferguson she plays in the soap opera weren't always happy ones," Dorsey said in the story.

She had gone to New York City in 1972, and completed the two-year course at the American

Academy of Dramatic Arts in one year. But she was "bitterly unhappy," Dorsey wrote.

"I cried the first year," Cynthia told Dorsey. "I never got used to the garbage trucks and the noise at 4 in the morning. I cried all the time." But Cynthia said she toughened up and made the decision to adapt to the way of life in New York City, instead of fighting it. (That was the Cynthia I knew.)

But then Dorsey zeroed in on the subject that apparently reached the root of Cynthia's happiness in New York. "She doesn't say so, but the home sickness and living alone in the YWCA may have been in the loneliness that drove her into a marriage that was measured in days. 'I chalk it up as my one big mistake.' (Bostick said)."

"A quick divorce followed," Dorsey noted and dropped the subject.

From that time forth Cynthia got jobs doing several commercials and acted in industrial-training films. She told Dorsey that she always played a young housewife and was never hired for any "glamorous parts." The products she plugged were Grease Relief, Mop and Glo, Earthborn shampoo, White Cloud tissue. She also performed in feature roles for AT&T training films. It was a good living, she told Dorsey.

I had learned while I was in Frankfort that she played one of the main characters in a major feature film which was first called "That's the Way of the World" then changed to "Shining Star" The movie was released in June 1975, starring now veteran actors Harvey Keitel and Ed Nelson in the top two roles, with Cynthia receiving third billing as the character Velour Page. The plot was record executives wanting a highly-regarded record producer to focus on a white pop act "whom they feel has the sound America wants," according to one synopsis in a Web film database. "To keep his creative integrity, Buckmaster (Keitel) carefully begins to fight the system that has made him the respected producer he has become. The movie also includes Maurice White and the rest of the acclaimed black R&B group of the 1970s "Earth, Wind and Fire." Bert Parks, the perennial emcee of the Miss America Pageant played a secondary role in the movie.

Cynthia got to sing in the movie.

Critics were never kind when reviewing "Shining Star" and, to my knowledge, the movie was never released nationwide. I've never seen it. Decades later, a film critic, Robert Firsching of All Movie Guide, wrote about Shining Star: "The cult favorite from director/producer Sig Shore featured the music of Earth, Wind and Fire and had a No. 1 soundtrack album, but went belly-up at the box-office. That's a shame, because what other film offers viewers Harvey Keitel as a record producer who skates at an all-black disco rink, Bert Parks as a child molester, and squeaky-clean singer Jimmy Boyd ("I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus") as a hardcase junkie? Other treats on hand include the manager of a Christian pop band threatening to stick an ice pick in Keitel's ear and appearances by noted disc jockeys Murray the K and Frankie Crocker."

"Amidst all of this insanity, Cynthia Bostick's female-lead turn as a Joplin-like junkie singer named Velour is lost," Firsching wrote. "The film ends with a number of Earth, Wind and Fire songs, but by that point most viewers will be in bad-movie shellshock."

Later, according to Dorsey, Cynthia got a small part in a Broadway play, "Something Old, Something New," but the play ran only one week before it was canceled. After that, Cynthia became very discouraged with "the whole acting business," said Dorsey.

"I came so close to getting a dozen things, but I was (either) never the right height or I didn't have the right hair color to or my complexion was a little too dark, 'It's not that you're not a good actress,' the director was always saying," Bostick told Dorsey.

Taking her name off the audition-call list, Bostick said, "I just became so disillusioned about what you had to do to get a job that I got out of the business." She said her agent pleaded with her, according to Dorsey's article. "You're too young to give up. At least let's keep your name on file.

For a while, Cynthia was working as a production assistant when NBC decided to cast for "Lovers and Friends." A producer remembered her from previous auditions.

Bostick tried out for the two main female leads. As Megan, "a rich, but naive" heroine, and as Connie, "the scheming villainess who turns out to be a little nutty," according to Dorsey.

"They told me I could be a better conniver," Cynthia said to Dorsey. Bostick's soap ran for six weeks in the summer of 1977, but it too was canceled. "Lovers" was revived in December 1978, and played in many cities (not in Louisville) opposite against the very tough, eventual soap opera classic, "All My Children."

Cynthia told Dorsey that she had a 13-week contract with the NBC show. "She knows it could all go down the drain ---- again," he wrote, "But she says she's not going to get hung up on acting ever again."

Her discouraging experience in New York City changed Cynthia. "I'm a different person now," she told Dorsey. "I don't even think I'll be a soap star. Whatever that is. I'll be content just to do the show and if that doesn't work out, I'll just do something else."

In the 1980s, Bostick made appearances on three other daytime dramas, handled public relations for the TV soap "Another World," returned to Owensboro for a short time, then took a job with Proctor & Gamble in Cincinnati where she worked for almost three years. She remarried, had her first child, and then began work for Johnson Outdoors in Racine, Wis.

I have kept the clipping of that Courier-Journal article about Cynthia all these years. I still think of her today and look at the pictures M-I photographer Bill Kyle and I shot before she competed in the Miss America Pageant. I remember how much she wanted to be an actress on Broadway. I remember how much I really cared for her, and always rooted for her success. In the short time we were friends in 1970-71, I knew just how much she wanted to achieve her dream. I knew how emotional she could be, and how hard she took thoughts of self doubt and the possibility of failure. My heart went out to her. I really admired her, and always considered her a success. To me, she was fearless and willing to take a risk. She was gutsy, determined and never afraid to give anything her best shot. I thought it was pretty impressive for her to display that kind of moxey, especially when she was only 18 years old.

I have never seen or talked with Cynthia in 40 years. But it is evident to me in that interim of decades how our lives have paralleled each other's. We both had big dreams at the start of our careers, achieved success in our professions, but many times struggled with the reality of failure, disappointment and disillusionment. Speaking only for myself, I had to settle for second place and play with the cards life dealt me after 1976. Though she never knew, I thought she handled adversity much better than I. She succeeded financially, married and started a good family. But the one thing I am sure we shared is that we both had the courage to face whatever bad times and tragedies life threw at us. We both have survived with honor and a lot of class.

2

So Many Personal Losses

On the day before the Blizzard of 1978 began, I had been reporting from the Daviess County courthouse on a Circuit Court trial in which six men had been charged with the rape of an Bowling Green woman on Aug. 21, 1977. I missed the last half of the testimony and then the verdict on Jan. 27 because I could not travel to Owensboro over the snow and ice covered highway. On Friday of that week in January, two of the men were found innocent of the charge and the jury could not reach a verdict on the other four.

I still recall the other major news events in Owensboro and in southern Indiana that we reported in 1978. Ten of the UMW strikers arrested for disorderly conduct in the December 1977 melee with law enforcement officers pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct and were fined $77.50. One pleaded guilty to second-degree wanton endangerment and got one year in jail, but 11 months of the term was suspended. Charges against the other strikers arrested after the incident were dismissed.

Meanwhile the nationwide UMW strike continued. On Jan. 7, 1978, violence erupted at the B&M coal loading dock at Rockport, Ind., (10 miles northeast of Owensboro) when more than 400 UMW miners stormed the non-union facility, firing guns and tossing Molotov cocktails. State police arrested 194 men, mostly miners from Indiana's UMW District 11, and an estimated $1 million in damage was reported. In the next three months, B&M, which was buying coal from 60-odd nonunion mines and selling it to power stations, posted security guards armed with AR-15 semi-automatic rifles. In March 1978, B&M owner, Paul Teegarden, who had lived in his office since the beginning of the strike, kept a 9-mm Smith & Wesson automatic pistol on his desk, told Time Magazine that: "If they come again they won't walk away."

Later in September 1978, months after the strike was settled, a civil trial was held in Spencer County Circuit Court. The jury handed down a verdict favorable to the B&M dock operation, saying that 191 UMW members had violated a restraining order issued before the incident and the union was ordered to pay about $175,000 in damages.

Former Owensboro Police Department detective Jim Stallings was tried twice in 1978, and finally convicted on two counts of murder for shooting his wife and setting a fire that killed three of his four children in August 1975 in Owensboro, WVJS and the Messenger-Inquirer reported.

There was also good and bad news to report in 1978 about Owensboro businesses and the local economy. The bad news, according to the Chamber of Commerce, was that city businesses lost an estimated $1 million in business during the several days that the city was paralyzed by the record snowfall.

On the brighter side, Towne Square Mall opened south of the city limits on U.S. 431. The mall contained 50 stores, employed almost 1,000 people, and was then the largest shopping center west of Louisville. In the months ahead, three large downtown stores --- Sears, Penney's and S.W. Anderson's --- moved to the mall, starting an exodus of general business to the south of town and leaving a lot of downtown store buildings vacant and boarded up.

A new organization, Downtown Owensboro Inc., was established in one of many future efforts to revitalize the downtown business district. At that time, the Executive Inn Rivermont

was already leading the way in that effort, becoming the linchpin of business in downtown Owensboro for several decades to come. Dollars spent on tourism flooded into Owensboro as Rivermont owner Bob Green predicted. The big hotel brought 100 conventions to town during 1978. "The most spectacular and memorable was the American Academy of Achievement meeting in June which brought celebrities from many areas to Owensboro," the M-I noted.

Meanwhile there was the first change of ownership of Owensboro's second biggest hotel. Gabe's Tower Inn at Triplett and 20th streets was sold to Owensboro Business College. "The business college will continued to operate what had been Owensboro's largest motel prior to the opening of the Executive Inn," according to the Messenger-Inquirer. "Half of the rooms will be used for the college and half for the hotel operations, the business college announced."

The Owensboro economy also took a big hit in 1978 as the American Cigar Co. factory at 11th and Walnut streets shut down in February and about 375 employees lost their jobs.

Nationally, the 1970s would be a decade of slow economic growth, a significant rise in prices, and relatively high unemployment. The term "stagflation," the new word used to describe the combination of these three economic conditions, became a part of the American vernacular for the first time. In 1978, the national economy continued to be a haunting concern to corporations, small businesses and workers everywhere. Worried economists began keeping a watchful eye.

Showing the effects of rising oil prices since 1973, the inflation rate which had been 3.2 percent in the post World War II era rose to 7.7 percent in 1973. Inflation inched upward to 9.1 percent in 1975 (its highest since 1947). The unemployment rate that had been at 5.1 percent in January 1974 rose to 9 percent in May 1975. It dropped to 7 percent in last half of the 1970s and was 6.4 percent nationally in December 1977.

. While overall unemployment rate dropped to 5.6 percent in 1979, inflation remained high and the economy slipped into a relatively brief recession. By April 1980, the number of those workers unemployed edged up to 6.9 percent and would hit 7.5 percent in 1981. But it got worse. The inflation rate rose to 9.1 percent, the highest in the United States since 1947. It continued to rise to 11.3 percent in 1979 and was at 13.5 percent in 1980.

On the Friday morning after the January 1978 blizzard, an Associated Press story on Page 1-A of the Messenger-Inquirer addressed the state of the national economy: "Congressional economists say the nation's persistent unemployment problem is likely to be solved within the next several years by sharply lower growth in the labor force. Such a radical development, they said in a report released Thursday, could result in startling social changes: less migration from the cold North to the Sun Belt, more flexible working conditions, more automation, greater opportunities for underskilled or older workers and perhaps a moving away from the 'materialism' of the 1970s." Boy, were the economists ever wrong.

Those economic conditions would eventually hurt me by the fall of 1978, but before that, in the spring, I had to bid farewell to yet another great old friend ---- my most exalted mentor and colleague, George Kerler. A few months after I had returned home from Frankfort, defeated and licking my wounds, I dropped by George's house on Ewing Court to tell him about my struggle with depression and my disappointing experience serving my almost four years. George would always give me a pep talk and cut to the heart of the matter when we discussed my mental depression. He had been there too, and he knew exactly how I felt. He also knew plenty about working in Frankfort. Maybe his own memories of the state capital and experience with anxiety and depression were the reasons he drank and smoked so much.

George knew how excited I was in 1972 when I went to Frankfort, hoping to learn the ropes about politics and government, establish my position in the capitol as a possible springboard to a job in Washington, and then go for that far-fetched dream I would never discuss --- a possible future run for public office on my own. Of course, George joked, my bout of depression would rule out all chances I would ever have to becoming vice president of the United States. (George McGovern, the 1972 Democratic candidate for president, suddenly dropped his vice-presidential running mate Thomas Eagleton during the election campaign when McGovern learned Eagleton had been treated for depression with having electroshock therapy.) I always left those visits with George feeling totally rejuvenated, forgiven for my sins and mistakes, and more eager than ever to get back into the game.

I didn't visit the Messenger-Inquirer while I was working for their competitor WVJS Radio, but would occasionally spot Kerler in downtown Owensboro and we would stop for a brief, sidewalk chat. We had been out of touch for a while (one of those personal mental lapses we always regret when we have gotten too busy and it is too late) when I got the news that he had died of cardiac arrest. George, who developed chronic heart trouble during the 1970s, became ill at the office and died at the hospital on Tuesday, March 28, 1978.

I attended his funeral, and mourned for George's wife Evelyn and daughters. Everyone George knew in Owensboro, especially his present and former colleagues, were quick to pay tribute to him after his death. I cut out and kept the clipping of the editorial that appeared in the Messenger-Inquirer on the day after his passing.

"George Kerler died suddenly Tuesday, stilling a voice that could be gruff and yet compassionate, laced with invectives yet so softened with wry humor, agitated and yet conciliatory," the editorialist wrote.

"He was a man who was zealous while claiming he was not. He cared greatly about what people were saying - in conversation with him, within the community as a whole or in a broad philosophical arena In a time when newspapers and other print media were looking for changes in appearance as a panacea for withering interest on part of some readers, (Kerler) stood staunchly by what was written as the area of primary importance. He cared little for the way the written word was packaged," the editorial writer continued.

"He was always kind and had a great interest in what was going on around him, in the community and in the office where he worked. He would offer advice when it was sought out, and even when it wasn't. Not one given to profound statements, he usually spoke directly, pragmatically and with delightful humor."

In August 2003, as I neared the end of my second and final tour of duty as an employee of the Messenger-Inquirer, I wrote a profile about George in the series of history pieces that appeared in the Perspective section for five years. I had a host of personal memories of George from my days with him in the newsroom, and I interviewed many of his friends, including his lawyer pal Calvin Ray Robinsion, former city manager Max Rhoads, and Ann Whittinghill, a colleague who first began working with George when the newspaper office was at Third and Allen streets near the current City Hall.

In my lead paragraph, I wrote: "As the quintessential old school newsman George Kerler was always on the prowl for a story. As city hall reporter and editorialist for the Messenger-Inquirer from 1958 to December 1978, Kerler was determined and tenacious, forever seeking the truth."

Max Rhoads said: "He was the most professional reporter to cover city hall while I was there (September 1959 to December 1991). George was the last of the great city hall reporters. He

knew how to get his story, and didn't mnd working to get it. He could smell a story. He was the only person I knew who could read (papers on a desk) upside down.

"He may have been the most intelligent man I ever knew," said Robinson. "He had a mass of knowledge and had a very sharp, penetrating mind and went to the heart of the matter immediately."

Mrs. Whittinghill dismissed George's rough newsroom persona. "George was gruff but nice. His gruffness belied his personality," said Whittinghill, who worked at the M-I from 1957 until retiring in December 2000. "He was very bright and quick to grasp what you were talking about. As a writer, he was quite particular about grammar. He had no use for someone at the reporter level unable to spell correctly or use appropriate words. He was a real bug about writing very precisely.

"George wasn't the green visor and pencil behind the ear editor type of journalist, but a writer who labored at his desk over a carton of cigarettes and an overflowing ashtray," she said. "Conversation with him was always like an interview and not casual. George gleaned something from everyone he talked to."

The most precise description of Kerler's personality was the one I received from George's longtime friend, the distinguished Kentucky journalist and author John Ed Pearce, who joined the Courier-Journal in 1946 and worked 50 years as a reporter, editorial writer, associate editor, magazine writer and columnist.

Pearce's friendship with George lasted from their days as classmates at UK , in Frankfort and until Kerler's death. "George was a likeable man, humorous, bright and generous," said Pearce, who was 83 years old when he talked with me. "He was very intense in both work and personable habits, smoking jerkily, speaking in fits and starts, punctuating his speech with short bursts of laughter. He could be caustic in his criticism of another's work, but it was usually kind. And though he effected a casual, informal air, there was a great constancy about him..."

As I previously noted, I stood in awe of George Kerler, like he as a boy in New York was awestruck with Babe Ruth. I tried to imitate everything George did as a news reporter. But I could never equal George. No one could do that. George was one of a kind ---- the very best newsman I ever knew.

I had been lucky to find a job in 1976 with the unemployment rate so high, but it was Joel Utley who had rescued me. He knew my reputation as a hard news reporter from the early 1970s. He described my reporting style as "relentless," and quickly hired me. However, Joel decided to retire in April 1978, ending his 17-year-run as WVJS news director, and I lost my biggest supporter on the management staff of the radio and cablenews station. WVJS radio-TV anchor Jim Parr replaced Utley, who went into the real estate business but stayed on to do the play-by-play of Kentucky Wesleyan College basketball. (Joel continues in that role to this day.)

I felt my voice and delivery were my only weaknesses in reporting radio and television news. I had learned to speak with authority and confidence, while at DINFOS but I could never disguise my western Kentucky accent. When I got mentally tired, I tended drop my g's and sounded as if I was from the "country." Which I was and am. That may have led to my downfall. He was not being critical when he said it, but one of the station's disc jockeys told me I sounded like Arkansas-born Fred Graham, a lawyer, journalist and justice correspondent for the New York Times and CBS News in the 1970s. (Graham is now anchor and managing editor of Court TV.)

At the end of September, the latest programming ratings were distributed to all managers at

WVJS. The news department totals were down, I was told. In early October, news director Parr, who I considered a good friend and another of my best supporters, called me into his office and told me that, while it was with much regret and sadness for him to express, he was going to have to let me go. I cannot recall that he gave a reason for my firing; it was just a business decision. A young woman, just out of college, replaced me in my reporter slot.

Losing that job was a total surprise for me. I did not see it coming. So while I had managed to at least temporarily conquer my three years of mental depression, I was out of a job again and my anxiety level naturally intensified, causing me a lot of restless nights in the weeks ahead. Trying to find a job in a bad economy is the hardest work I have ever had to do. It is so harrowing and frustrating. I was in for another long, hard slog. I would be jobless or under-employed for the next six years, barely able to pay my bills or even pay for my own way.

Short of losing a child, family member or friend by death, there is nothing worse for a man or woman than being unemployed, I have learned in life. I struggled to maintain my self esteem. I brooded about it. I worried. In those years of unemployment, there were times that I felt unworthy and totally rejected. I have always been harder on myself than anyone else, so I struggled with what I thought was my personal failure.

My life was more difficult than ever, but I never gave up. I tried my best to reach for the last measure of optimism I could muster. I had accomplished one goal in the last two years of employment. At least, while working at the radio station, I managed to pay off the balance of my hospital bill from 1976, and was in no way in severe debt by Christmas 1978. I didn't have much money in the bank, and I didn't have any source of income. But at least I was still living with Daddy and not homeless. We rallied to the situation, both of us trying to help each other overcome our mutual grief and misfortune.

I don't remember if I signed up for unemployment benefits, but by January 1979 I was very busy scrambling to find another job. First, I got part-time work as a "stringer" for the *Evansville Press*, that city's afternoon newspaper. I wrote about 50 stories or news briefs for the Press from February through August, making about $1,300.

I would get up early and be our phone at home by 9 a.m., filing my reports after the previous day coverage of my old M-I news beat at city hall, the county courthouse and U.S. District Court. I was seeking Owensboro stories that would interest Evansville and western Kentucky readers. I covered political campaigns, official misconduct by two Owensboro police officers, plane crashes, drownings, shootings and other serious crimes. Even civil disputes between Owensboro city police and the mayor.

I stuck to writing hard, breaking news because aside from investigative pieces, that is what I believe the people want to read the most in their daily paper. To get my facts, I attended press conferences, asked a lot of questions, interviewed and took notes from officials and witnesses at the scene, made telephone calls from our house in Maceo and wrote the stories on my portable typewriter on the kitchen table or on my lap in my bedroom. Each morning I phoned in my latest news articles, dictating them to the writer on the other end at the *Evansville Press* city desk. Stories had to be filed as early as 9 a.m. so the *Press* could include them in its afternoon page layout and subsequent press-run.

I received my first byline story as a *Evansville Press* correspondent on Feb. 8, 1979, reporting that Daviess Circuit Judge Henry Griffin was expected to make a ruling the following week on whether J.R. Miller was eligible to run for mayor of Owensboro. "Judge Griffin heard arguments yesterday in a lawsuit filed at the request of supporters of Miller, a former state

chairman of the Kentucky Democratic Party and general manager of the Green River Electric Corp. in Owensboro," my second graph read.

The lawsuit was seeking to test the constitutionality of Kentucky statutes regarding residential requirements for mayoral candidates in second class cities with the city manager form of goverment, like Owensboro, I pointed out. One statute in question required a mayoral candidate in a second class city to be a resident and voter in that city for at least three years before the election, I continued. "Miller would not be eligible to run under that law. He moved from a rural Daviess County residence into Owensboro in February 1977 and registered to vote in the city a month later. Miller's attorney, his son James Miller, called areas of the statutes conflicting and said the three-year residentcy requirement established in 1894, was outdated and no longer legitimate because, according to young Miller, "the public is better able to judge qualifications of candidates on their own." The courts ruled in Miller's favor; he ran unopposed and won the general election in November to become mayor.

Another of my first top stories for the *Press* was about candidate Terry McBrayer's speaking before Young Democrats at the opening of his Owensboro campaign headquarters in February 1979. McBrayer, former state commerce commissioner and Gov. Carroll's favorite in the race, was running in the May Democratic primary for governor, against U.S. Rep. Carroll Hubbard, Lt. Gov. Thelma Stovall, millionaire businessman John Y. Brown Jr., former Louisville mayor Harvey Sloane and state auditor George Atkins (who later withdrew before the primary election.)

McBrayer told me and other reporters that he thought Lt. Gov. Stovall would be his main competition in the primary campaign, assuring us that "he would not be drawn into a campaign of mudslinging, an apparent reference to recent statements made by opponents George Atkins and Carroll Hubbard," I wrote.

"It's easy to be critical and negative," McBrayer said. "You're never hear me attack a personality during this campaign. It's high time some of those in the political arena showed some maturity."

McBrayer also repeated one of his campaign themes of "getting back to the basics in education."

"We haven't had an innovative idea in education in Kentucky for 20 years. We aren't turning out a good finished product from our high schools. Some of our graduates still can't balance a checkbook or make correct change."

(As I read the clips of these articles I wrote 30 years ago, I thought with consternation about how many times I had heard such a statement about negative campaigning since those days. I also reminded that even today there has been little strong progress on those two state issues in the following decades. Negative political campaigning continued to thrive as an election tactic in most every state race since those days in Kentucky and the state still has basically the same problems with education it had in the1979. McBrayer finished third in the 1979 primary. Brown won the campaign and Sloane, who I also had interviewed during the campaign, was second in the voting. Brown won the general election and became governor.)

In late March 1979, I interviewed Bob Green about his first expansion of the Executive Inn Rivermont. "Plans call for construction of 100 new hotel rooms and an indoor athletic club by this fall, and a high-rise apartment building and office complex within the next five years," I wrote for the March 21 edition. "An early estimate of the cost of the entire project is $3 million, Green said." I noted. "All the new facilities will be built on a six-block section of riverfront that Green owns west of the Executive Inn. Green said the 100 new motel will be connected to the 25

units now being added on the main building of the hotel." (The high-rise apartment building and office complex were never built.)

On April 23, I wrote about plans for Owensboro's first barbecue festival. "A weekend 'bringing together the atmosphere of a country church picnic and the excitement of an urban street festival' will occur at Daviess County's International Barbecue Festival' At least that's the way the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce sees the event on the Owensboro riverfront Friday and Saturday.

"Dave Adkisson, executive vice president of the chamber, said the idea of the festival is not only to show pride in the quality of local barbecue but also to commemorate the barbecue picnics that have been a summer cultural tradition in Daviess County since the 1830s," I wrote. Teams from eight local Catholic churches, the Owensboro Jaycees and the National Guard signed up to compete for the festival cooking championship.

On May 12, 1979, I reported that the Owensboro city commission had eased restrictions on downtown housing by giving final approval to a zoning ordinance aimed at aiding redevelopment of downtown Owensboro. "The amendment also allows multiple uses for building in or near the central business district meaning apartments can be located above businesses in that area," I continued. "....Mayor Jack Fisher said he hopes the changes will encourage renovation of buildings and get developers to build condominiums and apartment complexes on vacant lots in the downtown area."

"Fisher said the main objective of the new building requirements is to stop a trend in which many downtown businesses are moving to suburban shopping centers," (This was during the continuous movement of development south along Frederica Street and beyond the Owensboro beltline during the 1980s.)

In a May 25 story I reported, nurses aides at Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital were ordered to be paid the same salary as male orderlies as result of an out-of-court settlement between the hospital and the U.S. Department of Labor.

After attending one of their rallies at the Hawesway Truckstop two miles down U.S. 60 from our house, I wrote about local independent drivers' participation in the nationwide independent truckers strike in June 1979. The truckers were pressing to get diesel fuel at lower prices. A group of the tri-state truckers gathered and parked their tractors near the gates of eight Owensboro's bulk fuel plants as part of an attempt to halt fuel distribution. The independents were losing money as diesel fuel prices rose, their expenses increased and their profits shrank on each of their hauls.

Joe Voyles, an Owensboro trucking company manager who was coordinating the attempted shutdown by independents locally, said at a June 12 meeting that the truckers wanted to avoid violence. "We're trying to do this peaceably." However, Voyles said both gasoline tankers and trucks carrying diesel fuel will be blocked. "If we stop the gasoline tankers along with diesel we will get 'Joe Civilian' involved and that will get another voice added to our situation. " Voyles said local truckers would permit farm fuel and fuel for emergency use to be distributed.

The mission of the estimated 175 Owensboro area drivers was to shut down all diesel fuel and gasoline distributors in Owensboro. Blockades at truck stops and attempts by truckers to slow traffic along the nation's major highways escalated in the first two weeks of June. National leaders of the Independent Truckers Association who also wanted higher speed limits and higher freight rates for truckers, called for nationwide participation in the shutdown. Independent truckers hauled 80 percent of the nation's food at that time. The protests slowed deliveries of

produce and meat, and strikers and shippers agreed escalation of the striker's tactics could cause major shortages of vital commodities, the *Evansville Press* reported.

The national strike lasted a little over two weeks until President Jimmy Carter deregulated the oil industry and pushed for mandatory fuel surcharge legislation that is still in effect to this day.

The Owensboro independent truckers gave up their fight and voted to return to work on June 26, 1979, while the federal action on the drivers' demands were stymied by a vacationing Congress and President Carter's trip to Asia. "We're not going to gain anything else by striking until they come back," said Voyles. He left open the possibility of resuming the strike if the federal government does not provide some relief for high fuel prices and conflicting weight regulations, according to press reports.

"Voyles said he supported the 6 percent surcharge allowed truckers last week by the Interstate Commerce Commission. And as an owner I'm willing to go back to work. And I won't force my drivers to go back if they don't want to," I wrote.

"Several drivers present at last night's meeting said they might not return to work until the end of the strike nationwide, saying they feared violence from other independents," I concluded. That was the last report I filed on the local drivers' involvement in the nationwide transportation strike. On July 23, in a story I reported, two Owensboro policemen, charged the previous week with misconduct and insubordination stemming from statements they made about faulty police equipment, accepted suspensions without pay instead of asking for a hearing.

Those two articles were among the last that I wrote for the *Evansville Press.* When I finish the last article for the Press, I would never write news stories for any paper before 2000. My career as a reporter was over.

In June 1979, during my last months as a reporter, I received the tragic news that impending death had arrived once again on our family's doorstep. My brother-in-law Billy Bivins learned that he had inoperable, terminal lung cancer. Nothing could be done to save him, we were told It was just a matter of time when he would die.

Hearing those words again cut like a butcher knife in the gut for me and Daddy, and it was one hundred times worse for Shirley, Billy's brothers John and Bobby, his father Carl and everyone in the Bivins family. I could not believe that Shirley, Daddy and I were having this same nightmare again. Devastating is an inadequate word to describe the emotional pain we all felt. It was only five years before that we dealt with Mom's hopeless illness and death. The way she died killed a big part of each of us and now Billy was going to be taken from us. My God, not Billy, I said to myself. He is only 45 years old and has half of his life l left to live, I thought to myself. This just cannot be happening!

In those preceding 26 years, Billy and I had been together so many times ---- playing catch, shooting hoops, going to ballgames, laboring and sweating in the tobacco barn, riding side by side on the setter or just having man to man conversations. I have never forgotten how he was there for me like a big brother in my most difficult times. He had always been in my corner as I tried to live through my personal grief after Mom's death and then survive the three years of severe depression that followed.

All the great times and wonderful memories he and I shared come back to me so clearly as I relive them and attempt to tell Billy's story now. My writing talent falls far short and is insufficient to express what a great man Billy was, and how much he meant to me. But I will try.

My sister and I were never very close when I was a small boy and I have few memories of our relationship in those early days. (She is seven years older than me.) At least I can't recall any. But when Billy came into all our family's life, he brought Shirley and me closer together.

When I was little and we lived at the Taylor place and for as long as I can remember, Shirley was looking for a way to escape the poverty of our household. I think she was ashamed about the economic conditions under which we lived. Many years later, she admitted to me that she didn't like to bring her high school girl friends to our house to visit.. By the time she went to Daviess County High School she was looking to get married as soon as possible.

She only had dated one or two high school boys before she met Billy. I'm sure she has always recognized how lucky and fortunate she was to find such a wonderful man.

"When I saw him for the first time, it was at a softball game at the Maceo playground in the summer. I think I was either 14 or 15. He was playing first base. I thought he was cute and sexy. He had a peroxide blonde streak in his (brown) hair. He had a dark tann and my heart fluttered. He also drove a red Ford convertible. I knew he lived somewhere in Yelvington and had attended Thruston Elementary School and went to Daviess County High. I would see him again at times but I never talked to him. We later got acquainted through the Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) groups at Maceo and Bethlehem Methodist churches.

"His younger brother, John, was in the MYF, but Billy wasn't. Once he took John, me and some other teenagers to the MYF Summer Camp at Kuttawa near Kentucky Lake. We started dating when I was in the second semester of my freshman year at DCHS. I guess we got too serious at such an early age, especially me.

"We had been dating for a while and decided we wanted to get married," Shirley remembers. "So we went to Owensboro and picked out wedding rings we wanted at Zale's Jewelers. He gave it to me during Christmas 1952. Mama wasn't too happy about the ring when she first saw it. 'This isn't an engagement ring' is it? she asked. "

As I noted in the first chapter, both our parents did not want Shirley getting married at such a young age. (She was 16 in 1952.) So I promised Mama that I would finish high school if Billy and I married. He and I held out until the summer of 1953, and were married Aug. 1, 1953. Mama and Billy's mom had to sign consent papers for us" to get our marriage license. "Both Billy and Shirley's parents were happy that they were going to be married, and Shirley kept her promise and did graduate from high school in 1955.

Billy quickly took to liking me. We were immediate buddies. He knocked flies and grounders to help me improve my skills as a baseball player. He threw batting practice balls to me and I learned a lot about basketball whenever and wherever we played together. He took me, his brother John and cousin J.R. Kirk to Louisville to see the Kentucky High School basketball tournament or the traditional Christmas week game the University of Kentucky played against Notre Dame or Temple at Freedom Hall. After he and Shirley were married, they often took me along with them to see movies at the drive-in theater, then located along U.S. 60 near Yellow Creek and what was Dewey-Almy Chemical Plant. I watched the films sitting behind them in the middle of the backseat. How many newlywed men would even think about taking their 12-year-old kid brother-in-law on a date with his new wife? I thought Billy was aces! He rated as one of my closest buddies until the day he died.

William Alton Bivins was 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighed about 160 pounds when he was in his 20s, was intelligent, handsome, physically fit with a sharp nose and dark, almost Italian facial features. In the 1970s, after I had seen the two Godfather movies, I thought that the actor Al

Pacino looked enough like Billy to be his twin brother.

Once I started to going to college and working downtown at the Messenger-Inquirer office, I would drop by Sherwin Williams Paint Store which Billy and his uncle Leroy Bivins managed on East Second Street near the Glover Cary Bridge. I would just hang out and talk with Billy when no customers were in the store, or we crossed the street and had lunch at Ferrell's Restaurant, a popular and usually crowded downtown diner.

Billy was a great friend and role model, and always my pal. We both loved major league baseball, UK basketball and high school round ball. He was a quiet, modest man, but very affable and friendly. He was smart conversationist who could talk about most any topic, be it baseball, basketball or national politics. He was a laid-back kind of guy, always calm. He could get riled, but I never saw him get really angry at anyone. Not even as a competitor on the softball diamond , or the basketball court where he could throw a few elbows. He seldom, if ever, cursed. The strongest word of profanity I ever heard him utter in frustration was an occasional "shit."

Billy had suffered from headaches and stomach ulcers most of his adult life, but never had been treated or had surgery for any health problem of a critical nature. However, in early 1979, he began having pain in his back near his left shoulder. Then an unexplicable tingling feeling developed in Billy's left hand. His doctor, John Lovett, surmised that the "tingling" was from what he thought was bursitis in Billy's shoulder. But the physician could not pin down the real cause.

Lovett did not order any x-rays. At that point, Shirley became very concerned. About a year earlier, Billy woke up one morning and saw what looked like bloody vomit or phlegm on his pillow. Soon after that discovery, Dr. Royce Dawson, was consulted and performed and exploratory test, inserting down Billy's esophagus a long tube with a light on its end. The doctor was trying to determine the source of the blood. Maybe it was an ulcer again, we all hoped. Shirley asked Dawson if he thought Billy might have cancer. (Billy's mother had died of cancer.) Dr. Dawson then said to Shirley --- I guess trying to reassure her ---- that "If Billy has cancer, then I have cancer" Still, no chest x-ray was taken of Billy's lungs.

The tingling continued for months without cessation. Dr. Lovett still remained baffled and hesitant to perform any other tests. He continued treating Billy with pain killers as if the "bursitis" had become chronic arthritis. Finally in late spring 1979, the skin on Billy's left hand became very dry and began to peel. Dr. Lovett ordered the chest x-ray. When Lovett got the x-ray film back and examined it, he found a dark mass on one of Billy's lungs. Dr. John Anderson, a surgeon, performed a needle biopsy procedure in Billy's back to get part of the mass. It was cancerous.

The Owensboro doctors immediately referred Billy's case to surgeons at Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville. They did further x-rays and found a well developed tumor wrapped around the upper section of Billy's backbone. It was the tumor that was pressing nerves in Billy's spine and causing the mysterious tingling sensation in his hand. The Vanderbilt surgeons were disappointed that the Owensboro doctors had failed to reach their diagnosis sooner. It was too late for surgery. There was nothing they could do to save Billy by removing the tumor, the Vanderbilt surgeons said. They told Billy and Shirley that he probably would not live more than another six months. All they could do was send Billy home with a prescription of liquid concoction of painkillers.

As a testament to Billy's character and in a touching demonstration of the Yelvington community's affection for Billy, about 25 of his buddies and co-workers from the Yelvington

Fire Department and Martin Marietta, members of the Bethlehem church, his brothers, cousins, nephews, and Daddy and I showed up to cut and house his tobacco crop when harvest time came in August. It was a sunny, hot and humid day and the large group of field hands had the whole crop cut, spiked, hauled and hung in two barns by mid-afternoon. By that time Billy was very frail, had lost weight and was very sad, but he came out of his house and sat with the work crew when we stopped for lunch.

Billy's prognosis had broken the hearts of all of us in his family. Every one:: Shirley, Tracey and Todd, Bobby, John, Billy's father Carl. and all of his former co-workers. I think the pain had already begun to worsen for him. He came out to sit in the back yard with his friends when we ate lunch there. He did it to show his appreciation and return the group's affection and respect.

It was so distressing to see Billy fade away and become so weak and more enfeebled as the summer months passed into fall and then into December. Everyone around him in those final months and days of his life never talked about his health when we visited. That old helpless feeling that we felt when Momma was dying came back for Shirley, Daddy and me. And I'm sure Billy's brothers, father and uncle felt the same way. We talked with him and did everything we could to lift his spirits and get his mind off his fate. But no one remained hopeful.

The most heartful realization we all had was that Billy was only 45 years old, and gone too soon. would be robbed of the second half of his life. What would his wife and children do without him. Once in those final months of his life, in a moment of acceptance and preparing himself to die, Billy told Shirley: "You're going to have to take care of the kids on your own now, the best you can."

We knew of no hospice services available then in Daviess County, and when Billy was in such pain and his condition became grave, he went into the hospital in Owensboro for the last time. Shirley, John Bivins, father Carl, his uncle Crawford Kirk, and the rest of his extended family took turns keeping watch at Billy's bedside during those final days.

I was scheduled to sit with him during the afternoon and early evening on Tuesday, Dec. 11, 1979. When I arrived at about 2:30 p.m., Billy's room was empty and his body had been removed. He had died unexpectly about 30 or 45 minutes before I got there. While Shirley was giving his liquid cocktail of pain medicine and strangled on it, dying of aphyxiation. His time had come.

Many, many folks from Yelvington and Hancock and Daviess counties came to Billy's visitation to pay their respects. His funeral was held at 2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 13, at Delbert J. Glenn Funeral Home at Fourth and Allen streets in Owensboro. I was one of Billy's pallbearers. I remembered standing up with the rest of the mourners when the service ended, stoic but with tears rolling down my cheeks. I was remembering all those great times when Billy and I had played ball, had discussed sports, or worked and sweated together. I felt that I had lost my big brother. (I noticed that a few days after Billy's death that Birdie Gasser, my old friend and colleague at the Messenger-Inquirer, had died on the same day as Billy. He was 82. Birdie had been a journalist for 57 years in Owensboro.)

Everyone in our immediate family loved him, as well as Pop, Granny, Lillian, Raymond, Joe and Frances too. Billy was a Christian who served his church and community well. I never ever heard anyone of his friends, colleagues or business competitors ever say anything negative about him.

To me, he was the ultimate nice guy who always deserved the best in life. I never knew a better man than Billy Bivins. Losing him at such a relatively young prevented so many people of

knowing such a good, kind and generous man. His death left a huge void in the lives of everyone who had the privilege to know and been touched by him.

Billy was always a farmer, who with his father Carl Bivins raised cattle, hay, soybeans and tobacco at Carl's farm on Yelvington-Knottsville Road south of Yelvington. While he was a student at Daviess County High School, Billy was one of the leaders of the school's Future Farmers of America chapter, winning a few county and state awards, before he graduated in 1952. He then joined his uncle Leroy Bivins as accounts manager and a salesman at the Sherwin Williams paint store on East Second Street just west of the Cary Bridge in Owensboro.

After his uncle Leroy retired as manager of the store, Bill stayed for a few months, quit and then got a job in the chemicals lab at the new Martin-Marietta Aluminum Co. in Hancock County near Lewisport.

In the late 1950s or early 60s, he and Shirley built a new brick home on Kentucky 662, east of the little community of Yelvington. Their house was near the crossroads of Toler Bridge Road and Kentucky 662 across the farm fields from where Leroy and Billy's brother Bobby lived. All three families were almost within shouting distance from each other. Otto Roberts Jr. and his wife Cordelia were also the Bivins families' neighbor.

When Mom, Daddy and I had to evacuate from our house on U.S. 60 during the 1964 flood, we stayed with Shirley and Billy until the water went down and we could return home. About two inches of water got into the house, bending, warping and destroying most of the hardwood flooring throughout the house. When the inside of the house dried. Billy was right there helping Daddy tearing out the damaged planks of flooring and laying a new floor.

Billy had served in the Army Reserve at Fort Knox during summers in the mid 1950s. Later he was very involved in the work of Bethlehem United Methodist Church, served on the church board, and was one of the organizers of the Yelvington Volunteer Fire Department. He was treasurer on the fire department board.

"He loved working as a volunteer firefighter and would help anyone in the community that needed it," Shirley told me in March 2010. "I think he really got a lot of his Christian beliefs from his mother. He knew his Bible, worked a lot at the church, taught Sunday School class, and help build the new Sunday School rooms at the Bethlehem Methodist Church. Anytime that there was work to be done at the church, he was there."

"I was proud and happy to become Mrs. William Bivins. Billy was the best person I ever knew. He was strong and honorable. He very seldom got angry. Billy loved his parents and brothers. I think he will always be remembered for his kindness, honesty and his patient manner," Shirley declared.

"He was a good man, and a good father to his adopted children Tracey Lynne and Michael Todd. I still love him and miss him every day. After we lost him to cancer at such an early age, our lives changed in so many ways."

Within the year after Billy's death, Shirley sold the house that he and she built, and moved to Owensboro. She had been working since graduating from high school. First, at Western Kentucky Gas Co., then in the Owensboro Public School System as a teacher's aide, at Pinkerton Tobacco Co., and finally at a local window sales store in Owensboro. She is retired now and is involved in volunteer work at Owensboro Christian Church.

She told me recently she intended to eventually marry again after Billy's passing. She dated a few other men in the first decades after his death, but none of the relationships ever became serious. She never found anyone who could replace Billy in her heart. Her love for him was

eternal. She remained close to and talks with Billy's brothers and their families. Shirley is retired now and devoted to her daughter Tracey, her two grandchildren, Tatum and Thomas in Owensboro; and her son Todd who lives in Indiana.

Shirley, Daddy and I felt like we had lost the heart and soul of our family when Mom and Billy died, so tragically, just five years apart. We each had to find a way to bear the pain of these personal human losses.

When thoughts of those tragic times in 1974 and 1979 return to me as I write this, I remember reading the words of Rose Kennedy, the wise and deeply religious matriarch of the Kennedy family who suffered the same kind of pain, losing four of her children to war, a plane crash and assassinations. "It has been said, 'time heals all wounds.' I do not agree," she once said. "The wounds remain. In time, the mind, (protecting its sanity), covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But, it is never gone."

But for me, the words of Thomas Jefferson give me the most comfort as I have grown so much older and still try to assuage the grief of lost loved ones that remains in my heart. Writing on Nov. 13, 1818, from Monticello, a 75-year-old Jefferson, a wise and mellowed old man, talked with great tenderness to John Adams, after the death of Adams' wife, Abigail. Jefferson consoled his old rival and great friend with the thought that he not dwell upon or discuss the pain of grief, surmising in due time, both he and Adams would hopefully reunite with their departed ones in an after life.

"The public papers, my dear friend, announce the fatal event of which your letter of October the 20th had given me ominous foreboding," Jefferson wrote. "Tried myself in the school of affliction, by the loss of every form of connection which can rive the human heart, I know well, and feel what you have lost, what you have suffered, are suffering, and have yet to endure. The same trials have taught me that for ills so immeasurable, time and silence are the only medicine. I will not, therefore, by useless condolences, open afresh the sluices of your grief, nor, although mingling sincerely my tears with yours, will I say a word more where words are vain, but that it is of some comfort to us both, that the term is not very distant, at which we are to deposit in the same cerement (burial garment), our sorrows and suffering bodies, and to ascend in essence to an ecstatic meeting with the friends we have loved and lost, and whom we shall still love and never lose again. God bless you and support you under your heavy affliction. Thomas Jefferson."

3

A Crisis of Confidence?

As 1979 ended, there was a Washington news story that grabbed my interest for the next year and I followed it very closely . President Jimmy Carter found his troubled administration confronted with yet another major crisis, one that would eventually end his presidency. On Nov. 4, 1979, Iranian students took over the U.S. Embassy in Teheran, and held 53 Americans hostage for 441 days as the beleaguered Carter tried to find a way to either negotiate their release or rescue them.

Previously that year, Carter had been faced with the problems of the nationwide truckers strike and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Carter's return of the Panama Canal Zone to Panama was seen at home as one more signal of U.S. weakness. Also, the U.S. Senate rejected the SALT II treaty that Carter had cobbled with the Soviets to reduce the number of the nations' nuclear arms.

In the preceding three years, Carter tried vigorously and succeeded in establishing a national energy policy that included conservation, price controls and new technology. He created two new Cabinet level agencies: the U.S. Department of Energy and a Department of Education. But the long period of international stagflation persisted through his term and eroded his popularity. So much so, that Sen. Ted Kennedy challenged Carter for the Democratic Party nomination in 1980.

I had lost interest in Washington politics after the Watergate scandal forced Nixon's resignation and his subsequent fall from grace. While I was neither impressed nor inspired by Carter as a presidential candidate, I yearned to see a Democrat return to the White House, and I hoped he would be another president like John Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson. So I voted for Carter because I thought he was an honest and intelligent man. He seemed to live his life by Christian principles and was a champion of human rights and equality here at home and around the world. I thought he would restore integrity to the office of president, and believe he succeeded in the latter respect.

But Carter faced unforeseen and overwhelming challenges as president. Once elected, he chose to govern as an outsider in Washington, relying entirely on a small, inner circle of young inexperienced assistants and older confidants from Georgia to formulate policy. Carter was very independent and insisted on things being done his way, without much compromise. Politically conservative and a devout Southern Baptist who refused to serve alcohol in the White House, Carter just did not fit in with the Washington politicians of either party. Carter was never able to get along with his fellow Democrats in Congress. In my opinion, it was Carter's arrogance and stubborn streak that I believe profoundly hindered his chances of getting anything done on some of the most important issues he encountered. An administration that began with high hopes ended in bitter disappointment.

Before what many Americans considered his mishandling of the hostage crisis in Iran, Carter's biggest political blunder was his bold, and, as some historians have expressed, flawed "crisis of confidence" speech in July 1979. He chose to make the speech at a time when energy prices had increased to a record high, there were serious energy shortages and the nation's

economy continued in a recession. Citizens soon lost patience waiting in long lines at gas pumps, and were angered by what seemed to be an endless economic decline, according to press reports. They directed most of their anger at Carter, and by 1979, his approval rating dropped to 25 percent.

In an op-ed piece in the July 14, 2009, edition of the New York Times, Gordon Stewart, deputy chief speech writer for Carter from 1978-81, described the political climate in which he and his colleague Hendrik Hertzberg wrote that historic speech:."In the summer of 1979, as millions of Americans idled in creeping gas lines, President Jimmy Carter was preoccupied with matters abroad. First he was in Vienna completing SALT II with Leonid Brezhnev, next pleading for it before Congress, then away in Japan and Korea, hoping to rest in Hawaii afterward. Instead, a White House reeling from approval numbers lower than Nixon's (during Watergate scandal) urged Mr. Carter to get back home fast and do something. In other words, make a speech that would silence the mobs and revive his presidency."

Because I have always been interested in speech writing, I have wanted to know how that much criticized speech was finally put together. Stewart said he and Hertzberger wrote the first draft of what was to be the "fifth presidential speech on the energy crisis since taking office." The two speech writers sent their draft to Camp David with "the word that we didn't much like it" and soon learned that no one at Camp David liked it either, Stewart said.

The original date of July 5 for the national telecast set up by the White House and the TV networks was scrapped too, as Carter's press secretary Jody Powell said, to give the president more time for consult, think and write, according to Stewart.

In the interim Carter called 130 public officials and private citizens including Arkansas Gov. Clinton and CBS anchor Walter Cronkite to Camp David to discuss the nation's energy emergency. Those governors, labor leaders, businessmen and preachers attending the meeting voiced their opinions of the seriousness of the energy crisis, and appealed to Carter for help. "The great and wise talked and talked, and the president took careful notes." Stewart said. "For 10 days a country already speechless with rage had a leader who said nothing.... Some of the notables spoke in apocalyptic terms."

There was no turning back. Once they got their orders to begin the address, Stewart and Hertzberg worked day and night, writing and rewriting what they never imagined would be tagged from that time forth as Carter's "malaise speech."

Carter's pollster Patrick Caddell was a strong advocate of the speech and had "filled volumes of memos and hours of conversation with his views: that after Vietnam and Watergate Americans had become inward-looking, obsessed with consumption, fragmented, incapable of collective action and suffering a crisis of confidence. It was clear from what the president was writing himself that he wanted these ideas to be at the center of his speech," according to Stewart. "And they are."

"Vice President Walter Mondale and the president's domestic policy adviser, Stuart E. Eizenstat, lobbied against the speech because they felt certain Americans were less concerned with philosophical emptiness than empty gas tanks," Stewart continued. When they saw the president deliver the speech, they had no doubts. What they saw and heard was in their eyes was honest and effective, Stewart pointed out. "Speaking with rare force, with inflections flowing from meanings he felt deeply, Jimmy Carter called for the most massive peacetime commitment in our history to develop alternative fuels,"

"Contrary to later spin, the speech was extremely popular," Stewart added in the NYT op-ed

piece. "The White House was flooded with positive calls. Viewers polled while watching found that the speech inspired them as it unfolded. To this day, I don't entirely know why the speech came to be derided for a word that was in the air, but never once appeared in the text. Still, the 'malaise' label stuck: maybe because President Carter's cabinet shake-up a few days later wasted the political energy that had been focused on our energy problems; maybe because the administration's opponents attached it to the speech relentlessly; maybe because it was just too hard to compete with Ronald Reagan and his banner of limitless American consumption. The real reason is probably that there was never any way the Jimmy Carter we all know would avoid saying: There is simply no way to avoid sacrifice. Where the speeches of Reagan and Barack Obama evoke the beauty of dreams, President Carter insisted on the realities of responsibility and the need for radical change. Mr. Carter's sense of our own accountability, his warnings about the debilitating effects of self-centered divisiveness were the speech's true heresies. They are also the very elements that keep it relevant today."

As I saw it, as Carter spoke to 100 million viewers from the Oval Office on July 15, 1979, the president startled nearly everyone with his candor. What he said was meant to rally, inspire and motivate Americans, but in the days ahead his pep talk was received by many citizens as condesending and demeaning. The intent of the speech seemed to have backfired and gradually turned public opinion against Carter.

The president said he viewed the energy crisis as a "crisis of the spirit in our country," and asked citizens to join him in adapting to a new age of limits. Unexpectedly, Carter admonished the American people, claiming that "human identity is no longer defined by what one does but by what one owns."

The most remarkable lines of the speech for me were these:

"After listening to the American people I have been reminded again that all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America. So, I want to speak to you first tonight about a subject even more serious than energy or inflation. I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy. I do not mean our political and civil liberties. They will endure. And I do not refer to the outward strength of America, a nation that is at peace tonight everywhere in the world, with unmatched economic power and military might.

"The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America. The confidence that we have always had as a people is not simply some romantic dream or a proverb in a dusty book that we read just on the Fourth of July. It is the idea which founded our Nation and has guided our development as a people.

"Confidence in the future has supported everything -- public institutions and private enterprise, our own families, and the very Constitution of the United States. Confidence has defined our course and has served as a link between generations. We've always believed in something called progress.

"We've always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own. Our people are losing that faith, not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy. As a people we know our past and we are proud of it.

"Our progress has been part of the living history of America, even the world. always believed

that we were part of a great movement of humanity itself called democracy, involved in the search for freedom, and that belief has always strengthened us in our purpose. But just as we are losing our confidence in the future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past. In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose."

President Carter finished the speech with these words:

"I will continue to travel this country, to hear the people of America. You can help me to develop a national agenda for the 1980s. I will listen and I will act. We will act together. These were the promises I made three years ago, and I intend to keep them. Little by little we can and we must rebuild our confidence. We can spend until we empty our treasuries, and we may summon all the wonders of science. But we can succeed only if we tap our greatest resources -- America's people, America's values, and America's confidence. I have seen the strength of America in the inexhaustible resources of our people. In the days to come, let us renew that strength in the struggle for an energy-secure nation. In closing, let me say this: I will do my best, but I will not do it alone. Let your voice be heard. Whenever you have a chance, say something good about our country. With God's help and for the sake of our Nation, it is time for us to join hands in America. Let us commit ourselves together to a rebirth of the American spirit. Working together with our common faith we cannot fail.

I thought it was a good speech. Straightforward and heartfelt, much like a sermon. I did not think its frankness was not lethal for Carter, but it was interpreted by many as too curt and judgmental. It went too far, and was not what people wanted or expected to hear. They were bewildered. Some of the criticism of the speech later may have been overstated by Carter's political opponents, but the pessimistic tone of his words seemed to wound Americans' confidence instead of bolstering it. Friends and foes alike would always remember the arguably ill-advised speech when they thought about Carter's administration years later.

The public and the political pundits reacted very harshly to Carter's speech, criticizing him for not offering enough solutions to the problems he identified, the environmental Encyclopedia of Earth states. "A little more than a year later, Ronald Reagan defeated Carter by offering Americans a vision that was as optimistic as Carter's was pessimistic. Today, many energy and environmental scholars observe that the problems Carter identified, particularly our dependence on oil and the connection among consumption, energy use, and environmental change, remain paramount issues."

The knockout blow to Carter's efforts to solve the Iran crisis came on April 24, 1980, when an attempt by Delta Force failed to rescue the American hostages in Tehran. The military operation began to self destruct quickly and was aborted when three helicopters were damaged in a sandstorm and forced to return to the Navy carrier, USS Nimitz. Then, as the remaining part of the U.S. force prepared to leave Iran, a refueling accident led to the other helicopters and a refueling aircraft being destroyed or left behind, resulting in the deaths of eight American servicemen. The botched operation put another nail in the coffin of Carter's administation. Failure became Carter's signature to many Americans. The Republicans used the backlash of the speech and the failed rescue attempt against Carter. Ronald Reagan won the November 1980 presidential election by 10 percent of the popular vote and with an electoral college landslide.

All during the presidential campaign, Carter tried every means available to secure the release of the hostages. As months passed and perhaps fearing the new incoming administration, Iran began new negotiations to free the hostages. Iranians originally asked for $24 billion in return for the captives, but eventually lowered their demands. On Inauguration Day, Jan. 21, 1981, Carter even took a telephone with him to Reagan's swearing in and was engaged in last-minute talks as the two men drove up to the Captol. That day Iran agreed to accept $8 billion in frozen assets and a promise by the United States to lift trade sanctions in exchange for the release of the hostages.

After 444 days in captivity, the 52 hostages flew out of Tehran to the Wiesbaden Air Force Base in West Germany. The announcement was made minutes after President Reagan was sworn in. President Carter, who had hoped to greet the hostages as his last official act, flew to West Germany as President Reagan's emissary to greet them.

Once again Carter was made to look weak. In the ensuing 30 years after he left the White House, Carter would be labeled as the worst president in the history of the United States by conversative politicians and rightwing pundits on Fox News and talk radio. But that was a lame and totally unfair assessment of Carter's presidency. He had been forced to deal with an international incident far beyond his power as president to control. He did all he could to free the hostages, but ran out of time. He had been humiliated, was the victim of bad circumstances, and very unlucky.

I have always chosen to remember Carter for what I think was his greatest, most historic achievement. That occurred on Sept. 17, 1978, when he persuaded Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat to agree to a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in the Camp David Accords. The Accords led directly to the signing of that treaty in 1979, and also resulted in Sadat and Begin sharing the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize.

Carter was the only presidential candidate I ever met, looked into his eyes and shook his hand. I still remember his wide toothy smile from that day in 1975 when our paths crossed outside the governor's office in Frankfort. At that time, I could never have imagined that Carter would be elected president. I have always considered him more of a statesman than a politician. Some may still call him a failure, but I think he was above all an honorable and truthful man, and did the best he could as president. I never considered him as incompetent.

4
What I Was Born To Do

In the first years of the 1980s, our family mourned the passing and celebrated the lives of two more of our most beloved members. Our grandmother Josie Hatfield and uncle Raymond Lee Hatfield. Granny died Nov. 5, 1980, at the age of 87; Raymond passed away suddenly Sept. 11, 1982. He was 67.

Granny's grandchildren worshiped her. She fawned over us and indulged us. Just like Mom, Granny was always there to help when we got hurt. We could never do anything wrong in her eyes, even when we obviously misbehaved, made too much noise, or spilled our food at a family gathering. She never had any harsh words for us, angrily corrected or reprimanded us. To Granny, I was her "Glennie" and my sister Shirley was always "Shirley Ann." I remember Granny always referring to our toys as "your pretties." And she never forgot our birthdays.

I still remember the joy of our family visits at Granny and Pop's house at the curve on the east end of Lewisport near the Negro church, in those days when we were still kids and all of our family members were still alive. On Sundays, one or two times every month, we would meet for a typical Southern home-cooked meal of fried chicken or ham, corn, mashed potatoes with gravy, green beans, peas, with Granny and my mom's specialty, banana salad. All the kids also loved her fried chicken and big, made from scratch biscuits.

After those big dinners in the 1950s and 60s, the women would clear the table, then sit down to talk in the dining room, while the men --- Pop, Raymond, Josephine's husband Charley, Billy, Daddy, Joe and Gary (when they visited from Louisville) ---- would congregate in the living room during the winter or outside under the trees in the spring, summer and fall. I made it my habit to sit with both groups. I sometimes chimed in with a comment when there was an opening, but I usually watched silently as the women talked and laughed. I remember how happy and content they were to be together and so sublime to have those conversations. I used to love just watching them smile and laugh. They really loved being together.

The conversations of the men were more serious (there was some laughter occasionally); they usually talked about farming, neighbors, their jobs, and sometimes current news events and politics in Washington. Their talk on those latter topics sometimes got loud and very lively. They were always civil conversations and debates, never arguments.

Raymond was an outspoken participant in those talks, and was very passionate in expressing his viewpoint. More times than not, he and Pop disagreed and they growled at each other. I could tell their blood was up when Raymond's face turned red and flushed. Raymond did not smoke, but like Pop, he chewed tobacco. His mouth filled up with tobacco juice, and sometimes during their spirited, verbal dustups, I thought Raymond surely would swallow the cud and strangle on the juice. Sometimes he could not speak until he spat and cleared his throat.

Even though Raymond could be gruff and was always opinionated, he had a warm, caring and gentle personality, especially with the kids and women of the family. His was a good, pure soul. He loved growing flowers and enjoyed showing Mom, Lillian, Shirley and Josephine how to plant their own. When I was a little boy, he liked telling me scary stories. Like the one when he, Granny and Pop lived at the old Thrasher house on Floyd Bray's farm near New Chapel Church. As I remember, some man had shot and killed himself in the attic many years ago, and the bloodstains were still on the attic floor, according to Raymond. I saw those stains myself. They could have been old drops of paint, and Raymond might have been joshing me. But the

stains were actually on the floor. I was convinced they were blood stains because Raymond said so.

Granny, Lillian and Josephine always called Raymond "Mister." It was always fun talking with him; but in the years before his death, I found him to be a sad and lonely man, especially after Granny and Pop died. I think his affliction with polio as a youngster led to him being frustrated and angry as an adult. I believe the physical handicap made him feel different from other boys when he was growing up. I never knew if Raymond had girlfriends when he was a boy. He had always lived with Granny and Pop, and never married. I definitely know he liked women, was attracted to them, and knew a lot more about women than anyone of his nieces could have imagined. He would give me his support, and tell me "I know how you feel" when I told him I had broken up with one of my latest girlfriends. On the other hand, maybe he was just telling me he knew how it felt to be depressed.

Raymond's crippled leg and arm did not prevent him from working on the farm. He managed somehow to drive his "Little A" International tractor in the fields. Limping along in the field, he dropped tobacco sticks, handed up sticks of cut tobacco from wagons, and cut stalks. He was able to drive a car with an automatic transmission around Lewisport very well, and he managed to drive a stick-shift tractor. I saw him do it but never how he did that. All it took was guts and determination and he had plenty of that.

Once, after my grandparents died, aunt Lillian looked after Raymond and he visited her house on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. She lived just about a mile down the street from Granny and Pop's place, and looked out for her brother. I knew that Raymond never slept very well. He would turn off the TV at midnight after programming ended in those days. He told me he would stay up late in his room, listening to the radio sometimes to 2 or 3 a.m. He would also spend his days in downtown Lewisport or tend to chores around the house.

After Pop and Granny passed, Daddy and I would drive up to Lewisport on Sundays to visit Raymond. When we reached the four-way stop in the middle of downtown, sometimes we found him sitting all alone on a sidewalk bench in front of what once was Jim and Bill's Grocery or up the street at Cases' grocery. There was not another person in sight on that deserted street on a Sunday afternoon. As soon as I blew my car horn or he spotted us, he would drive back up to his house and we would talk.

In her last years, Granny suffered from high blood pressure and kidney illness. She also had a pacemaker installed to regulate her heart beat. She was in and out of the hospital several times during the last decade of her life. She died of heart failure in the hospital. I did not know how sick Raymond was before his death and I was shocked when I heard he had died. Josephine told me that her mother, Lillian, had a gut feeling (perhaps a premonition) that they needed to check Raymond's welfare on his final day. Josephine said that when she and her daughter Pam Hagan went into the house that they found Raymond on the floor. They called an ambulance and Raymond died on the way to the hospital. Fluid built up during heart disease, flooded his lungs, and killed him, Josephine told me years after Raymond's death.

When he died, I could never remember of Raymond ever talking about being sick. I don't think he ever saw a doctor. At least he never mentioned it to me. Maybe after having polio as a kid, he never wanted to ever go to a hospital again. Maybe it brought back too many bad memories and reminded him of his affliction by polio as a little boy.

My last memory of the physical presence of Raymond while his body was still on earth was on the afternoon of his funeral and burial at the Lewisport Cemetery. His nephews, Gary and I,

were among the pallbearers that took Raymond's remains from the hearse and placed it on the biers of his gravesite. After the preacher said some final words of comfort for his surviving brother and sister, his sister in law, and his four nieces, there was a lightning strike nearby and a loud rumble of thunder. The sound broke the solemnity of the occasion as Raymond's spirit departed from this world and his body was lowered into the ground. As we walked to our cars, I told Gary that in the midst of a brewing storm would have been the way Raymond would have wanted to go out of life…with a bang. That moment comes to mind every time I visit his grave, and those of the rest of my family, all buried side by side there.

In the first two or three years of Reagan's Republican administration were not much better than those of Jimmy Carter economically, especially for me. In what was later called the "Reagan recession," many of us jobless or underemployed Americans continued our search before the unemployment rate topped out at 10.8 percent by 1982. In that time I found it almost hopeless to get a full-time job that would last. I did plenty of part-time work: On tobacco farms in the Maceo community, working as a tabulator and clerk for the 1980 U.S. Census in Owensboro, and struggling like a fish out of water to do a good job as a business office and accounting assistant for an Owensboro tire store.

It was a rough road for me. As the country song goes, if it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck at all. I felt so unwanted that I told a friend back then that I didn't think I could even get "arrested.' Not in Owensboro. Not in Evansville. Not in Lexington or Louisville. Trying to find a job from 1978 to 1984 was the hardest, most frustrating work I have ever done. I sold all my valuables, including my two gold high school and college class rings and the baseball card collection I had since I was 12. I even cashed in the John Hancock life insurance policy Mom had bought to cover me after I graduated from high school. I was flat broke and needed money to pay my credit card bills, car service and repairs, health care insurance and food.

In 1982, in an effort aimed at reducing the federal deficit, Congress agreed to cut government spending by $1 for every $3, and Reagan signed legislation agreeing to a $100 billion tax hike over the next three years, the biggest tax increase since World War II. Income taxes were not raised and there was not a cut in defense spending. The legislation included an increase in the capital gains tax. Reagan's popularity fell to 35 percent by January 1983, but the economy recovered, and by Election Day in November 1984, two million people had returned to the work force and the unemployment rate was down to 7.2 percent. The inflation rate also dropped to 3.2 percent in 1983. Voter anger had subsided and Reagan was reelected in November 1984 with 60 percent of the vote.

I finally gave up trying to find a job that I wanted in the town I wanted. In September 1984, I broke my personal vow never to return to work at the Messenger-Inquirer. I was way beyond desperate at that time, and had waited much too long. I applied for a part-time job as a newsroom obit clerk, the lowest of the low paying jobs at M-I, and was hired quickly. Paula Anderson, the young late 20ish news editor, was astounded that a person like me, who was so obviously over-qualified, would take that job. But I was broke and swallowed my pride. I was still under employed and had to hustle to get other work to make enough money to get ahead and pay bills.

Those years of under employment for me were the most time I spent in Maceo since I was a teenager. I reacquainted myself with the people of the community, eating breakfast every morning at the three restaurants within a 10 minute drive of our house. When I was working for farmers, I ate sandwiches at grocery stores in Yelvington and Maceo, and mingled with the other

patrons. I heard their gossip and opinions.

In those summers of the early 1980s, Daddy and I raised about three acres of tobacco on Bobby and Leroy Bivins' along Kentucky 662 near Toler Bridge Road. I supplied physical labor and took care of paying the costs of raising the crop. Together we fertilized the ground and then ordered it for planting with tractor, disk and packer, then we set the plants, hoed the rows to remove weeds and grass, sprayed the plants for tobacco worms, topped and suckered the tobacco stalks. In late August and early September, we cut and housed the sticks in two barns. I worked a lot of 90 degree days, hoeing our crop, and then sweating a few months later during the cutting and housing phase of harvest. We let the sticks of tobacco cure in the barns until November or December. When moisture in the air was at the right level and the tobacco was pliable and "in order," it was time to strip and bale the stalks of their leaves of trash, lugs and tips. When I was not stripping our tobacco crop, I worked for Rex Bivens, performing the same task for four dollars an hour.

During the 1980s, Daddy and I also worked for Paul Fullenwider during the setting and cutting of his tobacco crop at Maceo. Daddy always loved those times because it meant he would get to see one of his best buddies from Beech Grove School, Paul's oldest brother, Helm Fullenwider. The Fullenwider family had originally lived in the Troy Bend farming community upriver from Lewisport. Better known as "Ham", Helm Fullenwider and Daddy grew up together and went to Beech Grove, the one-room schoolhouse for the farm kids living in Troy Bend. The Fullenwiders moved to the Shaw's Bluff area near Maceo in 1927.

Ham was the consummate farmer. He was tough, diligent, efficient and particular at getting the job done right. In other words, he was a carbon copy of his old classmate Stanley. Ham was still strong and robust in his late 60s, full of fun and mischief, a jokester always flashing a big smile.

While they were working, Daddy and Ham would reminisce about their boyhood days going to school at Beech Grove. Their favorite story was from the 1920s when young Ham covered the chimney of Beech Grove with some boards, believing the smoke would go into the classroom and prompt the teacher to cancel class and send the kids home. Instead, sparks caught the roof of the building on fire and the students were forced to put out the flames before the fire destroyed their schoolhouse. Ham, who had been persuaded to do the deed by older boys (he said), was punished for his infraction but was not too severely, Daddy and Ham were quick to point out.

I enjoyed working for the Fullenwiders because I knew four of the brothers fought in World War II and I wanted to hear their war stories. Ham was the only Fullenwider brother to enlist before the war began. He entered the Army in 1940 and served 42 months overseas. He was a supply sergeant with the 1st Armor Division, the famous tank unit, and won five Bronze stars for engagements in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. Ham's brother Miller was inducted in July 1942 and was a crane operator who loaded ordnance from ships in the North Africa campaign and participated in the invasion of southern France in 1944. Later he joined the infantry in Europe, and before the war ended, was transferred to the South Pacific.

Of the five Fullenwider brothers, Henry Ford Fullenwider, was in the worst of the fighting in Europe. He was in Company A of the 116th Regiment of the 29th Division that was cut to ribbons as it went ashore at Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944, in the Allied invasion of Normandy. The experience when the ramps of his unit's landing crafts were dropped at Dog Green sector of Omaha Beach was so deadly that it was indescribable, Ford told me. Ford's company suffered 90 percent casualties in the withering fire from the Germans. "We were trying to keep from

drowning, and only eight men from his company survived the landing," he said.

After D-Day, Ford and his unit fought their way across France and Germany with the 29th. He rose to the rank of staff sergeant and was wounded three times, the first time on July 16, 1944, at the St. Lo breakout. In addition to the Purple Heart, Ford was awarded a Bronze Star and received the Silver Star for gallantry in September 1944 at Brest, France, when he single handedly took out a German machine gun nest. He was captured in December 1944 after a firefight with Germans on the Roer River and spent the last five months as a prisoner of war before being liberated by British troops. (Ford died on July 20, 2011, at his home near Lewisport.)

Miller Fullenwider volunteered and transferred to the infantry after he learned Ford was missing in action. "I didn't know whether he was dead or alive, I just felt that I wanted to do something more," Miller told me in an interview in the spring of 2003. "I was just discouraged, and didn't speak to anyone for a week, I was so sad about it." (In the 1950s, Ford and Miller each had teams of pulling horses that competed in and won many contests in Indiana, Kentucky and Illinois.)

Paul Fullenwider was 17 years old when he joined the Marine Corps in 1944, a month before his 18th birthday. He went first to Saipan in the South Pacific, survived several kamikaze attacks while aboard transport ships and was in the battle of Okinawa in April 1945. He went into Japan with the 2nd Marine Division after the war ended, and visited the ruins of Nagasaki in October 1945, two months after that city was obliterated by an atomic bomb.

The Fullenwiders' oldest brother, Bill was in his early 30s, married with two children and another on the way when WWII started and, like Daddy, did not have to serve.

I knew none of Maceo's early history when I was a kid, The Maceo I remembered from the 1950s was a place where I grew up riding my bike, buying bubble gum-baseball cards at Eunice Mae's grocery store, mowing lawns and playing baseball and basketball.

On my bike rides to Yelvington in those days, I remember passing Stillhouse Pond on the right side of the road as I approached the base of the big hill at the driveway leading to Dan Wilhoyte's residence. I wondered what the story was about the old pond. It was almost dry, and livestock did not drink out of it. Much later in life, I learned it had been the site of the C.L. Appelgate Distillery where the Beechwood and Rosebud brands of bourbon whiskey were distilled from 1875 and 1880, and housed until 1905. And I recall from my boyhood days that Halloween was always a night of fun and mostly mischief in Maceo. Kids usually went to Halloween parties held at a church or Maceo school, but we never did any trick or treating, going house to house. I do admit we were more interested in walking through the neighborhoods playing what we thought were tricks. The usual, like knocking on people's doors and then running away, or occasionally toilet papering a tree or lawn ornament. I always loved the excitement of just walking through Maceo neighborhoods, letting my mind wander free with thoughts of evil spirits or imaginary ghosts and goblins, hearing the wind whistling eerily through the streets, or seeing Jack O Lanterns in windows or spooky decorations on houses.

All Hallow's Eve was a night when you could depend on Maceo's outdoor privies being overturned, store or car windows soaped, roads being blocked by burning bales of hay, or eggs ---- fresh or rotten ---- being thrown at the cars of residents who dared to drive through the main drag of "downtown" Maceo. Those shenanigans were usually perpetrated by older teenage boys and adult men. Halloween was the one night of the year that county law enforcement officers

dreaded because they usually had to run off egg throwers or clear the roads of burning debris at Maceo.

I also remember going coon hunting with Daddy and other Maceo men and their sons in the river bottom woodland along Rockport Ferry Road.

Also in the 1950s, Sim Weber was Maceo's blacksmith; Jimmy Huff, Buddy Campbell, Hook Wagnor and Goebel Bartlett ran the auto repair shops; Bert Bennett and Forrest McIntyre operated the other grocery stores in town; Jolly Willett and Walter Gillim were the town barbers; Ford Sacra owned the sawmill down the tracks from Maceo, and built most of the new houses in town. Charlie and Georgie Petri ran a restaurant on the northside of U.S. 60 just before it crossed Rockport Ferry Road and the paved highway to Yelvington (now Kentucky 405).

One of the notable older Maceo gentlemen who I recall was Mr. Rollie Kelly who raced harness horses in the Rockport County Fair each summer. His best horse, named Easter Kelly, became legendary in winning harness races in the Midwest during the 1950s.

I also knew in those days that Delbert Estes, a son of our neighbors, Grace and Albert "Ab" Estes was killed in action Sept. 23, 1944, in Italy during WWII, and that Clarence Edward Gray, also a Maceo resident, was the first Negro soldier from Daviess County to die in that war.

The Hawes, Taylor, Gilliam, Estes, Hall, Basham, Luttrell, Clark, Roberts, Riddle, Jackson, Campbell, Potts, Fullenwider, Duncan, Carter, Sacra, Whitworth, Craig, Hanley, Wilhoyte, Gibson and Smeathers families lived there during my boyhood.

For socializing and entertainment after the war years and into the 1950s, Maceo men had ballgames to attend at the school playground, they could loaf at the poolroom or grocery stores, or they could go to worship services or prayer meeting at the three churches. Not many of the men attended churches unless their wives shamed them into going. The majority of Maceo residents were law abiding, church going people; there were only a few of what we would have called lazy white trash.

Maceo had its share of colorful characters when I was a boy. There was Dog Man, a black man, and Pinchecoe, a white man who was not very smart I.Q. wise but was known mostly around Maceo for being the town's biggest and most vocal Brooklyn Dodgers fan. Neither had any money and we kids wondered how they supported themselves. Both men were barely literate. All we knew is that they worked in the fields for Maceo farmers. But, most of all, we kids were always curious about the two men because we never knew their real names.

Then there was Percy Hall, a devout Christian and member of Maceo Methodist Church, who had a comical side that sometimes went too far and could get him into trouble. In those days, Mr. Hall had grown sons playing on the Maceo men's softball teams, and he attended their games and some of our Babe Ruth League contests. Percy was always there sitting on the bleachers behind home plate, ragging and heckling the opposing men's teams. He could really get under their skin with very personal barbs some times, and his unforgettable laugh, which went something like "Whaa! Whaa! Whaa!" I always wondered when one of the players of the visiting teams might go into the stands to get at Percy.

When I was a kid, my favorite person in Maceo was Mr. Gillim, Eunice Mae's and Grace Estes' father. A very wise, friendly old man, he enjoyed having kids around in his shop. And I always liked talking to him because he was a very good man, and was like a grandpa to every kid in Maceo. He made a very big impression on me.

One tragic event in Maceo that I never forgot from my boyhood was the death of 73-year-old Jess Horsley, who was hit by a L&N freight train on Friday, May 4, 1956, a short distance west

of the Maceo crossing.

Jess was a postal and grocery clerk who just about everyone in Maceo knew and respected. It was a shock when I heard the news after coming home from school. According to a news report May 5, in the Messenger-Inquirer, Jess had been watching some men as they were unloading poles from a truck onto the ground beside the railroad right of way. He stepped on the track and started walking west when the freight which was headed in the same direction struck him.

John Ladd, a witness to the accident, said he was standing beside Horsley when Jess stepped on the track. The engineer sounded his whistle and the bells on the freight were ringing at the time, Ladd told county deputy coroner Robert McGinnis. The train engineer, S.V. Dowell, told sheriff deputies that he saw the man and gave a warning blast with the train whistle and then applied the brakes. But it was too late. Horsley was knocked about 30 feet and his body was badly mangled, even dismembered.

No one ever knew why Jess stepped on the railroad track when the train was so close. I just remember it being such a sad thing to happen to such a nice man like Jess, who I saw often at the post office.

I learned most of Maceo's early history in the 1980s and 1990s when I did most of my research. The town had grown from a tiny settlement at a stop along the railroad built through eastern Daviess County in 1887. It was first known as Powers Station, named for Owensboro lawyer Joshua Powers, who had raised money to construct the railroad from Henderson to Owensboro to Louisville.

By July 14, 1887, brigades of laborers, working for $1.25 a day, had built 14 miles of road embankment east from Owensboro, and 75,000 crossties were dropped along the route from Daviess County to Hawesville. A bridge over Pup Creek was finished and the embankment approaching Blackford Creek at the Daviess-Hancock county line was completed and waited for driving pins into the rails at the creek crossing. Work then concentrated on Shaw Bluffs, two or three miles up the track from Powers Station, where workers prepared to cut through the rocky terrain of that area.

After a series of delays by striking workers and a shortage in funds to build, the railroad connecting Owensboro with Louisville was completed and officially opened on Dec. 3, 1988.

The railroad community which later became Maceo emerged at the time Edwin Pendleton "Pen" Taylor's political career was blossoming in Daviess County. The new town was close to where he grew up. Taylor was born in 1850, one of 11 children of Jonathon Gibson Taylor and Susan Hawes. He was raised at the Taylor home called Beech Hill, built in 1832 and still standing on Grandview-Yelvington Road east of Maceo. (My sister Shirley visited her best girl friend Ann Taylor at the residence of her father Ben Taylor many times when they were high school students.)

Pen Taylor, who practiced law in Owensboro, was elected county judge in 1898, served four years in that office and then was elected Daviess County clerk in 1906, serving eight years. He developed his idea for the new town of Powers Station after Yelvington, in the hills three or four miles to the southeast, was destroyed by fire in April 1890. He and many other merchants of Yelvington decided to desert that burned out townsite and move their business district north to the railroad stop at Powers Station. Taylor, who lost $12,000 in tobacco in the Yelvington fire, owned a 600-acre farm on nearby Iceland Road at Powers Station. He set an engineer to work laying out a new town, with gravel roads, trees, business houses and residential dwellings. When

other former Yelvington businessmen learned of Taylor's intentions, they decided to move to Maceo and restart their establishments there too. In September 1890, the buildings were ready for tenants, and Taylor built a new tobacco warehouse there that eventually employed 50 workers. A post office was opened and Taylor was named postmaster.

The town's name "Powers Station" became a problem because there was a Powers Store in Whitesville. That caused some confusion and a name change was required, residents thought. Some of them suggested the name "Rosebud" after the small group of residences just up the tracks from the railroad station. However, it was Taylor who suggested the name Maceo. He picked that name to honor Cuban General Jose Antonio de la Caridad Maceo y Grajales, the black revolutionary who died in his island nation's struggle to throw off Spanish rule in the early 1890s. In the years before the U.S. intervened in the Cuban crisis in 1898, Maceo was among the leaders responsible for the growing tide of patriotism and desire for a free Cuba.

Most of the white people in those days of the new Jim Crow segregation laws wondered why Taylor would make such a suggestion honoring a Negro. Several local historians think Taylor's favoring the name of the Negro general may have been offered as an olive branch of courtesy to the community of freed slaves who are believed to be the first residents of the present site of the town. Taylor's father, Gibson, owned 50 slaves before the Civil War and by 1876 farmed 1,400 acres of land most of which covered the present plat of Maceo. Pen Taylor inherited part of his father's land there and it appears he began selling it to blacks at the turn of the 20th century.

When Gibson Taylor died in 1886, he bequeathed two sites to African Americans for construction of a church and schoolhouse near the railroad stop. The First Baptist Church of Maceo, established in 1870 in the homes of freed blacks, moved its worship services to a log house on the Taylor land, and then the schoolhouse was built. (Those sites today are on Aubrey Road.)

Judge Taylor died Nov. 26, 1934, at his home in Maceo. It was said that his secret was his trueness to friends. A newspaper characterized him this way: "He could always be relied upon to do just what he said he will do and keeps his promises alike to friend and foe." Taylor was always upright and dignified in the administration of his duties, the editorialist of the paper concluded.

During those hard economic times of the 1970s and '80s, while I was doing part-time farm work at Maceo, Yelvington and Lewisport, I had plenty of free time so I chose to use it wisely. I became a historian. Over the next three decades, I realized that writing history was what I wanted and loved to do. I think that is why God gave me my talent to write. In the ensuing 30 years, it is what has given me a purpose in life. I wanted to tell the story of my family, our community, my experiences during the 1960s, my career in journalism and state government, and my service in the U.S. Navy. I felt a need to tell these stories about my family, Lewisport and Maceo friends, to let the public know what great contributions they made to Hancock and Daviess counties during their lives.

I began by joining the Hancock County Historical Society in 1980. I was elected secretary of the Society in April 1982 and secretary of the Hancock County Museum Inc. board of directors when the museum opened at Hawesville in January 1988. During my period of service with the combined organizations I was coordinator and researcher for the Kentucky historical site marker program in Hancock County, responsible for writing and producing eight historical markers that remain in Hancock County today. I also served as writer and editor of Hancock County

Historical Society-Museum Board newsletter.

With the moral and financial support of the historical society and museum board, I wrote two groundbreaking books about the history of Hancock County: *Fearful Times: History of the Civil War Years in Hancock County, Ky.* published in 1986, and *"Daybreak on Old Fortification Creek:* A *History of John Lewis, His Family and Descendants,"* published in 1989. I also addressed a crowd of about 1,000 Hancock County residents, telling the history of the founding of Lewisport at the town's sesquicentennial celebration at Lewisport Heritage Days in June 1989.

I received the seventh Hancock County Historian of the Year Award in April 1988, and the Community History Publications Award presented by the Historical Confederation of Kentucky at Frankfort in November 1989. (I ended my service as secretary of the Hancock County Historical Society in 2003, but remained a lifetime member of the group.)

Since graduation from college and becoming a journalist, I wanted to write the stories that my mother and grandparents told me about our family. But first, I traced our families' genealogy. Then I investigated to see if there were any facts about my great-great-grandfather Ephraim Hatfield's service in the Civil War. So in 1980 when I was not working in any of my part-time jobs, I was researching our family tree. In tracing my ancestors, I looked through family Bibles, viewed microfilms of U.S. censuses going back to 1850, went to courthouses in Hardinsburg and Hawesville looking for property records, and spent many hours in the Kentucky Room of the Owensboro public library, the archives of Transylvania University in Lexington, Vincennes (Ind.) University, the Filson Club in Louisville, and the family history section of the Willard Library in Evansville.

I talked with my aunt Lillian Hatfield Gittings to learn more about the Hatfield and Snyder families. Lillian always admired my deep interest in what she termed "old things" and was very generous in telling me family stories. I also visited with Patesville historian Lillie Pulliam, and Mrs. Tula Hatfield Sinclair, a resident of Hawesville and Pop Hatfield's cousin. Lillie and Tula shared with me all they had either seen or were told about my great-grandfather Tine Hatfield, his father and mother, Ephraim and Annie Morgan Hatfield, and rest of the Hatfield family.

I investigated the genealogy and history of the Hodges and Greathouse families in the same way. Every new fact that I uncovered piqued my curiosity and made me want to find more. I could not get enough knowledge about the history of our families. I just kept digging and probing for new information. When I got on a roll I could not be restrained. It was a magnificent learning experience to finally know stories of the members of our families who preceded us.

While I was researching the Hatfield genealogy, I was looking for more information about Ephraim Hatfields' service in the Civil War. I looked through histories of Union Army regiments formed in Kentucky during the Civil War, and Shelia Heflin, at that time the director of the Kentucky Room at the Owensboro library, secured microfilms of Civil War issues of the Louisville Journal that contained news reports of fighting in Kentucky. I also looked at microfilm of the Cannelton (Ind.) Reporter for more accounts of guerrilla warfare in the Hawesville, Lewisport and Owensboro areas. All this information grew and grew and I soon had enough to write a separate book on the history of the Civil War in Hancock County.

My initial goal was to research and write a book about the Lewis and Greathouse families. But I had accumulated a treasure trove of material about the Civil War and its effects on Hancock County and Perry County, Ind. It was information that had never been reported since the Civil War. At that point I had research material for two books on different topics.

I developed the story line of the Civil War book and wrote the entire volume in about two

months. It was a story 110 pages long. With design and printing help from Hancock Clarion editor Don Wimmer and financial contributions from the Hancock County Society leadership, we published the book in 1986. While work was being done to produce *Fearful Times* I was working three or four days a week writing *Daybreak on Old Fortification Creek.* I completed the research and writing work on that book project in the three years after *Fearful Times* publication.

Three people played a very big role in helping me research and publish the two books I wrote in the 1980s. I could not have done *Daybreak on Old Fortification Creek* without the encouragement and research assistance from the late Dorothy Hodges Thrawley. (She died Friday, March 29, 2010, in Black Mountain, N.C.) She was the niece of Emma Kate Hodges and Mrs. Mayme Haywood who lived in Maceo when I was in elementary school. I remember accompanying my mother on a summer day in the 1950s as Mom attended a Maceo homemakers meeting at Mayme and Emma Kate's house, next door to John Will Riddle's house and across then U.S. 60 from the old Maceo Post Office site.

The research for my book *Daybreak on Old Fortification Creek* began in June 1980 after I read a letter by Mrs. Thrawley in the Hancock County sesquicentennial edition of the *Hancock Clarion*. In the letter she encouraged someone to write a much needed history of Hancock County. The daughter of Fred and Mary Fletcher Thrasher Hodges, Dorothy was born near the old store and railroad station in the community of Adair up the tracks east of Lewisport. She grew up near where my parents' began their married life. My sister Shirley was born in the old Chrisler/Hodges house there at Adair.

While our respective Hodges families are not directly related, Dorothy and I shared much of the same Lewis ancestry. It was Dorothy who told me about the large collection of Lewis family letters and papers at Duke University in Durham, N.C. The letters, the oldest which that dated back to 1815, were originally part of the personal possessions of William Linton Lewis who settled in Lewis Bottom near Troy Bend in 1819. Many of the letters were written by his sister great-great-great grandmother, Hannah Lewis. The William Linton Lewis collection of letters, legal records, books and business documents was kept and enlarged through the 19th century by his son, Frederick Dunnington Lewis, who handed them down to his son, Joseph Chrisler Lewis.

Eventually the collection was obtained by Mrs. Thrawley's aunts, Emma Kate and Mayme, who were granddaughters of Frederick Lewis. Mrs. Haywood, a popular teacher at Linton School at the turn of the 20th century, and her other sister Pauline and her husband, Rev. William Gammon, an avid genealogist and Presbyterian minister at Lewisport in the 1920s, were the primary forces in maintaining the Lewis family collection of memorabilia and constructing the Lewis family genealogies. When Mrs. Haywood died in 1957, the family sold a major part of the Lewis collection to an Atlanta antique broker and by 1964 the papers and letters were purchased by the William R. Perkins Library at Duke University.

In the decade of the 1980s, I wrote letter after letter to Mrs. Thrawley, asking questions about the Lewis, Hodges, Linton and Berkeley families. Often our letters would pass each other in the mail between Maceo and Black Mountain. I accumulated a stack of correspondence from her that was three inches thick when we finished the project. We also talked by telephone several times in those years, and met once when she visited Hancock County.

Work on the book was a return to my past. My first memory of Lewis Bottom and Troy Bend upriver from Lewisport was as a 5-year-old visiting my Hatfield grandparents when they lived on the Sam Thrasher farm on Greathouse Road, located a short distance from New Chapel Methodist Church. Pop and Granny were members of the church congregation, and I remember

attending ice cream and pie suppers there with my parents.

I also recalled the trips to see my father's aunt, Jennie Jo Greathouse Sipes, who lived in the old house built by great-grandfather "River Joe" in 1864. Across the thicketed Yellow Creek west of Aunt Jen's house was the farm that Pop and Granny rented in the 1950s. That farm is where I learned to work in raising tobacco. I did not know that the land on which I was working, across the field from Chester and Marion Thrasher's place, was once the original home place of John and Hannah Lewis, the namesakes of Lewisport. It was 25 years later that I detected that my great-great grandmother Susannah Rebecca Greathouse was the daughter of John and Hannah Lewis who were the first settlers of Thrasher farm in 1799.

I had been to the Greathouse Cemetery near New Chapel Church many times. Granddad Will Hodges and my grandmother Maggie Belle Greathouse were buried there. So were my great-grandparents, James and Martha Lucinda Hodges and Joseph Lewis "River Joe"' Greathouse and his wife Jennie. The oldest graves there were of my great-great grandfather Rodolphus Bukey Greathouse and Susannah Rebecca Lewis.

As I got deeper into my research work, I learned that John and Hannah Lewis's graves were in a small, weed-covered, abandoned burial ground near Yellow Creek, behind the farmhouse once owned by Marion and Chester Thrasher. The Thrasher brothers, both bachelors, had been one-time friends of Daddy and Pop Hatfield. I went wading through the weeds of that mosquito invested cemetery, and learned that William Linton Lewis, his wife Ann Dunnington, their son Dr. Francis Lewis and many of the family's slaves were buried in that small plot surrounded by farmland.

It was amazing to me that I was so close to the original settlements of my families in the 1950s and did not know it. When I finished *Daybreak on Old Fortication Creek,* I was intrigued by how many times our families' paths had crossed and how we were interconnected socially in the Troy Bend and Adair communities of old Lewis Bottom in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Hodges, Greathouse, Thrasher, Lewis and Pate families were all related to each other by either blood or marriage. When I finished the two book projects, I felt somehow writing was my gift from God. I was born with the skill to do it. It was like those two great stories were just there waiting for someone to write them and it was me who was destined to do them.

Also in the 1980s, I had the honor and privilege as secretary to work with a gifted, hard working group of people from Lewisport and Hawesville who revived the Hancock County Historical Society and worked strenuously to restore and convert the abandoned L&N Railroad Station to the county's first history museum. Leading that challenging and colossal project were Horace "Sonny" Temple, Jack Foster, Jack's wife Mildred Emmick Foster, society treasurer Patsy Young and her husband Tobe, Jim Fallin, Steve Harmon, Franklin Meserve, Dorothy Sterett, Mary Robertson and Thelma Robertson. Each of the them played distinct, vital roles in the project.

Hancock County Fiscal Court approved a contract with ACM Group of Henderson on Oct. 14, 1985, to begin restoration of the exterior of the Hawesville railway station. The contractor's bid of $36,000 was combined with $30,000 budgeted by the fiscal court for the restoration project and a $20,000 historic preservation grant secured by the historical society. The money also paid for most of the electrical, heating, air conditioning and plumbing work. The Hancock County Museum was opened to the public in April 1988.

The two strongest, most forceful individuals pushing the Hancock County Museum project

were museum board chairman Temple and publicity chairman Foster.

Horace LaFoe Temple was born in Lewisport on March 25, 1916, graduated from Lewisport High School in 1935 and attended Bowling Green Business College. After serving in the U.S. Coast Guard from 1942 to 1946, Temple earned a degree in petroleum engineering from the University of Oklahoma. Temple retired and came back to live at Lewisport about the same time as Foster. Temple was an imposing, blunt, demanding, obstinate, and tenacious man who never accepted no as an answer in his crusade to create the Hancock County Museum. His work for historic preservation in Hancock County was unparalleled. After Sonny died May 4, 2009, he bequeathed in his will $20,000 each to the Hancock County Historical Society, Hancock County Museum in Hawesville and the Hancock County Farm Museum.

Together, Jack and Sonny were an unbeatable team. They were the best one-two punch any organization could ever hope to lead it. Jack was the exact opposite of Temple. He was smiling and charming, always friendly, smooth and charismatic in manner, a natural leader, wise, experienced and a man of action. He had a can-do, never say die attitude. He was always positive, optimistic and persuasive. When you met him, he made you feel like you were the most special person in the room, and had known him all your life. There was never any task too big or impossible for us to tackle. Jack could always rally people to a cause.

Foster was born Aug. 28, 1915, in Canton, Texas, a town about 10 miles east of Dallas. His parents Tate and Annie Bolin Foster ran a dairy. He was the quarterback on the Canton Eagles football team and valedictorian of his high school senior class in 1933. Known as "Cactus Jack" by his children later in life, Foster received degrees in journalism and history from the University of Texas in 1939. During World War II, he served as an officer in U.S. Navy at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. Jack would later own Triton Co., a distributor in the industrial market in Chicago. He lived in Downers Grove Ill. from 1948 to 1977 when he retired and moved to Lewisport with his second wife, Mildred. (Foster's first wife, Bonnie McBride, died.)

When Jack and Millie arrived in Lewisport, it was one of the greatest gifts that the people of Hancock County ever received. Jack dived into community activities in Lewisport, joined the Lewisport Methodist Church, the Lewisport Lions Club, and instantly became a friend of everyone he met. Millie was always there too by Jack's side. I stood back in awe when Jack, Millie and Sonny organized and launched the effort to restore the Hawesville Station and convert it into a county museum.

Jack Foster was a great writer and historian. His weekly column "So It's Been Told" in the *Clarion* became a must-read for the paper's subscribers. He wrote the history feature from 1980 to 2007 weekly until macular degeneration (loss of vision in center of one’s eyes) slowed him down to one column a month in the final years before he called it quits. Jack told me he launched the column thinking that he would probably run out of topics in a year. But through interviews, correspondence from readers, and stories he was told from both current and former Hancock County residents, the column became self-sustaining. All of his columns were eventually printed and bound into three large books by *Clarion* editor Donn Wimmer. The Hancock County Historical Society still sells them.

Foster became well-known and was honored statewide, receiving the Kentucky Historical Society's Award of Distinction in 1988 and KHS's Community Service Award in 1993. Jack was founder of the Hancock County High School Young Historians Club and was instrumental in organizing and establishing the Historian of the Year award dinner and award. He also organized the Hawesville courthouse time capsule ceremony.

Personally, Jack was like a second father to me. He always rooted for me and was interested in everything I did or wanted to do. Jack and Millie took me under their wings when I was researching and writing my two books in the 1980s. And they threw their generous financial support behind my effort to publish my Civil War book, *Fearful Times*, persuading several other members of the Hancock County Historical Society to do likewise. In return for his support, I wrote several guest columns on Hancock County history for his "So It's Been Told" slot of the *Clarion.*

One of Jack's kindest gestures to me was made in July 1998 when he sent a copy of *Fearful Times* to Thomas Fleming, author of several major books about the Founding Fathers and a frequent guest historian on "The History Channel." In his reply to Foster, Fleming commented: "Thanks for sending the Glenn Hodges book so promptly. I read it the moment it arrived. It is one of the best written local histories I have seen."

In September 1998, after I had sent a letter of thanks to Fleming, he said, "I'm glad to hear Jack Foster passed along my compliment on "Fearful Times. I thought it was first rate local history."

Millie died on Friday, May 27, 2011, at the age of 96. She was born Feb. 13, 1915, in Hancock County, as the oldest of the seven children of James Noble and Zenada Dove Buck Emmick. She was her Lewisport High School class valedictorian, and attended the University of Louisville and Western Kentucky State Teachers College. Her teaching career began in Hancock County, where she taught elementary education for three years. She married Alvin Goodman in 1937, and they moved to Michigan and then to Chicago. In 1949, they moved to Downers Grove, Ill., where she taught elementary education for 14 years and served as assistant principal for another five years. During this time in her career, she was a pioneer educator in the state of Illinois, where she began applying the concepts of team teaching and individualized education in the classroom. She served as principal for nine years at Washington Elementary School before retiring from the Downers Grove school system.

She finished her undergraduate degree at North Central College in 1964 and earned her master's degree in school administration from Northern Illinois University in 1968. In her career as an educator, she held positions in local, state and national principals and teachers associations. And she was a member of the American Association of University Women, the Business and Professional Women's Association and the Honorary Women Educator's Society.

Alvin died in 1964, and Millie married Jack four years later. When they moved to the Millie's family farm in Hancock County, she jumped in and became involved in retired teachers organizations and senior citizens projects and activities in Hancock County. She was given the AARP Award for Outstanding Service to her community, and ---sharing Jack's interest in historic preservation --- soon earned the Hancock County Historian of the Year award, the Hancock County Museum Historical Preservation Award, and the KHS's Distinguished Service Award. She was chairwoman of exhibits and volunteers when the Hancock County Museum opened.

Jack and Millie, who both were members of Lewisport United Methodist Church, were an extraordinary twosome, the most dynamic of husband-wife duos. And they were saints in my book. They were one of the kindest, most hospitable couples I ever met in my life. They treated me the affection and concern like they did their own children. They were also both a great comfort to me after my father died in 1996. To be a guest in their home and talk with them was a

wonderful, very special experience for me. We spent numerous Sunday afternoons in summer and winter, talking about journalism, history, politics and our solutions of world problems, sitting in the cozy sunroom of their exquisitely restored home on Beech Tree Hill farm in the hills, a few miles south of Lewisport. It was always clear to anyone who met them that both Jack and Millie were highly educated, knowledgeable about any topic, and great conversationalists.

When Jack died on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2009, I lost one of the greatest friends I ever had in my life. He came along at just the right time I needed someone like him in my life. Jack was one of a kind. He was totally irreplaceable in my life, and just unforgettable. I told Jack's daughter Marsha Weaver after his death that I will always treasure the memories and times that he, Millie and I shared. I was told Jack was active to the end when his heart stopped and he died in the middle of a conversation with another resident of the retirement home where he was living in Owensboro. He was 93 years old.

Jack Foster was the major influence in reviving my lifetime interest in American history. I had been collecting books about history and politics since my college days. In the 1960s and 1970s, I read what I thought were the best history books published in those years: All the most acclaimed books about JFK, Bobby Kennedy and Ted Kennedy; *American Caesar*, William Manchester's biography of Douglas MacArthur; *The Best and Brightest* by David Halberstam; *All the President's Men*" by Woodward and Bernstein; *A Rumor of War* by Phil Caputo; *Dispatches* by Michael Herr; *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley; Stanley Karnow"s *Vietnam*; and Theodore White's *Making of a President*, three books chronicling the presidential campaigns of 1960, 1964 and 1968.

However, it was in the early '80s, after I joined the Hancock County Historical Society and when I had the more free time that I began reading every new book on American history and politics I could find. When I wasn't writing, I was reading voraciously. It was my self education, much more intense for me than any of my studies of history and government in college. I was not competing for course grades like in college, and I enjoyed and absorbed everything I read. I started with books about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, beginning with Burke Davis' *The Long Surrender*" and Shelby Foote's brilliant 3,000 page trilogy of *The Civil War*. I finished reading Foote's three massive books in about a year. From that day forth, I was hooked. I collected 81 books about the Civil War, including biographies of generals Grant, Lee, Jackson, Longstreet and McClellan; all the books about battles, written by my favorite Civil War historians: Foote,, James McPherson, James Robertson, Stephen Sears, Gary Gallagher and Ernest Ferguson.

After I finished with the best Civil War books, I turned to studying the American Revolution and all of the Founding Fathers: George Washington (biographies by Willard Randle and Joseph Ellis), John Adams (David McCullough), Thomas Jefferson (Fawn Brodie and Joseph Ellis), James Madison (Ralph Ketcham), Alexander Hamilton (Ron Chernow, Richard Brookhiser, Thomas Fleming's *The Duel*, and Andrew Jackson (John Meacham).

My library at home has grown now to five shelves containing about 300 volumes. I have many of the newest books, including Taylor Branch's trilogy about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, *D-Day June 6, 1944* and *Eisenhower* by Stephen Ambrose; Douglas Brinkley's chronicle of the flooding and destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (*The Big Deluge*), the history of the rise of Al Qaeda by Lawrence Wright; and the most truthful and award winning histories of the wars in Iraq by Thomas Ricks, Rick Atkinson, Dexter Filkins,

George Packer, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, Michael Gordon and Gen. Bernard Trainor.

I also started traveling to Civil War battlefields in the 1990s. First I went to Shiloh or Pittsburg Landing near Savannah in southwestern Tennessee, then to battle sites at Murfreesboro and Franklin both due south or southeast of Nashville. I had seen the Chickamauga battle in Georgia while returning from a vacation trip to Miami, Fla., in 1975.

It was in 1993 that I finally seized the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream. In July, I took US Air flight out of Evansville and headed east to Pennsylvania, landing in the state capital Harrisburg. I had a rental car waiting for me at the airport, and then I was off for my first visit to the Gettysburg National Military Park. In my five days there, I toured the battlefield, attended my first Civil War battle re-enactment, and then took a bus through Baltimore to Washington.

The nation's capital had changed very much since my last visit there in 1971. It seemed to be more of an international city in style and culture, rather than the southern city I remembered from the two weeks I had Navy training duty there 22 years before.

I stayed in a hotel near the Iwo Jima memorial at Arlington, took the Metro (the new underground railway) into downtown Washington to see the Holocaust Museum which had just opened that summer. The tourists with me walked through the exhibits very quietly and looked at all of them very closely. It was a very funereal environment as we collectively reflected on the horrible deaths of millions of Jews in the concentration camps during Hitler's Nazi regime.

I also took the train out to the south end of the Mall area to see the Vietnam War Memorial for the first time. I turned left and walked down the steps to the lower level and saw the glassy, brown granite wall of the memorial laying before me with all the names of the then 58,000 American service men and women who died in Vietnam. A wave of pure emotion swept over me in a way I had not expected. My heart seemed to skip a beat and tears welled up in my eyes. I knew none of the veterans whose names were there personally, but it was still a deeply stirring sight.

I went to the directory site on the walkway and found the locations of the names of boys from Daviess County (David Nash, James Conkright and others) who had been killed in action in Vietnam. I took a "rubbing" of the name of Nash, the Medal of Honor recipient from Whitesville. Several people, some maybe children, other family members, or possibly old buddies, stood quietly by the names they knew. One young man caught my eye, and I took a picture of him as I stood respectfully far behind him on his right side. He looked like many young, lower middle class white men I have known over the years. He was probably in his early 20s, the sleeves cut out of his shirt at the shoulder, showing the tattoo on his right bicep. He stood there reverently for several minutes, head bowed with his right hand touching one of the engraved names. I turned and walked away, giving him his moment of privacy obviously with the memory of someone he had known or loved. Maybe it was his father or an uncle.

Visiting the Vietnam Memorial was the most personally moving moment of my 1993 trip. I have never forgotten that day. When you stand in front of a section of the wall, you see your reflection. It's like looking in a mirror. I've been told it is a touching experience that 'Nam veterans have when they go to the memorial to see the name of their long departed comrades who were killed in the war. They stand there solemnly, as their minds flash back to the days decades ago when they and their departed buddies were young and so alive, remembering the happier times and tight emotional bond of camaraderie that warriors share. After visiting the memorial, old Vietnam War vets tell the story that no matter how many times they look at the names of their old buddies on the wall, they always see their own image looking back. They feel

a survivor's guilt and ask the questions. Why him and not me? Why did I make it out of the war and he didn't? Why were too many young lives cut short in another unnecessary war? Such a tragic loss!

In early September 1996, I visited Gettysburg once again and took my time studying each battle site: Culp's Hill, Cemetery Hill, Little Round Top, the Peach Orchard, Devil's Den, McPherson's Woods and Seminary Hill. At Gettysburg that year, I walked the nine tenths of a mile that Gen. George Pickett's brigades braved rifle and cannon fire as they marched in their desperate assault across an open field from Seminary Ridge to Cemetery Ridge on July 3, 1863. I scaled the boulders atop Little Round Top where Union troops fought off a Confederate attack on July 2, 1863, being sure to move to the position of the far left flank of Union infantry which Col. Joshua Chamberlain and his 20th Maine Regiment held that bloody day. I also went into Gettysburg and toured the David Wills house at the crossroads of the town square. I stood quietly in the upstairs bedroom where President Lincoln polished his final draft of his famous address at the dedication of the military cemetery in November1863. That same week in September 1996, I drove west and visited Sharpsburg, Md., and the battleground on Antietam Creek where Union and Rebel infantry clashed Sept. 17, 1862. Again for the first time, I saw the white Dunkers Church, the Cornfield, the Sunken Road and Burnside Bridge.

On July 5, 1997, I returned to Gettysburg for a third time, saw another large scale re-enactment and added to my tour list, the battlefields at Harpers Ferry in West Virginia, Manassas, Fredericksburg, the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse. I also drove to Winchester, Va., saw the home of Gen. Stonewall Jackson and continued south through the Shenandoah Valley to where the battle of Cedar Creek was fought. At Manassas, I ventured to Henry House Hill west of Bull Run Creek where on July 21, 1861, *Stonewall* Jackson earned his famous nickname. I visited the house at Guinea Station south of Fredericksburg and stood in the room where Jackson died after being wounded by his own men in the battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. I also crouched behind the stone wall below Maryes Heights at Fredericksburg where one Union assault after another failed in the face of terrific Confederate cannon and infantry gunfire on Dec. 13, 1862.

On my visit there in 1997, I left Sharpsburg and drove north to Chambersburg, Pa., and approached Gettysburg from the west. As I reached Willoughby Run on the western edge of the great battlefield, a feeling that I was driving over hallowed ground washed over me. I realized that I was traveling across once blood stained earth where long ago cannon roared and marching troops, wearing the blue and gray, charged across smoke covered fields into the jaws of death. You don't have to be a historian or Civil War enthusiast to be impressed by what you see in those battlefields. It can be a grand experience. In most cases it gives you a perspective of the most emotionally touching and significant periods of America's past.

I continue my study of the Civil War through the late 1990s and then began reading about the administrations of presidents John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, FDR, JFK, Johnson, Eisenhower and Nixon; and the major battles of World War II in the South Pacific, North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany.

It has always been interesting, exciting work for me, reading and writing about the country that I love. It was what I was born to do.

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Finally, the decade of the 1980s ended on another sad, tragic note for me and Ann Whittinghill. We were working our shifts at the Messenger-Inquirer when we got the word that Bill Cox had died. He passed away on Friday, May 20, 1988, at Manhattan Beach, Calif., of complications from AIDS. He was only 39 years old. We had learned of his battle with the disease after he announced it in a Labor Day column in September 1986 in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, where he was managing editor.

"As a journalist, I have spent my career trying to shed light in dark corners," he wrote. "AIDS is surely one of our darkest corners. It can use some light."

The New York Times reported Cox's death in its obituary section May 21. "Mr. Cox resigned from The Star-Bulletin shortly after his column ran, saying he did not feel well enough to continue supervising the staff, and later moved to California. Afterward, he lectured to professional journalism groups on coverage of the AIDS epidemic."

Bill left the Messenger-Inquirer to join the Courier-Journal staff in 1971. He left the Louisville paper in 1978 to work for the Miami Herald, but returned less than a year later to become city editor of the C-J, the NYT reported. Cox held that post for five years until he moved to Hawaii in January 1984.

As a man and a journalist, Bill Cox was among the best of the best, who left this life much too soon.

5

Sweet Judy's Blue Eyes

As the 1980s began, I found myself backed into a corner, trying to fight off my lingering bouts of depression. Wrought-up, perplexed and downright dejected, I was read to find a little happiness in my life, no matter from where it came. But I also realized I had family responsibilities to face at the same time. I had to do all I could to take care of Daddy's life and help him with his farming work. And I had to help Shirley, who was trying to survive her personal emotional loss after Billy's death and the financial crisis that accompanied it.

I hadn't been close to a woman since my health and employment problems in the late 1970s, and really never had time to think about that part of my life. I just put it out of my mind. Though the worst of my clinical depression had passed, I was just trying to live one day at a time, hoping that maybe some sunshine would pour down on my life. Maybe sooner or later, I would feel better, I thought. I never really thought it was proper to pray for myself. I figured God had more important things to think about and my little crisis-filled existence was well below his radar. Anyway, all the prayers, wishing and hoping seemed to have done little good.

Five years after returning to Daviess County, my self-esteem and confidence had dipped to an all-time low. To use an old Navy term, I was "dead in the water." I was in a low depth in life I had never fathomed as I approached the age of 40. I was filled with negative thoughts of my dating past there in the years before I moved to Frankfort. I had not wanted to come back to Daviess County. It was there when I was in my 20s, that I had slogged through a swamp of personal rejections and humiliations in my love life. I had amassed a real bad track record. For example, I remember someone close to one of my girlfriends whose family was native Cuban telling me that the young woman's father preferred that she date a Hispanic. One mother did not think I made enough money or had reached a high enough status in life to be dating her daughter. Another wanted her daughter to marry a preacher or someone who was more of a practicing Christian.

I just was not getting any respect as a suitor. Some of my dates I just tried to forget. Like when I picked up an Owensboro girl friend on a Saturday morning to go to Lexington to a UK football game. As I was laying out my agenda for what I wanted us to do in Lexington after the game, like having dinner before we started home or maybe visiting one of city's dance clubs, she quickly let me know all that was out of the question. She had to be home early that evening because she had scheduled another date in Owensboro. When I heard that, I was instantly ticked off, turned my car around in the driveway and took her back to her house. I let her out in front and never asked her out again. Owensboro was the place where I was also told by one woman that I was too possessive, and another said I was too bashful and unassertive. It was very frustrating.

James Crowe, my best friend in high school, once set me up with a blind date with his wife's close friend, who was very religious and had done volunteer work for the Billy Graham Crusade. I took her to a movie in Owensboro and afterward, brought her directly home because all we could talk about was her religious life. We had absolutely had no mutual interests. I may have been a cad for doing it, but I got very bored after the movie. I paid for that sin when another

young woman stood me up for a date. When I arrived no one was at home at the address she gave me. There were no lights on in the house. No sign of life. Nothing. Maybe she gave me someone else's address. No one answered the phone when I called her. (This was in days a generation before voicemail or cell phones.)

I really took embarrassing lumps in my dating relationships in Owensboro. I faced stiff competition. The girls I dated there were very popular and had three or four more boy friends so I was given a choice of waiting in line or moving on. I had vowed to never wait in line for anything after coming home from the Navy in 1968, so I moved on. By some in my family and other friends standing on the sidelines aware of my personal battles, I was even told that I should stop looking for a beauty queen, lower my standards, settle for second best, stick with my class of people and date someone "more of my kind." It seemed that everyone had an opinion or advice on how I conducted my private life.

Obviously I found those unsolicited suggestions insulting. I was not ashamed of coming from a poor family and was always taught to stand up for myself, when someone --- either man or woman ---- was trying to intimidate or talk down to me. I never tolerated such disrespect. I considered it rude behavior. I contained my anger, and sucked it up like a man. But I let it be known that if someone did not think I was good enough for them, then don't tread on me.

So in 1981, I decided that anything goes. I was tired of hard times. I felt good enough to test the waters again. I would do whatever it took to find someone who made me happy, maybe even one who loved me. That was always a tough order for me in Owensboro. In the beginning, I looked for women attending church at Settle Memorial but those ladies, young and older, were all married. I did not find church-attending women very stimulating. They were not high on my list. Besides, I was beginning my backsliding years and losing interest in the church. It just did not make sense to me anymore after what my family had endured. After I interviewed Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, my religious faith became more of a one-on-one relationship with God. I did not find any comfort going to church after Mom's and Billy's deaths.

My dating skills were a little rusty. But, I was feeling better mentally and I had a healthy libido. Coming off the disabled list at long last, I was 38 years old but still a good looking man. I was blonde and blue-eyed, physically fit, 6-feet tall and 185 pounds, and I could still flash my signature trait ---- a great smile. So I had a lot going for me, I was told. I was always known as a gentleman. Very polite, kind and caring. Never overbearing, controlling or abusive. I was considered very intelligent, and thoughtful with a self-deprecating sense of humor. I was honest, straightforward, confident, considerate, modest, quiet and unassuming. Maybe with a little too much of the latter three.

In a discreet and charming way, I tried to make every woman I dated feel like she was the smartest, most beautiful person in the room. I was quick with the compliments. That was the only way I knew how to operate. I had always been taught by the examples of my parents to never be boastful or conceited, so I made it my cardinal rule not to talk much about myself, unless she wanted to discuss my personal interests. In many cases, that might have been my biggest flaw. More than a few times I was told I was too serious, too quiet, never settled for second best, and was hard to get to know. The latter may have been true because I was still so shy the first time I met a woman. Maybe it was a defensive measure to counter rejection. Maybe I had lost some of my engaging personality after battling depression. I had a hard time to breaking the ice and feeling at ease with many of my dates. So I would start asking them quesions, probing to learn what they liked.

On dates, I usually ended up interviewing them much as a journalist would for a story, learning as much about them as I could, but not talking too much about myself. The way I looked at it, not too many women like to discuss writing, history or politics. I was always looking for an opening to find what she liked. Sometimes my love for music, movies and books caught her interest and got a good two-way conversation going. I always wanted to make her feel special and know everything about her, so I concentrated on talking about her personal interests and ambitions, or if she wanted to divulge them, her problems in life. But absolutely no talk about past boyfriends or lovers. In many cases in my life, I was playing the hero out to save the damsel in distress. In 1981, I was a more mature, wiser man who had overcome many personal difficulties, gone through hard times, and knew the lessons of life. If they picked up that signal and was truly interested in me, they learned I was also cautious, reflective, a good listener, a good leader, steady, dependable and dedicated.

I was ready to pull out all the stops. I had to find someone who was acquainted with the same adversity in life that I had faced in the past five years. First I tried going to the bars and nightclubs in Owensboro. Places like the the Brass A, Barnaby's and the Timeout Lounge in the Executive Inn Rivermont. All I found were college age women, young divorcees, and free and loose older women in their 50s and 60s, too many of whom I did not find as attractive. I liked the music and dancing in the nightclubs, but wasn't really into drinking or having one-night stands. I certainly was not looking for prostitutes or escorts. I learned in the Navy that those kind of adventures could be very dangerous, and a little exposure to that lifestyle goes a long way.

I began going to Evansville again. I had always liked that city. It was much bigger than Owensboro and more like Memphis, Indianapolis, Louisville and Lexington. Before 1972, I took all my special dates to Evansville for the movies and concerts that never came to Owensboro. The restaurants and shopping were much better in Evansville, much classier and more exclusive like in the big cities. I had purchased my first car there, and all my televisions and stereo equipment. Plus, it was clear to me that the people in Evansville really knew how to take risks and have a good time.

While I was working at the tire store and had the money from my share of our tobacco crop, I got the urge to explore and see what Evansville nightlife had to offer. As still precarious and unpredictable my mental mood was in those days, I was looking for some excitement. I was looking for pastures greener than Owensboro's. I was hoping to find what I had always wanted. An intelligent and sexually attractive woman with a vivacious personality that would sweep me off my feet. I was prepared to take the advice of the pontificating hypocrites in my life and lower my standards if that was what it took. So remembering New Orleans and Bourbon Street, I was definitely into the mood for a walk on the wild side. I had not been inside a strip club since my visit to Bourbon Street in 1973. When I saw a newspaper ad about a nationally known stripper (I believe her name was Nikki Nicholson or something like that) scheduled to perform at the Exotic She Lounge, I decided to visit the club for the first time, hoping to have an experience like the night I had visited Judah P's in the Big Easy. That was all I wanted to do on the night I visited the "She" for the first time.

Nicholson was a professional feature performer who danced at booked dates in stripclubs throughout the United States. She was a knockout but I forgot all about her when a young brunette in a white lacy costume caught my eye that night. Her stage name was Lori. After we first made eye contact, I knew she was special. I was instantly smitten. I could not stay away from the club after seeing her that first time. I kept going back there at every opportunity,

talking with her, tipping her and buying her drinks. It had been a long time since I met a woman as impressive as Cynthia, but in the summer of 1981, I discovered finally that she at long last had been replaced in my heart by Lori. It was love or lust at first sight for both of us. Outside the fantasy world of the nightclub, Lori (her entertainer's name) was Judy Wilson. She was 24 years old, a graduate of Henderson County High School, and a recently divorced single mother with a 5-year-old son. She also worked at an Evansville steakhouse during the day while she danced at the club three or four nights a week.

The "Exotic She Lounge" was a very colorful, popular night spot in Evansville during the 1980s. Located west of U.S. 41 in an industrial-commercial on the north side of Diamond Avenue, the "She" was a small, dimly lit, redneck bar, much more erotic and rowdy in the 1980s than any of the Evansville strip clubs today. It drew large crowds of customers that included off duty policemen, lawyers, businessmen, city government officials, military men on leave, blue-collar factory workers, and a loyal platoon of southern Indiana good old boys. They were the bar's always dependable regulars seeking their weekly fix of cheap thrills. The bar clientele reminded me of those Old West saloons I used to see in the movies. The places where on weekend nights, lonely cowboys ride into town to unwind, maybe get drunk, and if fortunate, sit down for a conversation and get a bit more with a pretty woman. The kind of place where the truth and reality are always checked at the door, and no guns are allowed.

I found the atmosphere in the "She" very appealing. As a writer, I just loved observing men and women's behavior in that setting. I learned a lot about human nature as I watched. The club was doing big business. It may not have quite lived up to its name and been as exotic as Judah P's, but I went there for the adrenaline rush it gave me. A threat of danger always lurked inside the club, depending on the attitudes, moods and sobriety of its customers lurked inside. Judy was what I liked most about the place and I paid little attention to the rest. I saw only one or two fights break out on Friday or Saturday nights I was there, usually involving guys who had a little too much to drink or had made disrespectful remarks about one of the dancers. It was stuff I had already seen in the Navy or in Louisville or Lexington. I just blended in with the crowd, and was never afraid to go there alone.

Those were the days before methamphetamine, the most dangerous and crazy drug of the 2000s. But cocaine, marijuana and acid were always available if you knew who to ask and where to find them. However, I never saw evidence of drug trafficking in the She Lounge. Beer, bourbon, tequila and vodka were always the drugs of choice there. Any time I encountered a guy who was drunk and angry, or maybe under the influence of those of the aforementioned street drugs, I would smile and try to calm them while moving to another table out of harm's way as subtlly as possible. The club's manager and bartender was a hard-shell, 40ish woman named Jan who never used bouncers. The owner of the bar was a rich pharmacist named Ron who dated some of the dancers and kept adding to Jan's cash flow. When tempers flared and a disturbance occurred, Jan was a tough, dykish woman who I saw was capable of throwing the perpetrators out of the bar herself. Her druggist friend would also help out. Fights could erupt just by one man being loud and rude, or by saying something demeaning to his drinking buddy. Punches would be thrown. The girls would head to their dressing room behind the stage and the DJ's booth was evacuated until order was restored. Police were never called.

The dancers in the '80s at the "She" had tantalizingly sexy, attention-getting stage names like Tanqueray Holiday, Chancey, Blondie, M&M, Pink Lady and Temptation. You could count on them doing their dance sets to sounds of "Bette Davis Eyes" by Kim Carnes, "You Were Always

on My Mind" by Willie Nelson, "I Love a Rainy Night" by Eddie Rabbit, "Waiting for a Girl Like You" by Foreigner, "Somebody's Baby" by Jackson Browne or "Start Me Up" by the Rolling Stones. The top girls at the She, called "house exotics," were paid by the hour, and also made big money from stage tips and the drinks they got their customers to buy. They made surprisingly amounts of money on their work shifts, even though they did not do lap dances in those days, or have any physical contact with customers while on stage. Girls in the 1980s each had a wardrobe of dance costumes, did their own choreographed dance routines, usually stripping to bra and relatively conservative bikini panties. They would remove their tops during the third song of their dance set, usually a slow love ballad that they performed on a throw rug. By the end of the final song, the girls were making a lot of cash, dollar bills, fives, 10s and even twenties.

Judy was a simple, blue-collar working class woman who literally stood out in a big crowd of very pretty dancers in the club. She was stunning, a vision of beauty with a gorgeous smile and deep blue eyes, so disarming they would make all your defenses just melt. She had movie star looks. She later told me that she thought she looked like Elizabeth Taylor but I thought she was a dead ringer for Rachel Ward, an Australian actress who in the early '80s starred in the television series "The Thorn Birds" and the movie "Against All Odds" with Jeff Bridges. Today, Cote de Pablo, who plays Ziva David on NCIS, very much resembles the Miss Collier I knew in the 1980s. Judy had the happiest smile and the most perfectly shaped nose and lips. Her long brown hair was very thick and fell to her shoulders when I first met her. But early in 1982 she had it cut short and then it grew quickly into the popular shag style of those times. Her bangs brushed down to touch her brow, her shortened locks on the sides just covered her ears, and were cut very short in the back just touching her collarline.

She was a young, responsible single mother of average intelligence, about 5 foot 6 in height, weighing 120 pounds, with a voluptuous figure. PhysicalIy she was the woman of every man's dreams. I invited her to my table for a few drinks and talked with her. Later she would head straight for my table when she saw me come in the club. I knew it was the girls' job to make their male customers happy and to spend money of them for the bar. So I went along with that practice, knowing that was probably why Judy showed so much interest in me. I was a grown man, had been around and knew the ropes. She accepted and then everything seemed to fall into place, like it was meant to happen. I did not look back, and have never thought my dating her was a mistake. I did not hang out in the She after we started a dating relationship outside the club, but would pick her up or wait for her at her apartment when she finished work.

In December 1981 Judy sustained bruises and a concussion in a car accident on an icy street after a snowstorm in Evansville. I stopped in the bar on the night after her accident and learned she had been hospitalized at Deaconess. I went immediately to see her at the hospital where she was being held for observation after her head injury. I sat down beside her on the bed, kissed and held her, and then we took a short walk in the hallway. She looked so fragile and alone that night, and I knew I was really in love with her.

When we were dating, I lived with her in an upstairs apartment she rented at an 1920ish, two-story house at Jefferson and Linwood avenues, just off Washington Avenue west of US 41. When I stayed over with her, we would go to eat breakfast at Evans Cafe on 1010 Kentucky Ave. (now closed). In the following months, I took her to places she had never seen in Evansville, including most of the best restaurants and nightclubs. I had enough cash stowed away to always show her a good time, Once we really dressed up and saw a performance of *Carousel* starring

John Raitt at what is now the Centre in downtown Evansville. She was really impressed, having never seen a Broadway show production. We also went to a lot of movies all over Evansville at North Park Cinema, Ross Cinema and Washington Avenue Picture Show. On those nights we also went to Butterfield's Restaurant on Green River Road (now Shyler's Barbecue), Jo Jo's in the Drury Inn on US 41 near the airport, or the Ramada Inn lounge on US 41 in Henderson. I introduced her to a side of life she had never experienced with any of her previous boyfriends, and spent money on her like no other had. We stayed at the Executive Inn in Owensbor one weekend, swam in the indoor pool, ate in the dining room and attended a music performance in the Showroom Lounge.

I felt very comfortable and content with her. Our relationship was intense, delicate and frank, full of desire. From the beginning, it was the most blissful love affair of my life. Our conversations were like we had known each other all our lives and were destined to be together. It was just right. She was impressed about the history research I was doing and the books I had begun to write that year. She had also told her parents about me to get their approval. I certainly did not talk much about my book with her and we definitely never talked about current events or political issues. I wanted to know everything about her. For such a young woman, she knew a lot about people, had great human instincts, street smarts and the survivor skills of a woman much older. She could read men very well for someone of her age. That is what I liked most about her. She was down to earth. There was nothing phony about her. She told me she had been through a lot of adversity too, and knew how to handle herself.

After those first, few weeks of courtship, we became lovers. Our passion for each other was deeply romantic, sincere, insatiably sexual and explicit to the point of being pornographic. Coitus, fellatio and cunnilingus. We were ravenous for each other. She did me and I did her in every position a man and woman can make love. At any time, anywhere and any place. In bed, on her couch, in the shower, on the kitchen table and in the sink, in a hotel room and movie theater, even once in my car as we crossed the Veterans Memorial bridge, driving to Henderson during a late winter snow shower. We couldn't get enough of each other. She would snuggle up to me and giggle, "I'm horny!" and we would engage again. Once we had sex three times in an eight-hour period. We were so close emotionally and sexually. From the first months we knew each other, we had what all men and women want in their relationships; we were mentally and sexually compatible.

Our sex was reckless and unprotected, though she was on the pill. When she was "late" two or three times, we did home pregnancy tests. Each time it was negative and we were both happy and sad. I would have loved to have a baby with her, but not at that time. I did not want our baby brought into the world under circumstances of economic poverty. We should have shut down our relationship at that time, but I had gone too far and was commited to her. Not having our baby is something I have regretted and think about until this day.

I was so in love that I could have stayed with her forever. I missed her the first hours I was away from her. I had to go home to Maceo to see if Daddy was getting along okay (he always was), but I could not stay away from Judy for more than two or three days. She would call me at home, and if I wasn't there, she would talk to Daddy. I wanted to be with her 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Unfortunately it was after we were far into our relationship that the tire company decided to reduce its staff and eliminate my temporary experimental job. So that affected my thoughts about my relationship with Judy. At that time in the midst of "Reagan's Recession," I was back on the

streets, collecting unemployment insurance and hoping and praying that I would find a job in Evansville.

Being with Judy was the happiest time and most complete relationship that I had ever had with a woman. She was just what I wanted. We would sit and talk, me holding her in my arms. We talked mostly about our lives and families. We talked about children and her little boy David. I told her how I ended up back home after Mom died, and why I was where I was in my life at that time. I did not expect her to understand or grasp the feeling of desolation and emptiness I experienced. She told me her deepest, most gripping secret; that she was born Judy Wilson, and her father had killed her mother when she was 4 years old. The horrors of that death had remained in Judy's subconscious all the rest of her life.

I was taken aback by Judy's story about her mother's death, but it was true. Her 33-year-old father had killed his 41-year-old wife at about 10 o'clock on the night of Thursday, Sept. 13, 1962, at 216 Kriel Ave., Henderson, the home of Judy's grandfather, according to news reports in the Henderson Gleanor and the Evansville Courier. Witnessing their mother's death were Judy's 14- and 8-year-old sisters. They were in the kitchen as their mother was preparing a glass of milk for her baby girl when her husband stabbed here in the left lung, the newspapers reported. Judy and her five brothers were in the front yard with their grandfather, the newspapers said.

Judy's father claimed to have killed his wife in self defense because "she had something in her hand," according to the news report. His 14-year-old daughter said her mother had been holding a spoon that she was using to mix powdered milk for her baby girl. The newspapers reported that Judy's father had been laid off his job that day at Wathen Grain Co., Evansville, where he was a river terminal worker. The family told newsmen that Mr. Wilson was angry at his wife, because he said she had gone to Evansville that Wednesday to look for a job, stayed there overnight and did not return until Thursday. He asked his wife where she had been, and she said: "You know where I have been." The oldest daughter told police that after the stabbing, her father went to the front porch and sat in a chair. "He sat there rocking as if nothing had happened," the teenage daughter said, before running to a neighbor's house to call the police. "They took him away and that was it." Judy's grandfather said his son was gone to the couple's residence on West Main Street in Henderson, and was drinking as he doused the house with gas.

Judy's account of the killing disagreed on one point with the newspapers. She told me she was in the kitchen, hanging onto her mother's skirt, and was not in the front yard. She said even though she was so young, she remembered seeing her father stab her mother. She said that her mother's body was buried at St. Peter Catholic Cemetery at Waverly in Union County. Her father was found guilty of a charge of murder in Henderson Circuit Court and sentenced to life in prison. He began the term of incarceration on Jan. 29, 1963, and was paroled on May 14, 1986.

I found the newspaper account of the murder in the Henderson Gleaner in 1982. I never discussed her mother's death again after Judy first told me about it. It was all true, and in the proceeding months, I witnessed the bizarre emotional flashbacks that Judy still experienced about her mother's stabbing. It was obvious she bore deep psychological scars. Extreme emotional stress would cause her to have what I believed were psychotic breaks, brought on by her memory of the murder of her birth mother. In the midst of what I thought was a dispute with her adopted parents, I was with Judy when she began talking strangely in the baby talk of a 4-year-old. It came over her in the period after she had moved to a trailer home park near Green Street in Henderson later in 1982. It was a alarming and frightening thing to witness and I was at a loss about what to do. She was out of her head, and I was afraid to leave her alone. I just put

her to bed and stayed with her while she slept. In a day or two, she would come out of it and return to reality.

It was our great misfortune that her mental health condition and my unemployment and depression hurt our relationship eventually. Its demands and my inability find a job left me anxious and worried. I wanted to succeed so I could take care of her financially and satisfy her in every way she wanted. I was stressed about how I was going to pull everything off. As my anxiety increased, my depression began knocking on the door again, making life difficult for me. I reached one of those depths where all feeling goes out of life, and I could not explain it to her. She started to think I did not love her and was just using her. As the anxiety mounted, I put more pressure on myself to succeed. I was feeling desperate about getting a job. I was finally in a place I wanted to be in life, and I was having to fight through another episode of depression.

I had told Judy about my history of depression but I did not think she could believe or understand a story like that. In January 1982, the ice and snow was on the ground and the temperature near zero, and I had a flashback to 1976. I started thinking and worrying that my money would run out. I hit an emotional wall and went into one of those periods of depression that takes away all your feelings and you go into a deep lull. I sort of lost "that loving feeling" I could not explain it to her and I think she began thinking I was falling out of love with her.

I came out of my period of depression and everything returned to what was normal for us, but I still could not find a job. She was patient with me and I could tell she was getting apprehensive. I began to get scared I was going to lose her. I pleaded with her. Stick with me, don't lose faith in me. By the late summer and then into the fall of 1982, we both were frustrated and had argued. She ridiculed me saying, "I'm sure not going be like you, 40 and not married," she said. A couple of weeks later, she gave me an ultimatum. If I did not find work soon, it would be over between us. So, one night, in desperation, though I didn't want to propose to her in a bar, I asked her to marry me. I will find a way to take care of you, I said. "You cannot take care of me; you can't even take care of yourself." she retorted. That was the most humiliating moment of my life. Her words cut like a knife and have stayed with me ever since. So, about a year after Judy and I had met, she kept her word. It was over between us, she declared. She said she was going to start dating another man who she had met a few months ago. He worked on a tugboat on the Ohio, and while he was gone for weeks and months at a time, he made enough money to keep her going. She had at least two other new boy friends over the next three months but none of them lasted, I learned later.

Trying to make amends, I kept going back. I stopped by her trailer in Henderson one afternoon. A Buick I did not recognize was parked beside her car outside. It belonged to one of her new friends. He was a guy named Sonny, who she told me later was an old boyfriend who had just come back unexpectedly from Denver to visit her. He came to door in a bathrobe after I knocked, and I quickly got the picture. I asked if Judy was at home and if I could see her. I wanted to talk to her. "She's sleeping," he said. "Alright, then tell her that Glenn was here, " I replied before he closed the door. It was not the fearful, embarrassing moment I had imagined it would be in encountering the ultra lowlife white trash that he was. I was positive that he was probably sleeping with her, so meeting him at the door made me furious. "To hell with both of you" were the words that went through my mind. I was not going to fight any redneck scum like him if she had chosen him over me.

As I left, I was indignant beyond words. It was a typical male response. I knew that was the end. I vowed it was over. I knew that I had reached rock bottom. I did not return to Evansville or

Henderson for more than one year. I remained so angry at Judy that it took me years to cool down and remember the good times when I believed she was the love of my life. Memory of her always popped up in my mind for comparison, usually every time I was engaging in an intimate liaison with another new woman I met after Judy. That drove me crazy. It took me about 10 years until I could be with another woman without thinking of her.

Finally, there was the one fateful Saturday night in 1989 when she returned to my life for one brief moment in time. I dropped into the Busy Body Lounge at US41 and Columbia to visit Mary Mitchell, who was dancing there. M&M as she was called was just an acquaintance and not a girlfriend. Suddenly it was like I was dreaming. I was aghast. Judy had appeared out of nowhere. She was back in Evansville and working at that club. She came over and sat down at my table. As we talked for a few minutes, she leaned over to me. "Glenn, you treated me better than any other man I have ever known,." she whispered. Judy may have wanted to reunite. But that night brought back all my old rage about her rejecting me and sleeping with other men after saying she loved me. Her plea fell on deaf ears. I remembered her forsaking me at a time I was at my lowest point financially and doing everything in my power to please her. I remember feeling no love for her at that moment. I felt only betrayed and insulted.

In 1989, I was back working part-time at the Messenger-Inquirer and probably could have reconciled with Judy that night. A lot of thoughts went through my mind in those few minutes we talked. I did not want to let her know how much she hurt me. I got up and went to the bar and sat with M&M, another dancer I knew. I just wanted to use that moment to rub rejection into Judy's face. I ignored her in retaliation for the pain she inflicted on me. Looking back now, that moment of spite was nothing but a gesture of immature behavior on my part, and I feel ashamed.

Living with and loving Judy showed me an entirely different lifestyle and a segment of society that I had never known or been accustomed. The women who worked in the clubs were not like I had been told by hypocritical, so-called Christians who smugly judged them as white trash whores. But that was not true. Most were just like me. Judy was a good, sweet woman who as a toddler had seen the worst horrors that can happen in life and was robbed of a stable childhood. I have known other women like Judy in the years since the two of us parted. Dancers with names like Bambi, Heather, Phoenix, Katt, Lisa, Britney, working in strip clubs in Evansville called the Swinging Door, Vixen Lounge, Busy Body, House of Dolls, Teezers and the Playgirl (later the Lucky Lady) Lounge.

They usually are girls just out of high school and trying to earn big, fast money to pay their college tuition. At least, that is always their story. Some women like Pink Lady or Heather danced for 10 to 15 years and made careers of working in Evansville strip clubs. Ninety eight percent of the dancers are not prostitutes as many of the general public think. They are just women with pretty faces and curvaceous bodies but few real job skills and little education. They are trying to escape from poverty or unsafe, violent relationships with their fathers, boyfriends or ex-husbands. Many have been abused verbally, sexually or physically. They are women who began their lives in foster homes, or were raised by unmarried or divorced mothers. They feel abandoned by their birth parents, boyfriends or husbands, repeating the cycle, ending up alone as single mothers themselves and looking urgently for money to support their children and themselves. They turn to a way of life that provides money very quickly and gives them a feeling of empowerment. They trade that for low self-esteem. Some have no better choice. Some are homeless. They have no husband or boyfriend who can support them. In rare cases, they look for an older man who actually loves them, and can give them the financial security and the love and

emotional stability they crave.

For years, I told myself that Judy had done me a favor by giving up on me in 1982, but in the last 20 years I have always regretted losing her. She was once my greatest love, and I thought many times I should have gone back to find her and give her a second chance after 1989, But I was stubborn and still angry about how we finally split. In that interim, I have told myself she was not the woman for me, that it would have never worked out for us in the long run, and that our love was not meant to be. But I know I have never loved any other woman so deeply and completely as I did Judy.

In thinking about her again as I write this, I remember that Judy didn't lie to me when she wanted to break up. She treated me more honestly than most of the so-called better class of women I had dated in Owensboro, Frankfort, Lexington or Louisville during my life. Someone once told me I should feel relieved losing her because someone from her background was not good enough for me. She would never fit into my family or circle of friends. I was better off not marrying her because she was mentally ill and our relationship was bound to fail. What would my friends and family think of me marrying a low-class stripper? Though I literally spent my last dollar on her, I never felt cheated or short-changed by her affection for me. I also never forgot the kind way she treated me in the beginning. She was a good woman who was deeply troubled by her past. Even mindful of that, I know I could have done much worst. I was no better than her. She *was* one of my own kind.

I had not thought of Judy much in recent years until I began to write this. Clearly coming to mind again were the warm and wonderful memories of the good times we shared. When I look at the many pictures I have of her, I begin to think just how much I still miss Judy, and how much I lamented the anger-tinged decision I made in 1989. I think that if I ever get into that same position and am given a second chance to reunite with someone who I love half as much as I loved Judy, I won't reject her. I would say yes, I forgive you as you forgive me. Let's try to work it out; let's love each other again. Oh, for a return to those wonderful loving days when I could once again get lost, looking into my sweet Judy's blue eyes.

6

Daddy's Decline

In 1976, tragic events in our lives threw us together, and after 33 years, Daddy and I finally got to know each other. During the next 20 years we would enjoy good and happy times, and struggle through the very worst time in both our lives. We did it together, side by side. When he lost Momma, Daddy felt sad, lost and lonely. As for me, I had come home feeling devastated and defeated again. We had no choice. By necessity, we needed each other, and were forced to help each other at long last to overcome our utter despair.

We were the oddest of odd couples. Daddy was highly skilled farmer, carpenter and mechanic.. On the other hand, I was pretty much a direct opposite. I was a writer, journalist, historian and scholar. Our only common interests were horse racing, watching boxing and the love of baseball. We were also both hard workers, single minded and intense competitors with clashing egos and low boiling points. Daddy's strong will and vigor left little room for error or compromise. He never relented and was accustomed to having things done his way. So for the majority of our time together, I was the one who sacrificed my viewpoint and way of getting a job done. So it was never easy being Stanley's son. Daddy was hard for me to understand. He enjoyed my success, seeing me playing baseball. But he never complimented me on my school grades, or the news articles I had written when I became a reporter.

Love between adult fathers and sons is not always easy to detect. At least in my case, there was no displays of affection between us as adults, at least during our lives together. No hand shakes or pats on the back for a job well done. I just did what was expected of me and learned to deal with whatever response I received, That was just the way life was with Daddy and me. I just persevered, tried to be patient and wait to see if a mutual respect for each other would materialize. He and I were still very stoic after living through the dreadful experiences of losing Momma and Billy in a four-year period. We were like two soldiers who had fought and survived two great battles. We did not talk about it much, if at all. But I silently recognized his pain, and eventually an unspoken bond began to form between us.

While our personalities and demeanors were different, we both were of the same blood and innately shared, for better or worse, the same character traits. He was an old school farmer and by our family's nature, a hard egg to crack for any reaction showing approval or appreciation. However, I was amazed some times when he proudly introduced me as "he's my boy." In 1976, his mind was still in the 1930s and following the same daily patterns of living that he learned as a young man during the Great Depression. He absolutely refused to change in any way. In our work environment, he always watched everything going on around him, and was a real stickler for the way a job was being done. He was stubborn, hard to please and quick to be critical.

Daddy was never relaxed when the time came to plant a new crop of tobacco in the spring of the year. It was like he was planning to fight a major military campaign. He was a bonafide expert in the art of raising tobacco; no one in our family or in my lifetime was better. But Daddy approached the annual task like he had never done it before. He worried, stewed and stayed in an uptight mode until each crop was harvested and sold at the end of the year. Before the planting season began, Daddy was like a thoroughbred colt waiting in the starting gate, adrenaline

pumping, eager to bust out and ready to run He was in his personal work zone. He was a perfectionist in every sense of the word. When I got jobs working for other farmers, for him, our family reputation and pride always seemed to be at stake. Daddy's orders were: Get up early, get to the job on time (earlier if possible), always try to do more than the other guy you're working with, and do the job exactly right. At the time he was telling me this, I was 33 years old, had served in the U.S. Navy, had been working in tobacco since I was 11 years old, and at public jobs since I was 18. I tried to set my performance standard higher than his, and I never disappointed him. I cannot think of a time that I failed to do a job well. He never questioned or complained about my work ethic.

In the remaining years of the 1970s and the '80s, we talked more than we ever had when I was a little boy or teenager. I continued to learn more about him, and we moved closer than ever before. We had some great moments of fun and laughter, especially when we were working with his farmer friends in Maceo and Lewisport. We even had moments of serious, philosophical conversation. He was full of surprises, and smarter than I thought. He astonished me when I came home from the Evansville hospital. I saw his gentle, compassionate side for the first time in years. It revealed to me that Daddy somehow knew about how it felt to be clinically depressed. He gave me advice on how to overcome the illness. He would tell me to get out of the house, and into the sunlight. Move around, and get exercise. "Don't think so much about yourself; get your mind on something else," he would say. After Judy and I ended our relationship, he saw very quickly how shattered I was. He tried to console me. He held out hopes that she and I might reunite. He wanted us to get married. With women, things can happen and reversed themselves very quickly, he would say. Always be prepared and ready for them to change their mind, he said. I shook my head in amazement and disbelief that he was so insightful with what I thought were his suppressed words of wisdom..

I reciprocated by listening and trying to comfort him when he was feeling low. In the first two years after Mom's death,. Near the end of a day of work he was far away from the house at the hog pen, he told me he thought he heard Helen calling him to supper. "Uh, Stanley!" she used to say, I recall. When Daddy would talk about her during those moments, he would suddenly begin to weep. But then he would stop like he was embarrassed and quickly composed himself. As the years passed after Mom' death, he never mentioned her again. But there were times at night in 1976 when I thought I heard him crying in his bedroom.

Daddy had always been healthy well into his middle age years. He never went to a doctor unless he was injured. Like the time he got one of his arms caught in his cornpicker when it was running. He had ulcer-like symptoms, frequent heartburn, sinus infections, bad colds, but never any heart or breathing problems. Even when he was in his 70s, he was robust and active far beyond someone else of his age. However, in the 1980s, his eyesight was impaired temporarily when cataracts formed. He also suffered a detached retina in his left eye. He was very afraid that he would lose his eyesight forever. When the cataracts were removed and the bandages taken off his eyes, he was so thankful that he cried and kissed the hand of his eye surgeon, Dr. Garry Binegar.

After one of Daddy's eye operations, his two best friends Bill McDaniel and Wilbur Duncan, helped me and two other field workers set our tobacco crop on the Tony Gerteisen farmland down U.S. 60 from our house. I drove the old F-20 Farmall and disked the already plowed ground, preparing it for the tobacco setter. We all pulled the plants, and Mac and I set them in long rows as Wilbur drove the tractor that pulled the setter.

Daddy, Wilbur and Mac swapped work a lot in those days. Daddy considered Wilbur was the salt of the earth, and his best friend. He helped Wilbur build a loghouse for his daughter, and Stanley also dug a lot of post holes and helped his good friend Wilbur erect fences . Wilbur would return the favor by "marking" (castrating) the male pigs of Daddy's new litters. Wilbur did the work when the Sign of the Moon "was right"' It was an oldtime farmer's theory or practice in which Daddy and Wilbur believed religiously.

Sometimes I would tip off the newspaper about a job Daddy was doing at home that might be a good photo opportunity. Twice, photographers from the Messenger-Inquirer shot pictures of Daddy tending to his sow named "Arnold" (as in Green Acres) and her pigs in the hoghouse, and also when he was setting posts and building a fence for Wilbur. Daddy liked getting his picture in the paper and I obliged him. He received a lot of recognition and razzing from patrons of the store when he would go to Maceo on his daily trips to eat a hamburger or buy cigars.

There were many difficult times in the years Daddy and I survived together. One occurred on a Saturday night in 1985 that he and I succumbed to food poisoning after eating tainted bread pudding at the Banquet Table restaurant in Owensboro. Three hours after we had eaten and returned home, both of us began vomiting and having diarrhea uncontrollably. It was the sickest I had ever been, and a down and dirty, nauseating experience. In between spells of vomiting, I managed to call our neighbor Kenny Boling (we didn't have 911 then). He and his wife came over to the house, called an ambulance and it came and took us to the hospital. Daddy and I both spent that Saturday night and much of Sunday in the hospital before all the toxins were flushed out of our body's systems and we were released. On Monday morning, we went back to our patch at Rex Bivens' place with thoughts of cutting a few rows of tobacco and getting another day of work done. But we had to quit after about 30 minutes because we did not realize how dehydrated we were. We were much weaker than we had thought. We thought we were invincible to sickness, and laughed at ourselves for our foolishness. (Several other people reported getting food poisoning at the restaurant that night to the county health department. We all got a money settlement from the restaurant that paid our hospital bill.)

It was always special for me to watch how well Daddy could take care of livestock. Daddy knew more about birthing litters of pigs than anyone else among our family of farmers. I remember crouching beside him in the hoghouse late one January night in the 1980s as a sow delivered her piglets in near zero temperatures. I watched as he reached into the sow's birth canal to clear it of "after birth," making it easier for the mother hog to expell her little ones. I still remember the warm air from her womb coming out into the icy air as steam. After all the piglets were delivered, Daddy would take each of them to the house to warm them and cut tushes (the long pointed teeth or tusks baby pigs have at birth) out of their snouts before returning them to their mom. Once a beautiful, healthy litter of pigs and their mother came down with the earthborn disease of erisipelas that often struck hog herds. Daddy call a veterinarian to innoculate them, but it was too late. The sow died in the hoghouse, and her pigs died one by one on the ground outside. We had to call another farmer to help us pull the heavy mother hog out of the house with a tractor so we could dispose of the body. It was a tough financial loss for him. The little pigs were cute and almost like pets. Their deaths bothered me more than Daddy in an emotional sense. He had seen hogs die before and it was just one of the frustrating misfortunes of farming.

On weekends, Daddy liked to visit Raymond at least once each month in the years before he died. When we made those trips, I would also drive up River Road at Lewisport to let Daddy

take a look at how the tobacco and corn were growing. Sometimes we stopped to visit his cousin Katherine Logsdon at River Joe Greathouse's old home. Or we would visit the old homeplace of Grand Dad and Grandmother Hodges, then occupied by Roy and Elizabeth Emmick who had bought the house in the 1930s after grandmother's death.

In the early 1990s, after the state of Kentucky announced plans to fund and build a new bridge from Kentucky to Indiana across the Ohio River at Rockport, Daddy wanted to see the site on the Kentucky side where the construction was scheduled to start. It was upriver from the old Rockport ferry landing that Maceo farmers used in Depression days to cross the river. Both of us were curious and a little dubious about the bridge construction, so we made several trips along that old gravel road to the site where the bridge piers, the first phase of construction, would be located. Progress was very slow; and there were more than a few delays in beginning construction. We finally saw evidence of one of the piers being built. Daddy fumed and fussed, showing his doubts about the future of the project. "They're never going to build a bridge there that way," Stanley told me more than once. The bridge was eventually completed, but not in my Daddy's lifetime. (His friend Wilbur was one of the first members of the public to cross the William Natcher Bridge, as it came to be called. Duncan drove across in a farm wagon drawn by mules.)

At home while Daddy was in his mid to late 70s, he and I had a lot of conversations under the big tree in our backyard. We covered a wide, diverse selection of topics. But we usually talked about his favorite subject: growing up at home in Lewisport and remembering the fun he used to have with his buddies who lived at Adair or in the Troy Bend area. He talked mostly about his shrewd crew of pals of the 1930s: Joe Hamilton, Carl Morris, Orville Miller and Joe Taylor. He told stories about how the River Road folks rallied to help get their neighbors to high ground during the 1937 flood. He remembered the day of pegging acres of tobacco by hand with his teenage nephews Franklin and Douglas Banks. Then there was the time, Daddy said, that he and some other buddies put a smoke bomb under brother Roy's car on a weekend night in Lewisport. Their objective was to frighten and hassle Roy's wife, Ada Belle, who Daddy thought hen-pecked Roy. Ada waited in the car as Roy, who may have known of the prank, went inside the store to buy groceries before the cloud of smoke billowed from beneath the car. No one was hurt. Daddy always smiled big and laughed out loud when he told that story.

I either took notes or remembered most of the stories Daddy told. I included his boyhood tales in several of the guest pieces I wrote for Jack Foster's weekly "So It's Been Told" column in the *Hancock Clarion*. Daddy could never really understand why I was so interested in family history, but he could not stop telling those stories of his boyhood. I think he really wanted someone to preserve all the great experiences of that part of life lived by his many unforgettable friends and neighbors he knew during the Depression.

Daddy also helped me clear the long neglected and abandoned Lewis family cemetery on the Marion Thrasher farm in the late 1980s. He did so after I told him that his great-great-grandfather John Lewis was buried there. In about 1991, Daddy also did a lot of hard work digging holes and helping Franklin and I install a historic site marker that Franklin bought in memory of the Beech Grove School. Franklin had attended the one-room schoolhouse too.

After Mom died, Franklin would call Daddy almost monthly on Sundays. He would always invite us to visit him in Norfolk where he had been living since retiring from the Navy. In the summer of 1986, Franklin called again, telling us he wanted us to come see the commissioning of the Navy's newest aircraft carrierr, the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*. I really wanted to see the ship

and I convinced Daddy that we should go. It would be the most memorable event we experienced in the whole decade of the 1980s. Daddy would have several "the first time ever" experiences during the trip.

I thought going by air would be too expensive and I knew Daddy had never flown in an airplane and he would probably object and back out. So I bought a bus ticket. It was a most regrettable decision.

The bus trip and our four days in Norfolk would bring out the worst in Daddy, behaviorwise. We boarded the bus at about 2 p.m. on a Tuesday, and it took U.S. 60 by the old river route through Cloverport, Hardinsburg, Irvington and then to Louisville. We moved east on Interstate 64 past Lexington, Ky., stopped at Morehead, then drove past Huntington and Charleston over the laboriously winding (one dangerous curve after another) route of U.S. 60 through the mountains of West Virginia. Both of us stayed awake all night, and were exhausted when we made a 6 a.m. exercise and restroom stop in Lexington, Va., at the south end of the Shenandoah Valley. Continuing on that seemingly endless journey, we arrrived in Richmond, Va., at noon, and then got into Norfolk at about 3 p.m. after about 24 sleepless hours on the road. It was the most grueling road trip I ever made in my life, and I resolved never to take that route again.

After Billy died of lung cancer, a doctor or Shirley and I convinced Daddy he should stop smoking cigarettes. Instead he took up smoking cigars. Apparently thinking it was safer for him by not inhaling, he did not seem to care much about how unhealthy it was for me, inhaling those heavy clouds of smoke he was expelling throughout the house from our living room. In the cold months of the year I would close the door to my bedroom and stay out of the living room. After all, it was *his* house. After I pleaded my case against his smoking inside, he finally agreed to smoke outside during the warmer months of the year.

The issue of his smoking cigars suffered again big time as we traveled to Norfolk in October 1986. Daddy defied the rule of no smoking on the bus. He slipped to the rear seat of the vehicle to steal a smoke two or three times during the trip. The driver smelled the drifting smoke and through his rearview mirror saw the bright red, burning butt of the cigar. He warned whoever that was smoking in the back to cease or desist. Taking two or three more drags off the cigar, Daddy would stop and return to his seat. After each warning, I thought Daddy was going to be put off the bus at the next stop, but the driver had a trip to complete. He did nothing and kept going. Daddy got his way. He could be cantankerous, selfish and mean about his smoking. Nobody was going to tell him he could not smoke whenever or where ever he wanted. It was like a First Amendment right to him.

Franklin picked us up at the bus station, and took us to his house on Chester Street near the Norfolk Naval Air Station. (Planes were always flying over the house, making their approach for landing.) Then Franklin would have to contend with Daddy's indoor cigar smoking for the days of our visit.

Though Daddy's was ready to leave for Maceo after two days in Norfolk, Franklin was able to cajole him into staying and enjoying our visit. That wearisome bus journey was the first time Daddy had been farther from home than Louisville or Cincinnati. There would be more precedents to come that week. It would be the first time he ever saw the ocean. He would see where U.S. 60 ends at the Atlantic seashore in Virginia Beach. He did not seem impressed in either case.

Franklin had planned our tour of Norfolk and the Tidewater area very carefully. He was a great host, and determined that we enjoy our long awaited visit. He took us to a seafood

restaurant in Norfolk, and was a little embarrassed when Daddy said he would rather eat "meat and taters" instead of shrimp and lobster. I gritted my teeth and rolled my eyes in an apologetic glance at Franklin. He smiled and shook his head in more than obvious frustration. I think Daddy reminded him of how Grand Dad Will acted in his old age.

Franklin owned a sailboat that was tied up in a local marina. He took us sailing out for an hour or two that Friday in an inlet of Chesapeake Bay. He brought sandwiches and soft drinks. He operated the rudder, all the while talking with Daddy and pointing out sights to his aging uncle. The weather was perfect. There was a cool breeze blowing and the sun was so bright as it reflected off the water. It was a pleasant little cruise. I sat there silently watching both of them. For a while they were back in the days of their youth. It was a part of our visit that all three of us would always remember.

One of the days there, we drove around Norfolk in Franklin's spotless new 1986 Cadillac sedan. With a cassette of 1940s Big Band music playing as Franklin drove, we toured the Navy base, visited the Navy Exchange, and saw the piers where destroyers, cruisers, subs and tenders were tied up. One day we drove north through the underwater tunnel to visit Fort Monroe on the shore of Hampton Roads where the iron clads Merrimac and Monitor fought each other in a sea battle during the Civil War.

The three of us watched Game 6 of the 1986 World Series on television that Friday night. That was the contest in which Boston Red Sox first baseman Bill Buckner made the now historic defensive error, letting a grounder go through his legs into rightfield, allowing the eventual champions New York Mets to score the winning run.

On Saturday, Oct. 25, 1986, we attended the commissioning ceremony for the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* at the shipyard at Newport News, Va. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was the featured speaker, and we witnessed a flyover by the ship's aircraft. We also saw the always impressive "let the ship come alive" ritual as the crew rushed to their stations and assembled along the sides of the carrier deck. Then we took a tour of the ship. The three of us walked along the fight deck, and then went below to see the compartments inside the carrier. We stood on the gigantic elevator that lifts aircraft to the main deck. It was great for me being back aboard ship, especially as a civilian. I had never been on an aircraft carrier. It was something I had wanted to do since 1967. So it was an exciting, long awaited experience for an old Navy journalist like me. (The Theodore Roosevelt, nicknamed "The Big Stick", saw its first action in the Persian Gulf War of 1991.)

When it came time for us to end our visit to Norfolk, I was so determined to get home fast and not relive the horrendous bus ride experience that I used my credit card to pay about $400 for two one-way tickets from Norfolk via Louisville to Owensboro. We flew home in three hours. Daddy was not afraid to fly; he just wanted to get home by the fastest means possible. As our Ozark Airlines flight from Louisville to Owensboro passed over Maceo, I nudged Daddy and gestured for him to look out the plane window at our house U.S. 60. He had sat calmly and nonplussed in his seat all the way home on the flights from Norfolk to Owensboro. How was your first flight aboard an airplane, I asked him later? No big deal, he said with not a trace of excitement: "It was just like sitting in a rocking chair at home."

They would talk on the phone, but the last time Daddy and Franklin were together was in the fall of 1990. Franklin had told me he wanted to erect a historic site marker where Beech Grove School was located when he was growing up. He told me he would pay for it, if I would get the marker made. Then we would install it along Muddy Gut Road at the site of the old one-room

schoolhouse. I did as Franklin instructed and had the marker made in Grandview, Ind. Then Franklin came home from Norfolk, and helped Daddy and I set the marker in concrete at the site.

On a sunny but chilly Sunday afternoon Nov. 18, 1990, about three dozen former students of Beech Grove School attended a ceremony to unveil the bronze covered, aluminum marker. I had written the inscription telling a brief history of the school, and noted at the bottom that the marker had been erected by its former students. Franklin did the unveiling honors along with Mary Whitworth Roberts, who was a teacher at the one-room schoolhouse its last four years.

Beech Grove School opened in 1911 and closed when Hancock County schools were consolidated in 1938, the year Lewisport School was built. The site of the school was on property owned by descendants of Willie Joe Emmick, who himself was a student at Beech Grove in its early days. That happy occasion turned to sadness about two years later when someone stole the marker. We guessed, to sell the metal. When I phoned Franklin about the theft, he shrugged off the misfortune and never talked about erecting another marker. He rejoiced in remembering that he and his schoolmates had gathered to pay tribute to their old schoolhouse, and had honored it, at least, for a little while. That was enough.

In the years before we visited Franklin in Norfolk, Daddy finally lost sight in his left eye when the repaired retina detached again. Even after he lost the vision in that eye, Daddy continued to drive down U.S. 60 to Hawes Way for breakfast, drove to Mac and Wilbur's houses, or to the store in Maceo to buy his "smoking" or loaf awhile. When he became fearful of driving to Owensboro, I would drive him to the tobacco sales at the warehouses, to doctor's appointments, or to pick up loads of coal from Sampson's on Plum Street.

He had been very active in the years before his eye operations. In the early 1980s, Daddy continued to drive to Lewisport to visit his brother Roy who was in his 80s and had descended deeply into a state of senile dementia. Daddy would come back home visibly upset, complaining about how Roy's wife Ada and sons Roy Jr. and Wendell treated his impaired brother. In their defense, they were doing the best they could. They could not afford to put Roy into a nursing home, and chose to keep him home where Wendell's wife Golda provided nursing care. Based on what he told me, Daddy was very angry that they put restraints on Roy's arms and outraged by how his brother was being treated by his immediate family. (Roy died in February 1983 a few months before his 85th birthday.)

It was in 1988, that Daddy began to show signs of slowing down physically. He decided that he did not feel like raising tobacco after he sold his 1987 crop. Two years later, he also quit raising pigs and sold his sows. He began to complain about his legs hurting. Sometimes he was forced to stop and rest before walking to the house from the pasture land behiind the hog pen. He began showing signs of being worn out mentally too. He began to lose weight and was hollow eyed. While he always ate a big breakfast in those days, he did not eat much of a lunch or supper. I think he sensed that his state of mind and body was changing. "I don't think I am going to be around much longer; I think something is going to happen to me,'" he would say to me.

It was then that I noticed that he must have had a few minor fender-benders when I saw a few dents and scrapes on the front of his '77 Ford pickup truck. The driver's side rearview mirror was banged up. I suspected he may have hit another vehicle, did not realize it and had driven away.

Daddy's mental decline became most noticeable to me in 1994 and '95. Early on, I thought he was having TIAs or mini-strokes in the brain. But I may have been wrong. It may have actually been the onset of senility or Alzheimer's disease. I thought his brain cells may have begun to

harden, causing speech and memory problems. He had moments when he could speak fluently, like when he saw the bridge construction. Increasingly he began having trouble putting the right words together and talking in sentences. He grew absent minded when working. He seemed to be losing his mechanic's skills, forgetting how to fix routine mechanical problems on his tractor and lawnmower. He became more tense and irritable. First, he would get exasperated not being able to express himself. Then, he would get angry, exclaiming, "I can't talk!" He would get mad at me when I could not comprehend what he was trying to say or tell me what he wanted me to do. Once in a moment of desperate depression, he said: "I wish someone would just kill me." He stopped talking less and less. It was hard for me to bear seeing his personality gradually fade away, as many other caregivers most assuredly know from their own experiences with elderly Alzheimers-ridden parents.

As I realized what was happening to him, I was glad he and I had talked many years before on a very intimate and honest basis as father and son. I said what he needed to hear. I hugged him, told him how much I loved him, how proud I was to be his son, thanked him for the way he and Momma had raised me, and how much both of them had meant to me. Also for how much I appreciated what he and Mom and sacrificed for me. In a very rare moment for him, he told me that he loved me too. After my relationship with Judy Collier had ended in 1982, I was again an emotional wreck. Daddy was very supportive as I tried to recover such a personal rejection. I told him I was sorry I had never married and never gave him any grandchildren. I actually had tried very hard in my relationships. I confessed that I really loved Judy, wanted to marry her, but felt when I could not find a job I had failed her. I told him maybe I was inadequate in some way; that maybe Judy was really not the right woman for me; or that maybe we were never meant to get married or have a family. I tell that story now because more than a decade later in the mid 1990s when his mental health was failing, Daddy began asking me constantly why I had never married. I knew that I had discussed it with him several times. I wondered why he kept asking me. I guess he had just forgotten.

Though he was slipping mentally, his heart was still strong and he had not forgotten his basic survival skills. We went through a cold, snowy spell in January 1994 in Daviess County. We had a deep snow and the temperature was 20 degrees below zero for about a week. When I started shoveling snow away from the entrance of our driveway so we could get our vehicles out, Daddy came out with his shovel, and got to work clearing the snow with me. Though I pleaded with him to go back to the house and stay warm, I knew it would be futile to tell him "no." At the age of 82, he was still stubborn and thought he could work. I remember the summer of what I believe was 1994 that Shirley and her daughter Tracey Lynne Wendt brought Tracey's year old son Thomas to visit Daddy and me at home. Daddy held Thomas in his lap, but appeared to be distant and distracted, not seeming to understand who the child was. I had not seen him smile at all for a long while, but he did the day that he held baby Thomas.

Then we received the unbelievably emotional and jarring message that Franklin died suddenly on May 25, 1995, in Norfolk within two weeks of his 72nd birthday. (Franklin suffered many years with arthritis and had fallen and broken a hip. There were complications. He contracted an infection that caused his death, I was told.) When I told Daddy that Franklin had died, he said nothing, showed no emotion and had a blank stare on his face. Daddy had loved both Douglas and Franklin dearly, but he may have forgotten the two boys who always seemed to be his favorite nephews. (Douglas had died in 1981.) I realized much later that Daddy's lack of any reaction that day was a sign of even worst times to come. Franklin's death may have been

the last straw for Daddy.

A strange incident that occurred in late summer of 1995 told us that Daddy's mental condition was reaching a crisis stage. One afternoon at home, he panicked about a voice telling him that he or someone was in trouble. He drove his truck down U.S. 60 past the Elmer Smith Plant and stopped at a garage near Coast Guard Lane and Shady Rest Barbecue Restaurant. He knew a young man there who had worked on his truck engine many times. He was trying to tell him what was wrong. Shirley and I were both called and we went to see what happened to him. He was very scared and agitated that something was terribly wrong and he needed to get help. He was unable to express himself verbally. He was not physically sick but in obvious mental distress. We could not understand what had frightened him so. That's when we knew that he should see a doctor. I knew it was too dangerous for him to continue driving. I did not realize it but he was entering what Shirley and I feared was the final stage of his senility.

After someone at the store in Maceo told me that Daddy had been involved in another minor accident driving his truck, I took him to Dr. Mark Abshier for an examination. Abshier told us we should take Daddy's truck keys from him. Dr. Abshier told us that we were in for a real nightmare trying to care for Daddy.

When I told Daddy that he should give me his keys to the truck, and that he could not drive again, he became very angry. I feared he had experienced some kind of psychotic break. His personality, attitude and manner changed quickly and completely. He was not the same person we knew. He did not know me. I was his enemy from that day forth. In the following months, he would ask Shirley, "who is that man living in that bedroom back there?" "That's Glenn," she said. "That's your son." He could still call Shirley by her name but he thought I was a stranger in his house. That sickened me and I was heart broken.

Daddy's behavior and physical health worsened very dramatically in November 1995. He became incontinent, soiled himself several times, smelled of urine and body odor, and he relieved his kidneys on the floor or in a waste basket I put in his bedroom. He had forgotten how to groom himself so I washed and shaved him. However, I could not persuade him to eat anything nourishing. He picked at what food I gave him. Sugar cookies were all he would eat.

One night when we were there alone, I came out of my bedroom and saw him standing in the kitchen. He seemed startled, pulled a knife out of the silverware drawer in the kitchen cabinet, and poked it toward me in short jabs. I believe he thought I was an intruder and did not want me there. I walked slowly across the kitchen toward him, put my right hand on the blade of the very sharp knife, and took it away from him. I then hid all the knives in the house and when I went to bed from that day forth, I locked the door of my bedroom from the inside.

I was never sure how violent he would get. I recall one of the first times he said he wanted to leave and "go home." We were on the back steps and I tried to stop him. I put my hands on his shoulders, trying to forcibly get him back into the house. He resisted, became combative and pushed back. I lost control, thrusting at him with my open right hand. It was not a punch, but I struck him with a short, glancing blow under one of his eyes and broke the skin. It was a split second, almost automatic, defensive response that I have always regretted. He and I had never ever laid hands on each other in anger. After that, I let him do what he wanted when he got the notion to leave.

His behavior continued to get more bizarre each day, starting what physicians call "sundowning." He began going to bed at dusk and waking up in a few hours, then he would sit in the living room well into the night. He smoked his cigars incessantly, making me fear he would

burn himself. At about noon one day in late November, when it was getting cold outside, I came home from the newspaper to do a welfare check. I walked in the kitchen and saw that he had brought his lawnmower into the house and was working on it in the hallway near the wall furnace. He was sitting in the floor, smoking a cigar. The gas tank cap was off and I noticed he was dropping ashes from the cigar butt into the almost empty tank. I could not believe what I was seeing. It was miraculous that he had not set himself on fire. I took the lawnmower out of the house and put it in the garage. I stayed there with him the rest of the day. Shirley and I realized we could not leave him alone anymore. For several weeks, she stayed with him until I got home from work at night.

I was certain Daddy had lost his mind. A few days passed, and he began trying to leave again. It was a cold morning with the temperature in the 30s. He started going to the neighbors' houses and knocking on their doors, asking them to help him. He began going out to the highway trying to hitchhike a ride. He pleaded with me, "help me, buddy." He said he wanted to "go home."

Finally, I told him I was taking him to the doctor who I hoped would help him. When we reached OMHS, I held his hand in mine as we walked across the parking lot to the hospital. It was like I was his father, and he was my little boy. I remember how childlike and gentle he was to me because he thought I was going to help him. It was almost like he knew me again. I felt like I was leading an innocent lamb to slaughter. In my heart, I felt like I had deceived him and was almost sick with the guilt I felt. The memory of that moment haunted me for the rest of my life. I felt I had commited a mortal sin, and have never forgiven myself.

Many years earlier, when his mind was sound, he designated me as the executor of his estate and the court gave me power of attorney. I was the person who had to commit him to the hospital. He was admitted to the geriatrics ward at OMHS. Once there, he was so disoriented and fearful that he hit and cursed nurses, stripped off his pajamas, was restrained, continued to soil and urinate on himself and refused to eat anything. The staff medicated him heavily with Haldol to calm him down.

He was at the Owensboro hospital for 10 days until his Medicare hospital insurance coverage expired. We were told that our only alternative was to place him in a nursing home. Shirley and I went to several facilities in Owensboro but there were no vacancies. We learned the closest nursing home with a bed for a male was in Bowling Green. So in mid December we drove the 75 miles to Warren County late in the afternoon to look at Rosewood Manor Healthcare Center. It appeared to be a clean, modern facility that did not have that smell of urine and feces that a lot of nursing homes have, and which I despise. The staff looked very competent and professional. Without any other choice and having to make a quick decision, we both reluctantly authorized his transfer to the Bowling Green facility and Daddy was transported there by ambulance the following day.

When he got to Rosewood, Daddy was still ambulatory, and was confused by his new surroundings. We visited him on the Christmas weekend for two or three days. He seemed content to be with us as the three of us walked down one of the hallways together. But it was clear that he was alert enough to know he did not want to stay there, and was looking for his first chance to make a break for it. Once during our visit, as he was walking with my sister, he tried to escape out one of the side doors, telling her "push hard Shirley" before an alarm sounded, telling the staff that a patient was trying to leave.

He seemed healthy enough so after Christmas day, I returned home for a few days to work.

But I was summoned back quickly on Friday when his condition had swiftly worsened. The nursing staff told us his body organs were shutting down and he was dying. I was torn between hospitalizing him again at a Bowling Green hospital nearby. But his Medicare hospitalization insurance had expired. That would do no good, the staff said. That Friday was a day I would never forget. The nursing home needed a "do not resuscitate" order. I talked by phone with my attorney Louis Johnson in Owensboro and he recommended that it was the best thing to do. That there was no way Daddy would improve even if he was hospitalized and his physical health was restored. It was just delaying the inevitable. I struggled with making that decision emotionally, but my intelligence told me to not prolong his suffering and let him go peacefully. So I signed the DNR. I literally hated myself for doing that. I did not like having that kind of power over any human being. My action that day bothered me from that time forth.

On the final weekend of 1995, Daddy was confined to his bed, struggling to breath, and holding onto life by a slim thread. On Sunday, Dec. 31, his time was close at hand. Into the late evening hours as midnight approached, his chest heaved as he continued to gasp more and more for air. His eyes were open as he looked at both of us. Shirley was standing behind me as I sat by his bed. When he continued to fight for life, I sat on the side of the bed with him, trying to comfort him. I started to sob, and couldn't stop. He was not dying peacefully. He was putting up a last fight. I had put him in that position and felt responsible for his suffering.

As the hours passed, Daddy kept reaching out and looking at something or someone over my left shoulder. I thought he was beckoning Shirley to come to him. But later Shirley told me that Daddy was not reaching for her but was looking above and behind her in the room. For many years later, we both wondered if his guardian angel had come for him, or what he was seeing was either the spirit of our mother or maybe his mother Maggie. It was very mysterious and has remained in my mind.

Daddy and I had been through a lot of tough times together, and I could not conceive of him dying that night. He had never been sick much during his life, and during all my days with him. He had always been tough as nails physically. I thought he would battle away for the rest of the night. As the clock passed 12 midnight, I thought I would go back to the motel room and sleep for a while before coming back to relieve Shirley. I tossed and turned, sleeping a little, then waking up. The phone rang at about 2:15 a.m. It was Shirley. Daddy's gone, she said. I got back to his room in less than five minutes, and saw him as I came through the door. His head was tilted back on the pillow and his mouth was open, like the many times I had seen him at home after he had dozed off sitting in his living room recliner.

Within the hour after I left his room, Daddy's rapid gasping for air had stopped and a calm settled over him, Shirley said. Many years later, Shirley told me she had said to him: "Why don't you just rest, Daddy, and go to Momma." A few minutes later, he stopped breathing, she said. His time had come. He was dead.

I remember Monday, Jan. 1, 1996, as very mild for a New Year's day in Kentucky. The temperature felt in the low 50s. Shirley and I scooped up Daddy's belongings, then checked out of the motel and headed for my car. I remember the parking lot being wet like a winter rain shower had fallen during the pre-dawn hours. One of us told the nursing home staff to call Taylor-Raymond-Spear Funeral Home in Lewisport. They would pick up Daddy's body and handle the funeral arrangements. Shirley and I did not say a word as I drove back to Owensboro and Maceo. Daddy's struggle was over. We were both stunned.

Daddy's had died at 2:13 a.m. A Bowling Green physician examined our father and signed

the death certificate. Causes of death were listed by the doctor as respiratory arrest, possible pulmonary infection, poor nutrition and Alzheimer's disease. The certificate listed his occupation as "laborer." Daddy would have been 85 years old on April 12, 1996.

All Daddy's remaining Hodges relatives, plus my aunt Lillian, Josephine and Pam, from the Hatfield family, and two of his surviving boyhood buddies, attended the funeral service at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Jan.,3, 1996. Also there were Suzi Bartholomy, Ann Whittinghill and Lora Wimsatt, my three best friends from the Messenger-Inquirer.

Alton Lawhorn, our family's friend and former pastor at Maceo and Bethlehem United Methodist churches, preached the funeral sermon and included a tribute to Daddy that I had written: "In his last days Stanley always talked about going home to Lewisport. He was born and raised here, and liked to go back to the old Hodges home place on River Road, look at the farm crops and visit with cousins and nephews. He loved to talk about the great times he had with his family and boyhood buddies, Joe Taylor, Hugh Dean Taylor, Joe Hamilton, Carl Morris and Orville Miller.

"He would tell the stories about the speed of his favorite pony King and how proud he was when he was 17 years old and bought his first new car, a 1928 Whippet. He talked about how neighbors (of the Adair and Troy Bend communities) banded together during the Great Depression in the 1930s, and remembered how much fun everyone had together despite those hard times. Through good times and bad, he always cherished the great memories of Lewisport.

"Stanley was a man of strong character. Though not a church goer later in his life, he believed in the teachings of Jesus and always lived his life by Christian principles. He was a good husband and father, and was devoted to all his family and friends. He was honorable and steadfast. Truthful and trustworthy. Gentle and kind. He never refused to help a neighbor in need. As a farmer and in everything he did, he placed a high value on working hard. He always did his best, finished what he started and expected everyone working with him to do the same."

Then borrowing a few lines from my favorite western novel, Larry McMurtry's "Lonesome Dove," I concluded with these words: " 'He (Stanley) was pleasant in all weathers, never shirked a task and always showed splendid behavior.' Today he has finally come home."

Daddy was buried in Lewisport Cemetery beside our mother, Helen, and next to the nearby graves of Pop, Granny and Raymond Hatfield. May they all rest in peace. It was painful to see him die in the manner he did, angry and confused. Witnessing Daddy's decline was the most stressful, emotional experience of my life, different even than the slow death of my mother. I miss the Daddy that I knew before that awful disease destroyed him. I wished that he could have died with his mind clear and aware of his real surroundings, at peace with both Shirley and me, so we could have said goodbye. It still upsets me to think about him and his final months.

Then there is always the thought in the back of my mind that senile dementia or Alzheimer's Disease is genetically passed from one generation to the next in some families. I dread the possibility that I may die in that way too. I hope that I escape the same fate as Daddy. I have always wanted to die in a heroic, inspiring and dignified manner. All I can do is hope God will grant me that one last wish.

7

A Historian's Perspective

The early 1990s at the Messenger-Inquirer was my revival period as a writer. I finally got to do something I wanted to do. My city editors during those times, Ben Sheroan, Paul Raupp and Dan Heckel, gave me a greenlight to write what I liked.

When I went back to a full-time 40-hour work week in 1990, I increased my list of duties by writing for the new section of the paper called My Community. It was edited by Lora Wimsatt and included soft news about the achievements of elementary, high school and college students from the five-county area the M-I was serving at that time. I continued to report military news in a section of My Community called "In Our Nation's Service."

In 1994, I began writing a weekly story about the histories of the small communities in Daviess County for My Community. I researched and wrote stories about towns from Maceo, Yelvington, Knottsville and Thruston in the eastern part of the county, to Stanley, Sorgho, Curdsville, Birk City and Delaware in the west, plus stories about Utica, Sutherland, Masonville, Whitesville and Philpot. I researched the stories by looking at old editions of the M-I from the 1920s, 30s and 40s. I also used all the information available in the vast collection of records and documents in the Kentucky Room of the Daviess County Public Library, getting superior assistance from KR's professional staff Shelia Heflin, Jerry Long and Betty Spratt.

In 1992, the M-I commemorated the bicentennial year of Kentucky becoming a state by publishing a major special edition featuring stories about the history of Owensboro and Daviess County, as well as Hancock, Ohio, McLean and Muhlenberg counties. Keith Lawrence wrote the stories for the Owensboro-Daviess County section, and I did about 25 pieces about the most historic events and public figures in the four other counties in the paper's circulation area.

Keith and I joined other M-I staffers Steve Vied, Karen Owen, Tom Ross and Laura Skillman in writing stories of local history that appeared in Monday editions of the newspaper during 1992.

Among the four stories I chronicled in that series were narratives about Confederate guerrilla William Quantrill's raid through Ohio County in January 1865, Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's clash with Union cavalry in Sacramento in 1862 and the settlement of the Long Falls, which later became the town of Calhoun in McLean County.

The fourth story was probably the weirdest, most fascinating and humorous I ever discovered in my research of local history. It was headlined "Water walker kept excitement afloat along the Ohio River." The piece, found in an old edition of the Messenger and Inquirer, was about Professor Charles Oldrieve of Boston, Mass., who became an instant wonderment to the people who lived along the Ohio River from Cincinnati to Evansville in January 1907.

"Could he really walk on water?" I wrote. "No one had claimed such a feat since the days Christ walked the earth. Thousands turned out on the riverbanks in the dead of winter to see Oldrieve do it. He had bet Edward Williams of Boston $5,000 that he could walk on the water from Ohio to New Orleans in 40 days. The 38-year-old professor set out on his sensational journey from Cincinnati on New Year's Day."

How did he do it? What was the gimmick? "Wearing shoes made of cedar wood, he pushed through the water in a skating motion, accompanied all the way in a launch by two men who were handling the bet, and by his wife Charlotte who rowed a skiff behind him," I wrote. The little party of risk takers stopped at night and slept in the launch.

Oldrieve's unusual performance drew a crowd of 25,000 to the riverbank in Louisville on Jan. 6 as thousands more lined the river at New Albany, Ind. Later a boatload of Tell City residents met Oldrieve as he approached that town and the Tell City News reported the next day: "We want to say at this place that more than 50 percent of the people actually believed that a man could walk on the river."

Oldrieve arrived in Owensboro at 8 a.m. Jan. 11 as the whistle of the municipal water plant sounded and hundreds of people waited on the riverbank along Hathaway Street down to the western limits of town. There were a "few skeptics" in Owensboro, I wrote. "A reporter from the Owensboro Messenger claimed the professor was 'nothing but a clever faker' "

"He rides in the launch that is accompanying him until he gets in sight of a town and he then leaves the launch and floats past the town in his cedar shoes," the reporter said. "He didn't walk and he didn't float. He just skiddoed along."

Another writer from the Owensboro Inquirer went out on the river by boat to talk with Oldrieve while he "walked."

"I have been delayed by strong headwinds," the professor told him. "Last night I spent the night 2 1/2 miles below Rockport on the Kentucky side... For the last few days we have suffered considerably from the severe cold."

Oldrieve told the writer that he was behind time in his nautical journey but would make up for it once he got in the rapid current of the Mississippi River. "The amazing professor made it to New Orleans just under his deadline, covering the 1,600 miles in 39 days, 23 hours and 15 minutes," I wrote. "He won the bet."

The weekly stories about local history won for the Messenger-Inquirer and each of us writers shared and received a first place award from the Kentucky Press Association for the best series in the Daily Class III category in 1992.

Later in the decade, on Saturday, Jan. 16, 1999, the Messenger-Inquirer published a special two-section edition titled "Wendell Ford, A Life of Service." Several other M-I news reporters and I teamed up to write varying profiles about Ford, who was retiring after serving 25 years in the U.S. Senate.

My contribution was a piece called "The Shaping of a Senator." It was a chronicle of Ford's days growing up in the community of Thruston in eastern Daviess County, and about his father, family and the local people who influenced him the most in high school and as a young adult later when he rose from obscurity in Owensboro to become president of the National Jaycees, Kentucky's lieutenant governor, governor and in 1975 U.S. Senator.

In a taped interview at his Owensboro office, Ford also told me about his heroes of American history, his thoughts about what inspired him to begin his political career and the style he adopted in working in the U.S. Senate.

Two of the lead paragraphs read: "Unpretentious, straightforward and down to earth in manner, he has been a senator who devoted himself to being a servant of the common man. He avoided the national limelight in Washington and was more satisfied responding to the needs of his constituents. He enjoyed helping them cut through the red tape of government to find

solutions to their special problems.

"That style of government service was forged from Ford's experience as a boy and a young man," I wrote. "It was developed through his hard work on the family farm, the many friendships he had made in high school, and his years as a businessman and a member of the Jaycees in Owensboro and beyond."

I also learned that Ford's political philosophy came from reading about the work of his hero Henry Clay and one of the Founding Fathers, Alexander Hamilton.

"Clay was the Great Compromiser," Clay told me. "He said compromise is negotiated hurt ---- you have to give up something that hurts. I have to give up something that hurts --- before we can finally get to an agreement. In the Senate, you don't get everything you want, and it is a little slow in coming. That's one reason I never make many speeches, because I try to sit down at the table and work things out. Once you worked things out and you've got the votes --- as Dad used to say 'If you've got the votes let them talk.' That's the way I've operated the whole 24 years."

He continued: "Hamilton said, In these halls (the House of Representatives and the Senate) the people's voice shall be heard by their immediate representative. I decided when I went to Washington I would not make (my vote) a personal vote, but a state vote based on what the people at home wanted. Sometimes it was hard to determine where the majority was. Then you had to do what the people wanted you to do. On balance, I hope I cast my 9,806 votes the way they wanted me to."

My series of history pieces published several years later in the Sunday Perspective section of the Messenger-Inquirer was easily the most satisfying work I have done as a writer and historian. The long narratives, more than 40 of them written between June 1999 and December 2004, focused on public figures and historic events who lived in/or occurred in Owensboro and Daviess and Hancock counties, dating back to 1800.

I meticulously sought and selected all the subjects to instantly grab the reader's interest and hold it to the last word if I could. I knew I was nearing the end of my career so I put on a full-court press, went all-out, full bore, in writing those pieces. I did exhaustive research for the articles and was passionate in writing them. I wanted to write stories that had never been told. I wanted to leave behind something of literary value so people would never forget the stories I had told.

They were stories I felt compelled to tell; I had been thinking about some of them for 20 years. A few of them were about people I had met, knew or admired. They were stories of men and women who made huge contributions to the history of their local communities. I wanted my readers to know them. In scope and depth, the stories in that series were the best of my best, my last great attempt to achieve excellence. They were what I regarded as my "60 Minutes" stories. I enjoyed writing them and was satisfied and proud of everyone of them.

These were the stories and profiles that still stand out in my memory. I wrote about the county's namesake Joseph Daviess and his role in the trial of Aaron Burr in 1804; entrepreneur, civic leader and radio icon LeRoy Woodward in the 1950s; Christmas in Owensboro during wartime 1941; Robert Shaw's frustrated rampage and death at Waitman Station in Hancock County; Clemmie Wolf, the nurse who sacrificed herself in treating victims of the great flu epidemic in 1917 in Owensboro; my great-great-great grandmother Hannah Lewis, who struggled and survived in raising her family after her husband died in 1813 during pioneer days at Lewisport; the legacy of Owensboro mayor Fred Weir; the brilliant businessman Roy Burlew

who established General Electric as Owensboro's biggest industry in the 1940s; William G. Stevenson, who brought Texas Gas Transmission Corp. to Owensboro; Col. Benjamin Hawes, a man of integrity as Owensboro mayor; WOMI radio pioneers Hugh and Cliffordean Potter; smart and resourceful civic leader Mike Callas; the people's man Waitman Taylor Sr. of Lewisport; the dreams and vision of Dr. Reginald and Hattie Neblett, pioneer leaders of the African American community in Owensboro; the legendary and friendly restaurateur Gabe Fiorella; John Swindell Wright, an Owensboro physicist who helped build America's first atomic bomb; grocer and super market trailblazer Wyndall Smith; the unforgettable, colorful legislator and city prosecutor Elmer Brown; the "Human Landmark," Owensboro police chief Vernie Bidwell; the fabulous "Mr. Jim Ellis," millionaire business man and founder of the horse track Ellis Park; Harry Truman and his presidential campaign whistlestop in Owensboro in 1948; the Fullenwider brothers of Maceo, all in World War II and separated from their family; and Owensboro's celebration of the end of World War II in August 1945.

The best interview I may ever have conducted took place in October 1999 as I was writing the series of historical pieces for the Perspective section. The interview was with my friend, Owensboro pharmacist W. Grady Harreld III, a Marine officer whose descriptive story of service in the Vietnam War I found very graphic and totally frank. Talking to a combat veteran of that war, especially a Marine, was what I had been waiting to do since 1968.

Harreld, who was 57 years old when we did the interview, was the third generation of his family to run a pharmacy in Owensboro. His grandfather, W. Grady Harreld, operated a drugstore in Lewisport until 1931 (he was my parents' druggist there) when he moved to Daviess County. Grady's father, W. Grady Harreld Jr., took over management of the family business in the middle 1930s at a drugstore at Fourth and Allen streets, across the street from the old M-I building in downtown Owensboro.

After graduating from the University of Kentucky, Grady III joined the Marine Corps in August 1966 and completed officers training at Quantico, Va., He got to Vietnam on Oct. 1, 1967. At the beginning of his 13-month tour there, Harreld was a 24-year-old lieutenant in command of a platoon of 50 men in Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment. Harreld's platoon operated in territory inside and just south of the Demilitarized Zone (the 25-mile wide sector that stretched from the South China Sea to Laos) in the I Corps area. He was based in Camp Carroll with a company size unit of approximately 200 Marines. Their orders were to conduct platoon-size search and destroy missions south of the DMZ.

I interviewed Harreld months before the April 30, 2000, commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. He graciously welcomed my request to talk about his service. I was not sure if he had ever talked about his 'Nam experience with anyone as he and I sat down across from each other in his upstairs office at his drugstore, located then on Triplett Street near the Owensboro-Daviess County hospital. I tried to put him at ease, letting him know that we were just two friends and Vietnam era veterans having a casual conversation about the war. I was very interested in what he had to say. I wanted him to feel totally comfortable as we talked about what he saw and was thinking during combat. I was pleased and thrilled by his candor. I still have my notes from that interview, and some of his answers to my questions stand out vividly in my mind.

In the opening paragraphs of the narrative I wrote many months later, I cut straight to the heart of Harreld's most vivid memories about the war and asked his opinion of America's

involvement in that long, long conflict:

"Today almost 32 years after leaving Vietnam, Harreld has never forgotten the war," I wrote. "The smell of diesel fuel and the sound of helicopters remind him of his days there. He remembers his first firefight as a defining of his life and cannot forget the three Marines who died that day. He reflects on how the (anti-war) protests back home affected him and his comrades. And like many other veterans who survived the conflict, Harreld insists Vietnam was a war the United States should have won."

When was your first firefight?, I asked as we began our conversation. It was in what the Marines called Operation Kentucky, occuring a month after Harreld arrived "in country," he replied. "Our intelligence people had gotten word that a good size North Vietnamese army regiment was patrolling and working just south of the DMZ. The objective of our operation was to go up there and find them, make contact and push them back into North Vietnam."

Harreld's unit ran into the enemy while it approached a treeline as they were crossing a field of high grass and scrub. "We knew they (NVA) were there," Grady told me. Two platoons under the command of Capt. Mike Rich were out on point, Harreld said. "My platoon was moving parallel to the other platoon. Our squad was out front, 100 yards ahead of the two squads behind us."

About 75 yards from the treeline, Grady's men started "recon-firing," attempting to draw fire. "When we got no response we advanced. We got within 25 to 30 meters of the treeline and all hell broke loose," he said. Harreld's men was suddenly pinned down by strong fire from the trees. Cpl. Larry Graham (Bo) Buford, one of Harreld's squad leaders, was shot in the neck. "He was practically next to me. I saw him go down. I got to his side and called for a corpsman but I could tell by the look in his eyes. He waved me off like (to say) 'I'm gone.' "

"When I got to Buford, a North Vietnamese threw a grenade at me. It landed right at my feet. To this day I can still see the fuse. The thing was a dud and didn't explode."

Harreld said that as he left Buford's side, the Navy corpsman, James Keith "Doc" Oxley, came running to the wounded man's aid and was shot in the chest. "He was right behind me," Grady said. "There was no reason why I shouldn't have been shot too. I was right between both of them."

"My platoon sergeant was still with me and we couldn't figure out why they were getting so close to us and being so accurate. Finally one of our men saw a 'spider trap.' "(a hole about the width of a man's body with turf on the top so the man can pop up and fire his weapon..) Two Marines discovered the concealed gun emplacement, ran up and threw a grenade into it, Harreld said. As the Marines were returning, their M-60 machine gunner, Donald Willis Gebhart, was shot and killed.

By that time, Harreld's squads were receiving flanking fire. "To make matters worse I couldn't bring up my other two squads; they were pinned down from the fire on our left flank," he said. Harreld saw a B-52 bomb crater and he and 10 of his men jumped into it. "We were firing over the edge and they were firing back."

Capt. Rich radioed Harreld that the company was engaged along the whole front of about 250 North Vietnamese. But the NVA saw another Marine company advancing and the flanking fire stopped. Two other squads "came up and relieved us and we then advanced toward the treeline. They backed off and we found about eight NVA dead there," Harreld said.

At dawn on Sunday, Jan. 21, 1968, Harreld's unit was not far away when the North Vietnamese Army launched its assault on the Marine force at Khe Sahn, an action beginning the

now historic 11-week seige. The U.S. responded ferociously to the attack with massive Air Force bombings of the North Vietnamese Army positions that prevented the NVA from scaling the heavily fortified hilltop redoubts held by the Marines. The assault on Khe Sanh may have been implemented to distract American and South Vietnamese forces from another NVA military operation that started about 10 days later.

At 2:35 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 30, President Johnson's national security director Walt Rostow received a report at the White House that the U.S. Embassy and the South Vietnam's Presidential Palace in Saigon were under heavy mortar fire, historians later disclosed. The totally unexpected VC attacks broke a truce in the middle of the three-day Buddhist celebration of the Lunar New Year known as Tet. About 70,000 VC guerrillas launched surprise attacks in 36 of the 44 provincial capitals in South Vietnam. Their objective was to spark uprisings by the population of South Vietnam and topple the Saigon government.

In their penetration deep within Saigon's defenses, VC assault teams used prearranged codes to pick up weapons hidden in 400 homes in the capital city, according to historians and news reports. American forces fought back with superior firepower on the ground and in the air, winning every battle and killing 52,000 Communists in what would be a two-month-long engagement. A relative few Americans and South Vietnamese were killed, but the surprise attacks deep into South Vietnam cities revealed a disastrous intelligence breakdown by the U.S. military.

The real clincher occurred on the third day of the Tet offensive when South Vietnam's national police chief, Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, stopped a South Vietnamese patrol marching Vietcong prisoners through the Cholon district of Saigon. In front of photographers and newsreel cameras, Loan put his pistol to the side of the VC prisoner head and fired. The VC winced, then fell like a rock to the street, blood pouring from his head .When the photo and videotape appeared in newspapers and the American television networks on Thursday, the third day of the offensive, "poll measurements recorded the most decisive single drop in American support of the Vietnam War," historian Taylor Branch wrote years later.

Where was Harreld during the enemy offensive?, I asked. "I was at Cam Lo (32.6 kilometers east of Khe Sahn in Quang Tri Province) on a hill in a bunker on Route 9, the night Tet started. The bunker was big enough for 30 men. We could see an old French fort. Ten Marines were there about two miles away under heavy assault. They radioed that they needed our help. We went down Route 9 and it was just getting daylight when we got to the fort. Unfortunately for them (the NVA) they retreated right into us. I don't know how many we killed. We killed a bunch. They were finished and bringing their wounded back and trying to get across the Can Lo river, and get away from us. It was like a shooting quail. By noon that day, all the NV bodies had been collected. They were stacked up like firewood there were about 150 of them. They never overran that fort."

Then Harreld stressed: "The North Vietnamese didn't win the Tet offensive. It wasn't a positive thing for them. Because they didn't take Hue, didn't take Saigon or Cam Lo. They didn't even take the French fort. They caused a lot of uproar and suffered a lot of casualties and withdrew. But somehow for the (American) people back home, Tet was a victory for the North Vietnamese. It was a political victory for North Vietnam."

Could the U.S. have won the war? I asked. "Easily, easily," Harreld said.

By the end of 1968, did you think the war was worth winning? Maybe not, the former Marine lieutenant admitted. "Ever since World War II, the U.S. had a policy to contain communism. We

thought that should be done. Keep the NVA in North Vietnam. The main problem with the war was the South Vietnamese government was corrupt and the South Vietnamese army was incompetent. That's when that country ---- as far as the cities --- and the North Vietnamese were completely at bay. The South Vietnamese were armed to the teeth. They had better hardware and technology but they didn't want to fight. They didn't last any time." In the end, they abandoned tanks, artillery pieces and helicopters, Harreld said.

" The U.S. Marines worked very little with ARVN troops," Harreld pointed out. "I didn't want them on our flank for anything."

How did the anti-war demonstrations back in the states affect the morale of the Marines in your area in Vietnam? "When I first went there, there was some demonstrating going on in the states," he said. "We were an all volunteer unit. The morale was good. Nobody was saying 'why am I here?' I don't remember it being brought up as a factor. But in the year I was there, even the troopers realized that we weren't doing all we could to do to win that war. We were not even coming close."

Were you being held back; what could have been done? "It just started to occur to us that that we're taking this hill and that hill, cleaning out the DMZ. The Marines were being used in defensive action, search and destroy missions losing five to 10 men men and then being pulled back. By the time I left, the troopers were all catching on. When you had a squad set ambushes at night, if they saw NVA approaching their ambush, they let them pass."

"When I got the word they were doing that, I said why shouldn't we?," Harreld said. "That is what the Army and Marines were starting to realize in the summer of '68, Harreld declared. "Why are we over here? We should be invading North Vietnam."

When he left Vietnam in 1968, Harreld said U.S. forces had basically "cleaned out" the country and turned it over to the South Vietnamese. "We had done our job," he said. Then the U.S. withdrawal began after President Nixon took office. Harreld blamed the eventual American defeat on a corrupt South Vietnamese government and a South Vietnamese army "that wouldn't fight."

Did you have any regrets when you left Vietnam? "None. No regrets. I was one of the lucky ones. I could have been laying up in a veterans hospital with no legs.... " But then Harreld paused and qualified his statement. "The only regret I had was for the American boys that didn't survive to raise a family, go to school. I look at the war now as a big fiasco. A waste. That's why I had regrets about the people who lost their lives there. It seems like it was for nothing."

Do you still think about the men you lost? I asked. "Just about every day. It doesn't go away. Buford had twin boys. Several had children born while they were in Vietnam and they never got to see them."

Grady told me that he had never visited the "Wall" of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. "That's by design," he said. He went twice to see the "Touring Wall" that first came to Owensboro in 1998. "I didn't even look for my friends' names. I didn't want to see them. I went because I wanted to see the people who went. I was really pleased with the turnout."

Do you think our country let our soldiers, you and your Marines down? "I think the politicians did. I think Washington did. They let me down, let the people down, civilians and military, the whole deal!"

After going over the notes of that interview with Harreld, I tried to summarize my feelings about the war in the lead of my story printed in the Sunday, April 30, 2000, edition of the M-I:

"Twenty five years ago today, the city of Saigon fell and the war in Vietnam ended. The

United States yielded to defeat in a war that most of us who lived through those times wished our country had never fought. Our armed forces won virtually every battle in the field but lost the war after anti-war demonstrations on the homefront deeply divided the national and eventually forced gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops. When it was over, more than 58,000 Americans (that number has increased in last 10 years) had died in a lost cause. While some young people in the 1960s opposed military service and protested the war effort, others were drafted and had no other choice but to serve. Others (like me), inspired by fathers, uncles and cousins who served in World War II, thought it was their duty to answer their country's call."

I agreed with my friend Grady's views from his perspective as a Marine who actually fought in Vietnam. I wanted his battlefield description of the war expressed in my April 2000 piece. If turned loose, the Marines and Army soldiers could probably have run the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese out of South Vietnam. But early on, during my active duty service in the Navy back here in the states in 1967-68, Our troops were not going to be allowed to do that. It was easy to see from a civilian's perspective here in the states that no military progress was being made in South Vietnam. To complete their mission of securing Vietnam from the Communists, the United States would have to destroy most of South Vietnam.

I thought getting into that war was a big mistake. I still remember those days when I was a kid and heard the radio news report about the fall of Dien Bien Phu. In college, I heard no sound reasoning from our politicians for the United States to continue sending more troops to what I considered a civil war. What kind of threat would Communists in North Vietnam really pose to the United States mainland? None of that Cold War argument made any sense to me. When the Tet Offensive ended, American forces fought every attack, but I realized that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong could penetrate and fight in any city or village in South Vietnam, any time they wanted. That was the NVA's victory. That's when people back in the United States really saw what was happening in South Vietnam. They concluded that the war there could continue for years with no end in sight. That's when American politicians also got the message and thoughts of withdrawal from Vietnam took hold in the states.

I thought the United States should have begun pulling troops out in 1964, as President Kennedy, in August 1963 months before his assassination, had indicated he planned to do. Continuing that war was a waste of too many good American service men and women. It tore our nation apart for generations to come, and the American soldiers and Marines who returned home would bear the physical and mental scars of that wasteful war for the rest of their lives.

Finally, the most potentially compelling story I found in researching that history series was the one I could not write for the newspaper. So I saved it. To use some time later. I discovered the background for this specific, untold piece after June 27, 1999, when the Messenger-Inquirer published my story of Lt. John M. Spalding of Owensboro who led a platoon of the 1st Infantry Division ashore at Omaha Beach during the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. Spalding's story was a study in triumph and tragedy.

John Martin Spalding was a well known public figure in Owensboro before World War II. The son of Mary Margaret and Hugh Clements Spalding, John had worked at the Messenger-Inquirer in the early 1930s as a sports writer. He wrote a column called "Sports Sparks" and his byline was a familiar, popular one in the paper's sports section. He grew up in the West Fifth Street neighborhood and attended St. Frances Academy. Spalding worked at the Interstate Store in downtown Owensboro before going into the Army.

When America entered World War II in Europe, Spalding joined the Army and quickly advanced as an officer in the 1st Division (the Big Red One) sent to England in early 1944 to prepare for the Allied invasion of Europe.

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the 29-year-old Spalding was the leader of 32 men assigned to assault Easy Red, the sector of beach between the villages of Colleville and St. Laurent, just inland from the Normandy coast. The platoon was in the 16th Regiment of the Army's 1st Division (the Big Red One) which had orders to take the beach with the 116th Regiment of the 29th Division. Of the men who landed at Omaha Beach with Spalding, two were killed and seven wounded.

On June 14, 1944, Spalding wrote a reassuring letter to Birdie Gasser, then sports editor at the Messenger-Inquirer. Spalding told Gasser about the action at Omaha Beach and beyond. "Just a few hurried lines to let you know I am OK and feeling fine. So far I've been lucky as hell. The men did a marvelous job. Everything is coming along fine. The best of luck, John."

Spalding first described his experience at Omaha Beach in a more emotional and vivid letter to his mother June 28, 1944:

Dear mother,

This afternoon I received your letter of 13 June and as always I was happy to hear from you and learn all is well at home. Well, mother, when Mrs. Hagan woke you up at 4 a.m. (your time) Johnny and his men were raising hell with a bunch of Jerries in a strong point overlooking the beach. We cleaned it out and those we didn't kill, we captured. My section captured as many prisoners that morning as we had men in our section. In addition to that, we killed quite a few of the no good sons of ------. Some of the prisoners we took were scared as hell, others extremely arrogant. One of the Hermans we had cornered threw his hand grenades at us before we took him. We were within 15 yards of him. Fortunately none of the grenades hurt any of us. We should have shot him but we didn't. He was a young Nazi, the type which is crazy about Hitler.

The beach where we landed was a tough nut to crack and, as Ernie Pyle wrote, it's a miracle any of us survived it. Where we hit we found the Germans' morale high. Their equipment excellent and plentiful. Contrary to some reports, the German soldier is given the best of everything by his army and they fought like hell when we hit the beaches. I know for I hit them in the first wave and my section was really on the beam that morning and did an outstanding job. One of the German non-coms we captured said he did not know how we managed to cross the beach. Now that I look back and think it over I wonder myself. As I said before, the Good Lord took care of me. After almost drowning and then saving one of my men from drowning I was considerably shaken up. I saw men fall in front of me, to my right and left. Never once did I look back. Completely soaked, my equipment, heavy when dry, seemed to weigh a ton when I came out of the water. Evidently in inflating my life belt after hitting water over my head, I lost my rifle. I tried to run across the beach but I couldn't. I had swallowed too much water. I walked as far as I could, standing up, realizing that we had to get off the 400 yards of open beach and up the cliff. I stopped once on the beach, just long enough to take off the legging and shoe of a man in my section who had been hit in the foot. He (Pvt. William Roper, a rifleman) couldn't seem to reach his legging lace. As we crossed the beach, mines went off, artillery and mortar shells fell all around us and from the pillboxes and trenches on the cliffs, the Hermans poured hundreds of rounds of machine gun and rifle fire into us. We waded through mine fields and climbed over barbwire. To hell with it! We knew our only chance was to get across the beach and up the cliff. We made it up despite the mines and tripwires strung along our path as we went up the cliff.

After we got up we really went to work on Herman and gave him a hell of a beating. It was rough --- awful rough --- coming in to the beach and more than once we thought the boat was going to turn over. Many of the men were seasick. We were dropped quite far out in the water and had to pick our way through water and underwater obstacles. All the time under fire. In plain language, it was hell and those of us who are still around are lucky. I wasn't even scratched but the bullets came so close I could almost feel them. Then after we got inland we had snipers to contend with.

Did you get my watch? I sent it from England. I sent several coins and two small German emblems home yesterday. Let me know when you get them. My regards to all, keep up your prayers for me, and let me hear from you often.

Your loving son, John

In an interview with Messenger-Inquirer writer Ida Cockriel after returning to Owensboro on sick leave in May 1945, Spalding talked more about his section's action at Omaha Beach and later on D-Day. "We prayed, we fought and we cussed a little I guess," He said seriously. But then Spalding smiled, and added: "You know I wrote my mother once that I was doing two things, praying a while then cussing a little. She wrote back and said the praying was just fine but the cussing was bad. You know when a soldier prays on the battlefield, he really means it. He's not just talking to hear himself talk. He's really talking with God."

In the same interview, Spalding told Cockriel that his 1st Division troops began preparing for the invasion of France when they were transported to England in early 1944. He and his outfit underwent two months of the most rigid training they ever experienced during the war, Spalding said. That training included mock landings along a portion of an English beach that had been fortified and resembled Normandy beaches as much as possible. The troops experienced several stand-downs before the invasion received the greenlight, but H-hour finally arrived and Spalding's unit was taken to a marshaling area where they waited aboard transport ships. "We had been briefed for H-hour but of course didn't know when it would arrive," Spalding said. "Then finally at 10 o'clock one night (June 5) we were called together and told that H-hour would be the next morning."

After midnight, June 6, boats of the invasion fleet began heading across the English Channel to a rally point. There the troops boarded Navy LCVP's (landing craft) and rendezvoused at about 4 a.m. Then the small motor-powered craft moved toward the beaches, Spalding said, "The sea was rough and that didn't help matters any. We were getting closer and closer. Of course there were lumps in our throat, but we had a job to do and we were going to do it."

The Navy invasion craft dropped their ramps about 200 yards from the shore, Spalding said. "We landed in water waist deep on what was an unexpected sandbar. When we walked off it we hit deep water and had to swim for it. Some of us lost our carbines."

After swimming 50 feet, the soldiers reached shallow water and were forced to cross 400 yards of open beach while under fire, Spalding said. Carrying the heavy packs of equipment, the waterlogged GIs could not run but moved as quickly as they could.

Spalding's platoon was isolated on the far right flank of their sector of beach and had landed where the German defenses weren't as strong. They made it up the bluff, silenced machine guns in a pillbox, secured Easy Red, and were the first American troops to take German prisoners.

Lt. Spalding said he was in "several tight spots" on D-Day and afterward, but miraculously escaped death. He recalled one incident to Cockriel. "We had cleared a hedgerow, or so I thought," Spalding said. "Herman is a smart guy. He lets you get within 15 feet of him then

opens up on you. So it was then. I thought we had taken care of the last one and was walking up the hedgerow when suddenly a German stuck his rifle at me three feet in front of me. How he missed I don't know. I jumped. He shot. I threw a hand grenade and heard nothing more of him."

Also sometime during the assault on the beach a bullet severed the mouthpiece from the wire of the field radio he was carrying. He discovered it when he grabbed his radio and tried to talk with his company commander.

The official Army account of Spalding's combat on Omaha Beach was recorded by Sgt. Forrest Pogue of the Army's Historical Division in an interview in February 1945. Pogue's conversation with Spalding was quoted prominently in historian Stephen Ambrose's book "D-Day, June 6, 1944," published in 1994.

On July 2, 1944, Spalding and four other members of his regiment were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by Gen. Eisenhower, according to an Associated Press report published in the M-I July 4.

Lt. Spalding and other men of the 1st Division stood at attention on the lawn of an old gray chateau in Normandy when jeeps carrying Eisenhower, Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley and Maj. Gen. Leonard Gerow halted before their ranks. Eisenhower jumped out of the jeep, smiling, wearing an Air Force jacket belted at the waist and his trousers tucked into parachute trooper boots, the report said. Ike moved down the double rank, asking each man his job and where he was from in the United States. After pinning on the medals, Eisenhower called the group around him. "I'm not going to make a speech," he said. "But this simple little ceremony gives me opportunity to come over here and, through you, say thanks. You are one of the finest regiments in our army."

"I know your record from the day you landed in North Africa and through Sicily. I am beginning to think that your regiment is a sort of praetorian guard which goes along with me and gives me luck," Eisenhower continued. The supreme commander of allied forces told the men that he knew they wanted to be taken off the line but they would have to continue pressing the Germans. "You've got what it takes to finish the job. If you will, do me a favor when you go back...spread the word through the regiment that I am terrifically proud and grateful to them. To all you fellows, good luck, keep on the top of them, and so long."

After D-Day, the 1st Division continued its push eastward across Europe. With Gen. Courtney Hodges's 1st Army, Spalding's whole divison pursued the Germans across France through Arigny, Coutances, Mayenne, Chartres and Soissons. Spalding and his men were among the first 1st Army units into Paris. "The people were just plain crazy with joy over their deliverance," Spalding said as his troops passed through one sector of Paris in August 1944.

After that, the 1st Army moved on to Belgium. Spalding said he was wounded in the leg by shrapnel on Sept. 27, 1944, while riding a jeep with several other men east of Aachen. He was in the hospital for two months and was awarded the Purple Heart. By Jan. 1, 1945, he had rejoined his outfit to fight in the Battle of the Bulge.

When Spalding's unit got to the Roer River in Germany, he took sick with a temperature of 103 and was sent to the base hospital, then to Paris. He was diagnosed with battle fatigue and ordered home. Spalding returned to the United States on sick leave May 5.

After the war, Spalding represented Owensboro in the Kentucky General Assembly for two consecutive terms, beginning in November 1947. He was also in charge of the men's department at Interstate Store for more than 20 years.

Spalding returned from the war as a hero, but combat had changed him. His life as a civilian

began to unravel and go downhill. At the conclusion of the story I wrote about Spalding in 1999, I mentioned that on the night of Thursday, Nov. 5, 1959, he was shot and killed by his wife. In deference to the Spalding family I never told the story of what I had learned about the murder and its aftermath. But it can be told now.

The first report of the murder was run on Page 1A with a picture: "John M. Spalding, 45, former state legislator and holder of the Distinguished Service Cross, was found shot to death in his home today. His wife, Mary Christine Spalding, 36, is being held without bond on a warrant charging her with willful murder."

The facts of what happened that night of the murder at 110 E. 20th St. provide a very grim narrative.

Capt. James Presson of the Owensboro Police Department arrived at the Spaldings' house to investigate soon after the death was reported. He said Mrs. Spalding told him that she had gone out into the front yard and called across the street to a neighbor to phone for an ambulance. She said her husband was lying on the floor. Presson told a reporter afterward that the body of Spalding was found by an ambulance attendant lying beside the bed with the bedclothing wrapped around him.

Spalding had been shot with a .22 caliber bullet which entered the left side of his chest below the ribs and came out of the right side of his back. The slug was found by Coroner James H. Davis Jr. when he removed the bedclothing from Spalding's body.

Gilbert Love, Mary's brother, was told about the incident, soon arrived at his sister's house, and asked her what happened, according to the newspaper report. Mrs. Spalding told him,. "Something happened. I don't know what it was."

The gun with which Spalding was slain was not immediately found at the death scene by the investigating officers or the coroner. But after a search of the premises, Davis located a single-shot rifle in the attic. The weapon was apparently brand-new, the newspaper reported. The rifle and slug were sent to the FBI in Washington for tests.

The police said that Mrs. Spalding stated that she and her husband had argued that night, the M-I reported. The shooting occurred at about 11 p.m. while the couple's three children, ages 9 to 12, were asleep in another bedroom.

When the ambulance driver, Allan Harl of Glenn Funeral Home, went into the house and found the body, Mrs. Spalding said she wanted her husband taken to the hospital. Harl told her that Spalding was dead.

"She was just as spacy as she could be," Harl told me in an interview in 2000. "She had completely flipped out. She couldn't tell me what day it was. She couldn't speak coherently about anything. But she had enough gumption to hide the gun."

Mrs. Spalding was taken into custody and driven to the Daviess County jail. The next day County Judge T.B. Birkhead scheduled Mrs. Spalding's hearing for 9:30 a.m. Nov. 12 in Quarterly Court. The newspaper reported that Mrs. Spalding appeared stunned as she stood briefly before the court.

Owensboro attorney John D. Miller had gone to the jail after Mary Spalding was arrested. Mary's brother Gilbert, then of Rose Street, Owensboro, had contacted Miller and his partner Calvin Ray Robinson to represent Mary on the murder charge. Both lawyers had been handling the divorce proceedings for John and Mary.

"It was the most pathetic case I ever had," Miller told me in an interview years later. "I was alone with her at the jail. I asked her, 'what happened Mary?' She said, 'I don't know. The wind

was blowing. I couldn't keep the snow out of the house. I couldn't keep the doors closed and the elephants kept coming in. When she said that, I got up and left."

Miller told me that he had also gone into the Spaldings' house and seen that the family had been living in squalid conditions. He said the interior of the house were "dilapidated and filthy," littered with garbage. Miller said he had also talked with John Spalding after the divorce proceedings began and John told Miller that he was going to "make my daughter first sergeant" and put everything back into order at the Spalding home.

John Spalding and Mary Christine Love were married Oct. 31, 1946, in Henderson. The couple bought the house on East 20th Street in 1948 and were living there with their three children, Mary Margaret, 12, John Martin Jr., 10, and Hershel, 9 (these ages July 1959).

According to circuit court records, Mary Spalding sued her husband for divorce in October 1959, saying he had "habitually indulged in alcoholic drink to the extent of remaining drunk in an habitual manner for more than one year preceding the complaint" and behaved toward her "in a cruel and inhuman manner."

She wanted custody of the children, the house, alimony and $300 a month in child support. She asked to be supported because of "her unstable physical condition."

After the wilful murder charge was filed, Mary Spalding pleaded not guilty in her arraignment and was sent to the Kentucky State Hospital in Hopkinsville for observation. She was returned to Owensboro in January 1960 to attend a lunacy inquest before a Daviess Circuit Court jury.

At the inquest, Joseph Banken, who was then county's detective in Daviess County, read to the jury an affidavit from the state hospital stating that two examining physicians believed she needed further treatment and added that "it would be unwise and against the best interest of the patient" to return her to Owensboro to stand trial for her husband's murder. The affidavit was signed by Dr. M.S. Akaydin, clincial director at Western State, and Dr. Anastasia Sillins, staff physician.

County Judge pro tem Bill Gant said at the inquest that he had talked to Mary Spalding after the slaying when she was being interviewed to determine if she was mentally competent to stand trial. Gant said she seemed "dazed and unable to grasp anything." According to a newspaper report, Gant said she would start to answer a question and then wander off to some other subject or fail to complete the answer.

Gant, who knew Mrs. Spalding and signed the papers sending her to Hopkinsville for observation, said as juvenile judge he had investigated charges that Mrs. Spalding was neglecting her three children. Gant said that on occasions Mary locked her children in the house to keep them from going to school. "She once threatened to take the lives of the kids although she professed to love them," he told the court.

Gant said she once told him that "her troubles were tied up in her husband and if she could get rid of him, her troubles would be over." Gant had investigated the possibility of getting help for Mary Spalding from the Veterans Administration but was advised that the VA had no facilities for treating veterans' dependents with mental illness.

Dr. Frederick Ehrman, a Louisville psychiatrist, made a lengthy examination of Mary Spalding, according to Calvin Robinson. The doctor reported she was in a attitude of "quiet detachment, not hostile but totally disinterested." Her speech was hesitant and she was bothered by voices, Ehrman said in his report. The doctor said she attributed her condition to the "cruelty and possessiveness of her husband. Dr. Ehrman ended his report by saying Mary Spalding was

"definitely psychotic" and in no shape to stand trial.

The jury's verdict was that Mary Spalding was mentally incompetent to be tried for the murder. After the jury handed down its verdict, Circuit Judge Thomas Hennessey pointed out that she should be brought back to Daviess County to face prosecution for the charge if she regained soundness of mind.

Miller, who described Spalding as a "functioning alcoholic" in 1959, said he would never forget what radio commentator Paul Harvey said on his national news report the day after John Spalding's death. "There was another casualty of World War II last night," said Harvey as he announced Spalding's murder on the national broadcast, Miller noted.

The court appointed Miller as Mary Spalding's guardian during her hospitalization and after she was released and returned to Owensboro. She became a sort of "bag lady" who wandered aimlessly around Owensboro, Miller said. "She would come by the office frequently to get 5 or 10 dollars. The girls (in the office) were instructed to give it to her. Then she would turn up in New Jersey and New York, and people would call me. She had my name on her."

"It was a case about war not murder," Miller said of John Spalding's death. "All the veterans came home with problems that lingered after the war. It was hard for men like Spalding to come back from the war and adjust."

The Spaldings' youngest child, Herschel Spalding, told a Messenger-Inquirer reporter in 1995 that his mother was in and out of mental institutions for several years, but was eventually determined to be no threat to herself or others. She died in 1991 at age of 67 and was buried near Calhoun.

In one of life's most tragic and extreme examples of irony, Lt. John Spalding had survived the hail of German machine gun fire on Omaha Beach to be killed by his wife in his own bedroom in peacetime, years after the war.

By early 2005 I had reached a point where I had run out of high quality stories and profiles that reached the high standard of excellence I had set with the others. That body of work was the best I could produce. I decided I could not top myself any further, and, at that point, with my editor's permission, I discontinued writing the history series.

8

On the Road to the Millenium

The decade of the 1980s was a struggle for me personally and financially. The years between 1981 and 1984 were the roughest. I lost the job at the Owensboro tire company in December 1981, then drew some unemployment insurance, was rescued for a few months by the $2,800 I earned on my tobacco sales and the $750 I received from cashing in my John Hancock life insurance policy. I had to spend most of that money paying Daddy my share of expenses on our tobacco crop and also pay off credit card debts.

With no job but with money in the bank, I still felt confident in January 1982 that I would find a full-time job in Evansville so I could continue my relationship with Judy. I made that gamble, not totally aware of the impact that a painful national economic recession was having on the job market in both Evansville and Owensboro. I worked at every farming job I could find, but I spent most of the money I had in the bank, paying bills and personal expenses. By summertime 1982, I had paid off all my debts, but was flat broke for the first and only time in my life. I had $7.23 in the bank on June 10, 1982. That was when Judy concluded she was going to date other men. She knew that I had run out of money and did not have any good prospects getting a job. I spent the last half of 1982, looking for jobs cutting or stripping tobacco, and trying to save my relationship with Judy.

By the first quarter of 1983, I knew that I had failed Judy and that our relationship was finally over. The emotional pain I felt when I lost her tore me apart emotionally. I thought about it for the rest of my life. I did not go back to Evansville or Henderson for an entire year. In the first quarter of 1983, I drove to Lexington each week, and lived with my cousin Gary Hatfield while I looked for public relations jobs in Fayette County. I had a few interviews but no one was hiring anyone for those kind of positions. (Gary was recently divorced from his wife Hazel, and was living in an apartment.) I returned to Maceo on weekends to take care of Daddy's business. He was in good health, had plenty of money and was operating very independently. So I was able to continue to look for work in Lexington without worrying about him.

Oddly enough, when it seemed that I had hit rock bottom, my good kharma or maybe it was my guardian angel, saved me. I received $4,700 from the sale of my uncle Raymond's house when his estate was settled. It was half of the share that my mother would have received from the sale of her parents' home in Lewisport. (Shirley also received her share.) I received payments in September 1983 and March 9, 1984. Meanwhile I continued working for Maceo and Lewisport farmers. By September 1984 I swallowed my pride and took a part-time job at the Messenger-Inquirer.

By the end of the 1980s, I also lost my most favorite automobile ever when my beloved 1972 Pontiac LeMans was seriously damaged. The car was hit from behind while parked at Fifth and St. Ann streets, while I was inside the U.S. District Court building checking court records. The driver of the car who hit my vehicle was an older black man with no insurance. Instead of junking my treasured vehicle, I got Bob Arison, who ran a body shop at Hawesville, to make the repairs. It cost me $1,500 out of my own pocket but I wanted the car restored as close to its original condition as possible. However, being rammed from the rear caused permanent damage

to the automatic transmission gear shift. I was afraid to drive the Pontiac very much after repairing it. I bought a small 1988 Nissan pickup truck, put a for sale sign on the LeMans and parked it in the front yard during daytime hours. I finally sold it in 1989 to a couple of Hispanic guys for $800. The odometer had 285,000 miles on it. The engine still ran perfectly. The purchasers didn't mind the transmission glitch. What a great car the Pontiac had been. The pickup broke down in 1993 with a cracked engine head. After fixing it, I traded the little truck for a beige, four-door 1994 Corolla DX sedan, which I still have.

Going to rock concerts for me was like visiting Mecca. From 1969 to 1998, I drove each of my vehicles to 20 rock music concerts at Louisville, Lexington, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Nashville and Memphis. In almost 35 years, I saw Fleetwood Mac perform four times, twice in 1977 at Louisville and Lexington, again in 1982 at Market Square Arena in Indy, and last in 1997 at the Nashville Arena. I saw Linda Ronstadt in three concerts, and John Mellencamp twice. The last concerts I attended before prices increased higher than I could to afford were: Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers at Lexington's Rupp Arena Sept. 23, 1995; REM on Oct. 20, 1995 at Rupp; Sarah MacLachlan at the Cincinnati Music Hall Oct. 27, 1997; and John Fogerty on July 31, 1998, at Starwood Ampitheater south of Nashville. I saw Crosby, Stills and Nash at Rupp Arena in October 1977, the Eagles in November 1979 at Rupp, Melissa Ethridge at MacCauley Theater, Louisville, in July 1992, the Who at Rupp Arena in November 1982, Linda Ronstadt at Evansville Mesker Park amphitheater in 1969, at Louisville Gardens 1980, at Opryland in Nashville Nov. 16, 1982, U2 at Rupp Arena Oct. 23, 1987, Bonnie Raitt and Chris Isaak at Riverbend in Cincinnati Aug. 10, 1991, Bruce Hornsby and Rosanne Cash at Mud Island in Memphis July 6, 1991, Paul Simon at Starwood Sept. 15, 1991, Bruce Springsteen at Rupp Arena in November 1992 and Robert Plant in Memphis Sept.22, 1993. I also attended concerts by Journey and Jefferson Starship at Rupp Arena but did not keep the ticket stubs.

Since the 1960s, my collection of vinyl LP recordings and compact discs has grown to about 500; it gets larger by the year. I still love rock 'n' roll. In the 1970s, my favorites were the Eagles, the James Gang, Joe Walsh, Ronstadt, Emmy Lou Harris, Jackson Browne, the Allman Brothers Band, Derek and the Dominos, the Doobie Brothers; in the '80s, Bonnie Raitt, U2, Springsteen, Don Henley, Van Halen, Heart, Peter Gabriel, Phil Collins, Journey, Stevie Ray Vaughn and Double Trouble, Hornsby, Rosanne and Guns 'n Roses; the '90s, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Metallica, Pearl Jam, Robert Plant, Sinead O'Conner, REM and the Cranberries.

Today my favorite rockers are still many of the old classic performers and a few new kids on the block, U2, Springsteen, Mellencamp, Sarah MacLachlan, Alanis Morrisette, Steve Earle, Lucinda Williams, Nickelback, Keith Urban, Allison Kraus and Union Station, Staind and Three Doors Down. My list of the all-time greatest rock guitarists begins with No. 1, the greatest innovator of all time, Jim Hendrix, then of course, Eric Clapton, and Stevie Ray, George Harrison, Mike Bloomfield, Jimmy Page, Pete Townsend, Stephen Stills, Duane Allman, Dickie Betts, Jimmy Page, Eddie Van Halen, Mark Knopfler, Jeff Beck, Joe Walsh, The Edge, The Boss, John Fogerty, Slash, Nancy Wilson, John Mayer. Who did I leave out? There are more, I know. But the list is just too long to name all of them. (Sorry to those I left out.)

As the 1990s began, I was the author of two books that had received critical acclaim by historians across Kentucky and on a national level. My books earned me a state Community History Publications Award presented by the Historical Confederation of Kentucky in November 1989. By 1990, I was working full-time again at the Messenger-Inquirer, had paid off all my

personal debts and had a safe, comfortable surplus of funds in the bank.

I felt I had been successful in achieving excellence in my work as a historian and a journalist. But I was not happy in my private life. I began to think that I was probably never going to be married or become a father. I was 47 and there were not many opportunities left for me. I had no real relationships of any significance in the last years of the 80s and into the mid 90s. I began to think that maybe I was born to go through life alone. I began to accept the fact and live with it. I was bogged down with family responsibilities. I decided to continue working, and help my father live out his final years with some degree of dignity.

The ordeal of his mental decline and subsequent death changed my life again. Within the first six months after Daddy died on New Year's Day 1996, I feared I was slipping into another major depression, so I attended five individual psychotherapy sessions to talk about the guilt I bore for putting him in a position that caused his death and then how to deal with the grief I felt after his passing. I still thought of Judy every day. I could not get her out of my mnd. My only other real memory of 1996 was selling Daddy's 1938 F-20 Farmall tractor to Leroy Watkins, a neighbor of Wilbur Duncan's who restored farm equipment. Daddy had told me many years before he slipped into dementia that he wanted money from the sale of the tractor used to buy a monument for his grave. I did so and carried out his last request.

I continued to live at the house on U.S. 60 for about another year before Shirley and I put it up for sale. We sold it to David Estes of Maceo in late January, just weeks before the Ohio River flood of March 1997. The rain that caused the flood began the night of Friday, Feb. 28, 1997, and a deluge of 7.7 inches fell in a thunderstorm before dark on Saturday afternoon, March 1. I was at the Malco Theater south of Owensboro watching the film *Donnie Brasco* with Al Pacino and Johnny Depp. As I came out of the theater, rain was falling in torrents that I had not seen in ages. I did not know the streets would be flooded, so instead of getting off South Frederica onto the bypass, I drove into town, but kept running into flooded, impassable streets. I started backtracking and changing direction, trying to find a roadway that was not underwater.. I tried driving north on Breckinridge Street but ran into water about 15-20 inches deep at the intersection of 18th Street. So I drove up 18th to get to the higher ground of Leitchfield Road and then to Kentucky 54 and the bypass. Ten inches of rain fell between March 1-3. Flood waters rose all around Owensboro from the south and north; the Malco was surrounded by water and became an island by the next week.

The high water would rise up to the foundation of Daddy's house but not flood the interior of the structure. While the water was rising I moved all the furniture out and put it in storage in Owensboro. I stayed at Tracey's place for two nights before moving into ane extra bedroom Mrs. Byron Withers had open in her house on Griffith Avenue. She had been sort of a house mother over the years, renting her apartment to new staff members of the Messenger-Inquirer.

I continued working at the paper and, on weekends, began looking for a house for me in Owensboro. Shirley was looking too, and found a nice one for sale at 3315 Allen St. That street paralleled with J.R. Miller Boulevard and was within walking distance of Legion Park and Owensboro Country Club. It was a small house, the size of a large apartment and just perfect for me. It was newly remodeled with a living room, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms in 950 square feet of space. I converted one of the bedrooms into an office where I kept my books, awards and family pictures. I moved in by the end of April 1997.

Accompanying me to Owensboro was a 4-year-old tabby cat that I named Caroline, but who answers better to just plain "Kitty." As a kitten she had hitched a ride home from Maceo with

Daddy one day in 1993 and lived outside in his garage until I moved from U.S. 60. She is still with me, very healthy and frisky, even though she is about 17 years old. Kit has been my loving, loyal companion for these many years, living inside since 1997, with the exceptions of four or five times when she breaks out when a visitor comes to the door.

In the first weeks at my Owensboro location, I bought a new sofa, refrigerator, water heater and washer and dryer. I had a deck for a back porch and a fenced backyard with a small storage building for my tools, lawnmower, etc. It was a good, safe place except for the fact that the young married couple next door who had two children and two bulldogs, were selling drugs. That was my major concern for about a year before someone alerted police and the family moved one night.

It was a very emotional experience for me to leave our family home. I remember how many times we had moved before my parents were finally able to build their homeplace along U.S. 60. But the house and property was never the same without them. I was eager to leave after the flood, and did not want to return. It was no longer our home. All I had were mostly good memories, but some sad ones too. I recalled what I felt while living there during the last years of both Mom and Daddy's lives.

Moving from there made me recall my many experiences of deja vu and the inexplicable, recurring dreams that I had previously in life. First, when as a small child I dreamed that I was in what I thought was a dark hole with everything falling on me, feeling smothered as if I were being buried alive. The experience always frightened and woke me up. As an adult, I dreamed numerous times of facing someone with a gun and the trigger of my revolver was too tight or locked. The weapon would not discharge no matter how hard I squeezed the trigger. I think I began having that dream after seeing Michael Corleone test the trigger of the handgun he used to assassinate McCluskey and Sollozzo in my all-time favorite movie The Godfather. But I think the real meaning of the "tight trigger" was the fear that I could not fire a pistol and kill someone. I often dreamed of being back back at Mrs. Bacon's apartment on St. Clair Street in Frankfort, so alone, the rooms empty, zero cold and gloomy with snow on the ground outside. I'd wake up feeling terribly depressed. I never ever went back to that house.

In the years after finally moving from Maceo to Owensboro, I had a haunting, recurring dream about living at 7543 U.S. 60 East. In the dream I was still staying in my bedroom, although the David Estes family were living in the house. Strangely, Mom was always there in my dream, sitting alone in a chair, staring blankly straight ahead, never moving, saying nothing. That was her physical state during the last year she was alive. Daddy was never in the dream. It was just Momma, the Estes family and me. I was never able to understand the dream. I always wondered if it reoccurred so much because the house was the only permanent home I ever had, and maybe I did not want to leave it. Maybe I missed the good times and wanted to return. Or maybe it kept occurring because I had left something behind and could not remember what it was. I just remember that the dream was very depressing. After living in Owensboro a while, the dream gradually faded away, and I never had it again.

In addition to facing my father's mental deterioration and subsequent death, I underwent surgeries for the first time in my life in 1995 and 1999, Two of the three operations produced life-altering results. The first, during April 1995 rendered me unable to ever father children in a natural and normal way. That was when I gave up hope of becoming a dad, even as an old man. I was experiencing bad bleeding from hemorrhoids, and went into the hospital to cut them out.

With the bleeding piles my main concern, I ignored a problem I was having in urinating. I was 50 years old and apparently had an enlarged prostate gland. The hemorrhoid surgery by Dr. John Anderson went well but swelling from the operation somehow made it temporarily impossible for me to pee. Dr. Anderson went ahead and catherized me and attempted to reach my urologist Dr. Albert Joslin. But Joslin was out of town. His associate, Dr. Charles McKelvey, saw me instead, checked X-rays of my prostate and urinary tract, and said that my urethra was blocked by a small mass of tissue and swelling from the other surgery. He could not identify the mass, leading me to think it might be a malignant tumor. I was frightened at that point. He told me he could remove the suspicious tissue, detect whether it was cancerous, and that would help me urinate normally. I was so scared that it might be cancer, I gave the doctor the go-ahead and the surgery floor staff sent the hospital chaplain to my room to counsel me prior to the operation. We prayed and were both in tears before a nurse came by and said the doctor was ready. The operation was a transurethral resection of the prostate or TURP, a procedure used to treat moderate to severe enlargement of the prostate gland From what I read about the operation later, the urologist uses a surgical instrument to trim away extra prostate tissue. In most men, TURP effectively eases pressure on the tube urine passes through as it leaves the body (urethra), relieving the lower urinary tract symptoms of an enlarged prostate.

I was misled and totally misinformed about the consequences of the surgery. I was told that the surgeon would scrape away the tissue causing the blockage, opening the urethra to let urine flow freely from my bladder. That was all. The doctor did not tell me that after the surgery I would ejaculate semen back into my bladder instead of as normally from the opening in my penis. Thinking the mass might be cancerous (no one at the time said it probably was not) I was eager to go through the operation quickly, thinking by doing so I would improve my chances of survival if it were prostate cancer. I learned later what a terrible decision I had made. When Dr. Joslin saw me at his office weeks after the surgery, he said he would not have recommended that operation. He would have postponed it, keeping me in the hospital longer with the catheter attached until the swelling from my hemorrhroid surgery went down. The changes in my ejaculation during sexual intercourse were permanent. Normal ejaculation through the penis would be impossible. After hearing that I was devastated and angry as hell. First and foremost, it destroyed all my hopes of ever fathering a child in a natural way. Secondly, it was embarrassing to have to tell a woman what to expect when we had sex. It usually spoiled or put a damper on the moment, if you know what I mean. It was powerful blow to my male sexuality, and put a huge crimp in my attempts to have future sexual relationships. Dr. Mark Abshier, in his crude, crass manner of expressing optimism, said I should not be thinking of fathering children at my age anyway. Plus it was a permanent form of birth control about which women would not have to worry.

The other surgery was performed five years later on April 16, 1999. During a routine annual physical, a lung X-ray and subsequent CT scan showed a mass in my chest close to my pulmonary artery. I feared I might have lung cancer. Dr. Abshier, who performed my physical examination, thought the spot was suspicious, but added he thought there was one chance in 20 that the strange mass was cancer. He gave me a choice. We could wait six months and see if the mass changed or had spread, or I could go ahead with the surgery that would identify the spot. I decided to do the surgery as soon as possible. The six weeks I had to wait after the mass was discovered was the most harrowing part of the experience. My future was too uncertain in those years; I could not think about anything other than survival.

On the day of the operation I was ready to face the verdict. the thoraci surgeon, Dr. John Powell, told me how he was going to perform the operation and what I could expect before and afterward. The anxiety of the previous six weeks of waiting dissipated. The surgery nurses and assistants prepped me and took me down to the operating room, and wheeled me in on a gurney. It was about 6 a.m., I think. I was calm and mentally ready. I had no fear. Somehow I knew everything was going to be alright. From that point all I remember was that it was very cold on the surgery floor. In what only seemed like a few minutes, I awakened later in the recovery room.

Dr. Powell and pulmonary specialist Brent Bergen who had observed the operation came by my room hours later that day and told me the good news. The mass was a sarcoid tumor, and benign. There was no cancer. I was relieved. I stayed in hospital for two and a half days, and was off work to recuperate. I started my rehab as soon as possible. I began by walking along the streets in my neighborhood, increasing my distance each day. I gradually regained my strength, and was ready to go back to work six weeks after the operation.

I read two or three books while I was healing. The one I liked most was the biography of the great Kentucky lawyer Ed Prichard. The title is *Short of the Glory*. Prichard used to eat lunch with his young lawyer assistants at Mucci's Restaurant in downtown Frankfort. I ate there regularly with George Van Horne and Tony Williams, when the three of us worked for the Department of Corrections. Sometimes we sat at the table next to Prichard and his group. Though he was almost totally blind by that time in his life, Prichard was much respected and regarded as a legend in the state capitol.

I went back to Dr. Powell several times so he could check my progress. He gave me a copy of a two-page report that he wrote after performing the surgery. The mass was difficult to reach and hard to see, he stated: "The azygos vein, right superior pulmonary vein and and the pulmonary artery were all prominent and I could not easily see the mass so I felt I would need to proceed with a small thoracotomy."

"At this time I was able to retract the lung posteriorly and dress the hilum by dissecting the pleura gently, I was able to Identify a large lymph node mass that was interspersed between the branches of the right pulmonary artery including the right upper lobe branch and also, the right superior vein. This appeared to be a large lobulated mass and actually it was somewhat treacherous in that it was located between the branches of the pulmonary artery and as I dissected this, I was able to see that there was a anterior lymph node, roughly two centimeters in diameter. I resected this in its entirety."

An additional lymph node mass remained, Powell noted, "However I felt that it would be an increased risk to extensively dissect this and I felt that I should obtain a diagnosis first. At this time a frozen section was obtained and this revealed probable sarcoidosis." It was not necessary to take out the mass that stilled remained, the doctor wrote.

During the six weeks leading up to my surgery, I was so anxious and downright scared that I was excited beyond words when the doctor gave me the good news that my tumor was benign. I wanted to go out and celebrate, shout to the world how relieved I was. Giving my reprieve, I vowed to live every day of the rest of my life to the fullest. I wanted to get every moment of happiness I could from life, and live every day like it was my last.

You could always rely on Wilbur Duncan to keep his word. If he told you he was going to do something, he did it. If he made a promise, he kept it. On Oct. 21, 2002, the William H.

Natcher Bridge that spanned the Ohio River. six miles upstream from Owensboro, was completed and opened for traffic. Months earlier, as construction of the bridge neared completion, Wilbur told several friends that he, his mules and wagon were going to be the first to cross it.

"In the spring when preparations were being made for the bridge's dedication and it didn't look like livestock was going to be a part of the festivities, Duncan began work on a plan of his own," Suzi Bartholomy wrote in her Names and Notes column in the Messenger-Inquirer on Oct. 2, 2002. " After two conversations with the men working on the bridge, Duncan, his mules and residents from an Owensboro nursing home crossed the Natcher Bridge on June 1, more than two months before the dedication."

"Not many people know we did this," Wilbur told Suzi. "The men at the bridge didn't want me to tell the Messenger-Inquirer because they thought other people would want to cross it," he said. "But I don't think it matters now," he said. "I just wanted to be the first."

Less than a year later, Wilbur would be gone. He died Aug. 20, 2003, at the age of 83. "Wilbur Duncan, farmer, muleskinner and showman, died Wednesday night at Owensboro Mercy Health System." wrote Keith Lawrence in the obituary story. "He was 83."

" Wilbur was one of a kind," Steve Young, president of Cowboy's of Kentucky, a local equine center, told Lawrence. "He was one of the last of the real cowboys. A man of tremendous character."

A farmer who had worked with mules since he was 12, Duncan began training animals when a heart attack forced him to retire at age 61 in September 1980, Lawrence wrote. Soon, Wilbur became a big hit at parades and county fairs across western Kentucky, southern Indiana and northern Tennessee, driving his OwensborO wagon pulled by a mule named Genevieve - with his dog named Toadie perched on Genevieve's back, Lawrence wrote.

Through the years, several of his mules and dogs performed the stunt. Hannah was the dog featured in the act in more recent years. Before his death, Wilbur had been scheduled to appear the next week at the Jerusalem Ridge bluegrass festival near Rosine, Lawrence noted. He was billed as "Wilbur Duncan and His Mule Riding Dog."

"I'd never seen anything like that before," said Daviess County naturalist Joe Ford, a friend of Duncan's. "And I've never seen anybody else do that. Wilbur was known all over this part of the country."

"He had dogs, goats, anything that could possibly stand on a mule's back," Wilbur would teach them to do it, said Ford.

"It's the end of an era, that's for sure," said Glenn Taylor, president of Glenn Funeral Home, where Duncan's funeral was conducted. "Wilbur was the happiest man I knew," Taylor told Lawrence, recalling a year when Duncan arranged a mule-and-rooster race at the Daviess County Lions Club Fair. "You rode your mule to the end of the arena, jumped off, got a rooster out from under a bucket and had to get back on your mule and race back to the other end," he said. "But those mules weren't going to let you back on as long as you had that rooster in your arms. That was the funniest thing I had ever seen in my life."

Duncan said he had owned more than 1,000 mules and horses through the years. At the time of his death, he still owned three mules and a jackass, according to the Messenger-Inquirer. Wilbur received wide recognition when he was wagonmaster on the Abraham Lincoln Wagon Train that attracted 38 wagons and 219 people on a trip from Hodgenville to Lewisport. One driver came all the way from California that year, Keith Lawrence wrote. In 1991, he was part of

the Lincoln Wagon Train that left Lewisport on a 100-mile, six-day trip to Vincennes, Ind., the M-I reported. In the fall of 1992, he was on a wagon train that traveled from Vincennes to Springfield, Ill., a 200-mile journey. A mule team travels about 3.5 mph. It's a relaxing way to travel if you're not in hurry, Duncan told a M-I reporter. "You either love it or you hate it," he said.

Wilbur told reporters that he always enjoyed seeing people's faces as they watched his mule team pass. "His mules will take Duncan on his final ride Saturday morning, a short trip from Glenn Funeral Home across Breckinridge Street to Rosehill Cemetery, following funeral services at 10 a.m. Hannah the dog will make the journey with him," Lawrence wrote.

I still have the photograph that Gary Emord-Netzley of the Messenger-Inquirer took the day of Duncan's funeral. Bill Houtchen was driving Wilbur's mules with Duncan's daughter and a granddaughter riding in the wagon. Hannah was perched on the back of one of the mules.

What I remember the most about attending Wilbur's funeral was the song "Go Rest High on That Mountain" by Vince Gill which was played over a video of Wilbur's life shown at the service. It is an exquisite and incredibly moving song that balanced the sorrow and affection Wilbur's family and friends felt at his passing. It was a perfect selection to honor a man of integrity like Wilbur.

I had known Wilbur since I was a kid playing ball at Maceo, I told Keith Lawrence as he interviewed me for the obituary story. "He was my father's best friend. He was about the most hard-working, honest, reliable and trustworthy man I ever knew. I worked for him a lot and always looked up to him."

Wilbur was the best friend anyone could ever have. He was brave. generous and compassionate, always calm even during a crisis, good natured, good humored and hardly ever sad. Wilbur was always there when Daddy needed him. Daddy trusted Wilbur's opinion and advice more than any other person he knew. It was very, very rare that Daddy did that. I would never forget the wonderfully good times that Wilbur, Daddy and I had, working with each other. Or the funny, but also serious discussions that Wilbur and I had about his devout belief about "marking" (castrating) young male hogs "when (nature's) sign is right." I remember Wilbur telling me how he described his first heart attack he had while being examined in his doctor's office. And how he was shocked when he found his widower brother Ed Duncan dead in his house on Iceland Road a few miles from our house. I will never forget when Wilbur drove the tractor as "Mac" McDaniel and I set my father's tobacco while Daddy was recovering from eye surgery. I would always remember Wilbur's kindness in expressing his sympathy to me and Shirley, when Mom, Billy and Daddy died.

It was tough for many of us when Wilbur Duncan died. The last of Daddy's old gang at Maceo was gone. Earl Jackson, Bill McDaniel, Red Sutton and now Wilbur. His kind will never pass this way again, as the saying goes.

The years I have been living here on south Allen Street have been marked by dangerously close calls with and direct hits by bad weather. Plus one other big surprise by Mother Nature. First, I narrowly avoided the tornado of January 2000, and endured zero temperatures and 22 inches of snow dumped on my deck and the house in Christmas 2005. At 4:37 a.m. Friday, April 18, 2008, I was awakened by a window-rattling rumble that I thought must have an been explosion somewhere in Owensboro. After breakfast, I turned on the TV and learned the groundshaking was from a 5.2 magnitude earthquake that caused some damage at its epicenter

26 miles southwest of Vincennes, Ind. The earthquake had been felt in southern Indiana and western Kentucky. Later at 10:14 a.m., I was downtown checking the Circuit Court docket on the fourth floor of the Daviess County Judicial Center when a 4.5 aftershock occurred. I was sitting in the bailiffs' area when the building began to sweigh to the left and then the right. It was one of those times that you say whoaaaaa! What was that? The momentary sensation was similar to the rocking of a small ship in rough seas. The effects of the aftershock only lasted about 15 seconds, it seemed. That was the first time I had ever felt the effects of an earthquake. (I was driving across eastern Tennessee headed toward Knoxville in 1968, when there was an quake that cracked the concrete floor of the garage at my parents' house in Maceo. I never felt the quake while in the car.)

On a sunny Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008, Owensboro was in the direct path of straight line winds of 73 mph from Hurricane Ike that downed trees and caused power outages in Owensboro. But worst of all the weather experiences would be the ice storm of Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2009

The decade of severe storms and the earth moving experience began on Monday, Jan. 3, 2000, as an F-3 tornado swept through Owensboro at 4:10 p.m. "It was the most devastating storm in the city's 200-year history --- the first time a confirmed tornado struck Owensboro," Keith Lawrence reported the following day in the Messenger-Inquirer.

I was off from work that day and was at home after attending an appointment with Dr. Bergen, my pulmonary specialist. In late afternoon I turned on the television because it was very evident that an unusual storm was brewing. It was a January day and the temperature and the dew point were in the 60s. I tuned to Channel 25 WEHT as meteorologist Wayne Hart was following the storm front on Doppler radar. About 4 p.m., he advised residents of Owensboro to go to a safe place in their house. A funnel cloud would be entering the southwest side of Owensboro close to the bypass, he warned. Then a minute later, lightning struck the WBKR radio tower, followed almost instantly by a powerful boom of thunder. All electricity in my neighborhood went off.

About five minutes before Hart's warning, the tornado touched down along Kentucky 81 just south of St. Martin Church at Rome. It then swept northeast along Keller Road, damaging several houses, skipping along Carter Road, jumping over subdivisions on the south side of Southtown Boulevard and crashing headlong into houses west of Apollo High School, the M-I reported. The storm ripped through neighborhoods, randomly smashing houses, peeling off roofs and uprooting trees. The Seventh Day Adventist Church at 2288 Tamarack Road was virtually wiped out and OMU's headquarters just west of the U.S. 60 bypass lost part of its roof and a few windows. The tornado scattered power lines across the bypass at Tamarack.

About a kilometer to the southeast of Frederica Street, I stood looking west out my front door at the WBKR tower. I saw nothing but a rain-wrapped cloud. The tornado was so close and so big that all I could see was a wide wedge cloud on the ground, moving northeast. It was in the process of taking off the roof and damaging the rest of the President's House on the Kentucky Wesleyan College campus. Then it roared through the apartment complex at 705 Scherm Road and blew past the Chase Bank branch at Scherm Road and Frederica Street. Windows of the Roosevelt Houses were blown out as the twister moved further across town. The right edge of the twister had already heavily damaged Fifth Third Bank at Frederica and Byers Avenue, the Subway sandwich shop and Sonic drive-in restaurant. It continued along its path, blasting past the Winn Dixie shopping center, blowing over the neighborhoods at 25th Street and J.R. Miller Boulevard, and apparently skipping to Elmwood and Rosehill cemeteries where it uprooted trees.

The path of the tornado ended at the cemeteries, although some damage was reported in the Rolling Heights area near 18th Street and Leitchfield Road, according to a newspaper report.

As I was waiting for the storm to hit, Rita Woolen, a beautician who has cut my hair for more than 20 years, left her home on Kingman Loop in Owensboro and was driving along Scherm Road to Frederica Street where she turned right. It was 3:45 p.m. She had heard a radio report that a tornadic storm was in Webster County moving toward Owensboro. She was on her way to pick up her 16-year-old daughter Brooke who was working at the Subway restaurant at Frederica and West Byers Avenue.

In the spring of 2010, Rita told me that five or 10 minutes after 4 p.m., she looked out the front window of the sandwich shop, and saw the sky was oddish green, gold and gray in color. A part of a huge, rotating cloud was on the ground moving through the Byers Avenue and Frederica Street intersection. Debris was swirling through the air. The three women in Subway found themselves seconds away from being in the tornado, Rita quickly realized. She saw the violent cloud destroy the home of Kentucky Wesleyan College's president less than 1,000 feet away from the front of Subway. She did not have time to be frightened, she told me. She was more concerned about getting her daughter and her co-worker, Jamie, into a safe place in the tiny hallway in the restroom area, as far away as possible from windows.

Huddling in the hallway as the storm passed, the three women heard the roar of the wind, the sound of window glass breaking and felt the ear-popping sensation of the change in air pressure. It was like being in a vacuum and feeling the air sucked upward as the storm cloud passed through that part of the Byers Avenue and Frederica Street intersection, Rita described. The roof of First Third Bank next door to the south was ripped off, and fell on Rita's four-door Lincoln sedan in the parking lot, flattening the roof and all four tires on the vehicle. Against policemen's advice, Rita would drive her car home on on its wheel rims. The wind had wreaked havoc inside the Subway shop. "Brooke's cell phone was driven into the wall by the wind that tore off the front door of the Subway," Rita told me. Windows were broken and shards of glass covered the floor of the shop, the roof was twisted, and the building was knocked off its foundation by 12 inches, Rita said. The wind blew meat and condiments out of the sandwich making line. In somewhat of a peculiar, miraculously way, the wind moved a cup from one table to another without turning it over, Rita said. The chaos lasted no more than a few minutes and then passed. The tornado struck the Frederica street area at about 4:20. The manager of the Sonic Drive-in came over to tell Rita and the girls to get out of the restaurant building before it collapsed.

Just north up the street from Subway, one of the women working at the branch of Chase Bank at Scherm Road looked outside and saw the cloud on the ground coming across the big front lawn of Kentucky Wesleyan College, according to a bank employee I also interviewed in 2010. She alerted the other bank employees and they went into the small safe deposit vault during the storm.

Only 13 people were hurt in the Owensboro twister. The most seriously injured was a woman who suffered a broken neck when her house collapsed around her, reported M-I reporter Steve Vied. The tornado caused $70 million in damage in three counties, mostly in Daviess, Vied wrote. The damage to public property was $15 million. Inspections of 12,000 properties later determined that 1,644 Daviess County residences were significantly damaged by the tornado. Of that figure, about 280 were destroyed, including many that, while not completely knocked down, were damaged beyond repair, according to newspaper reports.

Kentucky Wesleyan College had $4 million to $5 million in storm damage. More than a year

would pass before the college president's house was replaced, the M-I reported. The Daviess County school system spent $4.6 million on repairs, most of it at Apollo High School. The newspaper noted that part of the roof over the gymnasium at Burns Middle School was stripped off, and windows were blown out at Tamarack Elementary School. Owensboro city schools suffered little damage. Owensboro Municipal Utilities' facilities on Tamarack Road was heavily damaged, but the utility's first priority was repairing miles of shredded power lines. OMU spent $4 million on direct tornado costs.

More than a week passed before all electric power was restored to all residents of the city. The National Weather Service reported later that the Owensboro tornado of January 2000 was classified as an F-3 , growing to a half mile in diameter with winds of 180 mph that rolled through densely populated residential and commerical areas,

Owensboro would be hit again as an outbreak of tornadoes occurred in the states of the Southeast on Oct. 18, 2007. Missing me by about two miles, a tornado first hit the area west of Moreland Park in Owensboro that includes Old Henderson Road, Bosley Road, Hickman Avenue, Ninth Street and Werner Avenue. Then it churned northeast, rolling through the downtown Owensboro area just south of Glover Cary Bridge. It cut a path from Frederica to Triplett streets, taking off the roof and steeple of Third Baptist Church at Fifth and Allen streets. The giant bell tower crashed through the sanctuary, leaving a gaping hole in the roof and ceiling and massive destruction totaling $7 to $8 million in damage.

There were other rotating clouds as part of that storm front. I looked out my front storm door and saw one passing at tree-top level over a house two doors south of my home. I had sighted another funnel cloud moving from southwest to northeast south of Southtown Boulevard, Wal-mart and Towne quare Mall. I was much closer to the Owensboro tornadoes in 2000 and 2007 than I ever was when Frankfort was hit by a twister on April 3, 1974.

The ice storm of Jan.27, 2009 left my property relatively unscathed. Five medium-sized limbs were down in the front yard and two in the backyard. The one in the front yard was laying against the roof of the house, but it was small and did no damage. It could be removed easily. Nothing fell on the newly constructed deck, the security fence or my new heating/air condition unit. However, the ice-encrusted storm door at the front entrance of my house fell off when I tried to open it that morning. Damage was minor, unlike the September windstorm from Hurricane Ike that felled a neighbor's tree in my backyard and took out seven sections of my stockade fence. (I just reinstalled it in December 2008.)

Just living through the ice storm and its aftermath was the worst part of the experience. Electric power went out at about midnight Tuesday in my neighborhood. It was one of the most eerie, nerve wracking nights I have ever withstood. Trees were cracking and limbs falling with a "craaack" and a "whoomp!" while the freezing rain continued to fall. I did not sleep more than 15 minutes at a time all night, fearing a tree would fall on the house or my car. Transformers were exploding with a reddish glow all over town. I saw one of them blow up on J.R. Miller Boulevard. Luckily electric power was off less than 48 hours on my street, and was restored late the following Thursday afternoon. It was a different story in the rest of Owensboro. Some folks went to stay at temporary shelters, others chose to tough it out at home while the power was out. By the weekend, everything was much better in my neighborhood. Within days after the freaky ice storm, chain saws could be heard on every street, and sawed-up chunks of limbs were piled on each side of the streets all along South Allen to Warwick Drive.

On Wednesday night, 24 hours after the icy rain fell, with the power off and no heat. I was determined to ride out the adversity at home without having to leave. It was 9 degrees outside that night and, with no heat, got down to 42 in the house. I wore two pairs of socks, sweat pants, a hooded Yankees sweatshirt and put a couple of extra blankets on the bed. I stuck it out, although I did wake up about 4 a.m. feeling very cold. It was my good fortune that the electricity came back that Thursday. I was determined to stay in my house no matter what. I didn't want to leave my property and go sleep in a shelter when other people needed to be there more than I. I then knew what the GIs felt in the zero cold, snow-covered Ardennes at Bastogne in World War II. That Wednesday night was like camping out under my own roof. I worked Thursday and Friday night at the paper, so I stayed warm there. All restaurants' power was out, but I had enough food in the house to make it through a couple of days. I ate peanut butter, oranges and some canned food. "We had difficulty at the paper," I wrote in an e-mail to Lou Posner a few weeks later. "Electric power stayed on at the newspaper plant at 14th and Frederica, and we have a backup generator system that keeps the paper power going. But all landline and cell phone service was out in Daviess County and all points south and west of Owensboro. We learned that a satellite phone worked in that situation, and several other reporters used it to make essential calls to communicate with outside sources. Most of the reporters were out in the city getting information. But as I said, I was lucky this time. I am glad it is over and I hope I never have to experience that again."

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The memories of leaving my parents' home during the 1997 flood stayed with me for the longest time of all. That departure always reminds me of my boyhood. Our family moved so much when I was an elementary student in Maceo that it seemed each time we moved we left behind something we valued very much. When I moved from 7543 U.S. 60 East, my father and mother's home for 35 years, I left behind three items of sentimental value that I never found again, though I tried very hard.

A small green crystal sugar bowl that Mom had kept among her pots, pans, silver and dishware since Shirley and I were both little kids. Two other items, one very valuable and treasured by me personally, were never recovered. The first of the two were makeshift shanks (that prisoners used as weapons) that I had been given after a visit to the Eddyville Penitentiary when I worked for the Department of Corrections. I did not care losing the shanks. They were just useless souvenirs. Losing my Rawlings outfielder's glove was the hardest loss to take. I bought it when I was playing Babe Ruth League baseball at Maceo. I knew the glove and the sugar bowl were missing within days and weeks after we moved. After the flood water receded, and the Estes family had not yet moved into the house, I went back to the empty house and looked for the baseball mitt and the sugar bowl. I went through all the kitchen cabinets and drawers, searching for the bowl. I also looked in my bedroom closet where I stored the ball glove, and dug through everything that Daddy and Mom kept in the 12 by 18 foot storage building behind the house. I could not find either of them. They were truly gone forever. The sugar bowl probably meant more to me than the baseball glove. Because I remember using it to spoon sugar on my oatmeal at the breakfast table when I was an 8- year-old. I believe all three of the lost items were stolen by someone going through the house after I moved out before the flood in March 1997. But I had no proof.

You get a sinking, nauseating feeling when you have been robbed of your property. A new Bulova wristwatch that Mom gave me before I went to the Navy was stolen from one of my

shoes in a locker I used while attending the Defense Information School at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis. (In those days, I always stuffed the watch all the way into the toe of the shoe and put my socks in each shoe to cover for it. I did not think anyone would look there.) Mom gave me another watch just like the one stolen. It was quickly replaced and I have kept it for 42 years in a very safe place. In the fall of 2009, I went through each drawer of my bedroom furniture for the first time since I moved to Owensboro in the spring of 1997. I could not find the shanks in any of the drawers where I know I put them in 1976.

Near Christmas 2009, I was exchanging e-mails with Johnny Mag while writing this book and I told him the story of the lost outfielder's glove in one of my letters. "Moving out before the flood, I put all my furniture in a U-Haul truck and got the rest of my stuff from the garage and utility building, transporting it by truck and car. When I finally got settled in Owensboro, I rummaged through all of it to see if I brought everything with me when I moved. The one thing I could never find was a Rawlings outfielder's glove that I bought with my own money in 1957 when I was playing Babe Ruth ball at Maceo. I soon went back to the empty house to check. The folks to whom we sold the house were moving in. I checked the house, garage and utility building. No glove. I kept my glove, balls and bats in my bedroom closet for years while my parents were alive. When I moved in '97 I took all the bats in the closet, but noticed the glove was not there. I called the buyers and they said they didn't have it. It may sound crazy to you but I was crushed by the loss of that unimportant but treasured memento of my boyhood. I had bought all my ball equipment with money I made from mowing yards and working in tobacco. My theory was that men installing a new furnace and ductwork in the house in 1995 may have stolen the glove out of the closet or my father, who was beginning to become senile at that time, had forgotten whose glove it was and just gave it to those men. It has been an unsolved mystery in my life for 12 years. I never was able to find it and gave up hope. So last week I decided I would replace the old glove with a brand new modern fielder's mitt. I searched the Rawlings baseball equipment website, shopping for a glove that most resembled the one lost. I found it. I ordered it online last Thursday and received it on my doorstep by FedEx Friday night. It's a reddish orange 12-inch Gold Glove model, with that great Rawlings logo. The best thing is that the glove is almost identical to my boyhood glove, only much bigger. By the way I paid 140 dollars for it, so the prices have not gone up that much in 50 years. To me it was money well spent and I enjoyed it. Anyway, the whole purchase and delivery of the glove made my weekend."

9

The Hagers: End of an Era

Though I had sworn never to work again at the Messenger-Inquirer after leaving in 1972, I had no other choice when I signed on again there in September 1984. It was a humbling experience for me. I kept my reasons for not wanting to return confidential. I do not think I had been in the building at 1401 Frederica St. but once in 12 years and that was to visit with my old colleagues George Kerler and Ann Whittinghill. George was gone in '84, but Ann was still there writing and editing the weekly Food page and the Lifestyle section, and reporting engagements, weddings and anniversaries. I hated the idea of going back. At that time, I did not particularly like the Hager men, especially John, and did not feel like I could develop a friendly relationship because of how they handled the composing room workers' strike in 1972. I thought the way they broke the union was an injustice, and had hurt and mistreated my friends and former colleagues who had walked the picket line in vein during the strike.

So I was more than shy about returning to the newspaper. I felt I was selling out my principles in order to survive. Upon my return, I also wanted a role where I could stay in the background because I didn't want anyone to know I was still battling my mental illness and had failed to accomplish my career goals. I had been a very high profile reporter in the four years before 1972. Even one of my biggest supporters described me as the Golden Boy of Owensboro journalism in those days. Hardly. So I was determined to keep a very low profile. I also did not want to be a news reporter working full-time. Even though it was what I loved to do most, I never liked going back over plowed ground, reporting local news. I was tired and felt burned out after working the government, courts and police and sheriff's department beat while at WVJS and Cable Channel 2.

My new part-time job was writing obituaries, reporting real estate transfers, and eventually reporting news from the district and circuit court dockets, and major civil court lawsuits. In a nutshell, I would be doing grunt work. Writing obits is the lowest but the most important of entry level jobs at any paper. It was the only job available at the paper at the time, so I took it. I needed the extra money. At first it was only 28 hours a week, working in the obit slot on Fridays and Saturday from 4 p.m. to 12:30 a.m., and collecting records at the courthouse and judicial center from 2 to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday. I would eventually turn it into a full-time 40-hour week.

I had returned to familiar surroundings and would work at the Messenger-Inquirer for the next 24 years and seven months. I was working for the Hagers again. I knew more about their history in Owensboro journalism than I did about the family members themselves. The Hagers had been in Owensboro since 1909 when Samuel Wilbur Hager bought the Owensboro Inquirer and became its editor.

An outsider to Owensboroans, Hager had already gained statewide acclaim in Democratic politics and service in state government in Kentucky. All this, before buying his own newspaper. He was born near Gallipolis, Ohio, in 1858, and was 4 years old when his family moved to Salyersville in Magoffin County, Kentucky. That was where his father worked in the lumber

business. S.W. was educated as a lawyer but never practiced the profession, being more involved in commercial and political life of that community. He moved to Ashland in 1887, entered mercantile business and soon became president of an Ashland bank. He was elected county judge of Boyd County in 1896, and then rose to prominence in state government, winning the office of state treasurer in 1899 on a ticket with governor-elect William Goebel.

Judge Hager served as state auditor 1904 to 1907, and was a member of commission responsible for construction of the state capitol building in Frankfort. In 1907, Hager ran for Democratic nomination for governor but lost his bid. He supported Woodrow Wilson as a candidate for president, and managed several election campaigns by state candidates, including the race of A.O. Stanley in 1915. When Stanley won, Judge Hager was appointed state banking commission and in 1916 became member of state workmen's compensation board on which he served until his death.

He bought the Owensboro Inquirer at 103 W. Third St. and became editor on Sept. 21, 1909. The newspaper was published at two locations in downtown before it combined with the Owensboro Messenger and they moved their offices into the old post office building at 100-102 Third St.

Hager ran the newspaper for nine successful years. After a yearlong illness Hager died on Dec. 27, 1918, at the age of 60. In a history of Kentucky published in 1922, Judge Hager was characterized as "a man with a warm heart and kind nature, who was ever true to the trust placed in him. His actions were ever the result of careful, conscientious thought. And when once convinced that he was right, no suggestion of policy or personal profit could swerve him from the course he had decided upon. His career was complete and rounded in its beautiful simplicity. With snap and vigor business acumen and latitude of vision he made the Inquirer one of the leading dailies in Kentucky."

As Judge Hager's body was being transported back to Ashland for burial, his son, Lawrence W. Hager, was in France awaiting discharge from the American Expeditionary Force. While waiting for Lawrence's return to assume his future role as editor of the Inquirer, Judge Hager's other son W. Bruce Hager became a strong force as he took over the editorial and the business management of the newspaper. With the passing of their father, the two Hager brothers embarked together on their journey into a new era of journalism in Owensboro.

In a speech at Kentucky Wesleyan College, April 22, 1996, Lawrence Hager's son, John, noted: "In 1909 my grandfather Samuel W. Hager lost his race for governor. Although a keen disappointment to the family, it was the best thing that ever happened to it. It resulted in my grandfather's purchase that year of the Owensboro Inquirer and the dedication of four generations of the Hager family to publishing the newspaper of this great community. For 20 years, the Hagers' evening Inquirer competed with the larger morning Messenger, published and owned by Urey Woodson. The competition, robust and vigorous, civil and decent, engendered mutual trust and respect. When Woodson retired, he selected his Inquirer competitors and a colleague, George M. Fuqua, as successor owners of the Messenger. Lawrence W. Hager and W. Bruce Hager and their mother, Bessie White Hager , and George M. and Martine Fuqua, his wife, organized the Owensboro Publishing Company in 1929 to combine the two newspapers. The relationship of mutual trust and respect of these families governed Messenger-Inquirer ownership decisions during the next 67 years, culminating in my brother, Larry Hager 's 1989 sale to me"

Lawrence Hager Sr. expanded the role of the Owensboro Publishing Co. in 1938, forming

Owensboro Broadcasting Co. and starting WOMI, the city's first radio station. He was one of the founders of the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce in 1913 and Owensboro Rotary Club in 1915, and started the Goodfellows Club in 1916. He campaigned for major changes in the structure of city government, advocating for a transformation from city council to city commission form of government, and later to the city manager form.

Hager led the fight for construction of the Glover Cary bridge that opened in downtown Owensboro in 1940, was instrumental in pushing for better roads to the city, and construction of what became the Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport in 1950. Lawrence was a leader in, and the newspaper supported, successful drives to build Our Lady Of Mercy Hospital and, in 1950, to raise $1 million to bring Kentucky Wesleyan College to Owensboro from Winchester, Ky.

The Messenger-Inquirer fought for approval of bond issues for public schools and public buildings and improvements such as the courthouse, city hall, Sportscenter and a failed attempt at urban renewal of downtown Owensboro in the 1960s. Putting Owensboro on the map had long been an aspiration of the Messenger-Inquirer. Efforts to bend the Western Kentucky Parkway closer to Owensboro failed, but later efforts brought the William H. Natcher and the Audubon parkways.

Lawrence Hager Sr. died on Christmas Day in 1982 at the age of 92. We saw him about once or twice a week in the newsroom in the mid 1960s when the paper's offices were located at Second and Allen streets downtown. I remember Mister Lawrence (as we all called him then) coming into the newsroom late in the afternoon or some time after 9 or 10 p.m., usually to check a news story or an editorial he wanted written or printed just exactly as he desired. Any major written piece that might address or contain some controversy always had to pass Mister Lawrence's muster.

With his white, gray streaked hair, his appearance was that of a very well dressed, and the spit and polish artillery officer he had been in World War. He was a distinguished looking Southern gentleman with a career's record of high achievement and splendid service to the state and Owensboro community. He never had much to say when he wandered into the newsroom. We smiled and gave him the right of way if he walked our way. If he ever stopped by my desk, which was totally rare, I rose to my feet. It was kind of like we always we were taught in the Navy, when we shouted, "Attention on deck!" It was like the admiral was passing. Only I was silent and did not salute. He was still intellectually brilliant even as an old man, and highly respected by all of us. It was a priviledge to work for him.

Mister Lawrence's newsroom conversations were usually with afternoon news editor Miz G, writer Ed Shannon, the main night copy editor Dave McBride, or my mentors Birdie and George. He would sit down and peruse the copy of the story or editorial of interest to him, holding either of them six inches from his face or using a magnifying glass to see it perfectly. (His eyesight was failing.) Sometimes the writer of concern would read the story or editorial to him.

After 1968, when the newspaper offices moved to the 1401 Frederica Street site, Lawrence Senior was semi retired, getting into his final years, so the staff saw him even less. That was when he was sort of the publisher emeritus. Sometimes he still came through the newsroom during the day to make an appearance in his old stomping grounds. He had a cot or improvised bed in the newspaper morgue in the basement, where he took afternoon naps. He would always use the front foyer steps that made it easy for him to negotiate his way past the business office and head for what we called the "cage."

When I first started full-time at the M-I in 1965, my only contact with the Hagers was through Mister Lawrence's son Larry Jr. who hired me for the newside. Larry started working for his father as a paper boy, and after serving in the Army in World War II, came home to become picture editor, reporter, news editor, assistant to the editor in 1962, and co-publisher and co-editor of the Messenger-Inquirer in 1966.

At first, I found both Larry and his brother John as two men in the communications business who had trouble communicating, especially with their staffs. I saw them as businessmen, who just did not seem to be good writers or real journalists at heart. I had the toughest time of all with Larry in the 1960s, trying to understand the assignments he gave me. I found his orders vague and imprecise, and had trouble grasping the meaning or logic of his story ideas and what he wanted me to do. But he was the boss, was much older than me, and had been a reporter himself. I was 21 years old and just out of college and had not written anything but football and basketball game stories. So I thought he must know better than I. I labored to interpret his assignments because I wanted to please him. I did my best in that respect, but it was difficult. Sadly and with no offense intended, I found what I saw of his news writing even worse.

In April 1989, Larry retired as co-publisher of the Messenger-Inquirer after 41 years in the newspaper business. He was 66 when he sold his interest in Owensboro Publishing Company to his brother John who remained as editor and publisher of the paper. Larry was a warmhearted, empathetic and compassionate man, well known for many community service projects including his interest and involvement in United Way, and his leadership in the Goodfellows Club. In November 1990, Hager announced the formation of the Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation, and donated a million dollars to the organization to begin tackling the problems of children living in poverty in Owensboro.

In the 1960s and early '70s, I only knew John Hager as a lawyer. I just remember him as distant,and short on personality. He reminded me of Navy officers I had known who never talked directly to or ever fraternized with enlisted men. John was not in the newsroom often but I saw him in court a few times when he was a partner in an Owensboro law firm with Morton Holbrook, William Craig and Ridley Sandidge. I remember him as almost struggling to find the right words as he addressed the judge and juries. He appeared mentally stumped and temporarily inarticulate. He would pause as his mind seemed to drift away in thought until he decided how he wanted to phrase his statement. It was a delay in courtroom discourse that seemed like five minutes instead of seconds. Then he would continue. You really had to be patient in waiting for him to make his point. He was no Morton Holbrook.

John Hager left the law field and became full-time editor of the Messenger-Inquirer in 1973. He would retire in 2007 at the age of 80. In 1997, He founded the Public Life Foundation, which had as its main goal to foster citizen engagement in major public decisions and policy making. He also resigned as leader of the foundation in 2007. In my opinion, John became even a greater man in his twilight years. His foundation ranked at the top as his greatest contribution to the people of Daviess County, and the greatest personal accomplishment in his public professional life.

In my last 24 plus years at the M-I, I never had a single conversation with John Hager. Most every time we met in the hallways, he would say, "Hi, Gil!" I would smile, stifle a laugh and reply, "Hello John." I always wondered. Maybe he meant Gil as in "Gil Hodges" who played first base for the Dodgers in the 1950s. Maybe he just did not know my name and Gil was the first word that came to mind that he could associate with the name Hodges.

Larry Hager was retired and involved with the Hager Foundation during most of my last tour of duty at the M-I. But until he developed health problems and began to decline, Larry visited the M-I building occasionally. He always greeted me cheerfully, complimenting on one of the history pieces I had written. I always admired Larry for his service as an Army officer in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium during World War II. Once I asked him to let me interview him about his combat experience, but he declined. He said his memory was failing him, and he had forgotten a lot of what he experienced during the war, and could not talk about those days.

In the eyes of some of his employees, the John and Larry Hager men may have been eccentric, aloof, sometimes stiff, never good with small talk, and aristocratic in manner, but they were never arrogant or condescending. On good days they could both be very magnanimous and astute if they were discussing something about a public issue or operation of the newspaper of which they had knowledge. I just think they were born to be very formal, were all business, and had a hard time to connecting in a warm, friendly way with regular Joes like the paper's employees. Who knows? It might have been more shyness than anything, or maybe they were not raised under the less comfortable circumstances as we staff members were. Some paper employees complained that the Hagers treated them as their vassals, especially after the 1972 strike when some of us kept our jobs while our fellow workers and friends on the picket line were locked out and finally lost theirs. But as years passed, the vitriol from that sad year dissipated in those of us who still remembered. Calm soon ruled again and time healed those wounds. Most of us in the newsroom who went through that experience regained what was a true affection for the Hagers, but always seemed to regard them in the same loyal, respectful way as the British people do the Royal Family.

Lawrence Sr., Larry and John were very serious and seldom smiled, but there were times Larry would burst out laughing. It was the Hager women who always saved the day, Mister Lawrence's wife, Augusta, was the warmest of all, followed by Marge Hager (John's wife) and Frankie Hager, Larry's spouse. Augusta was so gregarious, a really good mixer, who smiled and laughed whenever she visited with staff, usually at holiday dinners. Of the Hager's children the staff saw most frequentl, Sally and Susan, were the nicest and the most engaging. Everyone who worked with him found John's son Bruce a quiet, sweet young man who at that time, at least to the newsroom staff, did not seem particularly interested in journalism.

After I returned to the paper in the 1980s, I gained a much higher, professional and personal regard for John and Larry. The two of them were much older, and they were also out of day to day contact with the reporters and editors on the newsroom staff. Their attention was almost exclusively on the latest executive editor, or in presiding over the editorial board. When they did mix with the newsroom staff, I thought they were more jovial, but never good at chit chat. Maybe it was just me or maybe the three of us had matured with experience. Maybe I was wrong, but it seemed like we felt more at ease with each other. Sue Trautwein, the paper's human resources director and the Hagers' undesignated chief of staff for so many years, was a force that helping the Hagers break the ice to connect with all of us in their extended Messenger-Inquirer family.

The Hagers were wealthy, but conservative and sometimes their staff thought they were downright stingy, especially when overseeing the management of the newsroom payroll and the rest of the Messenger-Inquirer budget. They were cautious sticklers in the way they spent their money. As businessmen, they were always focused on "the bottom line."

"The Hagers have used their money well," said my former M-I colleague, John Maglinger, who worked for the newspaper for 16 years and had a long, friendly professional relationship with the Hager family. "That's what I like about them, and the community has greatly benefited because of them. Many wealthy people squander their money on themselves, but the Hagers didn't, Maglinger noted. "I remember when John and Marge bought a home in Stone Creek. John was vocally opposed to the move. He was well satisfied with Eaton Avenue. Margie insisted. Margie won. John never drove a Cadillac. At company Christmas parties, he, Larry, and their families were always served last. John and Larry also made a point to walk over to each table and say hello."

I agree with Johnny Mag that the Hager family was unmatched in their high devotion to the welfare and future of Owensboro and Daviess County. "As publishers of the only local newspaper they received a lot of criticism for their stands on controversial issues such as merged government and, from time to time, for not quashing unflattering stories about locally prominent people such as Wendell Foster and Bob Green," Johnny pointed out to me in July 2010. "If their brand of journalism did not sit well with a lot of people, it still was a principled attempt to tell the truth as they understood it. The important thing to remember is they knew they were always going to be put in tough public positions and they faced it with an enviable stoicism and gentlemanliness that, if nothing else, earned our staff's enduring respect."

Maglinger had many talks with John Hager: "I remember one in particular; it was after Progress Printing burned to the ground. John and Larry loaned their presses to Bob Puckett absolutely free. I repeat, at *absolutely no charge*. Because of their generosity, Bob didn't miss a printing deadline and won the Small Business of the Year award that year. Bob gave a glowing speech at the Owensboro Country Club. He thanked everyone for their support. He did not even mention the Hagers. I asked John after the luncheon if he wasn't upset with Bob. He said, 'Maybe at one time in my life I would have been, but it doesn't really matter.' I cite that story to say John, too, matured. The gesture made by the Hagers to Puckett was unprecedented and came from the purest of motives."

Maglinger added: "I once wrote a story in which I misspelled the names of the two persons featured. I became so upset the next day when I learned of my errors that I walked out of the newsroom. John (Hager) tracked me by phone to my aunt's house and asked that I come in and talk with him. I did. It was a call he didn't have to make. I have always appreciated his gesture."

John and Larry had their rough edges, may have appeared uppity at times to some of their employees and at an early point in their careers (John especially) knew how to make more enemies than friends. But I thought they always knew how to handle themselves with class and honor. Johnny Mag gave me one example that he had witnessed: "One time Bob Green was upset with the Messenger-Inquirer after it printed an unflattering story, which I believe, focused on the Executive Inn, the hotel he owned. Soon after the story was published, Mr. Green told a reporter that essentially John and Larry fell far short of the ideals of their father, Lawrence Sr. John and Larry responded in print by thanking Green for thinking so highly of their father."

"Today, we point to downtown and debate its significance to our community's future," Maglinger told me in an email July 2, 2010. "I believe the buyout of the Hagers was just as significant to Owensboro's history. That routinely noted transaction not only signified a rupture of the spirit of a once-proud city, but foreshadowed the coming tougher times for us all. Few could gauge its impact at the time, fewer, perhaps, even cared and still fewer care today. But I do. I especially do each time I breeze through a daily edition of the current Messenger-Inquirer."

I had come back to the Messenger-Inquirer when print journalism had already begun entering a new age of reporting technology. The typewriters and 8 x 11 standard sheet copy paper had been replaced in the newsroom by computers or "news terminals" as they were called then. Writers could type or "keyboard" their news stories and convey messages to each other and the copy desk electronically. It was an amazing innovation to those of us journalism veterans still accustomed to the old-school methods of composing on typewriters, using glue pots to paste the pages together, and editing story pages one at a time with a ballpoint, ink pen or pencil. (I still had my portable Royal typewriter that I had used to report basketball games, and was using it at home in the 1980s to write my two books.)

The terminals in the Messenger-Inquirer newsroom were the big modular shaped kind of the 1980s that looked like a console television set with a 17-inch screen and a keyboard. After a story or obit was finished, it was sent electronically to the city desk for editing and then sent to a printer in the composing room. The page dummy with the design of the page was already with Mike Hardesty and the three Phils --- Calvert, Martin and Trivett who glued the printed out pages to the standard size broadsheet with ads already on the carousel. Most of the inside pages in the 1-A and Region sections had already been completed before the front sections were started. Late breaking local news stories for 1-A, the Region and Sports fronts were still being written, edited and waiting to be pasted up. To newcomers, it looked like organized chaos the way the layout of the paper came together, but Mike and his other compositors were very smooth and made their job look easy.

The newfangled way of writing became a snap after the first two weeks of adapting to the new technology, because, if you remember, I was considered by the editor who hired me as "overqualified for this job." My main mission while working at the Messenger-Inquirer, doing obituaries and collecting all the public records, for the remainder of my career was to always be fair and never make any errors in anything I ever wrote or reported. Absolutely no errors was my motto.

As soon as I was on the clock in the afternoons and sat down at my terminal, I started taking obits over the phone or received them from local funeral homes. The funeral home directors read them to me as I jotted down all the names and facts on a obituary form. We strived to make no mistakes and dreaded the embarrassment of having to rerun an obit to correct errors. Deadline was 9 p.m. for having obits typed up, finished and in the computer system, ready for pasteup on the Records page of the Region section.

When the pasteup of pages began on the carousel in the composing room, my additional duty was to proofread the Records page which in addition to obituaries and funeral times included police reports, district and circuit court, marriage licenses, divorces and birth announcementses. Then I checked all the stories and briefs on the Region and 1-A front pages and then switched to read the jump pages. Without any foulups, breakdowns or remaking of pages, I finished my job at midnight ahead of time for the press run at 12:30.

In the mid to late 1980s the newsroom staff and copy desk crew were a very professional but free wheeling, fun-loving bunch under the leadership of Rob Schorman as executive editor, Judy Hetrick at city editor and Paula Anderson as news editor. I found the morale of both staffs to be high. They were very loose, confident, and optimistic like a baseball team on a long winning streak. They appeared to enjoy, even love, their jobs. There was an obvious bond between the copy desk and the reporters. The crew loved to drink and socialize together (some would say

party) after hours in those days. So a good time was had by all.

In the late '80s and into the 1990s, we had great city editors like Ben Sheroan and Paul Raupp, and copy desk personnel like Michael Hall, Hunter Reigler, Tommy Newton, Kim Parson, Dewayne Bevil, Todd Turner, Ann Green, Chuck Noe, Ken Altine, David Franks and others.

Among the reporters was the still prolific news reporter and columnist Keith Lawrence, who since 1972 had racked up an unprecedented number of by-lines. (He is still doing it.) Keith was senior writer on the staff, leading a well-trained group of enterprising reporters like Keith Smith, Jane Nicholes, Alan Chitlik, Cathy Behan, Chris Carey, Dan Heckel, Karen Owen, Laura Skillman, Mark Stalcup, Jim Mayse and Steve Hunt. Also anchoring the sports department were veteran writers Steve Vied, Rich Suwanski, Mark Mathis, Jake Jennings, Luke Andrews and sports editors Danny McKenzie and Gene Abell.

David Boeyink and Paul Morsey were two of the first editorial page editors. Suzi Bartholomy, a versatile editorial page assistant, handled the Readers Write letters on the daily Opinion page and later in her career wrote three weekly columns. Sherri Evans was our librarian, Marty Payne was chief obit clerk and the top flight page compositor was Michael Hardesty, a hard-working, no errors guy no one would ever forget, and his colleagues the three Phils ---- Calvert, Martin and Trivett.

At the helm, writing and editing copy for the weekly Food page and the Sunday Lifestyle section was Annie (Whittinghill) my best old friend and confidant who had been working for the paper since 1957. Lora Wimsatt. an assistant to executive editors, began writing a weekly column for the Saturday in 1988 and in the 1990s took over as editor of Community, a separate section of the paper featuring soft local news from elementary and high schools, colleges and the military.

Dan Heckel had just graduated from Murray State University in 1986, and became our police and courts reporter after Keith Smith switched to coverage of local government. Together, Dan and I cast a wide net of coverage in reporting crime and news from the courts. He and I worked closely in the years before he was promoted to positions of editorial page editor in 1998, city editor in 2001 and then executive editor in 2005.

The staff's experience and intelligent writing were the main reasons for the success of the paper in those days. During my shifts, it was just fun again being back in the action of a newspaper newsroom, fighting to make deadline on time, rushing to get the broadsheet pasted up and ready well before presstime.

That wacky, full steam ahead squad of much younger pros in the newsroom in the '80s really knew how to let the good times roll. My two most memorable highlights of being the old new guy at the M-I were first, the staff's pizza party on election night November 1984 when Reagan won his second term. Second was a Sunday night in March 1988 when a vanload of M-I staffers (six or seven of us) went to Louisville's Freedom Hall to see Michael Jackson in concert. We had a incomparably good time, witnessing the most phenomenal performance by Jackson that I had ever seen.

One day at work, the quiet, professorial Schorman and Judy Hetrick, known for her hardcore, looking over your shoulder editing, and a cackling, almost psychotic laugh, announced to the staff they were going to be married and would be leaving the paper. The M-I personnel staff policy at that time was that a married couple could not be working closely together in their two newsroom management roles.

With much credit to its great staff, the Messenger-Inquirer flourished in the first five years after my return and reached its peak in In April 1989, when the American Society of Newspaper Editors selected the Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer as one of the 14 best small newspapers in the United States. Richard Halicks, Schorman's successor, accepted the award when it was announced during a program on excellence in small newspapers at the society's convention in Washington, D.C. It was the second major national ranking the Messenger-Inquirer had received in recent weeks. Earlier that year, a study at the University of Missouri School of Journalism listed the Messenger-Inquirer as one of the nation's Top 5 daily newspapers with a circulation of less than 50,000.

The morale of the paper peaked and the performance of the news staff reached its high water mark by the time Halicks left July 1988. It was then that the newsroom parties were over and there was a quick succession of executive editors. As this was happening, working at the Messenger-Inquirer became a unhappy experience for some of the staff. Dissension and unrest seemed to develop within their ranks and a staff turnover ensued. The number leaving made up a large portion of the 300 reporters, copy desk editors and photographers would come to and leave the Messenger-Inquirer from 1972 to 2010, according to a decades-long list kept by Keith Lawrence.

The revolving door trend began within the top management of the paper. The way I saw it, that process began in November 1989 when Tim Harmon became executive editor. At that time John Hager was still publisher of the newspaper and president of Owensboro Publishing Co. and Owensboro Broadcasting, and continued to serve on the three-member editorial board that determines the newspaper's position on public issues. It appeared to me and some others on the news staff that John was dissatisfied with the direction his executive editors were taking the paper. Harmon stayed on until August 1991, when he accepted a job with a Hammond, Ind., newspaper. Then, Dave Berry, a 43-year-old Kansas native, was named executive editor in August 1991. He had been a newspaper consultant and created a feature service for Texas newspapers; and worked eight years as vice president/executive editor for the Dallas-Fort Worth Suburban Newspapers, a subsidiary of the A.H. Belo Corp., that operated seven suburban papers in the Dallas area.

In addition to Hager and Berry, the newspaper's senior managers at that time were Ed Riney, vice president for finance and administration; Julian Boone, vice president for operations and circulation; and Tim Thompson was the advertising director.

After Berry's appointment, Hager said in a public statement: "I must tell you that the shift from a publisher/president-directed newspaper to a team-directed newspaper comes from strengths, not weaknesses. Never has our newspaper and the company been better managed than during the past few years."

In March 1991, city editor Ben Sheroan was named managing editor, given the responsibility to supervise local news coverage and direct the community news department and planning special projects. Anne Green became night editor, and sports writer Rich Suwanski succeeded Green as sports editor. News editor Tommy Newton moved to the position of Sunday editor, and Paul Raupp, a city staff reporter, assumed the duties of the M-I editorial page editor.

A native of Hardin County, Ky., the 33-year-old Sheroan began his newspaper career as a part-time sportswriter at age 16, and later was assistant editor of The News-Enterprise in Elizabethtown. Green, 32, had served in several positions at the Messenger-Inquirer, including news editor and Sunday editor. She was named sports editor in December 1989. As night editor,

Green supervised the news copy desk and was responsible for production of each night's edition in the hours before deadline. Suwanski began working at the Messenger-Inquirer in July 1974 as a sports reporter, and was sports editor from August 1977 to February 1979, when he decided to return to sports reporting. Raupp would replace Sheroan as city editor in June 1994 when Ben took a job as editor of the Parkersburg (West Va.) News.

Robert (Bob) Ashley, a journalist and editor for more than 20 years, came to the Messenger-Inquirer as executive editor on Tuesday, March 1, 1994, succeeding Dave Berry, who left the paper in 1993. he had most recently been executive editor for seven years of the Centre Daily Times, a daily newspaper owned by Knight-Ridder Inc. in State College, Pa. Prior to State College, Ashley spent 10 years at The Charlotte Observer as assistant metropolitan editor deputy features editor , features editor and assistant managing editor. He had graduated from Duke University in Durham, N.C., with a degree in history.

In the almost 11 years he would hold the top job in the M-I newsroom, Ashley was a lightweight as a journalist and editor, in my opinion. I thought he showed a lack of leadership and judgment, From what I heard from knowledgeable people downtown, they never seemed to our readership that he was competent. I did not think Ashley's writing was that compelling and was at times downright dull. Many of our paper's subscribers agreed in readership polls taken by the M-I. His words just did not connect with the average Daviess Countian. I did think he was a very articulate, verbal communicator. It was a smooth, cool talent he always seem to like to use to impress John Hager and every publisher of the paper after him. That seemed to me to be Ashley's main objective. He was a history major like me so most of our rare and brief conversations in the office were usually about the latest history biographies we were reading. In those days, there was talk among staffers who wondered why someone like Ashley, who had graduated from Duke, allegedly worked once at the Philadelphia Inquirer and had a good job at State College, would ever want to be an editor of a small town Kentucky newspaper. It was puzzling.

Ashley did not communicate much directly with the individuals on the staff, but when he did, he was cordial. He directed Alexieff to convey to them what he wanted done, and Mike relayed those orders to the reporters. Ashley was very intelligent, highly educated, well read and articulate and he loved to display those talents in his infrequent one-on-one conversations with staffers. I profiled him as a showoff, a snobbish elitist intellectual who always liked to remind you that he had graduated from Duke. I read him as being a mysteriously insecure guy who feared screwing up and losing his job. Then, in January 1996, the unexpected happened.... The Messenger-Inquirer ended its 120-year history as a family-owned, independent newspaper. John, Larry and the Hager family closed a deal, selling their newspaper to the Belo Corp. of Dallas, Texas, publisher of the Dallas Morning News and owner of seven television stations. The sale was first announced to the Messenger-Inquirer's 175 employees on Monday, Dec. 4, 1995, and then revealed to the public in the Tuesday edition. At the time of the sale, the newspaper had 33,400 subscribers.

Belo officials Robert Decherd and Burl Osborne promised to continue and nurture a partnership that would promote the highest standards of community service and journalism. "This is one of the finest community newspapers there is," Osborne said.

The sale meant the end of three generations of newspaper publication by the Hager family. John Hager stepped down as publisher at age 68, telling employees: "With Belo, we have ensured that the Messenger-Inquirer traditions and values of high public trust will endure and be

carried on into the future."

In his report of the sale Dec. 5, business writer Stewart Jennison wrote that industry analysts said Hager could have interested any number of potential buyers in bidding for the the newspaper; instead, he negotiated only with the Belo group.

Osborne told the M-I employees that there would be no changes: "It ain't broke and doesn't need us or anyone else to fix it. We're coming here as stewards." Osborne worked for the Associated Press for 20 years before joining the Dallas Morning News as executive editor in 1980. In announcing the sale, Osborne told the paper's employees that the possible acquisition of the Owensboro paper was not discussed at the time he joined the board of the Messenger-Inquirer.

Robert Decherd, the chairman, president and chief executive officer of Belo, praised Hager's courage in selecting Belo as the new owner of the paper. "There are enormous external pressures on owners of papers of this quality to take a different course," said Decherd, who along with Osborne flew into Owensboro to join Hager in making the announcement. "He could have had an auction with 17 groups crawling through the place and then presenting him with a lot of big numbers."

Decherd said that Belo was going to give the Messenger-Inquirer "the degree of independence it needs to fluorish," according to Jennison's story. "I will be here periodically to see the successes you have achieved," he told the M-I employees. "But we are totally convinced these companies prosper only when the publisher and general manager have the authority to run the company. Just give us a chance to prove it to you." Osborne added that he has the same advice to readers who fear their local newspaper will be harmed by a change in ownership. "I hope they will just watch us and read and see."

Hager told us that his decision to sell to Belo was shaped mostly because of his long relationship with Osborne, a native of Letcher County, who began his career in journalism at the Ashland Daily Independent. Osborne had been a member of the board of directors of the Owensboro Publishing Company since 1989.

On Friday, Dec. 22, 1995, 18 days after the Hagers' sale of the paper to Belo, Robert W. Mong Jr., who had been managing editor of The Dallas Morning News since 1990, was named publisher of the Messenger-Inquirer.

A native of Ohio, the 46-year-old Mong, joined the Dallas staff in 1979 as an assistant city editor. He later served as businessas editor, projects editor, assistant managing editor and deputy managing editor before being named managing editor. Burl Osborne, publisher and editor of the Morning News and president of Belo's publishing division, revealed Mong's appointment to the Messenger-Inquirer staff. He said Mong is "largely responsible for the progress we (the Morning News) have made. He's a dyed-in-the-wool newspaper man." Mong had been in charge of a newsroom staff of 500 in Dallas, leading a paper with a daily circulation of more than 525,000 and a Sunday circulation of 800,000.

Mong said he considers the move "a step up. Being a publisher is different. This allows me to continue to grow." An editor of a newspaper is in charge of the paper's news coverage and operations.

A publisher is in charge of all departments including news, circulation and advertising. "As publisher, your horizons can broaden," Mong said. He told the staff he doesn't expect any immediate changes. "One of the things I'm about is listening," Mong said. "To the staff and the community. I'm not one of those people who comes in and says everything has to be changed."

I was both happy and sad when Belo bought the Messenger-Inquirer. Sad because it was the end of an era for the Hager family in publishing Owensboro's only newspaper. We reminisced proudly about all the good times instead of the bad, and thought about all the good work the newspaper had done for the people of Owensboro and Daviess County while led by Mister Lawrence, Larry and John. We were happy and encouraged that a big publishing giant like Belo and the Dallas Morning News would have such confidence and faith in a small paper like us and thought we were worth buyng. We were hopeful Belo would take our paper to even greater heights of success.

Just as publisher Mong said, he brought everyone of the news staff into his office for individual talk sessions. We were all delighted with the nice package of employee benefits Belo offered to all our full-time employees. In addition to a better healthcare plan, life insurance and an individual pension fund, Belo also gave us the opportunity to establish our first 401k accounts. All the pension plan money that we had under the Hagers' ownership, was rolled over into our individual accounts with Belo and Fidelity.

We were very optimistic, but we were unaware that the newspaper industry was entering an era of vast change when print journalism would have to make the transition to online Internet public and face the fact of diminishing advertising revenue. Newspapers would have to find a way to compete after the year 2000. Numerous newspapers would go out of business or be sold when they failed to find ways to make the change to online publication and compete for advertising. It was a tough reality that Belo would have to contend.

In June 1997, after being editor for three years, Ashley was given the mission to establish the new Southern Indiana edition of the Messenger-Inquirer in Perry and Spencer counties. He had brought Mike Alexieff from the Corpus Christi (Texas) Caller-Times to replace Raupp as the new city editor in May. Reporters Mike Stalcup and Scott Hagerman covered news and sports respectively out of a Tell City office, and Jim Mayse focused on hard news events in Rockport. The Indiana edition was an experiment from the beginning, and it would fail. It just did not take off and sell papers. The Hoosiers got most of their Indiana news from the Evansville Courier-Press and their own newspapers in Spencer and Perry counties.

In that same period, he also increased the daily workload of his reporting staff, and Alexieff, who many staffersI considered a wiseguy and Ashley's abrasive lackey, made sure that his writers always complied with the executive editor's order. They were to give him exactly what Ashley wanted. From the start, I considered Alexieff an obnoxious bully who was weak on writing and reporting skills. He did not like me and I did not like him. It seemed to me that he did not think a newspaper of the M-I's size should report the public records that we did, yet later he gave me an additional assignment of reporting city building permits and food service inspection for the Sunday Business and Wednesday Food section.

In September 1997, Bob Mong left his job as publisher of the Messenger-Inquirer to return to Dallas to become executive vice president of Belo's publishing division. He would also become president and general manager of The Dallas Morning News. The move blindsided everyone on the Messenger-Inquirer news staff. I do not think anyone saw it coming. We began wondering if any other bigger surprises were waiting for us down the road.

Mong said his main goals had been to visit the various communities in our circulation area, listen to readers and help find ways to make the paper indispensable to them. Having achieved those goals went hand in hand with his objective to guide the transition from Hager family ownership to Belo stewardship in a way that respected the great legacy of the paper and won the

trust of Messenger-Inquirer readers, advertisers and employees."

"I also wanted to help one of America's best community papers get even better." Mong said, During his tenure, the Messenger-Inquirer expanded across the river with the Southern Indiana edition with bureaus in Rockport and Tell City, and added Kentucky bureaus in Ohio and Muhlenberg counties.

Ed Riney, who took Mong's place as publisher, said the Indiana edition "has been tougher than we imagined, but in another two to five years we expect some success there. Riney, a former vice president of Green River Steel, joined the Messenger-Inquirer as chief financial officer in 1987. He said he learned a lot from the three publishers he worked for over the next decade. "Bob Mong taught me to understand the importance of interacting with employees and the community. I was insecure because I didn't have a journalism background. But he convinced me I had good instincts."

On Oct. 19, 1997, six weeks after Mong's departure, the Messenger-Inquirer launched its Internet online edition, and soon was being read by an average of 2,000 people a day. However, the quality of the M-I faded in the years after Mong left the M-I. At the end of 2000, the Southern Indiana edition that was started 3 1/2 years ago was discontinued. Riney said that rising costs, especially newsprint pricing, along with fewer subscribers than were anticipated led us to make the decision. "We are proud of the work our news, production and circulation folks did with a strong newspaper, and it is through no shortcomings of theirs - or lack of acceptance from our existing subscribers - that we reached the decision," Riney declared.

Then in June 2000, Belo sold the Messenger-Inquirer to Paxton Media Group of Paducah, along with Belo's weekly newspaper, the McLean County News, and dailies Henderson Gleaner and Bryan-College Station Eagle in Texas. Belo officials had decided smaller newspapers did not fit into their long range strategy. In addition, the Texas corporation sold its interest in the Dallas Mavericks basketball team and the sports arena in Dallas. Members of the M-I staff also learned that Belo sold those parts of their total holdings to complete the purchase of the Providence (R.I.) Journal which Belo bought in 1996.

Ed Riney told M-I employees on Tuesday, June 27, 2000, that the sale to PMG should be complete between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31. Riney said he had expected more than five bidders and a sale price somewhere between $50 and $100 million. In explaining the surprise sale, Riney told M-I employees that Belo had bought the M-I, hoping to produce a profit margin in double digits, but the M-I normally achieved an overall revenue growth of 4 to 5 percent a year. The Messenger-Inquirer just was not in a high growth market, Riney said. The circulation of the Messenger-Inquirer on June 28, 2000, included 31,917 daily subscribers and 34,824 on Sundays.

After Belo's sale of the M-I to Paxton Media Group, John Hager told a M-I reporter he had sold the paper to Belo for 70 percent of its market value. "I thought that discount was worth it to have a company with corporate values that would continue the tradition and values my family brought to the Messenger-Inquirer," he said, "Belo's decision to sell the M-I was a disappointing surprise. But that is history now."

10

A Sprint to the Finish Line

One week in July 2007, I noticed that our executive editor Dan Heckel had not been in his office for about two days. I inquired around the newsroom, asking if Dan was ill or on vacation. I had seen his wife, Sherri, so I thought maybe Dan was using some vacation time to take their son Max to Boston to see the Red Sox play. Dan and Sherri were big Sox fans. But I learned that Dan was not on vacation and was in town. Someone told me that they had seen him earlier in the week in his office.

After lunch one day, I passed Matt Francis, walking in from the paper parking lot. I asked if Dan were sick or if Matt had seen him. Francis said absolutely and sincerely that he did not know and was as curious as I was about Dan's whereabouts. Within a few days, staff members learned that Heckel had been dismissed by the publisher, but no one knew why. Then the same ultimatum given by management after Riney's firing came down from the top. If you talk about it among yourselves or tell someone inside or outside the newspaper family, you will be fired too.

Within weeks I learned the facts of Dan's firing but never discussed it with anyone. But the word had gotten out somehow to the public. In August I got a visit from an Owensboro man that had habitually pestered me and Dan about a mistake that continued to occur in the Lifestyle meetings section. I had fouled up and apologized, said I would make sure the error is corrected, thinking I had settled that matter. But the guy wasn't satisfied, and said quite bluntly that he wanted to talk to Heckel. Is he here? Is he in town? the complainant asked. I told him straight up that Dan was no longer working at the Messenger-Inquirer. Well, why is he not working here? The man asked again. Again, straight up, I told the man that other M-I employees and I had been told not to discuss Dan's absence. It was an internal matter. At that point, the man complained about the secret way the newspaper corporation ran its business. Then he asked, "What are you people running here? A newspaper or the CIA?" At that point, I sort of wondered the same thing. I then did an about face and returned to the newsroom. I never saw that guy again.

On Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007, Matt, city editor since January 2005, replaced Dan as executive editor of the newspaper. Bob Morris told the staff that he had interviewed several candidates from both inside and outside Paxton Media Group, but "concluded that the best person to lead us into the future is Matt Francis." We all thought Matt was a good choice, but had been happy working with Dan and hated to see him leave. When he was chosen, Matt, who was 34 years old, had handled both the city editor and executive editor duties in the preceding weeks after Dan's dismissal.

A native of Russell, Ky., a community near Ashland, Francis began his career at the *Messenger-Inquirer* in the old Muhlenberg County bureau in August 1998. For the next year, he covered news in Muhlenberg, McLean and Ohio counties. Francis moved to the Owensboro office in late 1999 and covered law enforcement until his appointment as editorial page editor in May 2001. He continued in that position until becoming city editor in January 2005. Francis selected photo editor Bob Bruck to assume the duties of city editor.

In the weeks through November and December 2007 into early January 2008, tense conditions continued at the Messenger-Inquirer as all employees waited for the next shoe to

drop. Or more fearfully, when the next downsizing would occur and another group of M-I employees would lose their jobs.

In early February 2008, we got the word that three part-time employees on the copy desk and in the photo and sports departments would lose their jobs. (Jobs of other part-time employees elsewhere in the M-I building were eliminated too.) Everyone in the newsroom where I worked was safe from the job cuts. The three part-timers got three weeks of advance notice. We also were told that the *Messenger-Inquirer* and *Madisonville Messenger* were going to be consolidated and the *M-I* copy desk with the addition of one copy editor from the Madisonville paper would be producing two daily newspapers each night. Each of the reporters in the sports department including sports editor Jim Pickens would be required to multi-task and learn how to design the sports sections of the papers.

Then in August 2008, the Owensboro copy desk editors were told the *Sun Commercial*, the daily newspaper in Vincennes, Ind., would be added to the consolidation. The Owensboro desk crew would eventually edit, design and produce three daily newspapers each night. It would be a formidable task. When the copy editors, led by *M-I* news editor Hunter Reigler, got the word they nearly panicked, they felt so overwhelmed by their new workload. We all would have to go through a month of intense re-training until the nightly production plan was implemented. I would be a crucial part of it. The first night the M-I copy desk produced both the Owensboro and Madisonville papers was March 3, 2008.

One of the part-time employees who lost her job was our weekend obit clerk, Cathy Varble. Some full-time staffer would have to take her place those nights. Cory Maglinger, son of my friend John Maglinger, was the regular obituary writer who performed those duties five days a week. Eventually, the replacement on the obit desk would have to take obituaries from three newspapers, an average of 20 to 25 death notices a night. The replacement would have to learn how to scan obit photos in place of Phil Martin, who had done those on a part-time basis before his job was eliminated as a result of the consolidation. There was a lot of new technical work for the replacement to learn, such as how to operate one of the Mac computers used by the copy desk editors. (Newsroom reporters worked on PCs.)

Within a few days after the announcement of the consolidation, Matt Francis came to my cubicle and asked me to join him and Bob Bruck in the executive editor's office. They asked me to help them solve their problem finding Cathy's replacement. They wanted me to do her job two nights a week. They wanted me to step up. I was totally taken aback, because my plans were to work as the court records reporter until my full retirement year beginning in June 2009. And then if they approved, I hoped to perform those same duties on a part-time basis. But Bob and Matt had their backs against the wall and needed me. I had experience doing obits and about everything else in the newsroom. They wanted me to revise my courts reporting schedule so I could work two nights a week in the obit slot on the copy desk. God, I didn't want to take that extra work! I was totally against it. I was already feeling so old, tired and run down from the tension growing at the paper. I did not think I could make it to my goal in 2009. But I was also afraid they might retire me on the spot if I did not take the obit clerk work. So, I said, "I guess if those are my orders, I will have to do it. I am a member of the team." That solved Matt and Bob's problem, and I was committed to do a much bigger and more difficult workload. Again, I just hated the prospect of doing the obit slot. I had worked so hard in 1990 to give up the obit duties that I had been performing since 1984. This was going to be like my worst nightmare.

With three or four weeks of training on a Mac computer in February 2008 and after learning how to tone pictures for the obits, I began my work with the copy desk at the *Messenger-Inquirer* in March. I still could not believe it was happening. Nearing the end of my career, I had returned to the obit desk, where I had started in 1984. I would be working Thursday and Friday nights. I thought the Paxtons had made another of their ludicrous, impractical moves in consolidating production of two, then eventually three newspapers.

PMG's idea, probably cooked up by an accountant in Paducah, was to fire some full-time and all part-time workers, then get the copy desk staff in Owensboro to design pages for two, then three newspapers each night, while tripling the *Messenger-Inquirer* copy desk's daily workload. The corporate executives apparently thought that the M-I's better computer technology and some of the best copy desk editors in the business would make their strategy work. I thought it was a lame idea and it pissed me off, seeing my good colleagues struggling hopelessly. All the PMG corporate suits wanted to do was maintain the *M-I's* profit margin while advertising revenue in Owensboro continued to plummet during an economic recession. PMG treated its Owensboro, Madisonville and Vincennes employees like second class citizens. They did not care one iota that their *M-I* staff's life in the workplace was miserable. At first, PMG was willing to pay the *M-I* copy desk page designers overtime to adjust to their bigger workload. But within a few months, when the overtime pay hours began to mount, PMG shut that down. Paying overtime to the reporters, copy desk editors and all other employees was prohibited. The corporate board would not hire anyone full-time to help make the *M-I* copy desk's job easier. As long as PMG's bottom line was solid, the employees did not matter. Be happy you have a job. You will just have to gut it out. Several of the employees already in their 50s and early 60s did not hold out much hope for finding another job in journalism, since many other newspapers were dealing with the same production troubles in the new age of journalism.

In my last year there, at the beginning of the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, employees throughout the M-I building came to work each day, worried and stressed out, knowing the paper was still losing advertising money, and scared stiff that their jobs would be eliminated at the end of the next business quarter. It was a toxic environment. Covered up with so much extra work and most performing two jobs, employees sat at their computer terminals like robots, afraid to even talk to each other.

Employees such as I who reported news from the courts at the courthouse and judicial center in downtown Owensboro were told to never talk to anyone in the public about the job cuts, revenue losses, or how many reporters still remained on staff. If word got back to them that we had talked about the newspaper's problems, Matt Francis and publisher Bob Morris would fire the person leaking that kind of information.

Morale was worse than I had ever seen it in more than 30 years I worked under the M-I banner. One veteran employee who had worked loyally for the Hagers and Belo quit because she could not endure the additional job stress. Anyone who was reaching retirement age would be gone automatically. And worst of all, through all this mayhem, PMG did not have a clue how to make money on the *Messenger-Inquirer's* online Web site. A lot of us thought the Paxtons' big ship had hit an iceberg, was taking on water, and going down bow first.

Personally, I was expected to compress my regular 40-hour week into three days instead of five in order to work the 16 hours of the obit shift two nights a week. So I was doing one full-time job and an extra two days of a part-time job. After laboring through such a schedule in the first two weeks of the consolidation implementation, I thought I was going to die. On Thursday,

March 13, of 2008, I came into the office and began work at 3 p.m. I was so covered up (I also had to insert the daily Dow Jones stock market report) I did not stop to take a supper hour. I did not finish my work until 12:30 a.m. At about 10 p.m., as I was rushing to finish all the work in front of me, I could feel the adrenaline building up in my body, and my blood pressure and heart rate rapidly increasing. I had no chest pains but I felt panicky. I kept pushing myself, pumping up the effort, racing to the nightly deadline and my head started to feel like it was going to explode. At that point, I thought, "I'm getting too old for this." I got up from my chair and took a stroll through the hallways of the newspaper offices until I walked off all the adrenaline and stabilized.

That moment actually scared me because I had never ever felt that overwhelmed physically. I thought I had almost suffered a stroke. Worried, the next day I scheduled an appointment with my physician. When he examined me he was concerned about my high blood pressure and irregular heart rate, he sent me to a cardiologist who did all the blood work, heart X-rays and treadmill stress tests. After looking at those test results and listening to my heart, the heart doctors told me my echocardiogram test showed that my ejection fraction was way below normal. (In cardiovascular physiology, ejection fraction is the fraction of blood pumped out of ventricles of the heart. I had never heard of such a term or condition, but it was one of those rare, freaky conditions that only a gung ho guy like me would have.) It was at 35 percent when I was in the rest position, when it should be the normal percentage of 50 to 65, the cardiologist said. As I understood it, my heart muscle was not pumping the normal amount of blood into the rest of my body. The X-rays did not show any arterial blockages. The doctor said I had not had a heart attack, but my condition baffled him. He said there were three possible causes. It might be genetic in nature brought on as I aged, or some kind of viral infection. After he put me on blood pressure medicine and pills to reduce bad cholesterol which were borderline high, my heart and blood pressure stabilized and my ejection fraction were all normal when I took the echo ultrasound again and saw the cardiologist a year later. He told me that the strange attack I had was probably caused by extreme stress. I personally concluded that I had suffered an old fashioned panic attack.

In the months after my incident in March 2008, I dialed down my intensity, reorganized my schedule, and became more adept at handling the huge amount of work I had to complete in the office and downtown at the judicial center and courthouse. It was the hardest mental work I had ever done, but I was determined not to let the extra pressure destroy my health, especially so close to retirement age. I learned to chill, take it one day at a time and not be outraged by what was going on all around me. I think I stressed out in the first months of the two-paper production phase because I disagreed vociferously with what I felt was the outrageous way PMG treated their employees.

Then the Owensboro desk staff got another job to do. At 9:30 a.m. on a Monday in early August 2008, Karen Owen returned to the *Messenger-Inquirer* from vacation. She had been employed as a reporter at the *M-I* for 27 years and had worked part-time several years, writing a column and compiling local news for the paper's weekend Religion and Values section. Soon after she arrived at the *M-I* that day, Karen was called to publisher Morris' office and in about 15 minutes returned to her worksite crying, according to Sharon Payne, editor of the My Community news section who shared a two-desk office space with Karen.

Sharon asked Karen why she was upset. Her job had been eliminated, Karen replied, and she had been told to leave the building as soon as she picked up all of her personal belongings. Mike

Weafer, the operations manager of the paper, brought Karen a few boxes in which she could carry her stuff. Paxton Media Group was downsizing staff at the *M-I* again, and several other employees of the Owensboro paper had gotten their pink slips that day. We learned in the next day's edition of the *Evansville Courier-Press* that employees at the *Vincennes Sun Commercial* lost their jobs on Monday too.

The *Messenger-Inquirer* copy desk staff began designing and producing the Vincennes paper in Owensboro on Aug. 25 a few weeks after the *Sun Commercial* job cuts were announced.

The jobs of the newsroom and accounting department at the Indiana newspaper were eliminated for economic reasons, the *Courier-Press* reported August 7, 2008. PMG officials never returned the *Courier-Press's* calls for comment about the personnel changes at the *Sun Commercial*, the *C-P* reported. Evansville newspaper reported the Vincennes layoffs on its online website, adding that newspapers across the United States had been struggling to maintain advertising revenue, noting the Newspaper Association of America had reported that print advertising had dropped 9.4 percent in 2007.

A reader posting a comment below the story on the website of the Evansville paper stated: "The Courier-Press staff is getting smaller all the time. I've read all three of these papers and several others in this region for years, it seems like the publishers and owners truly believe you can somehow save a dying business by cutting staff. New stories are produced by reporters and photographers. There is no way around that."

One poster below the story, probably in Owensboro, wrote: "I can tell you that the atmosphere in Owensboro is a mixture of fear, depression and exhaustion. They've shifted most of the non-news gathering operations of four other papers there in the past few months. Madisonville, Franklin, Ky, and Portland, Tenn. (the last two are weeklies) and now Vincennes. The Owensboro copy desk must produce all those pages, the ad composition people do all the ads, and the pressroom will be printing all those papers when Vincennes is added in a few weeks. All the extra work is being loaded on Owensboro at the same time they're making staff cuts."

The anonymous writer continued. "The attitude of Paxton officials seems to be that technology makes it easy to do it all in one spot, at least for them. And the M-I employees should just be grateful their jobs haven't been shifted to India, as some papers are doing with ad composition and page layout."

Then another poster, apparently from Owensboro, added a detailed assessment of the Messenger-Inquirer's condition: "Yes, it is the loss of advertising that is hurting the M-I and every other paper in the country. That's why you're seeing such a small Region section. The number of pages is determined by the number of advertisements. The more ads we sold, the more pages. So, let's say the percentage of ads to news hole is 50-50, The fewer ads, the fewer number pages. To put it another way, if you have the equivalent of eight full-page ads, you get the equivalent of space for stories. If you have only four full page ads, you get four pages for stories. So the paper may look like it still has a majority of ads, all while the amount of pages and news hole are both shrinking."

Finally, another website poster not in Owensboro was more succinct about PMG's way of treating its employees: "At least when the *Courier-Press* downsizes departments, they are up front with their employees, give them plenty of notice and severance. Sounds like the Paxton big-wigs are assholes in this case. I feel sorry for everyone who works for them!!"

I would reach my full retirement age of 66 in June 2009, when I would draw my biggest monthly Social Security paycheck permitted, so I was just trying to hang on until I could retire

comfortably. Then I would have the opportunity to take another part-time or full-time job again and make as much money as I wanted. I thought and hoped my final year at the *M*-I would be a relaxed period in which I could enjoy myself and maybe celebrate my long service to the newspaper. I never would have imagined that I would have had to work so hard and sprint to the finish line.

While fighting my own personal battle with stress, I tried to be a friendly and supportive first sergeant to all my younger colleagues on the copy desk. I encouraged them, stood up for them and told them they were doing a fantastic job. None of the newsroom managers did that. I kept telling my colleagues to hang in there. I always tried to make them laugh and boost their morale. They got none of that from Paxton management.

It seemed like the staffers in the newsroom and copy desk were in survival mode. There was no esprit de corps; it was every man for himself. I saw this happening all around me. The desk staff composed of people ages from mid 20s to their 60s were on super stress overload as we headed into the fall and early winter months of 2008. There would be no relief for them. No new employees would be hired to help them. They had to do the job within 40 hours each week. No more paid overtime was permitted, and they knew they would be getting no bonuses at the end of the year. (The bonuses were always based on the paper achieving its performance goals in the preceding year. We were always told that in the past two years, paper was struggling financially.)

Our backs were against the wall. One or two of the copy desk editors quit when they found better jobs. I never saw so many good people work so hard and tolerate so much of what we thought was mismanagement by the publisher and PMG's corporate executives. My colleagues were all proficient professionals and were being treated like machines or second-class rabble.

I thought PMG was the cheapest, most amateurish newspaper organization for whom I had ever worked. Those of us staffers who had complained about the Hagers' foibles and management of the paper now knew we had been blessed to work for Mister Lawrence, John and Larry. Working for PMG was way off the charts, a 1,000 times worse than anything I experienced in any of my other jobs in my career. I learned to appreciate and respect the Hager family so much in those last 10 years working for the Paxtons.

By the end of the 2008 work year, I continued to get better organized in performing my duties as I reported court news from downtown and got faster and refining my work at the obit desk. I had to overcome the pressure, had begun to relax, feeling the end was near for me. I was preparing for what lay ahead after leaving the *Messenger-Inquirer* for the final time. When the New Year began in 2009, I sensed I did not have much more time at the *M-I.* I wondered how long it would be before I got the final call to come to publisher Bob Morris' office. That came on March 23, 2009, a week before the end of the first quarter of business. Matt Francis was there with Morris as I entered. Bob told me that the *M-I* would be going through another personnel restructuring at the end of the first quarter of business, and my job would be eliminated. My first day of retirement would be April 1, 2009. Morris thanked me for my service to the *Messenger-Inquirer* and gave me a very curt, impersonal letter of thanks which contained the totals of the severance package that I would receive for my last 24 years and nine months of service to the M-I. It was not particularly generous for someone who had contributed so much to the *Messenger-Inquirer* for so long. But I knew I would not get anything better from the Paxtons.

The meeting did not last 10 minutes. I was happy that my time at the M-I was at its end. Working there with that schedule in the past year was so hard that it almost destroyed me. I was happy about leaving, but then I surprised myself. I was unexpectedly overcome with emotion as I

suddenly flashed back to the wonderful memories I had accumulated, working for the *M-I* for over 30 years. Like Ann Whittinghill had done when she was retired, I broke down for a few seconds as I remembered working in the old days alongside old pros like Herb, George, Birdie, Ann, Miss G and the Hagers. Then I remembered the nights of the past year as the intrepid, feisty new gang of *M-I* copy desk employees and I battled each night to produce three newspapers. Feelings of pride almost overwhelmed me, all crossing my mind in an instant. This is hard, I told Morris, "A lot of great memories, you know," I said, composing myself.

I shook hands with Morris, and then turned to Matt and kissed him on the right cheek, whispering "Thanks, kid." I knew that PMG had wanted to retire me when the corporation announced the first consolidation in February 2008, and also knew that city editor Bob Bruck and Francis had used me to solve their dilemma of filling Cathy Varble's part-time slot as obit writer on weekends. But in assigning me that job, Bob and Matt also gave me what I wanted, allowing me to work one more year so I could reach my full retirement age and draw my highest Social Security payment. It had been a real hard battle getting through that stress-filled final year, but I had survived. I had crossed the finish line.

The last three weeks before I signed off for the last time at the newspaper were emotional for me. I had asked Bob Morris if I could address the newsroom staff on my last day and he said yes. In those remaining days before April 1, I wondered how I could say goodbye to all my desk mates without breaking down in tears. I wrote the speech quickly and then began psyching myself up to give it. On my final day, I waited right up to the last five minutes before the staff would gather at 3 p.m. to say our goodbyes. Then I told city editor Bob Bruck "I don't think I can do this." So I went into Matt's office and asked him, "Can you read this for me? I don't think I can make it through it without breaking down." He said, "Sure."

Matt asked all the reporters and the copy desk editors, about 20 folks in all, to gather near my cubicle so the little ceremony and party could begin. Suzi Bartholomy and Sharon Payne had ordered a cake with an icing replica of the face of talk show host Rush Limbaugh. That got a big laugh from me. Matt then thanked me and said a few kind words to honor me, and a few others expressed their gratitude for my service. I told them that I had asked Matt to read my farewell statement because I would get emotional doing it. I wanted them to hear exactly how I felt about them. Then Matt read my final statement.

In the speech, I thanked sports editor Herb Parker for giving me the job as his sports clerk in 1962 and Larry Hager Jr. for hiring me as a full-time reporter in 1965. I paid tribute to my mentor, George Kerler, "who by example taught me all I know about being a good journalist." I also thanked "those great folks on the M-I staff when I first came aboard: "George, Herb, Birdie, Ann, Dave McBride, John Nichols, Mister Lawrence Hager, and the Hager family."

I thanked all of the current staff by their first names, adding: "And it's been a pleasure working with all of you. I want to thank Dan and Matt for the freedom they gave me to research and write my history series in the Perspective section for five years. I consider that series (of articles) the most rewarding, invigorating body of work I have ever done as a writer and historian."

Then I wrote: "I need to say that it has been an honor and privilege to be in the trenches and work beside everyone on Hunter's (Reigler) copy desk staff in the last year. All here in the newsroom need to know of the marvelous effort and the great personal sacrifice the copy desk has made in the last year, designing and publishing multiple newspapers each night under the toughest, most stressful conditions. They succeeded in producing order out of chaos and

performed far beyond the call of duty. Their hard work, team play and improvisation, in my opinion, have given this newspaper its best chance to weather hard financial times and enable the newspaper to move on to better days. We all owe them a huge debt of gratitude."

I almost broke into tears when Matt read my final admonition to the staff: "I have always strived for excellence and perfection in all the work I have ever done. I want all of you to do the same. Always remember to do your best at all times. Be fearless. Reach for the stars. Ride toward the guns. Seek the action. And always work hard, play hard and let the good times roll. Good luck to all of you. I hope you all fare well. I won't be far away if you need help. I will always cherish our memories. My cup runneth over. Semper Fi.".

We then cut the cake, enjoyed it and talked in small groups before going back to work to produce the next day's papers. When I got ready to leave, I embraced Joy Campbell and said so long, and started to walk out. Then I turned and saw Suzi. She was holding back tears, and I went back and hugged her tightly, saying goodbye. Then I walked through the copy desk area for one last time as a *Messenger-Inquirer* journalist, punched out at the time clock near the restroom hallway, and left the building.

That was my last day at the *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, the newspaper the Hager family built. I was proud to have worked for them for some many great years.

After I was retired from the M-I in April 2009, my duties of reporting district and circuit court docket news, grand jury indictments, real estate transfers, marriage licenses and divorces, birth announcements, food service inspections, bankruptcies and building permits (40 hours of work) were divided equally among the remaining reporting staff. While being strapped down and burdened with that additional work, the reporters I left behind fought to get time to devote to writing in-depth investigative stories about important issues facing Owensboro, like economic development, construction of the new OMHS hospital, and the new downtown improvement plan.

On Aug. 18, 2011, two years after I left the newspaper, the Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer had consolidated and restructured even more, with the new M-I copy desk staff producing two dailies seven days a week, Durham and Owensboro. The other six dailies were produced on a six days a week: Tuesday through Sunday. Those papers include Madisonville and Vincennes; Griffin, Douglasville and Carrollton, Ga.; and Sanford, N.C. We have six weeklies: Franklin, Ky., Portland, Tenn., Villa Rica, Tallapoosa and Harelson County, Ga.; and the Chapel Hill Herald, which is a thrice-weekly wrap around the Durham paper. There is also the McLean County News, but the editor of the paper does at the Owensboro plant. Staff includes 15 copy editors under the direction of a copy desk hub manager, The staff doubled the number of copy editors when seven were hired to start the Georgia papers. Hunter Reigler, the news editor and two other veteran copy editors, Harold Martin and Eugene Embry, all with almost 100 years of experience, left or retired from the M-I in August 2011.

“Every day I go into work now just reinforces that it was the right decision,” to leave the M-I after 22 years of service, said news editor Hunter Reigler. “I didn't have time to respond to your email (Aug. 1) because I was so swamped. I got in about 3:30 and worked without a dinner break until midnight just to get the three live papers done that I was working on. Then I had to do some work on advance sections. Ugh.

“You're right about not being able to do a good job. It's just crazy around there. I meant to tell you about LaMar and the reporters' obit shifts the other day. He took the lead reporter's job in

Madisonville about a month ago. With Eugene, me and Harold leaving, that takes out four of the key seven copy desk personnel who were down there, leaving only Michael, Mary and Jamie. No telling how long they'll last. I overheard Matt responding to the Georgia publisher today who was asking how things were going with North Carolina. Matt told him we were losing some people, which would be "a minor setback." After next week, which will be it for Eugene and me, he'll find out it's not so minor."

I left the Messenger-Inquirer that day in April 2009 on an optimistic note, happy that I would not have to work for the Paxtons again, but my last three months at the M-I had been a very dark time too. I received very bad news during the first two weeks of January 2009.

Ann Whittinghill, an institution in Owensboro journalism for 43 years, died Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009, at Owensboro Medical Health System. She was 77. Another era in Owensboro had ended. Ann was my closest friend at the paper in all my years as a journalist, and my biggest fan since the day I joined the M-I sports staff in 1962. In her eyes, I could do no wrong. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ann and her husband T.D. hosted great parties for the newsroom staff at their home. There was always plenty of wine and great food. Those times were full of fun and laughter. She and I had many serious intellectual conversations in those days. She was a Republican and we disagreed politically but we always debated as friends. She heard me talk about my troubles with my women and the good Episcopalian she was, she listened to my regular confessions. She knew all my deepest secrets and kept them. Ann was straightforward and honest but kind in expressing her opinions to me. Through thick and thin, she always stood beside me. She was always a true friend and I loved her for it. I would never forget her and always miss her.

Few of the M-I staff knew of the constant and excruciating physical leg and back pain Ann suffered daily in her last years at the newspaper. She had always soldiered on, never letting it show. "She was a wonderful lady," said Larry Hager, who worked as everything from reporter to co-publisher at the Messenger-Inquirer over a 41-year period from 1948 to 1989. "She was very focused," he said in an interview with Keith Lawrence following Ann's death. "She ran the tightest ship at the *Messenger-Inquirer*. It was her way or the highway, but I was amazed at how well it worked for her. She was great at what she did."

Earlier that month, my dear friend, father figure and benefactor Jack Foster died on Jan. 4. Then, my cantankerous old friend Sonny Temple, the co-founder of the Hancock County Museum with Jack, died May 4. All my great role models at the *Messenger-Inquirer* ---- Birdie, Miss G and George --- had died. Now it was Ann, Jack and Sonny. I was so sad. Their deaths left me grief-stricken for a very long time. We would never see the likes of them again.

11

"For the Times They Are A-Changin' "

.....Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call. Don't stand in the doorway; don't block up the hall. For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled. There's a battle outside ragin'. It'll soon shake your windows, and rattle your walls. For the times they are a-changin'. Come mothers and fathers throughout the land, and don't criticize what you can't understand. Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command. Your old road is rapidly agin'. Please get out of the new one, if you can't lend your hand. For the times they are a-changin' The line it is drawn; the curse it is cast. The slow one now will later be fast as the present now will later be past. The order is rapidly fadin' and the first one now will later be last. For the times they are a-changin' --- Bob Dylan, 1964.

(July 4, 2011). Dylan's song was my generation's anthem when we came of age in the 1960s and set out to change the world. Too many of us who were drafted or enlisted in the military service paid a deadly price with blood in Vietnam. The lives of 58,000 of us were wasted in those far off Southeast Asian highlands, mountain jungles and rice paddies in what seemed to those who Americans who opposed it to be a misguided, never ending war. Most of us were patriotic and had noble intentions as we fought in the war or against injustice here at home. But we fell far short of achieving our objectives. Just too many of my generation veered off our straight and narrow course, and in the 1970s and '80s, were corrupted by greed and became soft, obese and slothful. We introduced our own set of problems to American culture ---- drug abuse, domestic violence, street crime, corporate graft, scandal in our churches, state and federal government. The times are still "a-changin," and those, who indulged in such self-destructive behavior and brought us this far, know they failed and disappointed so many of our parents and grandparents who had sacrificed so much.

The quality of life in America has diminished in the last 20 years. In the 1990s and early 2000s, middle class workers drove gas guzzling SUVs, bought houses they could not afford, and enjoyed the temporary charge-card comfort of the high life. In the process, they accumulated too much debt that they knew they could not repay. Now, in the throes of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the divide between the rich and the working class has widened dramatically. The families of the middle class are bearing more of the tax revenue burden than millionaires and large corporations. The percentage of households living in poverty in the United States was as high in 2010 as it was when President Lyndon Johnson declared the War on Poverty in the 1960s. Homelessness is pervasive in our cities, especially among veterans of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. There is so much uncertainty in life that even stable, employed families cannot promise their children that their life will be better than their parents. The middle class families of America work more hours today and earn less for their efforts. They pay for the health care of the poor, while their unemployed neighbors struggle futilely to find jobs and Wall Street investment bankers and stock brokers are making millions in bonuses. Too many good people are paying the bill as our country suffers from its sins of overindulgence and extravagance in the last 30 years. The nation's housing market is in the tank. New home

construction is down, foreclosures are at an all-time high, and people wanting to sell their homes owe more on them than their houses are worth.

Hard economic times may be part of the reason that people's temperaments have changed since the 1990s. There has been a slow continuous breakdown of our nation's morality. There is no longer any rational discourse between our politicians. So ordinary citizens think it is alright to spew hate against their friends and enemies. The standard of human behavior has reached an all-time low. Repugnant remarks and lying are tolerated, often encouraged and even dismissed as acceptable. Public figures can be as deceitful, obnoxious and profane as they want and no one challenges their morally bankrupt behavior. Even If they commit felonies or cheat on their spouses, they think an apology is enough punishment for their transgressions. Such manic behavior sets a bad example for our youth, and has unfortunately has become too much of the social norm of the 2000s in America.

As the nation's other problem of immigration problems continue to worsen, white males resent and call for deportation of Hispanics, those people who are willing to accept less pay to perform tough farm jobs that whites refuse to do. These same white men, who have little education and hardly any job skills, reject the agriculture jobs in our region that require hard manual labor and sweat. They would rather make their money cooking methamphetamine and selling Mexican marijuana while they bitch and moan to the government that too many Hispanics are getting a free ticket to live in the United States. It is their fault that they are too lazy to take any respectable job that comes along. These were the same kind of jobs I was more than proud and willing to accept 30 years ago when I was down and almost out financially.

As a retired journalist, I still follow the daily news and try to stay abreast of what is happening in the United States and the world. I have seen so many changes in the past 40 years in politics, the economy, morality, religion, culture, language, education and technology. Too many of the negative changes that I have seen in my home region of Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois in the last 20 years are disturbing. Those years have been marred by the rampant use of marijuana, crack cocaine and meth by middle and lower class whites and blacks. Drugs and alcohol have destroyed families in each of those states. Too many adults do not care enough to learn their responsibilities as parents. In the worst cases, mom and her boyfriend leave their children alone to play video games or watch television shows while they go into another room and do drugs or have sex. Too many of today's parents are too stoned and just don't care enough to teach their children to do chores and develop a work ethic and some basic ambition.

The advent of the Internet has been revolutionary in bringing news and information to our eyes and fingertips almost instantly. But the Internet with all of its instant answers has also made too many of us less interested in thinking, reading and learning.

As a result, the education system in the United States is in a steep descent now as Americans tries to pull out of the Great Recession. As I write this in 2011, primary and secondary education in the United States within the last year, ranks 17th overall in the world, according to test results released in December 2010 by the Program for International Student Assessment. American students ranked 17th in reading, 23rd in science and 31st in mathematics.

Chinese students who took the test in Shanghai topped the world overall and in all three categories of their education assessment.

In today's America, elementary school children are fatter and more sedimentary than kids in the 1950s and '60s who like me were running and playing during recess on ball diamonds or

doing calisthenics in gymnasiums. Kids sit behind computers too much, don't get well-balanced meals in school, don't exercise in physical education classes, and they eat too much fast food because it is cheap. Far too many high school kids go to school today mainly to socialize, rather than to learn. They show less interest in participating in active sports or club activities, and are obsessed with text-messaging or talking on cell phones. The result is that there is no face to face conversation with their friends and family members. All communication in families suffers for it.

Tests have also shown that too many of today's teachers are not qualified to teach. Others who can teach and do their job admirably are being laid off. High school dropouts increase each year. Poor kids who want to go to college cannot, because their mothers and fathers cannot afford it. Many 18-year-olds escape their family's poverty by going into the military service, where they risk death in combat in order to get bonuses to help pay for a college education or provide for their spouses and children back home.

And it baffles and angers a history major like me when I hear that schools do not teach American history like they did in the 1950s and '60s when I was a student. In one survey of our culture in 2010, research showed that an alarming majority of Americans in the age group of 19-34 cannot answer the question, from what country did the United States get its independence?

A similar poll of people 45 years and older in overwhelming percentages knew the answer. The survey noted that the study of history has been taken out of elementary and high school curriculums, primarily because students and parents consider American and world history a dull, useless subject of study, In essence, they are saying learning history is a waste of time if it does not help you get a job and make money. (These are the same people who think study of the Bible should be taught as a required course in elementary and high schools.)

"We're raising young people who are, by and large, historically illiterate," the noted American historian David McCullough said in an interview with a *Wall Street Journal* reporter in June 2011. Having lectured at more than 100 colleges and universities over the past 25 years, McCullough told the reporter, "I know how much these young people—even at the most esteemed institutions of higher learning—don't know, it's shocking,"

In June 2011, the U.S. Department of Education released the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress, which found that only 12 percent of high-school seniors have a firm grasp of our nation's history.

McCullough told the *Wall Street Journal* reporter he began worrying about the history gap some 20 years ago, when a college sophomore approached him after an appearance at "a very good university in the Midwest." She thanked him for coming and admitted, 'Until I heard your talk this morning, I never realized the original 13 colonies were all on the East Coast." According to the WSJ story, "Remembering the incident, Mr. McCullough's snow-white eyebrows curl in pain. 'What have we been doing so wrong that this obviously bright young woman could get this far and not know that?' " the 77-year-old author and historian asserted.

Even our most high profile national Republican politicians and candidates for president and vice president have demonstrated in public speeches that they don't know the most elementary facts of early American history that I first learned in the fourth grade of elementary school. If they don't know the history of our nation, how can they possibly legislate, formulate policy and govern.

In Kentucky state government at Frankfort, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. Each year it is the same old story. For one example, the governor and state

legislature fight the same problems that have existed in the Kentucky education system for decades. Many of these issues are ones Kentucky politicians were jousting over and failed to resolve when I was as state employee in Frankfort from 1972 to 1976.

In today's sour economy, colleges and universities battle funding shortages. Tuition fees go up each year, but the quality of education in our high schools and colleges declines. Dropout rates in Kentucky high schools are still embarrassing and disgraceful.

Outside the cities of Louisville and Lexington, the rest of Kentucky remains a poor state that loves its college basketball and football teams more than the work, sacrifice and tax money required to improve an educational system that can make the Commonwealth more economically competitive with other more affluent states.

Kentucky also clings to its conservative political and religious views, and conducts state government without replacing its embarrassing, outdated 1890 constitution. Helpless to make progress, Kentucky remains a backward state because it continues to elect Republican congressmen and senators who are more concerned about padding their pockets with money from lobbyists who contribute to their reelection funds. In the process, these same Republicans let their poor and middle class constituents suffer in silence. And the Democrats in the General Assembly are just as guilty as their GOP counterparts.

Here at home, Owensboro still takes pride in calling itself a city where it's good to live and raise a family. That is, if you make enough money to do it. As General Electric, Texas Gas or the city's great industries of the past have gotten much smaller in most recent decades or left town, they have been replaced by service industries that pay wages on which most poor and lower middle class families can live without government assistance. The less educated of our promising young people stay in Owensboro to live and perform what jobs they can find in their hometown, while the best and brightest of our youth leave the county to find a better future elsewhere. There is nothing left here that would make them want to stay when the economy and social culture in Owensboro are still influenced and controlled by local churches and a power structure of home-grown millionaire builders and entrepreneurs.

Nothing much has changed for the better locally, when there is always opposition to progress. Today city and county government are attempting to show progress by working to revive downtown Owensboro. They have found it to be a long hard slog to achieve their goals in the time of a severe economic recession. I have not forgotten the days in the 1950s when downtown sidewalks were so crowded on Fridays and Saturdays that there was barely room for me to walk. During Christmas holiday shopping season especially, and even on some days in the summer months, both lanes of traffic on Main Street crept along and backed up as slowly moving motorists circled the blocks trying to find a parking space. That changed In the 1970s. Government and the private sector of businessmen predicted that the city's downtown shopping trade would gradually die if a solution to the downtown parking problem was not found. An idea was floated and then adopted by the city's businessmen and developers allowing stores and restaurants to build new shopping centers on the edge of town where there would be plenty of parking space. All cities throughout the nation were doing it, business and government leaders said.

As downtown stores made their move toward the more affluent neighborhoods and suburbs, Bob Green came to Owensboro, opened his Executive Inn Rivermont in 1977 and saved downtown and the city's convention and entertainment economy for 15 years. But the demise of

downtown was virtually decided when the 80-year-old Green died on Dec. 3, 1991.

A few days following Green's death, a *Messenger-Inquirer* editorialist wrote: "Whether you loved him or hated him, Bob Green got things done. And when he died Tuesday afternoon in a car crash just south of his hometown of Vincennes (Ind.) people all over the region recalled his accomplishments and how they affected the lives of others. Among the biggest benefactors of Green's financial empire was Owensboro itself. His 650-room Executive Inn, which opened in 1977, single-handedly created a tourism and convention business here, and it breathed some much-needed life into the downtown area. Today the hotel pumps about $20 million into the local economy, and thousands of Owensboro residents are among the tens of thousands of people who have enjoyed the top-flight entertainment brought to the hotel each week."

"Less visible were Green's philanthropic endeavors, but they had a tremendous impact on a wide range of entities on both sides of the Ohio River. Brescia College and Kentucky Wesleyan College were among the local recipients of his support, and the Wendell Foster Center benefited substantially from his time and generosity. Indeed, it's no accident that when the facility for cerebral palsy patients opened a new wing a few years ago, it was named the Robert E. Green Pavilion.

"Green wasn't perfect, and he garnered his share of enemies and detractors over the years. Part of that was due to his straightforward style of communicating, and the iron will he brought to the negotiating table. In the final analysis, however, Bob Green, as *Messenger-Inquirer* reporter Keith Lawrence pointed out Wednesday, was an American success story. Overcoming truly humble beginnings and combining hard work, guile and a hands-on philosophy, Green succeeded when other predicted he'd fail. The Owensboro area shared in that success, and it shares in the loss of a man whose impact on this community isn't easily forgotten."

Following Green's death, the public learned that the hotel was in financial trouble and on the brink of bankruptcy. In June 1996, a group of 16 banks that held a combined $10.07 million mortgage on the hotel began foreclosure proceedings against Green's heirs, the Messenger-Inquirer reported. Then in September 1996, Servco of Kentucky, was formed to buy and operate the hotel, according to a news report. However, Servco failed twice to get the money to pay the banks. Owensboro city officials gave the hotel a Feb.10, 1997, deadline to pay $238,685 in delinquent taxes or lose its business and liquor licenses.

The state said it would close the hotel if the Executive Inn owners did not find the money to pay the delinquent taxes. Daviess Fiscal Court threatened to file criminal charges against the hotel's owners if they did not pay the room taxes it had collected from guests. Servco scrambled and paid the taxes by the deadline, and in the summer of 1997, bought the hotel for $7 million at a foreclosure sale.

The *Messenger-Inquirer* had reported that Servco was a subsidiary of the Rev. Gerald Payne, founder of Greater Ministries International Church of Tampa, Fla. What no one knew in Owensboro, Payne was under investigation by federal law enforcement officers. He was alleged to be an outlaw preacher who was cheating his religious followers. But in August 2001, the law caught up to the 65-year-old Payne. He was found guilty and sentenced to 27 years in federal prison for "fleecing tens of thousands of investors out of more than half a billion dollars during the past decade," the *M-I* reported. "When Payne's empire crashed in 1999, the gold mines, banks and other assets of which he had once bragged could not be found."

Payne and his organization had left the Executive Inn in financial and structural shambles. Rene Childress, a market analyst in Alpharetta, Ga., was hired by the Owensboro Tourist

Commission in early 1999 to investigate the amount of business the Executive had been doing. She found that the number of room nights - number of rooms multiplied by number of nights occupied - at the Executive Inn plummeted from 25,546 in 1996 to 11,447 in 1997 and rebounded only slightly to 13,988 in 1998, according to news reports. The number of conventions at the hotel dropped from 72 in 1996 to 42 in 1997, and then rebounded slightly to 49 in 1998. The analyst's report said problems at the Executive Inn cost the community an estimated $5.1 million in 1998 that year. Thirty two conventions were canceled because of the hotel's problems. A survey of 60 associations found that 34 would not consider Owensboro for a convention. Seven of those said it was because of the Executive Inn's problems. Of 26 associations who said they would consider Owensboro, 12 said they were apprehensive about the future of the Executive Inn. (All of these facts were reported by the *Messenger-Inquirer*.)

The analyst's report also said that the hotel's rooms were second class. Some were uninhabitable and closed off, according to the report. "Meeting rooms were converted to storage bins, the Showroom Lounge closed and the swimming pools were deserted. The rooms have door keys that do not work, cable TV is limited to local channels, the switchboard cannot handle wake-up calls, ice-makers are inadequate, problems with the air-conditioning prevail, elevators are sluggish and little service is offered..."

The last best chance for the Executive Inn Rivermont to survive and keep a strong convention business in downtown Owensboro came along in October 1999 when Chicago businessman John Bays bought the hotel for $5 million at an auction. Bays spent $14 million for improvements to the hotel in the next five years. The future looked brighter for downtown hotel. But Bays was another outsider from Joliet, Ill., a Marine veteran, used car salesman and creative entrepreneur whose Owensboro's movers and shakers never seemed to trust after getting burned by the Rev. Payne.

Bays had big dreams for his new venture. He was willing to gamble to make the hotel succeed. But when he proposed bringing casino gambling to Owensboro, he was met with strong opposition. The city's power structure could never get on board with the idea of a casino in Owensboro, and turned against Bays. Despite Bays' relentless efforts, conservative churches and the state legislature lined up against any suggestion of introducing casino gambling in Kentucky. Bays went to Frankfort and begged the state legislature to allow casino gambling in Kentucky. He had told Owensboro and Daviess County leaders he would build a casino, a 20,000 seat arena, an indoor water park, a convention center and parking for 14,000, a total of $200 million worth of construction. But the legislature never took any action. Bays' chances of bringing the casino business to Kentucky and Owensboro were fading, and almost dead.

Gradually local government leaders abandoned Bays. Talk circulated through Owensboro that Bays was planning to sell the hotel. "I've lost $8 million in operations of the hotel and $14 million in renovations," he told Lawrence of the *M-I.* "We do good on weekends, but it's slow during the week." Bays said the hotel has lost $900,000 since Jan. 1. He said he will still be involved with the hotel, but not in the operations. Bays said if Kentucky approves casino gaming within 12 months - and he got a license for Owensboro, he would still build the $200 million complex. He said he had recently purchased a $50 million hotel in Chicago and is negotiating to buy a Florida hotel. "I've got to go where the money is," Bays told the reporter.

The only support Bays seemed to have left in Owensboro was from County-judge executive Reid Haire and hundreds, maybe thousands, of average, ordinary citizens of Owensboro who loved the hotel and wanted it to continue operation. But Bays sold the Executive Inn Rivermont

for $10.75 million in 2005, and left town disappointed and frustrated. He had been defeated by the Owensboro power structure.

The new owners never tried very hard to restore the hotel. The Executive Inn Rivermont closed on June 9, 2008, leaving about 200 employees jobless. The structure and grounds were purchased by the City of Owensboro for $5 million. The hotel building was demolished before a small, nostalgic audience on Sunday morning, Nov. 8, 2009. With the implosion of the Executive, downtown Owensboro's business flagship for 40 years, was officially dead.

After the Executive Inn was sold and subsequently razed, a downtown development committee, headed by Judge Haire, Mayor Ron Payne and Downtown Development Director Fred Reeves (who resigned in the past year) began working on an $80 million downtown restoration project that includes a new version of Smothers Park, construction of a new hotel, bluegrass museum and a convention center in the riverfront property where the Executive Inn Rivermont once stood.

Still in the middle of a slow recovery from the Great Recession of 2007-2009, when 10 percent of Daviess County's workforce remain unemployed and the revered RiverPark Center is trying to find funds to pay its half million dollar annual mortgage, Owensboroans still wait patiently, crossing their fingers, even praying a little, in hopes that the promoters of this ambitious, sometimes seemingly hopeless downtown construction project will succeed, and bring about the new era of change that Owensboro's residents crave so much. Only time and a revival of the local and national economy will tell us if they get the results they envision. If they do, it will take men and women with the grit and craftiness of a Bob Green, and the guts and the determination of a John Bays.

On the national level, 2011 is a time when the print and television news media are struggling to make a profit as they attempt to make the transition to online news reporting. They fight to survive while being vilified as irrelevant and biased liars by ignorant right-wing extremists, radio talk show hosts and conservative television pundits.

Moreover, in my view, our nation's code of ethics and morality has broken down. Running for public office and trying to govern are malicious, vicious and corrosive endeavors. So negative a pursuit that politics has become a mean, blood sport. In the last 20 years, national and state politics has become a shady profession in which reason and civility have been abandoned. Our political leaders can no longer debate important issues on a bipartisan basis.

We are going through an era now in which an ordinary citizen cannot rise up through the political ranks and run for office, unless he or she are billionaires themselves or are financed by the big contributors in the two political parties. Would-be leaders are forced to raise millions of dollars to pay for television ad campaigns. It's a time when in most cases the candidate who raises the most money wins, and whose votes, once in office, can be bought by lobbyists who run Washington. The reality is that campaigning for office takes precedence over governing in a world of politics that is short on patriotism. Partisanship abounds unchecked. No room is left for compromise. The end result is that no progress is made in solving the nation's problems.

Politics in Washington and state governments has become a freaky carnival sideshow. We live in an age when Republicans and conservatives rail against the federal government while they apologize to a big oil corporation for the feds' effort to force the oil company to reimburse victims for business losses, and clean up an environmental mess caused by the worst offshore oil spill in American history.

It is a time when President Obama took office, saying “change has come to America” and then is opposed on everything he says and does by Republicans. It has been a time when most conservative Republicans have accused Obama of being a socialist dictator who imposes too much government control. Then in their very schizophrenic way, Republicans reverse field, attack Obama for not assuming enough government control to stop the Gulf oil spill and take over the cleanup. They began their sadistic attempts to destroy Obama's presidency in the town hall meetings of August and September 2009 when alleged grass roots "Tea Party" members shouted down Democrats attempting to explain healthcare reform legislation. Their opposition to the President continued as Republicans geared up to find a candidate who can beat Obama in the 2012 election.

In 2009, the Tea Party people, a leaderless contingent of angry, anti-government conservatives, resorted to the old tactics of the anti-war demonstrators of the 1960s, shouting down Democrat politicians in town hall meetings and calling it honest, nonviolent protest. They probably never heard the line in President Kennedy’s 1960 inaugural address, the one that reminds us that "Civility is not the sign of weakness." In those days, we lived in a desperate, dastardly age when conservative Americans, who watched Fox News, or listened to Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh on radio, question a black President's citizenship. It is so very sad that a huge number of viewers and listeners actually choose to believe the crazy bullshit of an admitted pain pill addict and a recovering alcoholic rodeo clown. It just shows their lack of education. I think the last three years of the second decade of the 2000s have been the craziest time in American politics in my lifetime. When he joined the crazy conservatives who hate Obama, South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint, announced he was determined to see the president fail, pledging that the Tea Party was going to make the President’s fight to pass healthcare insurance reform “Obama's Waterloo.” But the President succeeded, and DeMint failed. It’s my belief that the more moderate country club Republicans were always the main force behind the Tea Party, as the Partiers went totally partisan and negative in a full-scale campaign to win the 2010 Congressional elections.

If you look closely and study it, it is easy to see the real face of the Tea Party as they used their shock and awe tactics to create so much political and social havoc. Created by an old Republican loser, Dick Armey, the Partiers are a conglomerate of thousands of disguised hard-right wing Republicans, including NRA fanatics, old line John Birchers who in 1963 called President Kennedy a traitor and the Evangelicals of the social conservative wing of the GOP, all of whom to return life in America to the 1950s.

Republicans never change. Perennially, they are in the pocket of the big corporations, the top oil companies, Wall Street bankers and investors, and billionaire defense contractors. Down deep in their hearts, they espouse the views of Limbaugh, who despises illegal immigrants, gays, African Americans, poor people, unions, college professors environmentalists and homeless veterans with post traumatic stress disorder or alcohol / drug addictions. Republicans show their true colors every day in the halls of Congress when they endorse Limbaugh’s rants on his psychotic conservative radio talk show.

In their efforts to destroy President Obama politically, they have even resorted to personal attacks, calling him a liar on the floor of Congress and questioning his American citizenship. They opposed Obama and Senate Democrats for three years on every on major issue that would benefit the middle class in the United States, saying Democrats are conducting class warfare in their attempt to give America’s working class a fair shake. Refusing to work on a bipartisan

basis, they dug in their heels in the summer of 2011 when the Democrats and the president were trying to reach a compromise agreement on raising the debt ceiling and saving the United States from default from paying its bills.

In their desperate effort to prevent Obama from winning a second term as president, the GOP relished being called the "Party of No" and blamed Obama for a trillion dollar budget deficit that, for the most part, was amassed by the administration of President George W. Bush. The Republicans rejected every effort for compromise at a time when as patriots they could be debating and passing legislation to solve the nation's economic crisis. Their rallying cry is obstruct, obstruct, obstruct! They have not been smart enough to know that if they gamble all their chips and lose in their fight to bury President Obama, they are leading their party down a path to its own political self-destruction.

As I have observed, the most revolutionary change in American culture occurred when the Internet exploded onto the worldwide scene and came into millions of households in the late 1990s. It changed our means of personal communication and conversation, and we can now find news and information with the click of a plastic mouse. But our sweeping improvements in technology in those 15 years have also had a downside, and have created a dangerously, un-welcomed cyberspace anarchy in which anyone can write anything, be it true or false, and do it anonymously. The result is that we no longer know what is true and who to trust. It has also taken the face to face human element out of conversation and destroyed the romance and intimacy of old fashioned letter writing.

Anonymous posting and e-mailing also have given cover for school children to make vile remarks about their classmates, bully them without giving a name, making it easy to spread rumors that have even caused some kids to commit suicide. Then in the past few years, even more impersonal ways of creating communication barriers between communicators have surfaced with the advent of Myspace, Facebook and Twitter.

As for as I am concerned, nothing will ever replace two friends just sitting down and talking face to face. You will never see and feel emotion, humor and honesty expressed adequately by communicating through two computer screens.

Also, it’s disappointing to see how much credibility that organized religion has lost in the United States in the past 40 years. It has been a time when we finally discovered that the Catholic Church protected pedophiles among its priests, pushing victims to beg the Vatican for apologies and go to court to get justice and reparations. And for all of those of us in the Midwest and upper South, I am disgusted that we are not really considered a Christian if we are not a right-wing, war-loving Evangelical fundamentalist. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and the Moral Majority conservatives really turned me against organized religion. When religious fanatics got into politics in the early 1980s and started spouting their right wing agenda for public service, I left organized religion and stopped going to church. I am a Methodist in my heart, and I still talk and pray to God, whoever he or she is. My personal relationship with God, and my practicing the principles that Jesus Christ taught are all that I need.

I have been enamored by the English vernacular and dialects in my part of Kentucky since the first time I entered elementary school or listened and later participated in discussions with my family, friends and neighbors. I have always wondered why people in different regions of the United States spoke English with noticeably different accents and voice inflections. I remember

hearing these unfamiliar, intriguing expressions and phrases even before my schoolmates and I adopted the more modern lingo of the 1950s and 60s. These changes in vocabulary and language even went back to the words my parents and grandparents used. I have noted in my study of history that English was spoken more eloquently by Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today's English is spoken in a much simpler, droll dialect.

In the 1930s, many residents of the Lewisport and Maceo communities were still riding horses when they did not have to travel too far or did not have automobiles to take them to their destinations. I remember my father saying that his father Will Hodges told him about transporting tobacco to market in Owensboro by horse drawn wagon, much as the way Granddad's parents and grandparents had done in the 19th century. What I did not realize until I was in my 20s was that people of the Depression generation were speaking with different words than I was using as I learned the language. My father often used the word "d'rectly" as in I will be there directly. Not, as I would say, I will be there soon. Many in my family used "tol'able" for tolerable. As in, the heat or hot weather is "tolerable." To be interpreted today as the temperature is very hot. Some folks in my family born in the late 1800s wrote in letters that crop market prices were "dull" instead of low, sluggish or depressed. I have noticed contracted slang words such as "I'swan" used in place of "I swear." Then there was the exclamation "forever more" that I interpreted as meaning "unbelievable" or "amazing".

After much research and study of English in my life, I learned that 'tol'able' and "I'swan," just like the contractions "ain't" and "y'all" originated and were commonly used in the dialects of people of the American South and Appalachian Mountains in the 19th century. They were rooted in the dialects used in the northern part of England in the 1700s. At that point, I realized that American vernacular changes with each generation, even from decade to decade. I still use the "y'all" and "directly" often, but none of the others I have mentioned here.

As a writer in this decade of the 2000s, I continued to be both amused and bewildered by the changes occurring in modern day English language and vocabulary. Forty years ago, at the height of the Watergate Scandal, the overused pet phrase "At this point in time" made its way into our personal conversations and public debates. The silly hippie exclamations of "far out, man!", "let your freak flag fly", "out of sight" and "groovy" have been replaced by the omnipresent and the overused adjective "awesome" Let me also say up front that I think the most annoying word used in the United States in the last 10 years is "whatever." Today, "issues" has replaced "problems," and "at the end of the day" is becoming another cliché that pundits and television journalists use constantly in interviews and commentary, replacing my old favorite, "in the final analysis." And more recently, the word “multiple” is substituted for “many” and “several.”

My most emphatic gripe, or peeve, of these days of the 2000s, is the use of the word "leverage," as a verb. In the field of finance, it is a noun defined as using given resources to magnify the financial outcome. It is not needed when "lever" is a perfectly good verb, as linguist Martin Edwardes explained on an online blog in recent years. Use of the word allows business types to take "diabolical liberties with the English language when they use leverage in their business-speak." Using it as a verb can lead to confusion, Edwardes noted. "If an organization is leveraging a project we cannot know, without other defining reference, whether they are starting it, ending it, or performing some intermediate process. But, at the same time, this obfuscatory aspect of the verb is an important part of its function and meaning."

These same linguists are right on target when they note that people who talk about leveraging

things are usually trying to be obscure either because they don't want you to know what they mean, or because they haven't got a clue themselves, Edwardes declared. "They conclude that it is one of the useful little white lies that allow the business world to keep turning. So for people who wish to communicate in a clear, unambiguous, straightforward manner, 'leverage' should not be used as a verb. On the other hand, unless you work for a company selling levers," he says, "it's hard to imagine you using it as a noun that often. Its use as a verb being symbolic of the obfuscation, dissembling and cleverly disguised clueless-ness that passes for much corporate speak these days," Edwardes concluded. "Its use is verbal nonsense and should not be used to communicate more clearly."

I have also noticed a change in the use of profanity during my lifetime. When I was a boy, my family and the people that I knew at Maceo and Lewisport were very religious and never used "swear words" of any kind. It was considered a sin. When I heard profanity in Maceo, it was usually from the World War II veterans. That did not shock me much because they had learned that language in the service where swearing was was used I standard conversation, a way of relieving mental tension and emotional stress. It had become a part of their daily conversation and I excused it. But I never heard anything from them worse than "goddamit", "son of a bitch" or "shit." I was so innocent and pure of heart that I never used profane or obscene language in the first 30 years of my life. I was always surprised when a schoolmate used profane language, but I never considered it sinful unless the words were directed at someone in anger.

I never heard crude language at home or from my other relatives anywhere. I did not see "the f-word" until I viewed it on a restroom wall at high school, and I rarely heard the obscenity used at a church school like Kentucky Wesleyan. Of course I heard it used on a daily, routine basis by drill instructors, company commanders and recruits during boot camp at Great Lakes, but very rarely from my colleagues at the *Messenger-Inquirer* or in the public affairs office at the Naval Air Station in Memphis. The foul word was unacceptable and never part of civilized conversation by educated people in the 1950s and '60s. But the licentious, anything goes era of the 1960s changed that part of our American vocabulary.

Today, in the 21st century, "fuck" is one word that I hear being used more frequently than ever. Casual use of this noxious expletive is now considered acceptable in public and private rants. It is used so much now it seems people don't really care any more what they do or say. That in itself is a discouraging and unfortunate thought. It reflects poorly on the sad state of our individual moral standards and personal expression. Unlike 40 years ago, foul epithets are particularly popular among young adults, both male and female, in western Kentucky and southern Indiana. I've seen and heard it. Maybe everyone's excuse is that we are just so depressed and frustrated about what is happening during hard economic times in the United States. It is an age of personal desperation. I think the use of "fuck" reflects the angry mood of people, who seem to be more worried, frustrated, depressed and desperate than they have been in any previous decade in which I lived. It seems there is no moral taboo for the use of the "f-bomb" today. It has gone viral. Uttered on the Web, in movies, on ball fields, in street fights and barroom brawls, firefights in Iraq and Afghanistan, locker rooms, newsrooms, in the chief of staff's office in the White House, in the well of the U.S. Senate (remember Dick Cheney) or during the trashy, hair-brained cat fights in cable television episodes of the "House Wives of New Jersey."

On almost any day, with the possible exception of Sunday, you can bet you will hear it used as a verb, noun and adjective, “multiple” times in a single paragraph. As in, I don't give a bleep!

Bleep you, mother bleeper. Shut the bleep up! Bleep! Bleep! Bleep! The word is very effective when used in a timely, strategic way. It gets attention immediately and succinctly drives home a point. It can even be valuable in more civil conversations, but I don't recommend it. It makes all of us who use it sound like lowdown bikers, convicts and redneck, white trailer trash. But an economical use of the "f-word" can be cathartic, if it helps people vent their emotional stress we are struggling to overcome in these hard times. Then it can be a good thing. As long as no one takes offense to such a degree that an argument leads to a fist fight or someone getting shot or killed. It looks as though the current economic recession will continue for months, maybe years, so I think the expletive is definitely here to stay for a while. But, with all that said, I do not recommend its usage at any time. It is too inflammatory and toxic for casual conversation. It soils our souls. As our Jerseyite friends would say in television dramas, we need to forgetaboutit!

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Presidents, 9/11 and Iraq

Like my parents, I have been a lifetime FDR/JFK Democrat, a passionate advocate for the advancement of a strong middle class, and opponent of Republicans who represent greedy bankers and investers on Wall Street and corporations who want to keep all of America's wealth for themselves. As I write this in 2011, I have lived through the administrations of 12 presidents of the United States. First there was Franklin Roosevelt who I was too young to remember. All I know is that my parents loved him, and, before JFK became president, Roosevelt was like a god in our home. FDR had led our nation to victory in World War II and brought Americans out of the Great Depression. I remember hearing radio news reports and reading about President Truman, who I later learned had made the bold decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, defeating Japan and ending the war for American military forces in the Pacific. He also implemented the Marshall Plan and ordered the Berlin Airlift. In 1948, he took the unpopular action desegregating the U.S. military, and he made it illegal to discriminate against persons applying for civil service positions based on race. By an executive order in 1951, he established a government committee ensuring defense contractors to the armed forces did not discriminate against a person because of their race. And he showed courage going against popular opinion in firing Gen. Douglas MacArthur being insubordinate to the commander in chief. Though Pop Hatfield never liked Truman for his action against Macarthur, who was my Uncle Joe's commander in World War II, I knew that Truman was always popular at our house, mainly for his folksy, down to earth language and his feisty, straightforward, no nonsense style in governing. When I was a student at Maceo school, I remember reading in November 1950 about Cuban nationalists' attempt to assassinate Truman as he walked from the Blair House across the street from the White House. And I remember Truman most from his appearances on television at the 1956 and 1960 Democratic conventions when he was considered the elder statesman and titular head of his party who presidential candidates like JFK and LBJ sought his endorsement. I learned the most about Truman many years later, when I read his biography written by David McCullough;I thought President Eisenhower's greatest accomplishment was signing legislation to build America's interstate highway system in 1956, and, his greatest political contribution was in his farewell speech in 1961, when he warned America about the growing political influence of the military-industrial complex in the 1950s. Though he was a moderate conservative, Ike continued New Deal policies, and enlarged the scope of Social Security. Later after reading about his eight years in office, I felt President Eisenhower seemed passive and reluctant in enforcing desegregation of public schools in the United States after the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. But true to his constitutional oath, he sent federal troops to Little Rock, Ark., to provide security in the desegregation process. He also proposed civil rights legislation that passed in 1957 and 1960 to protect the right to vote. In addition, Eisenhower began the NASA program to compete against the Soviet Union in the space race, strongly and very publicly opposed military moves by Israel during the Suez Crisis in 1956, and intervened in the crisis saving Egyptian dictator Co. Gamal Abdel Nasser from a an Anglo-French Invasion. In 1958, he sent 15,000 U.S. troops to Lebanon

to prevent the pro-Western government falling to a Nasser-inspired revolution. What frustrated me most about Eisenhower as a kid was watching film of Eisenhower's press conferences on television and listening to his fractured syntax in responding to reporter's questions. His answers were doubletalk, and never made much sense to me. It was baffling. I found them hard to decipher and remember thinking, what did he say? In those days, while I was in elementary school but already interested in history and current events, I did not think Eisenhower appeared to be very smart to me. Fifty years later as an adult and I had become a writer, journalist and historian, I learned from reading books about Eisenhower that he hated news conferences and made his answers obtuse and ambiguous just to confuse and frustrate them reporters. He always kept his cards close to his vest, even in public. Let them figure out what I don't want to say, he seemed to be saying. I learned later in life that Eisenhower was a very bright politician and knew exactly what he was doing. As an adult I grew to admire Eisenhower most for his military success as commander of all the U.S. armed forces in Europe. He had been a great political general. Without Eisenhower's strategic acumen and his ability to cajole or prod his top commanders in just the right way at the right time, America would never have defeated Hitler.

When I was in my late 20s and later in my 30s, I was distracted from my usual attention to Washington politics after assassins killed our greatest leaders in the 1960s, and then President Nixon disgraced the office and resigned. And I was too busy in the 1980s and early '90s to care much because I had to work each day at whatever job I had, recover from my mental illness and attend responsibly to my family obligations. However, my love for politics and public affairs never went away. I just did not have time for it. I was never really fond of any of our presidents in that period, but I was in tuned enough to always have an opinion about them and express it bluntly.

I had no opinion about Gerald Ford, thinking of him as a caretaker president. I thought Jimmy Carter was a man of high character who achieved much in his first years in office. He succeeded in ratifying the Panama Canal treaties and rebuilding trust with Central American countries. He was able to get energy reform and ethics legislation through Congress and airlines were deregulated. But he lost his battle fighting stagflation in the economy. I thought he was doing well as president until Iranian students took the American hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. However, through the final year and a half of his term, Carter was helpless to free the hostages during the 1980 election campaign and his chance of being reelected was doomed. Unfortunately, his presidency went down in some people's minds as a failure. We have had much worse presidents than Jimmy Carter. I thought he was a truly honest man who did the best he could, but was just a victim of very bad luck.

I did not like Ronald Reagan when he was elected president because I remembered all of his extreme right wing rhetoric in the 1960s while he was governor of California. I saw him as a bad B-movie actor portraying an eventual and equally inept President in the White House, surrounded by aides who really ran the Oval Office. A man who had been a loyal Democrat and admirer of FDR, Reagan went from being a liberal to conservative Republican when the political winds blew in his favor. I always viewed Reagan an actor playing the role of the president. I never was convinced that he actually knew what he was doing as president. I was never impressed by his speeches. He was no JFK or Martin Luther King. He seemed to be reading from an actor's script. I never trusted him. I think he lied when he said he played no role or had any knowledge in the Iran-Contra Affair. Though he ordered massive weapons buildup in military hardware, I did not think he was a competent commander in chief, especially after the Marines

were killed on his watch in the October 1982 bombing of their barracks in Beirut, Lebanon.

I was angry enough to write Reagan a letter in which I was critical of his administration for failing to provide better security for the Marines. It was a total snafu by the chain of command, and him as president for not providing better security for the barracks against the terrorists who drove their right into the compound and blew it up.

But like FDR, Reagan was a beacon of hope and optimism to many Americans in steering the nation out of the economic recession of the early 1980s. He worked with Democrats in Congress to revive the U.S. economy, The end of the nuclear arms race and the fall of the Berlin Wall happened during Reagan's administration, and I have to give him and his staff credit and respect for those achievements.

Most of what I knew about Reagan came from what I saw of him on television. He always seemed cheerful and smiling, confident he could solve the problems Americans had in the 1980s. And I admit I was more sympathetic toward him after he was shot in an assassination attempt. I liked the courage, fortitude and humor he expressed after that near fatal event. I also liked the way he worked with Democrats to reform and save the Social Security fund when it was in trouble in the 1980s. I did worry about his actions in his second term when I thought he was drifting into senility. In the first fours years, Reagan had very capable Cabinet members and staff in his inner circle like James Baker, George Schultz, Michael Deaver and Caspar Weinberg. I thought they made all the important decisions for him, and usually acted wisely. But they left their positions after four years, and left Reagan with Donald Regan as his chief of staff, and at that point, President Reagan's mental involvement in his administration began to lessen.

I respected President George H.W. Bush for the decisive way he planned and executed the strategy of the Persian Gulf War. In 1990, the United States sent 500,000 American troops to the Middle East after Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on the pretense that that small Arab country was driving down the price of oil with overproduction and endangering Iraq's economy. Sending our military forces to kick Saddam's troops out of Kuwait in January 1991 was done quickly and efficiently with few American casualties, I thought. President Bush achieved his objectives with experienced assistance from Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf, the perfect generals to direct the fight. He cooked his own goose and committed political suicide when he did the right thing and raised taxes. It was an act of political sacrifice that had to be made.

In the Persian Gulf War, I would have liked to have seen the president order our overwhelming force of troops to drive on to Baghdad and take down Saddam's regime when Bush had the dictator on the ropes. I have heard all of his arguments against it, and respect them. But, in my opinion, the United States could have possibly stabilized the Middle East at that point, deposed Saddam and eliminated him as a potential military threat to Israel and Saudi Arabia's oil fields on the Kuwait border. However, Bush and his advisers thought the U.S. had no right to go further. They believed they had done enough damage to Saddam's dictatorship and continued to apply pressure on him, imposing tough economic sanctions and initiating a no-fly zone in Iraq. If they had deposed Saddam in some way, it would have saved thousands of American lives 12 years later.

I was ambivalent and tolerant of Bill Clinton during his eight years as president. I think Carter and Clinton were the smartest presidents in the 1970s and 90s. However, I found it exasperating to listen toi Clinton's repeated explanations and excuses of why he did not really avoid the military draft while a graduate student during the Vietnam War. I thought he was a

brilliantly slick, shady, hothead as a president, but I didn't think getting blowjobs from a female intern and lying about it ---- even to a grand jury --- constituted grounds for his impeachment. Other Presidents had done much worse.

Clinton was said to be a genius in analyzing policy issues, but I thought he talked interminably, droning on and on, taking too long to make decisions. I thought his biggest failure was not being more aware that al Qaeda terrorists were a serious threat to our nation's security, and not taking tougher action against the jihadis. He hesitated and failed when he had a chance to kill Osama bin Laden a year or two before the Sept.11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington. And working in a bipartisan effort with Republicans like Newt Gingrich, Clinton got welfare reform legislation passed, balanced the budget, presided over a booming national economy, expanded markets for American products, paid off a $405 billion national debt, sustained Social Security and Medicare and left office in 1999 with a $155 billion budget surplus. His only real legislative failure was not passing healthcare reform. Despite my lack of respect of him as a man, I thought Clinton was a successful president.

By the turn of the 21st century, it was Bush 41's son, George W. Bush, who made my blood pressure rise. In the presidential election campaign of 2000, he appeared to me as intellectually lazy. He was a swaggering, arrogant cowboy, full of bravado with little physical courage He reminded me of the lying little gunfighter in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven.*that admits he had never killed anyone like he had bragged. I thought Bush was unqualified for national office, had been a caretaker governor of Texas, and approached being president of the United States as though he thought it would be just a walk in the park.

My passionate dislike of Bush rose after he was awarded an unprecedented victory in the November presidential election by a 5-4 political decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. He lost the popular vote by 500,000 votes and was in actuality a minority president, but he took over the White House like he had won by five million votes. It seemed to me that he felt he had a divine right to be president, following in his father's footsteps. I thought Al Gore was robbed of the presidency. The inauguration of George Bush as president in 2001 was the start of one of the most disastrous decades in American history.

I considered myself a conservative Democrat by the mid 1990s when President Clinton was in his second term, but grew very liberal as Bush 43 and his neoconservative advisers became more radical and extreme in exercising power after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.. Like many other Americans I fully supported Bush and approved of the way he rallied the nation in common cause after 9/11. I felt that under his leadership, all Americans, whether Republican or Democrat, were united to oppose the al Qaeda terrorists who flew those hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The attacks angered just about every breathing American. People began flying the flag again, and were ready to go to the caves of Tora Bora in Afghanistan in October 2011 to find Osama. Thousands of young men and women enlisted in the Marines and Army, wanting revenge for the 3,000 lives lost in the Twin Towers and Pentagon.

Before 9/11, I had never heard of Osama bin Laden, although there had been the news stories that his terrorist group known as al Qaeda had bombed two U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, Africa, and taken credit for the suicide bombing of the Navy destroyer USS Cole, that killed 17 and wounded 39 sailors, on Oct. 2, 2000, at the Yemeni port of Aden. American journalists did not discover until a few years after the 9/11 attacks that bin Laden, who hated America’s culture, had declared jihad (Muslim holy war) on the United States because of the

presence of U.S. troops still stationed in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War.

In August 1990, as Saddam was in the process of invading Kuwait, U.S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney told King Fahd and the Saudi Arabian government that the President Bush had decided to send troops to the Persian Gulf region. Saddam's invasion of the Kuwaiti oil fields was an intolerable threat to U.S. security in the Middle East, especially endangering the Saudis' control of their oil fields along the Saudi-Kuwait border. That was what Cheney told the Saudi monarch. The Saudis' problem was America's problem, Cheney told the king.

If Saddam succeeded in snatching the oilfields, he would control most of the world's available oil supply, said Cheney, who promised the Saudis that American troops would be removed from the region after the Gulf War ended or whenever the Saudis asked them to leave. When bin Laden learned the American military forces were coming to the Gulf region, he pleaded to the Arab royal family to let him raise an army of jihadis to repel an invasion by Saddam's forces. Bin Laden wanted American troops to stay out of the Middle East. But the Saudi monarchy thought that bin Laden's offer was so unrealistic, it was laughable.

As a rejected bin Laden left for Afghanistan, the Saudi government asked the American military forces to come as soon as they could, and never asked the remaining American forces to leave after the Gulf War. A U.S. military presence was still there on Sept. 11 when an enraged bin Laden got payback and launched his terrorist offensive against the West.

The 9/11 attacks on American soil were the first evidence that made me believe that most of the staff in Bush's White House were asleep at the wheel. That included by now Vice President Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. I was disgusted when information was released a few years later that, two months before the attacks, CIA director George Tenet had told Rice that his agency had received an intelligence report indicating that al Qaeda was planning a strike in the United States, using jet airliners. The White House apparently overlooked the intelligence report or did not take the warning seriously.

After al Qaeda and bin Laden took credit for the attacks, I along with a lot of other Americans dismissed any thought of Saddam Hussein being involved. But within the next 18 months, the White House started talking about striking both Saddam and bin Laden. I just never thought George Bush's administration would invade Iraq. Because by that time, we knew bin Laden had ordered the 9/11 attacks and Bush had retaliated by invading Afghanistan in an attempt to kill or capture Osama. Why would Bush invade Iraq? When his advisers and Republican think tank conservatives started talking about regime change in Iraq, I thought that meant that Saddam would somehow be deposed by the CIA as some in the Saudi monarchy suggested. Maybe Saddam would be paid off and allowed to leave Iraq, or black operations units of the U.S. military would be sent to Baghdad to either kidnap or kill him. Otherwise, I did not think it was wise to invade Iraq with American troops. I had not heard any sufficient reason given to attack another sovereign country. War was not necessary.

In early 2003, most Americans outside of Washington were not aware of any planning by the United States to invade Iraq. But as journalists eventually learned, Bush, his defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Cheney, Rice and other top aides were considering a response against Iraq in the months before the 9/11 attacks. We also learned eventually from historians that Bush wanted to take on both bin Laden and Saddam after 9/11.

Bush had opposed "nation building" ventures by the United States when he campaigned for president in 2000. But once Bush took office in January 2001, Cheney was talking internally about regime change in Iraq with his fellow neoconservatives from the Project for the New

American Century, a group of conservatives that included the plan's chief architect Paul Wolfowitz and his supporters Doug Feith, Elliott Abrams, Robert Kagan, Richard Perle and William Kristol, editor of the online magazine, *The Daily Standard*. These members of that right wing think tank group had posted an open letter to President Clinton on the neocons' website in January 1998, urging Clinton to remove Saddam from power, using U.S. diplomatic, political and military power. They argued that Saddam was a threat to the security of the United States, its Middle East allies and oil resources in the region, if he succeeded in maintaining what the neocons asserted was a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological and possibly nuclear). The letter said the United States could no longer rely on its partners in the Gulf War to uphold U.N. sanctions or to punish Saddam when he blocked or evaded United Nations' weapon inspections. American policy could no longer be crippled by what, the letter said, was a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN. The neoconservatives argued that an Iraq war would be justified by Saddam's defiance of U.N. "containment" policy and his persistent threat to U.S. interests. Clinton apparently never replied or commented about implementation of the conservative think tank's ultimatum. I believe Clinton's biggest fear was the strong possibility that civilians would be killed in a missile attack. I believe he was totally against any military campaign to force regime change in Iraq.

When George W. Bush was told in a briefing that Central Intelligence Agency could not depose Saddam with covert action, the president seemed to buy into the neoconservatives' idea of taking military action against the Iraqi dictator. Cheney and the rest of the neoconservatives, using 9/11 and the unproved belief that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, convinced Bush to go against the long-standing conservative principles that he espoused during the 2000 election campaign. None of we ordinary Americans in the country knew or were ever told this. Neither did most of the news media. That information about considering armed regime change in Iraq before 9/11 came out in books and news reports written long after U.S. troops had invaded and occupied Iraq.

An important side note I must mention at this point: None of the think-tank neo-conservatives calling for an American invasion of Iraq ever served in the military. Cheney was given five deferments during the Vietnam War era because, according to him, he "had other priorities in the 60's than military service." In an article in the *New York Times* on May 1, 2004, Cheney told a reporter: "I don't regret the decisions I made. I complied fully with all the requirements of the statutes, registered with the draft when I turned 18. Had I been drafted, I would have been happy to serve." Four of the draft deferments from 1962 to 1967 were because Cheney was a student and the fifth, because he had become a father. Believe me, five was a lot of deferments during the Vietnam War. An average American who signed up for the draft at 18 in those days could never receive that many deferments unless he knew someone of high influence in the federal government was supporting him.

I just did not see justification for the United States to invade Iraq. Saddam and his government posed no threat to U.S. national security. I believed that going to war in the cities of Iraq was not prudent militarily. It would involve a lot of urban combat, kicking in doors and fighting from house to house. I thought it would be very difficult for ground troops to fight insurgents. It could escalate into a civil war in which the United States should be involved. We had no business occupying another country without legal grounds. I believed then, and still believe, even though Congress authorized it, that the invasion of Iraq and the inevitable occupation were violations of international law. The instigators of such a preemptive strike of

that sort would be war criminals, in my estimation. But Congress apparently believed Bush's story about Saddam having weapons of mass destruction and voted to authorize the invasion.

When our troops rushed to Baghdad so quickly, I was even more amazed because it was done so easily. There seemed to be no real opposition to the Americans' fast-moving attack. I wondered if I had been wrong in my judgment. At first the news about our invasion of Iraq was encouraging. But it was in those first days that our Army and Marines were in Iraq that the goal of the invasion showed immediate signs of unraveling.

The American invasion, the ensuing occupation by American troops and the insurgency made the war in Iraq the best covered news event in U.S. military history by television and print journalists. Reporters like John Burns and Dexter Filkins of the New York Times, Richard Engel of NBC News, Lara Logan of CBS News and Thomas Ricks of the Washington Post were among the very best. But I found the most compelling, authentic, starkly descriptive combat reporting of Operation Iraqi Freedom was by Evan Wright, a correspondent for Rolling Stone magazine, who during the invasion was embedded with the First Reconnaissance Battalion of the First Marine Division. What he had heard and learned was compiled in a 2004 book appropriately named *Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Capt. America and the New Face of American War*. The book would be adapted to a HBO television series, just called *Generation Kill.*

With Wright riding with them in a rolling force of 70 Humvees, the First Recon Marines' mission in the 2003 invasion of Iraq was to drive north deeply into Iraq's Fertile Crescent east of Baghdad, and engage Saddam's loyalists and Syrian, Egyptian and Palestinian jihadis along the 110 miles of treacherous highway between Nasiriyah and Al Kut in central Iraq. It was the very worst place to send an invading army, Wright would realize.

First Recon and 6,000 other Marine regiments probed through urban areas and farmland far to the northeast of the flank of Army troops that were heading straight to Baghdad on highways to the southwest. Wright rode with the lead combat team of Bravo Second Platoon and interacted and was under fire with all the Marine officers and enlisted men from the start of the invasion until the Marines withdrew to Kuwait when their six-week-long mission concluded. (First Recon returned to Camp Pendleton, their home base in San Diego, by June 2003, and some of them would return to Iraq by 2004.)

The Marines of 2003 were a new breed, much different from those in World War II and Vietnam, as Wright learned. Some of the NCOs had already seen action in Afghanistan and were "Marine Corps Killers" like their aging and elderly counterparts. However, most of the privates, lance corporals and other younger Marines were still green but ready to see combat action, to "*Get Some*," as the Marine Corps cheer goes.

" '*Get Some*" is shouted when a brother Marine is struggling to beat his personal best in a fitness run," Wright declared in the prologue of *Generation Kill*. "It punctuates stories told at night about getting laid in whorehouses in Thailand or Australia. It's the cry of exhilaration after firing a burst from a .50 caliber machine gun. *Get some*! expresses in two simple words the excitement, the fear, the feelings of power and the erotic-tinged thrill that come from confronting the extreme physical and emotional challenges posed by death, which is, of course, what war is all about. Nearly every Marine I've met in this war with Iraq will be his chance to *get some*."

The young Marines of the Iraq War were what Wright called America's "disposable children," who are exposed a much more high tech culture, many of them coming from broken

homes, raised in poor conditions by single parents or grandparents. They are kids seeking a way out of not having the love of a parent, a way out of not having a job, a way out from not having a future.

As Wright said, these young Marines he saw were on intimate terms with video games, TV reality shows and Internet porn. They knew about hip-hop, Marilyn Manson and Jerry Springer They knew more about the writing of Tupac than the writing of Abraham Lincoln. To them, calling a fellow Marine *motherfucker* is a term of endearment.

Commanding the Marines during the invasion was Maj. Gen. James Mattis, a traditional infantryman and scholar of ancient and modern military campaigns. Wright described Mattis in 2003 as a small man in his mid 50s who had a speech impediment that gave him a "folksy charm." And Wright quickly established that Mattis was a bold thinker and proponent of maneuver warfare; his favorite expression was "Doctrine is the last refuge of the unimaginative."

During the invasion Mattis's communications call name was "Chaos." Why? Because Mattis wanted his Marines creating chaos, operating behind enemy lines in Iraq, employing speed over firepower to throw Iraqi defenders off balance. He did not want Marines shielded from chaos, he wanted them to embrace it, Wright noted. First Recon got the message, and once the invasion began, were the embodiment of Mattis's

Commanding First Recon's Alpha, Bravo and Charlie platoons was Lt. Col. Stephen Ferrando, who before Iraq had no combat experience and had been parade commander at the Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C. His call sign was "Godfather" because of the raspy whisper of a voice, the result of his vocal cords that were removed seven years earlier during surgery for throat cancer. Ferrando was given the assignment to carry out Gen. Mattis's strategy to the letter. In the end Ferrando's battalion exemplified the virtues of maneuver warfare advocated by both Mattis and Rumsfeld.

On their way to Baghdad First Recon killed a lot of people, didn't win many hearts and minds, and learned when they reached the Iraqi capital that they were ill-trained, unequipped without enough troops to impose order. As soon as they approached and then set up their base in Baghdad, the Marines knew that the Iraqis did not want them in their country. They saw the lawlessness and looting by a country disintegrating into its own version of chaos. The Marines also learned that Iraq was ripe for insurgency and civil war.

Wright reported that dozens, maybe hundreds of Iraqi fighters and some civilians were killed by the Marines in firefights and ambushes during the operation. Innumerable other Iraqi civilians were killed in artillery strikes or 30,000 pounds of bombs dropped on villages from aircraft, said Wright. The Marine grunts found themselves in situations in which military rules of engagement were always changing, making it hard to decide whether their actions were wanton killing or civilized military conduct, Wright noted.

The Marine officers were also surprised that when they got to Baghdad and saw the chaos created by the American invasion they were second guessing their strategy, knowing they were not ready to be a force of occupation.

Before he left First Recon, Wright did a final interview with both Ferrando and Mattis. The general praised the men of First Recon for their courage and initiative, crediting them with a large measure for the invasion's speedy success. "They should be very proud," Mattis told Wright.

As Wright finished his interview with Ferrando, the colonel added a coda to his remarks that was surprising and quite revealing to the reporter: "Something I'm struggling with internally is

it's exciting to get shot at," Ferrando said, almost sounding confessional. "It's excitement I hadn't thought about before. He hastily added, But at the same time it's a terrible feeling to be the man sending other people into combat."

Ferrando had been Mattis's "go-to guy" in central Iraq, Wright added. The colonel was reckless and never turned down a chance to send his Marines into "another hairy situation," Wright added. But Ferrando's battalion had exemplified the "virtues of maneuver warfare," which had pleased it greatest proponent, Gen. Mattis, which had always been the colonel's first mission.

In a group setting, Wright, who had ridden in the lead Humvee with Colbert's team talked to Lt. Vick and four Marines and got uniquely different insights from each of them about how they had been affected by the killing they had seen and committed themselves.

"After I return to the Second Platoon's squalid encampment and pass on the general's praise, the men stand around in the dust, considering his glowing remarks," Wright said. "Finally Cpl. Gabriel Garza says, "Yeah? Well, we still did a lot of stupid shit."

When told the invasion assault they had just completed was "Operation Iraqi Freedom," Lance Cpl Jeffrey Carazales scoffed: "Fuck that! I'll tell you what freedom was, Phase Three Iraq (referring to the military term to the combat operation phase of the invasion. That was fucking Iraqi freedom. Rip through this bitch shooting anything that moves from your (Humvee) window. That's what I call freedom."

The best educated and most articulate and profound of the Marines talking with Wright was 29-year-old "Doc" Robert Timothy Bryan, a Navy corpsman with a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, who Wright said always seemed pissed off, carrying a lot of pent up rage he vented in weekend bar fights. "War doesn't change anything," Bryan said. "This place was fucked up before we came and it's fucked up now. I personally don't believe we 'liberated' the Iraqis. Time will tell."

"The American people ought to know the price we pay to maintain their standard of living," Sgt. Anthony Espera, another team leader, asserted to Wright.

"Despite his avowals of being a complete cynic, Espera continually turns back to the incident at Al Hayy, where he shot and killed three unarmed men fleeing a truck at the Marines' roadblock, Wright wrote. "I wish I could go back in time and see if they were enemy, or just confused civilians," Espera said.

"It could have been a truckload of babies, and with our Rules of Engagement you did the right thing, " his platoon leader Lt. Vick interjected.

"I'm not saying I care," Espera continued. "I don't give a fuck. But I keep thinking about what the priest said. It's not a sin to kill with purpose as long as you don't enjoy it. My question is, is indifference the same as enjoyment?"

"All religious stuff aside," Sgt. Brad "Iceman" Colbert cuts in, "The fact is people who can't kill will be subject to those who can."

Despite their qualms or lack thereof, about killing, Wright said, most of the Marines unabashedly loved the action. "You really can't top it," said Cpl. Daniel Redman, a 50-cal. machine gunner, says. "Combat is the supreme adrenaline rush. You take rounds. Shoot back, shit starts blowing up. It's sensory overload. It's the one thing that's not overrated in the military."

"The fucked thing," Doc Bryan said as the discussion broke up, "is the men we've been fighting probably came here for the same reasons we did, to test themselves, to feel what war is

like. In my view it doesn't matter if you oppose or support war. The machine goes on." P.348-349

It was months later that I became skeptical and wondered if Bush had any real, well-defined plan for occupying a country like Iraq. We learned within six months through journalists who were in Iraq that Washington had no plan. When the war got out of control, the occupation became chaotic and the insurgency erupted, Bush then began disclosing his list of other reasons for launching the invasion. First, our troops had invaded Iraq to find the WMD. When no such weapons were detected, Bush explained that our troops went into Iraq to liberate the country and set up a democratic government. Other officials in the Bush administration and their right wing pundits on radio talk shows and Fox Television put out stories that the U.S. invaded Iraq because Saddam had directed the 9/11 attacks in league with bin Laden. However, during the first years of the war, any American who read a newspaper or watched television news reports learned that bin Laden hated Saddam and his secular Baathist government. The two Arab leaders were avowed enemies. Bin Laden was a religious extremist, and Saddam, a secular, totalitarian dictator. Saddam had nothing to do with 9/11. Most average Americans never connected the dots and believed exactly what the Bush government told them.

No one among informed Americans learned about the neoconservatives' urgency for regime change in Iraq until Bush was in his second term in office and historians began writing books about the war. From the time of the invasion in March 2003 to the withdrawal of our combat troops in August 2010, I read daily about the war in Iraq. Early on, I concluded that the only logical reason that the Bush administration had invaded and occupied Iraq was to establish an American military presence in the Middle East, perhaps to protect Israel and provide a military buffer between Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran and Afghanistan. I thought we should have concentrated on Afghanistan, destroying Al Qaeda and killing bin Laden.

13

A Letter To Dubya

A few months into the war, a lot of Americans began to think that an occupation of Iraq by U.S. forces appeared to be insane. We had not sent enough troops to stop the looting and lawlessness that ensued after our troops arrived in the country. Rumsfeld, who from the beginning had advocated a smaller, fast moving, blitzkrieg-like invasion force, had not thought or planned for occupation of the country, believing the American military forces would probably begin withdrawing from Iraq by August 2003.

When American troops entered Baghdad, both Saddam and his government were already on the run and could not be found. Paul Bremer, the American civilian leader of the Coalition Provisional Authority, arrived in Iraq and immediately dissolved the Iraqi Army, the country's police force and Saddam's Baath Party. He did not think it was essential to use them to secure and restore order in the country. And Bremer was unaware that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi professionals were members of the Saddam-led party. Those people immediately lost their jobs, adding to the already staggering 40 percent unemployment rate in Iraq.

So the Iraqis, especially the Sunnis, were not pleased with the United States invading their country and did not welcome the soldiers and Marines as liberators. Bremer had eliminated any way for the Iraqis to govern or provide security for themselves. The invasion and occupation by the Americans destroyed what was left of Iraq's economy. The Iraqi people were left with a infrastructure that was in shambles after years of neglect by Saddam, and little electricity, water or enough police to provide security. The Iraqi economy was in shambles. What government apparatus Iraq had before the American invasion was destroyed.

Many members of Saddam's Republican Guard and intelligence service, most of them Sunnis, soon joined other Iraqi forces that were forming to resist the American invaders. Conditions in Iraq could only be described as chaotic. What we here in the states saw at that time was exactly as *Washington Post* journalist Thomas Ricks described in his book about America's occupation of Iraq: It was a "fiasco."

As months passed, American civilian representatives directing the occupation went about the task of restoring enough order to set a date for a democratic election and help the Iraqis form a new government. The invasion and then occupation by American troops had clearly created conditions for civil war. With the mayhem and no security in Baghdad, Sunnis and Shiites, the two opposing Muslim sects in Iraq, began fighting each other, settling old scores. The Sunni Arabs, who had controlled the western half of Iraq and had reigned on top as Saddam's strongest supporters, were outnumbered and lost all their status to the Shiite majority. So Sunnis began attacking the American troops, contractors from the U.S. and anybody who supported and gave aid to the Shiites.

Here in the United States after the first year of the war, we were seeing daily television news reports of the growing violence in Iraq. The most alarming of all of these events, occurred in Fallujah, a city of 250,000 inhabitants, 43 miles northwest of Baghdad in the Sunni Triangle of al-Anbar Province.

For many years, Fallujah, surrounded on three sides by desert, had gained a reputation as an untamed, bad-ass city, full of hardcore criminals, according to journalists and military officers who had been there. In 2004, reporters wrote that Fallujah was made up of narrow streets and about 40- to 50,000 concrete buildings crammed (some two feet apart) into 2,000 city blocks.

News correspondents and historians who also knew Fallujah said it was a perennial haven for thieves, smugglers and bandits, who conducted their business on supply lines through Iraq from Syria and Jordan to Iran, and north to south from Turkey and Saudi Arabia. According to news accounts, Fallujah's streets were littered with junked cars and stinking trash, and were sometimes covered with sewage after the Euphrates River overflowed its banks.

The city's people were described as "mean, sullen and hostile" to all outsiders and foreigners, according to Dick Camp in his book, *Operation Phantom Fury, The Assault and Capture of Fallujah, Iraq.* After the American occupation began in 2003, there were 70,000 unemployed men in Fallujah, many of whom were Sunnis who had always supported Saddam, plus former Iraqi Army officers, and Baathists. Scores of them were getting paid to join the resistance against the Americans, Camp wrote.

The incident that lit the fire of the insurgency in the Iraq War occurred in Fallujah on March 31, 2004. It involved four agents of Blackwater USA, the American security firm hired to protect Bremer. The agents were ambushed and killed by Iraqis as they were driving into the city providing security for an American food service contractor bringing kitchen equipment into Fallujah. Shot, stabbed to death and mutilated by a mob of men and boys, the four contractors' bodies were burned, then drug through streets, and hung from the supports of a trestle bridge over the Euphrates.

The insurgents in Fallujah later stated they killed the Blackwater employees because they believed they were CIA agents.

American civilian leaders in Baghdad, at the Pentagon and the White House reacted with rage at the killings, demanding an instant military retaliation. CENTCOM commander, Gen. John Abizaid; Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, head of all the Coalition forces; and Gen. James Mattis, commander of the 1st Marines Division at Fallujah, cautioned against any immediate American military response to the killing of the Blackwater agents, saying the situation on the ground in Fallujah was too volatile and needed to cool down. They said any action that would endanger Iraqi civilians would be exploited by Arab news media, make an already bad situation worse, and unite all Iraqis against their American occupiers.

But the generals were overruled by Bremer, Rumsfeld and President Bush. "The U.S. has got to react to this outrage or the enemy will conclude we're irresolute," Bremer said. Rumsfeld agreed, "We have got to attack, and we need to do more that just get the perpetrators of this Blackwater incident," he said. "We must make sure the Iraqis in the other cities receive our message," according to Gen. Sanchez's 2008 autobiography, *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story.*

In a video conference with the president, the National Security Council and Rumsfeld, Army and Marine commanders in Iraq again recommended waiting before assaulting the city. Let things settle down, they recommended. They warned that it would be a nasty, bloody operation and might kill civilians and cause vast collateral damage to infrastructure in Fallujah. Not listening to the advice of military commanders in Iraq, Bush said he appreciated the reasons for the generals' caution, but then ordered the attack. "Heads must roll," Bush reportedly said, as George Packer wrote in his 2005 book, *Assassins' Gate.*

In the afternoon of April 7, 2004, Sanchez briefed President Bush and Secretary of State

Colin Powell in a video conference on the progress of the Marines and Army's morning attack on Fallujah. "The masses are willing to come out and pile on when there is a Humvee burning. We've got to smash somebody's ass quickly," Secretary Powell said, according to Sanchez. "There has to be a total victory somewhere. We must have a brute demonstration of power. This is broader than anything we have seen."

"Kick ass!" Sanchez later quoted Bush as saying. "If somebody tries to stop the march to democracy, we will seek them out and kill them! We must be tougher than hell! This Vietnam stuff, this is not even close. It is a mind-set. We can't send that message. It's an excuse to prepare us for withdrawal."

"There is a series of moments and this is one of them," Bush continued. "Our will is being tested, but we are resolute. We have a better way. Stay strong! Stay the course! Kill them! Be confident! Prevail! We are going to wipe them out! We are not blinking!"

In one stage of their ensuing retaliatory strike, the Marines encountered about 40 insurgents, firing at them from the courtyard of one of the city's 100 mosques, Camp reported in his book. Gunships were called to put down fire in support of the ground troops and a Marine F-16 aircraft dropped a 500-pound bomb that destroyed the Muslim house of worship. Later when they entered the bombed out mosque and courtyard, Marine infantrymen found no bodies or even bloody traces of human remains.

Perhaps the insurgents had escaped or been vaporized. However, the next day, the two Arab television networks in the Middle East reported that the 40 insurgents and 200 civilians, including women and children, had been killed in the past 24 hours by the Americans. Because of their fear of being captured by jihadis, Western journalists were not embedded with U.S. military units during the first assault of Fallujah. So no American reporters were available to verify the ground reports of their pro-insurgent, cheerleading counterparts in the Arab media.

This was the United States' first "Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot" (WTF) moment of the war. From that point, our military forces in Iraq were screwed. Because, as the Marines and Army were attacking Fallujah, Bremer decided to confront Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr and close down his anti-American newspaper in Baghdad, and arrest al-Sadr's top officers.

"The Mahdi Army is a hostile force," President Bush had told Powell and Rumsfeld in their previous video conference, Sanchez wrote. "We can't allow one man (al-Sadr) to change the course of the country. It is absolutely vital that we have robust offensive operations everywhere down south. At the end of this campaign, al-Sadr must be gone. At a minimum, he will be arrested. It is essential that he be wiped out."

So the American government created trouble for itself in two Iraqi cities. Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army then took to the streets, with orders to strike coalition forces "where ever you meet them," Soon, Bremer got a call from Gen. Sanchez, telling him that all hell was breaking loose, and demonstrators were in the streets of Najaf, Sadr City and Al-Kut. Fighting erupted in Basra, Karbala and Nasariyah, three cities in southern Iraq, Sanchez said in his autobiography.

While the Marines disputed the reports of civilian deaths, they said they controlled about 30 percent of Fallujah and thought American forces were on the verge of breaking the assault on the city wide open, journalists disclosed later. But then the civilian leadership in Washington and the White House had second thoughts about their action and began to back down. According the Sanchez's book, the Bush administration was getting political backlash from all directions, including from Coalition forces, the UN effort in Iraq, the Iraqi Governing Council, and Democrats in Congress. With a presidential election campaign heating up in 2004 in the U.S. and

the transfer of sovereignty to the new Iraqi Government set for June 30, Bush lost his earlier zeal for combat, called a halt to the assault and ordered a withdrawal. His decision pissed off all of his Army and Marine generals, triggered the feared uprising of insurgents in several Iraq cities, and increased violence throughout the country.

Maj. Gen. Mattis, one year after commanding First Recon during the 2003 invasion, was furious when told by Gen. Abizaid that the Marines had been ordered to stand down. Mattis thought "the enemy was on the ropes and he was within a few days of finishing them off," Ricks reported in Fiasco. Mattis had lost 39 Marines and Army soldiers in that short-lived assault on Fallujah and was fuming about the order. "If you're going to take Vienna, take fucking Vienna!!' Mattis "snarled" to the sympathetic Abizaid, reprising the statement once made by Napoleon Bonaparte, Ricks wrote.

Mattis could not understand why the Marines were told to stop. He was not alone in his frustration. "It was like going in half-assed and then running away," another Marine general said, according to Ricks. "They hadn't thought about the consequences. It was the same as the way they went to war, and the same way Bremer operated," he was quoted by Ricks as saying.

The Marines first strike against Fallujah officially ended April 28, 2004, with an agreement from the leaders of the local population that they would keep insurgents out of their city. The Fallujah Brigade composed of local Iraqis led by Muhammed Latif, a former Baathist general, was allowed to pass through coalition lines and take over Fallujah, journalists in Iraq reported. Insurgent strength and control began to grow to such an extent that by Sept. 13, a senior U.S. official told ABC News, that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the bloodthirsty leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, was back, operating with a force of 5,000 men, mostly non-Iraqis. At that point, getting rid of Zarqawi became "the highest priority," American leaders in Iraq said.

In November 2004, elements of the 1st Marines Division, Navy SEALs and Army Special Forces returned to Fallujah and launched a ground and air assault that left the city in ruins. After most of the civilians heeded American warnings and left the city, artillery, tanks and heavy mortar teams blasted buildings they knew were occupied by insurgents. F-18 Hornets dropped ordnance on insurgent positions. Bulldozers demolished walls of Fallujah homes as Marine infantrymen went from house to house, then room to room, flushing out and killing jihadi fighters

"Half of the 39,000 homes and buildings in Fallujah were destroyed, but Zarqawi and his al-Qaeda terrorists, jihadists from across the Muslim world, the Sunni insurgents and the Saddam loyalists, could no longer use Fallujah as a sanctuary," Patrick O'Donnell wrote in his book, *We Were One: Shoulder to Shoulder with the Marines Who Took Fallujah*, "While Zarqawi was still at large, the fight for Fallujah had removed thousands of terrorists from the battlefields of Iraq. The cost of clearing the largest terrorist bastion in Iraq had been high. Seventy Americans were killed." The U.S. reported that the 1,200 insurgents that were killed included Chechens, Sudanese, Syrians, Arabs and Jordanians.

U.S. military historians described the fighting in the Second Battle of Fallujah as the heaviest urban warfare in which Marines had been involved since they drove North Vietnamese Army forces out of Hue City in Vietnam in 1968.

Blackwater USA had come to Iraq in the summer of 2003 after receiving a $27 million, no bid contract, to protect Bremer. The North Carolina based security firm would make $1 billion during the course of the war protecting American government officials and State Department

diplomats, Jeremy Scahill reported in his 2007 book *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army.*

When Bremer left Iraq on June 27, 2004, before turning over sovereignty to the new Iraqi government, he issued his final occupation order, giving all American security agents complete immunity from being tried in Iraqi courts on criminal charges.

After Bremer's departure, Blackwater agents may have been seeking revenge for their dead comrades left hanging on the Fallujah bridge. Blackwater mercenaries who got paid at least $600 a day by the U.S. Government were given free rein for the rest of the American occupation of Iraq. And Iraqi civilians learned quickly to fear them. "The power of the mercenaries has been growing," British correspondent Robert Fisk wrote from Baghdad in the *Independent on Sunday, London*, July 4, 2004. "Blackwater's thugs with guns now push and punch Iraqis who get in their way. Kurdish journalists twice walked out of a Bremer press conference because of their mistreatment by these men. Baghdad is alive with mysterious Westerners draped with hardware, shouting and abusing Iraqis in the street, drinking heavily in the city's poorly defended hotels. They have become for ordinary Iraqis the image of everything that is wrong with the West. We like to call them 'contractors' but there is a disturbing increase in reports that mercenaries are shooting down innocent Iraqis with total impunity," Fisk wrote, according to Scahill.

Blackwater agents considered Iraq the most dangerous environment in the Middle East and they were trigger happy. In Nasour Square of Baghdad at 12:08 p.m. Sept. 27, 2007, Blackwater agents in four SUVs opened fire on men, women and children in vehicles in the crowded intersection. Seventeen Iraqi civilians were killed and 10 other wounded by machine gun fire. The Blackwater agents claimed they had been violently attacked and had acted lawfully, defending American lives. The Blackwater contractors did not have to show any proof of their claim. The Iraqi civilians didn't know why the Americans had fired upon them.

Blackwater security agents were involved in six deadly shootings in the year leading up to the massacre in Nisour Square, and 10 deadly shootings from June 2005 to September 2007. But they suffered no consequences in the killings alleged by the Iraqi government. Even when Prime Minister Nuri Maliki demanded that their expulsion, none of the Blackwater agents were ever prosecuted, according to Scahill's reporting.

Both Gen. Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker praised Blackwater for protecting American officials while in Iraq. Blackwater agents reported directly to the White House, not to American military in Iraq or at the Pentagon. And they had the full support of President Bush and Vice President Cheney. "They protect people's lives," said President Bush. "I appreciated the sacrifice and service that Blackwater employees make." (Bush's statement was quoted by Scahill.)

The Department of Defense had begun farming out the majority of its support services to private contractors in the period of 1989-1993 when Dick Cheney was Secretary of Defense. After August 1992, Halliburton, the world's second largest oilfield services corporation based in Houston, Texas, and Dubai, performed virtually all support work for the military in the next five years. Cheney became chairman and CEO of Halliburton from 1995 until 2000, when he broke all ties with Halliburton to join the Republican presidential campaign, avoiding any claims of conflict of interest.

The US military created much of the demand for security guards, Scahill wrote in 2007. "It has outsourced many formerly military functions to private contactors, who in turn, need protection," Scahill declared in his book. "Because the U.S. privatized so many of these essential

services like providing food, fuel, water and houses for the troops and made private corporations necessary components of the occupation, the Bush administration did not even consider not using contractors when the situation became ultra lethal."

When Halliburton teams working to rebuild oil pipelines first arrived in Iraq they had military protection, Scahill said, quoting an article from *Fortune Magazine*. "But now they've had to hire private security," the Fortune article noted. "With armored SUVs running more than $100,000 apiece and armed guards earning $2,000 a day, big contractors like Bechtel and Halliburton were spending hundreds of millions to protect their employees. Since the government picks up the tab, ultimately that means fewer dollars for actual reconstruction work." That meant more money for private military companies like Blackwater; so mercenaries became a necessary part of the occupation, Scahill wrote.

I thought the Blackwater incident ignited the nationwide insurgency, turning all Iraqis against the American troops. It was obvious to me after seeing on TV video tape of the burned bodies of the Blackwater agents hanging from the bridge. Bush's decision to attack Fallujah in April 2004 was among the first of many mistakes the president made while commander in the chief during the war in Iraq, in my opinion. Trouble was just starting for Bush. As the war in Iraq continued, Sunnis and Shiites insurgents banded with al Qaeda fighters, and began attacking Americans, mostly with rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and AK-47s. Then the insurgents started planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or Iranian supplied explosively formed penetrators (EFPs). Our troops never expected or planned for anything like roadside bombs. They were the big equalizer as a weapon of the insurgents. American troops in Iraq had no defense against them. Soldiers quickly learned that a $150,00 Humvee may as well been made of lace when the vehicle rolled over one of the $100 IEDs.

U.S. troops had no way to detect the improvised explosive devices at first, and a lot of U.S. troops died or were maimed before they learned how to find and defuse the bombs. For the next five years, American troops were terrified by the thought of walking or driving their vehicles on the streets and highways of Iraq. By the end of the war, about 1,100 U.S. military personnel would become amputees as result of the IEDs.

Saddam, who had been hiding since the March 23, 2003, American invasion, was captured by U.S. forces at Tikrit on Dec.13, 2003, and brought to trial by the Iraqi Interim Government. He was convicted of charges related to his ordered killing in 1982 of 148 Iraqis Shiites who had planned his assassination. Saddam was sentenced and hanged Dec. 30, 2006. After Saddam was executed, I thought the United States government should have declared victory and brought our troops home.

As a journalist and a student of American military history, I watched the daily news reports from Iraq, and read every book I could find about the war. I was appalled with how U.S. troops were being misused and abused. American politicians were leading us down another deadend street of war once again. I started compiling notes from the books and newspaper articles to write my account of the war in this book.

When it was revealed that American enlisted personnel had mistreated Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in October 2003, I was so livid about the Bush administration's conduct of the war, I wrote the President a letter on May 5, 2004. "Heads should roll at the Pentagon, and you should apologize to the civilian population of Iraq," I wrote. " Admit your mistakes to those people who we've been trying to give democracy and win their 'hearts and minds'...You may

think of yourself as tough and decisive, and the strong leader that the people want but you have deceived our nation, leading us into a war that was unnecessary. You are just plain stupid for taking advice from Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice and Wolfowitz, letting them call the shots. I am convinced that is what you have done. You should be a real leader who thinks for himself. It's apparent that you had no plan of what to do after we invaded and occupied Iraq."

As a citizen and Navy y veteran, I urged Bush to fire Rumsfeld and I bluntly continued my criticism, "You've gotten a lot of good American boys and Iraqi civilians killed for nothing with your arrogance and incompetence. Don't try to tell us that our boys have died fighting for our freedoms and are protecting us from terrorism here at home. That's nonsense. They have died carrying out your ill-conceived political policy."

In the letter, I gave Bush credit for doing "the right thing" after 9/11 by going into Afghanistan and trying to catch or kill Osama bin Laden. "But then you went too far," I noted. "You did nothing but screw up by invading Iraq unilaterally just to replace Saddam. Our military is just not trained to occupy a country like that and do what you set out to do. (If you remember in 2000, you were not into nation-building.)"

Further in the letter, I declared, that invading Iraq was doomed to fail as soon as President Bush declared victory. "It is an impossible task and not worth the costs in dollars and human lives. Saddam was never an 'imminent threat' to the United States. I am convinced you knew that. All you wanted to do was nab Saddam, get payback for his attempt to assassinate your father and get control of Iraq's oil. There were never any weapons of mass destruction. Iraq had no connection with al Qaeda."

Finally, I wrote: "All you succeeded in doing was to stir up a hornet's nest, destabilize the Middle East further and strengthen the resolve of terrorists all over the world. With this latest incident at the prison, the credibility of the United States is being destroyed. We can't humiliate the Iraqi people like that and expect them to accept us as friends and liberators."

I urged President Bush to pull our troops out of Iraq as soon as possible. "Capture bin Laden and fight the war on terror by keeping us safe here within the borders of the United States. Leave the Middle East alone. We can't solve their problems."

I had vented my rage about the war, and my disappointment with President Bush. I signed the letter and listed my Owensboro address below my signature. I got no response to the letter, and did not expect one. I am sure the president never read it. It was probably shredded by some White House staff member.

Within the next year, many of us in the states, watching and reading news reports, felt that the war in Iraq was a disaster and U.S. forces were getting bogged down. I was amazed. It was like we were fighting again in Vietnam. Taking an objective one day, and then giving it up the next. It struck me that nobody in the military's top brass had learned anything from the Vietnam War. None of the top generals in 2003 were old enough to have fought in Vietnam, and apparently had studied little of the history and tactics of that war.

After Sunni insurgents affiliated with Zarqawi's al-Qaeda of Iraq bombed the ancient Shiite mosque at Samarra in February 2006, the sectarian violence in Iraq exploded to an unprecedented level and U.S. troops were caught in the middle. The time period between mid 2006 to mid 2007 turned out to be the bloodiest year in the war for the United States when 1,105 Americans were killed in action.

Many Democrats and Republicans in Washington thought the United States was losing the

war. Others were calling for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. After the Democrats regained majorities in the House and Senate in November 2006, President Bush changed his war strategy, accepted Rumsfeld's resignation and replaced him with former CIA director Robert Gates. Gen. David Petraeus took over for Gen. George Casey as commander of all U.S. forces in Iraq. Choosing Gates and Petraeus were the best decisions Bush made during his entire eight years in office, in my opinion. Gates immediately ordered manufacture of armament to be added to U.S. troop carriers to give our soldiers and Marines better protection from IEDs.

In January 2007, the President Bush announced on television that he was increasing the number of American troops in Iraq to 170,000 in order to provide better security in Baghdad and al-Anbar Province. In what he called "the surge," Bush ordered the deployment of more than 30,000 additional soldiers to Iraq, five brigades in all, and sent the majority of them into Baghdad. He also extended the tour of most of the U.S. Army troops in country and some of the Marines Corps already in Anbar Province. He was implementing the surge strategy that was created and recommended by Gen. Petraeus.

In the speech, Bush described the overall objective as establishing *"a unified, democratic federal Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself, and is an ally in the War on Terror*." He said the major element of the strategy was a change in focus for the U.S. military *"to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security."* The President stated that the surge would then provide the time and conditions conducive to reconciliation among political and ethnic factions.

Col. Ralph Kauzlarich and his battalion of 800 Rangers of the 1st Army Division from Fort Riley Kansas, were among the first surge troops sent to Iraq. Accompanying them was David Finkel, a reporter for the *Washington Post and winner of the Pulitzer Prize*, who was embedded for eight months with Kauzlarich's men. Finkel's reporting resulted in his 2009 book *The Good Soldiers* which was about the battalion's experiences during that first year of the surge.

Kauzlarich and his troops had arrived in Baghdad in April 2007 to begin executing their role in the new Army strategy. The forward operating base of operations they had been assigned to control was a 16-mile square portion of Baghdad, inhabited by 350,000 Iraqis, with at its center, Sadr City, the infamous slum and center of the insurgency, plus several other of Baghdad's hostile neighborhoods.

Kauzlarich had made his first contact with Iraqis speaking from an Army-funded radio station called PEACE 106 AM, its studio situated on the top floor of a four-floor building that had once been a hospital. The colonel and Mohammed, a local Iraqi who the military paid $88,000, according to Finkel, conducted the first of dozens of call-in talk shows in which Kauzlarich answered questions from the residents of his AO, explaining the surge strategy and what American troops would be trying to accomplish peacefully.

Once there, the Americans set out to follow Gen. Petraeus' instructions: No raiding from remote secure bases. All U.S. soldiers were to set up command posts and live in their assigned sections in close proximity to the Iraqi population. They were to establish communication links with the locals and gain their trust. They were to move on foot most of the time, sleep in local villages and conduct night patrols, all of which were required to make the surge effective.

On the first day, they began conducting foot patrols through the entire AOP to let the Iraqis know why they were there. In following days, they went about the hard task of searching houses,

clearing and securing sectors of Baghdad and meeting with Iraqi community leaders, asking them what they needed to protect their neighbors and what kind of improvements the Americans could provide for them.

Some of the Iraqis welcomed the surge troops; others didn't. American officers asked Iraqi civilians to deny sanctuary to insurgents, and they tried to get the locals to show them where IEDs were being planted. Often Iraqis were too scared to tell the Americans what personal improvements they needed and declined to divulge any military intelligence, fearing reprisals from Iraqi militias, independent insurgents and criminals in their sectors, said Finkel and other journalists who witnessed these actions. American officers learned to cajole, persuade and negotiate with Iraqi officials, getting them to open up and talk about their needs and fears.

U.S. soldiers had each been given a booklet of information about the Iraqi culture containing appropriate Arabic words and phrases, like hello, thank you, please and goodbye. The standard greeting of "as-salamu alaykum" translated to "peace be with you." "Habibi" means friend; "shaku maku" is what's up?

The booklet also told our soldiers what not to say. For the Iraqis, a right hand over the heart was a sign of respect or thanks, but the Americans were told to never give the Iraqis the American thumbs up or OK gestures because in Iraq those were considered obscene. Americans were cautioned to never use the phrase, "allah ye sheelack" which means "May God take your soul," which basically meant "I hope you die." When the work of the surge became really frustrating, American soldiers out of earshot of Iraqis had picked up on the Arabic words "cooloh khara" which means "It's all bullshit."

What the U.S. soldiers feared most during the surge were the enemies they never saw: IEDs, EIPs and snipers. Finkel and other reporters who were in Iraq in 2007 said in some cases that the new U.S. surge troops were most fearful of the powerful makeshift bombs, which caused injuries that no other American forces in any of U.S. war had ever experienced, not even in Vietnam or the American Civil War. Even when an IED exploded between Humvees and caused no major damage or injuries to the Americans, they always thought that maybe the next time an IED exploded they might not be so lucky. In some cases, moving slowly in Humvee convoys was an invitation for trouble for the Americans. Iraqi civilians shared the Americans' fear. When U.S. vehicles approached pedestrians, the Iraqis would drop their heads and step away from the Humvees, fearing an IED would go off, injuring them too. As Humvees approached Iraqi vehicles, their drivers pulled over, made no sudden moves, waited for the Americans to pass, and showed "no frustration about the inevitable traffic jam that the convoy would leave in its wake," Finkel reported in his book.

Occasionally one of those Iraqi "foot mobiles" (as American Marines had called Iraqi pedestrians during the invasion) would set off a roadside bomb, sometimes waiting for convoy of six vehicles to pass before triggering the bomb under the third or fourth Humvee. That became a horrific tactic, and added to the daily fear and tension the Americans lived with. (The Humvees were fitted with jamming devices to defeat EFPs, armed with infrared triggers, but the devices were not always effective, Finkel said.)

If soldiers weren't blown apart and killed in the explosions, they endured the permanent effects of severe brain injury, lost eyesight, third-degree burns, disfigurement, arms and legs maimed, ringing ears, concussions, and the vomiting and nightmares from the psychological effects of constant anxiety. Some soldiers who had seen too much of the deaths of their comrades and the other horrors of that war came home in one piece physically, but suffered flashbacks and

mental depression of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder).

There was always a necessary combat phase of the surge when U.S. soldiers went into new sectors to set up command posts and begin communicating with the Iraqi civilian families still living there. Once Americans entered these dangerous sectors, snipers became a big problem for them. As they moved into those neighborhoods, Americans were alert, kept their rifles pointed up, always vigilant, and never standing in one place, providing an easy target. But eventually insurgent snipers would get a lucky shot.

On April 14, 2007, Bush said: *"Violence in Baghdad, sectarian violence in Baghdad, that violence that was beginning to spiral out of control, is beginning to subside. And as the violence decreases, people have more confidence, and if people have more confidence, they're then willing to make difficult decision of reconciliation necessary for Baghdad to be secure and this country to survive and thrive as a democracy."*

One of the most "out of control" sectors in Col. Kauzlarich's AOP (area of operations) was Kamaliyah, Finkel said: "Sixty thousand people lived there, largely ignored since beginning of the war. Insurgents were thought to be everywhere. Open trenches of raw sewage lined the streets, and most of the factories on the eastern edge had been abandoned, one of which (a former spaghetti factory) had a courtyard with a hole in the middle of it. That was where the colonel's
soldiers discovered a cadaver they began calling Bob."

The war was costing $300 million a day, and because of rules governing how it was spent, Col. Kauzlarich could not get enough money to get rid of Bob who was delaying the Rangers' mission of getting Kamaliyah under control. It needed to be done because rockets and mortars were launched into the Forward Operating Base and Green Zone every day. Intelligence reports said IEDs and IFPs were being made there, Finkel noted.

Kauzlarich's executive officer, Major Brent Cummings, was given the job to remove Bob the cadaver from the spaghetti factory before setting up a COP inside. And he and his fellow officers and NCOs went to talk with an Iraqi family that was living temporarily in a brick-mud hovel next to the factory building. Officers up the chain of command did not want 120 soldiers of Bravo Company moving in the factory to live with a floating cadaver. It posed a morale problem for American troops, they concluded. They also said they wanted to remove Bob and give him a proper burial out of respect to Iraqis.

The hole in which cadaver Bob was floating was a sewage septic tank. Bob's body was not intact. The corpse consisted of a severed head with a bullet hole in the face, and the rest of the body, hands and feet with toes and fingers cut off. Bob had been tortured and killed by insurgents, his remains left floating on top of the sewage. The soldiers talked with the Iraqi family first, assuring them the Americans were there to protect them and they did not have to move. Then Cummings returned to the battalion's FOB to figure a way to draw the water and excrement from the septic tank and pull out Bob's body parts. They would be back later, the Americans told the civilians. Mainly the U.S. commanders did not want their soldiers doing the nasty job of draining the septic tank and removing the body parts. A civilian contractor further complicated the situation by turning down the job of removing the cadaver parts from the sewage hole. "You couldn't pay me enough," he told Col. K's officers, Finkel wrote.

A day after the Americans left the spaghetti factory, Col. Kauzlarich's soldiers received a

report that a dozen masked men with guns and explosives had gone into the factory, and set off a huge explosion. How much damage had been done? the officers asked. At their request, a fighter pilot flew over the building and radioed back to Cummings on the ground that the spaghetti factory was gone. So the problem of removing Bob's remains was solved, but Americans never knew what happened to the family of Iraqi civilians, which included an adult male, a pregnant mother, a dozen children and an old woman. They had thanked the Americans for letting them stay in their simple little shack of a house. Now they had probably been blown up with Bob. Afterward, the U.S. soldiers cursed in frustration, Finkel noted. I hate this place; I hate all these motherfuckers, they said.

On May 7, 2007, President Bush said*, "Our troops are carrying out a new strategy in Iraq under the leadership of a new commander, Gen. Petraeus. He is an expert in counterinsurgency warfare. The goal of the new strategy he is implementing is to help the Iraqis to secure their capital so they can make progress toward reconciliation and build a free nation that respects the rights of its people, upholds the rule of law and fights extremists alongside of the United States in the war on terror. The strategy is still in its early stages."*

Also included in Finkel's book is a touching account of the wounding of Sgt. Michael Emory of Kauzlarich's Ranger battalion, who was shot in the back of the head by a sniper while standing on the roof of another building the Americans were clearing in Kamaliyah. The passage deeply personalized the full extent of the fear and emotional strain spouses and families of the soldiers and Marines in Iraq were experiencing back home. I think it needs to be shared with the people at home in the United States that do not have a family member in military service.

After being wounded, Sgt. Emory was moved from Iraq to a military hospital in Germany. When his fever dropped and an infection cleared up, Emory was brought out of an induced coma and transported to the Bethesda Naval Hospital in the United States. The sergeant was diapered, barely able to move, and a ventilator tube had been inserted in his throat, Finkel wrote.

Emory's wife Maria was told April 28, 2007, by the Defense Department that her husband had been wounded, and she was flown to Germany to be by his side. On June 15, 2007, Maria stood by her husband's bedside at Bethesda, wearing a mask, gown and gloves, Finkel wrote. "Give me your hand baby," Maria asked her husband. "So this is what I do now?" she cried out.

In his book, Finkel said Maria Emory had begun keeping a daily journal in Germany. On May 3, she wrote she kissed her husband on the lips; May 6, they got on the medevac flight and flew from Germany to the U.S and Bethesda; on May 17, Sgt. Emory opened his eyes for the first time. On May 19, he moved his fingers and legs, then started crying when she told him that she loved him. On May 20 and 21, he was sleeping, she wrote.

Then on May 25, 2007, President Bush came to see the wounded at the hospital and stopped at Sgt. Emory's bed. Maria told Finkel about the president's visit. "He said, thank you for your husband's service to his country and that he was sorry for what our family was going through. She said, thank you for coming. She wished she had said, "That he didn't understand what we are going through because he doesn't know how it feels, and that I didn't agree with what was going on with the war. Why she had not said it? "Because I felt it would not have made any difference. And my husband of course had his eyes open and I didn't want him getting upset." About what Bush didn't understand: "I mean, when I saw him, I was so angry I started crying and he saw me and came to me and gave me a hug and said, everything's going to be okay."

Maria Emory thought Bush came to her because he misunderstood the reason for her tears, Finkel wrote. "He had had no idea they were because of anger and had no idea they were because of him," Maria said. "And nothing was okay," she said, "so he was wrong about that too." Her husband was ruined. She told Finkel that in seven weeks she had lost so much weight that her dress size had gone from a 12 to a 6, her daughter was living with a relative, she was living in a hospital, doctors said it would be years before her husband would be better, if ever, and hope, if it existed at all, had to be extracted from wherever it could, from the awful day, for instance, in which he lifted his right hand and placed it on her shoulder, and then tried to move it across her breasts and then started to cry, Finkel wrote.

In June 2008, Sgt. Emory was one of eight wounded soldiers of the battalion who attended the Ranger Ball in a hotel banquet hall on the outskirts of Fort Riley. The event brought many of Kauzlarich's men together one last time before they went to other battalions or duty assignments, according to Finkel. The sergeant was still in a wheelchair, but struggled to his feet when his name was called that night. There he was, his head misshapen, left arm quivering, his speech slurred, and his memory still hazy, but he could still stand up bravely. In January 2008 the sergeant was severely depressed and suicidal. He had tried to tip over his wheel chair and bang his head against the floor until he died. He begged Maria for a pen that he could use to punch through his neck and bleed to death. The sniper in Kamaliyah had changed Maria and Michael's lives forever.

Sgt. Emory's mental state after being shot illustrated the grave psychological pressure the demons of war put on the soldiers who had seen their buddies shot, eviscerated, vaporized or incinerated. On the day Emory was shot, his comrade, Sgt. Adam Schumann, had rushed to his aid. He draped Emory over his back in a firefighter carry and hauled him down the stairwell of the three-story building until a medic and other soldiers came with a backboard. As Emory's eyes opened and closed, he asked why his head was hurting, Finkel wrote. His buddies told him he had fallen down some steps. Schumann put Emory in a Humvee that took him to an aid station, then went back to the roof to recover Emory's weapon and bloody Kevlar helmet.

Finkel wrote that Schumann had a tough time processing the trauma that he had seen the day Emory was shot. "I remember the blood was coming off his head and coming into my mouth. I couldn't get the taste out. That iron taste, I couldn't drink enough Kool-Aid that day," he told Finkel. A few months later, Schumann was mentally broken, Finkel said.

While the President, Republican politicians and top military leadership at the Pentagon were saying the surge was working, soldiers on foot patrols, in their Humvees or at command posts in Baghdad communities felt differently. They were tired of the multiple deployments and their families just wanted their men and women to come home to stay.

"*Iraq is a filthy country*," I was told in an e-mail from Rick Atkinson, author of *In the Company of Soldiers*, a chronicle of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 when Atkinson was embedded with Gen. Petraeus and the 101st Airborne Division. I had asked Atkinson a question after I read what a military nurse in Germany said to Lee Woodruff, wife of *ABC News* correspondent Bob Woodruff, who suffered a traumatic brain injury from the explosion of a roadside bomb in Iraq in January 2006. The nurse told Mrs. Woodruff that the soil of Iraq contains the "vicious bacterium" Acinetobacter, which soldiers and Marines leaving Iraq carried on their boots.

Soldiers who came home from Iraq described Baghdad to journalists as a "shit hole." Five of our soldiers got much too close to this ever annoying problem on June 5, 2007, at 10:30 at night, when their Humvee rolled into a sewage trench, turned upside down and sank. "It happened in Kamaliyah, where uncovered, unlined trenches ran along every street and passed in front of every house," Finkel wrote. "At some point after the war began, the U.S. had decided to show its good intentions by appropriating $30 million to bring sewers to Kamaliyah. It was an ambitious project involving Turkish and Iraqi subcontractors that by the time Kauzlarich's battalion arrived, had come to dead halt because of corruption and incompetence."

Kauzlarich was given the "task of resuscitating the project." Finkel wrote. "The great leaders of previous wars may not have had to do sewers, but Kauzlarich did in his version." The colonel met with Kamaliyah leaders in May 2007 stressing his desire to succeed. "I know about half the (Iraqi) workers working on the sewage project are militants and they've got no choice," Col. Kauzlarich said. "They can either work with me or against me. If they don't work for me I will arrest them. If they sabotage the sewage project, I will hunt them down and kill them," Kauzlarich told Finkel. The colonel never made much progress, and his soldiers had to just put up with that real kind of shit for the rest of their tour.

Four of the soldiers escaped easily from the Humvee on that June 5 night, but their gunner was trapped in his harness inside the overturned vehicle. So one of the soldiers jumped into the ditch, holding his breath and slipping and sliding until he found and freed the gunner, and they made out of the Humvee and up the side of the ditch. The two soldiers "were wiping raw Iraqi sewage out of their eyes and ears, and splitting it out of their mouths." Finkel said.

According to journalists who were there, the daily stench of sewage and piles of trash along Iraqi streets was intolerable. Soldiers of the surge occupying Rustamiyah south of Baghdad learned that when the wind blew from the east, the smell was always of raw sewage. If wind came from the west, it was burning trash from a town landfill. U.S. troops had to adjust to the smell mentally because the wind never blew from north to south.

On April 10, 2008, President Bush again addressed Americans in Iraq*: "I want to say again to our troops and civilians in Iraq. You've performed with incredible skill under demanding circumstances. The turnaround you have made possible in Iraq is a brilliant achievement in American history. While this war is difficult, it is not endless. And we expect as the conditions on the ground continue to improve, they will permit us to continue the policy of return on success. The day will come when Iraq is a capable partner of the United States. The day will come when Iraq is a stable democracy that helps fight our common enemies and promote our common interests in the Middle East. And when that day arrives, you will come home with pride in your success and the gratitude of your whole nation. God bless you."*

As April 2008 approached, while they were still contending with mortar attacks and IEDs, Kauzlarich's battalion were short-timers. Four hundred and fifteen members of the battalion had headed home on April 5 and 6. Only 80 of them remained, and they were packed and ready to go.

On April 8, while a few men watched the telecast of Gen. Petraeus testifying about the success of the surge before two Senate committees in Washington, most of the men of the battalion were more concerned about the report they received that the command post that they had built in Kamaliyah had been mortared, was on fire and burning to the ground, Finkel wrote.

. On April 10, 2008, 15 months after the surge had begun, Col. Kauzlarich, Maj. Cummings and the remaining men waited for helicopters to come to Rustamiyah to pick up all of them at the completion of their tour in Iraq.

Finkel described the scene: "They're coming," Cummings said on the tarmac. "Everyone looked where he was looking, toward the horizon beyond Rustamiyah, until they saw them too," Finkel wrote. "Two shadows. They came in fast, and as they settled with spinning rotors onto the tarmac and dropped open their rear hatches, they gave the soldiers a final coating of the foul-smelling Rustamiyah dust,"

As Finkel noted in his own words, nobody lamented finally leaving Iraq: To all of them, it was "This place. The fucking dust. The fucking stink. The fucking all of it. This fucking place. Up rose the helicopters with their hatches still open, allowing Kauzlarich a last perfect view of the surge. Instead of opening his eyes, though, he closed them. They (the surge troops) had won. "They *were* the difference. He was sure of it. It was *all* good. But he had seen enough."

Fourteen of Col. Kauzlarich's men were killed during their months in Baghdad.

After the new forces of the surge arrived and security in Baghdad gradually improved, combat deaths began to drop in the summer of 2007. They fell to levels not seen since March 2006. Meanwhile, Sunnis and Shiites finally tired of fighting and killing each other in their sectarian war. Their respective communities had been ethnically cleansed, and segregated. Sunnis went to their neighborhoods and Shiites flocked to their own.

A major factor in reducing the violence in the civil war was the Sunni Awakening that began in the fall of 2006. The 25 Sunni tribes in Anbar Province banded to fight al Qaeda with the blessing and financial support of the American military. One hundred thousand Sunni Sons of Iraq were on the American payroll, fighting al Qaeda. The Triangle of Death, the most deadly area of the war, southwest of Baghdad, changed dramatically by May 2008. At Petraeus's order, the U.S. military paid each of the Sunnis $300 a month to run checkpoints, scout for IEDs and take over securing their neighborhoods. The Sunnis, who had been enemies of the U.S. in 2004, were now being literally paid not to fight American troops. In that same period, al-Sadr, the young Shiite political leader, withdrew his forces into their home neighborhoods in the Sadr City district of Baghdad and they stopped fighting Sunnis.

As all of these changes were occurring, Black Ops units of the U.S. Army led by Gen. Stanley McChrystal were killing key al Qaeda leaders. The biggest of the kills was in June 2006 when an air bombing attack eliminated Zarqawi, the most wanted leader of al Qaeda of Iraq.

At his last press conference at the White House Jan. 12, 2009, President Bush answered some tough questions as he defended, sometimes angrily, his conduct of the war and the rest of his record during the eight years he was in office. "I think it's a good strong record," he said. "You know, presidents can try to avoid hard decisions and therefore avoid controversy. That's just not my nature."

Bush was indignant when a reporter's question suggested that America's moral standing around the world had been damaged during his presidency. "I disagree with this assessment that, you know, that people view America in a dim light. It may be damaged amongst some of the elite. But people still understand America stands for freedom."

Bush acknowledged holding suspected terrorists without trial at the Marine detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was a controversial issue at home and around the world. He defended

his approving harsh interrogation techniques methods for terrorist suspects and electronic information gathering in domestic surveillance, all of which were done he said in the name of protecting the United States against another attack like 9/11. The "enhanced interrogation" techniques, as they came to be called, included water boarding, a process of partial drowning and asphyxiation that is considered torture and was banned by the United States in 1901 and by Geneva Conventions in 1929.

After the 9/11, 2001, attacks, Bush and Cheney pushed the war powers of commander in chief far beyond the limits of U.S. and international law. Bush was forced to drop water boarding and other excessive means of interrogation in September 2006 after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled theses methods were "outrages against human dignity." The court said president must always abide by the rules of war and the Geneva Conventions.

In that same press conference, Bush admitted making mistakes in invading Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein. "Not finding weapons of mass destruction was a significant disappointment." Bush said. The accusation that Saddam had and was pursuing weapons of mass destruction was Bush's main initial justification for going to war. Bush insisted that while he felt about it, bad intelligence had steered him astray.

President Bush also cited the abuses found to have been committed by members of the U.S. military at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq as "a huge disappointment." He was sickened by it, he said.

"I don't know if you want to call those mistakes or not, but they were --- things didn't go according to plan, let's put it that way," Bush said. He also finally admitted for the first time that it was an embarrassing miscalculation, declaring premature victory less than two months after the war started, when he said, "in the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed." Making the claim very dramatically with the "Mission Accomplished" banner from the USS Abraham Lincoln, as he spoke that day, turned out to be wildly optimistic. "Clearly putting 'mission accomplished' on an aircraft carrier was a mistake," he said. "It sent the wrong message."

Bush admitted he had made mistakes during his eight years in office but he never apologized to the American people for any of them. He said his lawyers told him that water boarding and other enhanced interrogation methods were legal, and that was all the authority he needed in order to keep the United States homeland safe.

The issues of not finding WMD and getting rid of Saddam Hussein still nagged Bush after he left the White House. On Nov. 9, 2010, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Bush said: "Everyone felt that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. When we didn't find weapons I felt terrible about it and sick about it, and I still do because a lot of the case to remove Saddam Hussein was based on these weapons of mass destruction," he said. "Oftentimes history judges you on the decision you make and not on the decisions you don't make. Saddam in power today would mean the world would be less stable and more dangerous. The world is better with him gone."

Bush never doubted his decision in 2007 to send the surge troops to Iraq. The original counterinsurgency plan conceived and designed by Gen. Petraeus, proved to be the only military strategy that came close to producing positive results in Iraq. It helped quell the fighting and improved security in the cities. Petraeus's strategy combined with the Sunni Awakening, al-Sadr's decision to stand down, and the assassinations of al-Qaeda leaders by Black Ops reduced U.S. casualties, putting the Iraqis back in charge of security of their country.

American troops eventually withdrew to approximately 100 bases throughout Iraq. About 90,000 combat troops were scheduled to leave Iraq by the end of August 2010. Under Bush and Gates' plan, about 50,000 U.S. support troops stayed behind to advise and train Iraqi military and police. They were to come home in 2011.

On Aug.16, 2010, as the exodus of American combat troops continued, Richard Engel of NBC News reported that the 100,000 Iraqi security forces of the Sunni Awakening patrolling east Baghdad were fearful that the United States was abandoning them. They told Engel that they were not getting paid on time by the Shiite dominated government. The Awakening units had become a neighborhood watch during the surge, patrolling the streets, providing security at check points and sharing information with the Americans.

The Awakening militiamen were afraid the Shiites would not honor U.S. commanding Gen. Raymond Odierno's promise to integrate them into the new Iraqi Army. They feared they would be excluded and the Shiites would take over power in Iraq, touching off another civil war. Would the Sunnis begin fighting the Shiites again? It was just one of many questions that remained about the future of Iraq when all American support troops would finally leave that country. Only time would tell if Iraq could become a peaceful, democratic country. If that happened, and stability continued, then our troops' mission in Iraq would have finally and truly been accomplished.

The last combat troops in Iraq begin leaving the country at 7:30 p.m. (EST American) on Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2010. A total of 440 members of the 4th Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, transported in 68 vehicles, arrived at the Iraq-Kuwait border at about 4 a.m. Baghdad time, according to NBC News. By Aug. 31, all U.S. combat troops had departed.

The success of the surge still depended on whether stability could be established in Iraq and the people could live in peace. On Aug. 25, 2010, there were bombings in 25 Iraqi cities, leaving plenty of evidence that al-Qaeda of Iraq were still in business in the country. Once again the jihadis were feeling good about themselves, reconstituting their forces as the Americans were beginning to leave, knowing that although an Iraqi election was held in March, the Iraqis politicians still had not formed a permanent government.

Bobby Ghosh, an Indian national who has been Time's chief correspondent reporting on the war in Iraq since 2003, wrote for the news magazine's Sept. 6, 2010, issue: "There's ample reason to believe that the Iraqis will get it right in the end (in forming that government). Theirs is a modern nation, rich in resources both human and material. But confidence that they will eventually conquer their demons and solve their problems is tempered by the suspicion that things may get much worse before they get better. There was little celebration among Iraqis as the last U.S. combat brigade rumbled down the highway to Kuwait, with only a sense of exhausted resignation."

A total of 56,000 U.S. Army support personnel remained in Iraq in August 2010 to train Iraqi army and police forces. The combat portion of the war in Iraq lasted seven years and five months for the United States. During that period, 4,415 servicemen and women were killed in action.

The most important questions of all still remained. How would the once dominant Sunnis adjust to a majority of a government controlled by Shiites? That was the Iraqi version of the bottom rail being on the top. What would Iran do when all the Americans left in 2011? Then maybe we would finally learn if getting rid of the paper tiger, Saddam Hussein, and fighting an insurgency in Iraq was really worth such American sacrifice?

When historians begin writing biographies of George W. Bush, they will most likely determine what colossal damage that Dubya, his associate president Dick Cheney and their little gang of neoconservatives did to America's military men and women and their families, damage that for some of our combat troops could never be repaired. And it would take decades and whole lifetimes to heal the mental scars of those troops that came home.

Bush was defiant to the end. He should have been tried for war crimes for perpetrating such an unnecessary, immoral war. Operation Iraqi Freedom was just like Vietnam; it was all a waste. The war in Iraq could only be described with expletives. To put it in the strongest of terms, the war was a filthy, unfuckable cluster fuck.

On Friday, Oct. 21, 2011, Bush's successor, President Barack Obama, announced that after nearly nine years, America's war in Iraq was over, and all American troops there should be home by Dec. 31, 2011. "Over the next two months, our troops in Iraq, tens of thousands of them, will pack up their gear and board convoys for the journey home, and the last Americans soldiers will cross the borders out of Iraq with their heads held high, proud of their success." Obama said. "After a decade of war, the nation we need to build and the nation that we will rebuild will be our own."

In 2010, the Obama administration had intended to leave 40,000 troops behind to train Iraqi security forces, but the Iraqi government in 2011 wanted all of them to leave. The U.S. kept 150-200 troops in Iraq to defend the American Embassy in Baghdad, and relied on civilian contractors to provide any additional security for diplomats.

On Oct. 21, 2011, *CBS News* reported 4,479 American military personnel were killed in the Iraq War, and 32,000 were wounded or injured. The total cost of the war for the United States was $805.5 billion.

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Obama: Crises and Challenges

The weeks of October 2008 frightened me almost as much as the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when Soviet missiles in Cuba were well in range of every American city, and all our lives were in danger. The United States could have faced almost instant physical annihilation if President Kennedy had not made the decision that resolved that international crisis. In the stock market crash in '08, those of us who had IRAs and 401Ks felt a different type of fear. We Americans close to retirement age were seeing our life savings vanishing before our eyes.

In the week of Oct. 9-13 in 2008, the Dow Jones Industrial Averages fell 1,814 points, a loss of 18 percent of value in the market's worst weekly decline ever on both a point and percentage basis. In the entire month of October 2008, the market loss would be 21 percent in value. The S&P 500 fell more than 20 percent.

I was monitoring the Dow Jones figures at my newsroom computer terminal most days during that period, and also copying the daily stock market totals for placement into the next day's M-I on the two nights I worked in the obituary slot on the copy desk. Everyone on the news staff who had 401Ks was watching the market with furrowed brows. I was trying to make it through the three-paper consolidation process during the remaining months of 2008, hoping and praying to reach my retirement age in 2009 with all my pension and 401K funds intact and at their peak levels. I too lost 18 percent of the value of my 401K during the crash.

Taking such a big personal financial loss had a profound psychological effect on me and many of my colleagues at the newspaper. It was a fearsome, helpless feeling that all of us investors experienced. It made me more anxious and depressed in my last year at the newspaper. It was at the beginning of the great financial crisis in September 2008 that I started writing this book.

Since returning home from Frankfort in 1976, I had hoped and dreamed of some day rejuvenating my career as a journalist and reporting important stories on a national level, either for the Associated Press or a major newspaper in a big city. It was a dream that I knew at the time that I would never realize. But during financial crisis in ‘08 and after Barack Obama was elected president, I became so interesting in trying to get real answers about why the Great Recession occurred, I began reading as many of the top economic new stories as I could, as they appeared daily in the Messenger-Inquirer, the New York Times and Washington Post, weekly in Time Magazine and Newsweek, and in many other of the major online news sites. I took pages of notes, organized them and began writing the story of how America would attempt to recover economically as a nation. As each day passed, I wrote down what I had read about the economy. It was my small way of realizing my dream of reporting the biggest national news story of my life. The results of that research and reporting appear in this and the next two chapters.

When George Bush left office in January 2009, he would definitely go down in history, remembered not for his accomplishments as president, but uniquely as the only American president in history to have a shoe thrown at him during a press conference in Iraq.

Many journalists, historians, political pundits and ordinary citizens, especially Democrats

and Independents, have agreed tha Bush's positive achievements while in office could be counted on one hand. He was totally consumed, even obsessed, with fighting the war in Iraq and abandoning the war against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In my view, Bush and his Oval Office sidekick Dick Cheney presided over eight years of incompetence, corruption and greed by government officials, Wall Street bankers and investment brokers. I thought that as its former CEO and with his connections to Halliburton, the oil field service that had numerous contracts with the Pentagon during the Iraq War, Cheney's business associates profited personally from the Iraq war. And I thought Bush's molasses slow response in attempts to rescue and provide aid for the flood victims in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was deplorable and embarrassing. It put another black mark on his administration's record.

Moreover, Bush and Cheney left the United States economy in such a disastrous state that it would take decades for Americans to recover, if at all. Beginning their eight years in office with a budget surplus of $152 billion, Bush and Cheney would leave behind in 2008 a bill of almost a trillion dollars of national debt for waging their two wars and not paying for Bush's Medicare prescription drug program. Both wars were paid for with borrowed money. Worst of all, President Bush was clearly unaware and blindsided by the conditions of the economy that led to the devastating financial crisis and stock market crash in September and October 2008. Those catastrophic events showed a critical failure by both the Bush and Clinton administrations in regulating the banks and financial institutions during the late 1990s and most of the decade of 2000. Admittedly, most of the news media did not see the meltdown coming either, and failed to report the crisis until after it occurred.

In December 2007, the nationwide unemployment rate was 4.7 percent. From that point a global recession ensued, international trade dropped sharply, and commodity prices fell. Trouble was first detected when oil and food prices started to increase.

The United States had been losing manufacturing jobs since 1998, but the bottom dropped out of the U.S. labor force when the Great Panic of 2008 started in the hours of Sept. 17-18. Five hundred thousand jobs were lost in November 2008, and 1.9 million jobs were lost in the last four months of 2008. A grand total of 2.8 million jobs were lost after the Financial Crisis began in October. Yields on short-term bonds plummeted to zero and the world economy was in free fall, according to Wall Street analysts. The country lost 8.4 million jobs in 2008 and 2009.

The Panic of 2008 was frightening. Investors' money markets dropped $400 billion overnight when $5 billion was normal. International insurance agent AIG was dying and needing bailout funds, according to news reports.

No computer models forecasted the coming crisis. But in retrospect, economy analysts said the stock markets began softening in the spring of 2008, growth slowed and jobless claims began creeping up. People, including me, began noticing the effects of volatility on their stock portfolios and our retirement savings began taking on water. We saw our 401k accounts dwindling and felt the fear of possibly losing our jobs. As fall arrived the economy quickly became a dominant issue.

Then on Sept. 15, 2008, the day Lehman Brothers collapsed, the bottom began to fall out of the economy. Job layoffs began. Republican presidential candidate John McCain said the Americans were struggling but added the "fundamentals of the economy are sound." The statement would have a brutal, almost deadly effect on McCain's campaign.

McCain's rosy statement came when the worldwide economy was on brink of systemic

breakdown, according to Jacques de Larosiere, director of the International Monetary Fund. Americans were filled with fear by the "most frightening market turmoil in their lifetime." Value of homes, investment portfolios, and life savings dropped from 25 to 50 percent. It was the most alarming news in investors' lifetimes.

In his first reaction to the collapse of banks and investment institutions, President Bush's Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson drafted a three-page plan called the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in which the government bought millions of toxic assets from investment banks. He presented the plan on Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008, when the Democrats and Republicans from Congress met in the Cabinet Room at White House, at the president's request.

The Democrat Party presidential nominee Barack Obama was selected by House Speaker Pelosi as the Democrats' spokesman. According to Jonathan Alter in his book, The Promise, which is about Obama's first year as president, Democrats were in agreement and close to a deal with Paulson in support of TARP. People taking notes for Alter in that meeting said that Bush showed no knowledge of the specifics of the financial crisis, and turned the discussion over to Paulson. Obama seemed to have had a well-informed overview on specific issues, Alter wrote.

Republicans seemed in disarray at the meeting, and their presidential nominee McCain was silent and sullen, clearly peeved when Obama taking a leading role in the discussion. "What do you think John?" asked Obama, Alter wrote. McCain was not ready to speak about the issue at that moment, Alter reported. "I will just listen," McCain reportedly said. One person observing Bush's body language and quiet demeanor, said the Bush "was already in Crawford," Alter declared in his book.

McCain did not participate in the discussion, and Obama seemed to be the only one who knew what he was talking about, Alter wrote: "Obama jumped at the chance to make the banking meltdown work for him politically." It was 43 minutes into the meetings before McCain said anything, and that was very little, Alter added. McCain, Alter wrote, talked in platitudes, spoke in monotone, like he was "going through the motions," Republicans had legitimate concerns, McCain said. Everyone needs to work together, and move forward until they reach a compromise, said McCain, according to Alter. Observers said President Bush was listening to Obama, and ignored McCain. Alter said Bush indicated that he believed Obama would be the man succeeding him and the one who would have to deal with the crisis for the next four years.

"At 72, exhausted by the grueling pace of the presidential campaign, the one-time Navy aviator was lost at sea," Alter wrote. When asked his opinion of Paulson's plan, McCain said he had not read it. Bush was mostly silent and detached at the meeting; Vice President Cheney looked on with "crooked smile, saying nothing. "Obama told his aides that "these people cannot run the country," Alter wrote. "We cannot leave it in McCain's hands," Obama said. Bush expressed serious concern about the financial meltdown: "If money doesn't loosen up, this sucker could be going down." according to a quote taken for Alter. (All but a few Republicans voted against TARP which saved the banking system.)

The financial crisis of 2008 spawned the worst economic recession that America had experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The downturn in the economy was so complex and complicated that I don't think any of us ordinary middle class taxpayers in America, and even some economists, could break it down, process and understand all of what happened. It was an event I will never be able to explain, and many Owensboro bankers and lawyers couldn’t either. I was just thankful that my savings rebounded in the next year and recovered most of lost value in my IRA account after October 2008.

What I read later about the economic panic was still hard to comprehend. The financial crisis, analyzed later by the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research, was triggered by reckless lending practices by financial institutions encouraged by the government and the growing trend of securitization of real estate mortgages in the United States. "U.S. mortgage-backed securities, which had risks that were hard to assess, were marketed around the world," the NBEC noted in a report. "A broad based credit boom fed a global class speculative bubble in real estate and equities which served to reinforce the risky lending practices.

“The precarious financial situation was made more difficult by a sharp increase in oil and food prices. The emergence of sub-prime lending losses in 2007 ignited the crisis and exposed other risky loans and over-inflated asset prices. With loan losses mounting and the fall of Lehman Brothers (the investment bank that dated back to 1850) on Sept.15, 2008, a major panic broke out on the inter-bank loan market. As share and housing prices declined, many large and well established commercial banks in the U.S. suffered huge losses and even faced bankruptcy, resulting in massive public financial assistance."

I liked the political savvy Senator Obama demonstrated during the 2008 presidential campaign. He reminded me more of John Kennedy than any other presidential candidate that I had seen since JFK’s death. The take-charge, but cerebral approach, cool demeanor and decisiveness that Obama demonstrated in the midst of the financial crisis were particularly comforting.

On the other hand, political analysts like journalist Jonathan Alter thought John McCain did not seem to grasp the details of the economic crisis and was doomed for defeat at that point before the election. In 2008, I did not mind, from the historic perspective, that Obama could be the first black president of the United States. His color was none of my concern. He just looked totally qualified to me, and appeared to be the best Democrat candidate. The first few times I heard Obama speak and debate in television appearances, I was convinced that he was the right man as president to champion the cause of beleaguered and deserted middle class citizens.

He surprised me with his political campaigning skills. He seemed to enjoy getting out and talking to people on the grassroots level. I learned that Obama knew how to run a campaign efficiently when he outsmarted and defeated Hillary Clinton to win the nomination in the primaries, sending her staff scurrying, cussing, fuming and shouting: How did this just happen to us?

Most of all, once Obama took office, I thought he was very cerebral in analyzing problems and making decisions. His detached, unsentimental nature reminded me very much again of President Kennedy. Though he would make mistakes, I grew to have complete faith and confidence in his leadership.

It was interesting to me as a writer and historian to see how much Obama has been influenced by Abraham Lincoln's writing style. Like Lincoln, Obama, for the most part, was writing his own speeches. He outlined, organized and wrote the basic speech on his computer, or sometimes he wrote the old fashioned way, with a pen. Obama then gave the draft to his speechwriters to get their contributions, before going back over the text to give it a final edit, making sure that the last draft was exactly what he wanted to say.

What impressed me most was Obama's most heartfelt tribute to Edward M. Kennedy at the senator's funeral in August 2009. The president closed the eulogy with these lines:

"We cannot know for certain how long we have here. We cannot foresee the trials or

misfortunes that will test us along the way. We cannot know God's plan for us. What we can do is to live out our lives as best we can with purpose, and love, and joy. We can use each day to show those who are closest to us how much we care about them, and treat others with the kindness and respect that we wish for ourselves. We can learn from our mistakes and grow from our failures. And we can strive at all costs to make a better world, so that someday, if we are blessed with the chance to look back on our time here, we can know that we spent it well; that we made a difference; that our fleeting presence had a lasting impact on the lives of other human beings. This is how Ted Kennedy lived. This is his legacy.

"He once said of his brother Bobby that he need not be idealized or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life, and I imagine he would say the same about himself. The greatest expectations were placed upon Ted Kennedy's shoulders because of who he was, but he surpassed them all because of who he became. We do not weep for him today because of the prestige attached to his name or his office. We weep because we loved this kind and tender hero who persevered through pain and tragedy, not for the sake of ambition or vanity; not for wealth or power; but only for the people and the country that he loved.

"In the days after September 11th, Teddy made it a point to personally call each one of the 177 families of this state who lost a loved one in the attack. But he didn't stop there. He kept calling and checking up on them. He fought through red tape to get them assistance and grief counseling. He invited them sailing, played with their children, and would write each family a letter whenever the anniversary of that terrible day came along. To one widow, he wrote the following: ' As you know so well, the passage of time never really heals the tragic memory of such a great loss, but we carry on, because we have to, because our loved one would want us to, and because there is still light to guide us in the world from the love they gave us. We carry on.'

"Ted Kennedy has gone home now, guided by his faith and by the light of those that he has loved and lost. At last he is with them once more, leaving those of us who grieve his passing with the memories he gave, the good that he did, the dream he kept alive, and a single, enduring image. The image of a man on a boat; white mane tousled; smiling broadly as he sails into the wind, ready for whatever storms may come, carrying on toward some new and wondrous place just beyond the horizon. May God Bless Ted Kennedy, and may he rest in eternal peace."

In his book The Promise, Alter compared the decision making and governing style of Obama and Bill Clinton. "Both men as presidents were pragmatic, well informed and exceptionally bright, but their minds and operating styles were sharply different," Alter wrote. "Clinton was volcanic and discursive, Obama cool and focused. Those who worked for both presidents generally preferred Obama as a boss because he was less likely to bite their heads off."

Though he had little experience as an executive, Obama seemed well equipped to manage the government, Alter added. "He was sophisticated enough to grasp the games that bureaucrats play to stymie presidents and their political appointees but not yet experienced enough to navigate expertly around the impediments."

"At least, he was decisive," Alter noted. "Obama's decision-making style fell somewhere between Clinton's deep, if gauzy discussions and Bush's snap judgments based on instinct, which Obama had long believed to be a recipe for failure."

Obama's more compelling comparison was to Clinton, Alter noted. In meetings with his staff and Cabinet members, Obama went around the table, asking for everyone's view, including even department deputies. He listened to all sides of an argument on an issue, analyzed the

different points made, and then made his call,

When mistakes were made, Alter continued, "Clinton was more prone to self-pity and raging ---- Who did this to me? Obama disciplined himself to power through recriminations and focus to getting things back on track."

Alter added: Clinton was "almost always late, let himself get fatigued from too much work." Obama delegates more, "He is more punctual and well rested."

In his observance of Obama's first year as president, Alter characterized him as "a deductive thinker with a vertical mind. He thought deeply about a subject, organized it lucidly in point by point arguments for a set of policies or a speech, and then said, here are my principles, and here are some suggestions for fleshing out the details."

Obama does not second guess himself as Clinton did, Alter wrote. Nor does Obama hide out in the Oval Office. He would walk around in the West Wing during the day, dropping in at the offices of staff aides. Like Lincoln did with his two young secretaries, John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Obama would sit down opposite a staffer and prop his feet up on their desk. This was unprecedented with other White House administrations, according to Alter.

Obama's routine was to have dinner with his wife Michelle and daughters at 6 p.m. Then at 8 p.m. he went back to his study in the residence for three or four more hours of work. Unlike Bush who went to bed promptly between 9 and 10 p.m., Obama stayed up to midnight, reading policy statements and doing other paper work.

Unless he had been confronted with an impending civil war like Lincoln or a worldwide Great Depression as FDR had, Obama could not have shouldered a heavier burden domestically when he took office. After having the huge debt of two wars dumped into his lap, added deficits caused by the Financial Crisis of 2008 and job losses from the subsequent Great Recession, Obama responded aggressively and with confidence in his attempt to deal with the nation's unemployment problem. And he did it in a practical, smart way.

Instead of tackling only a few problems in his first term, Obama decided to wage battle full tilt on several fronts, announcing in an interview with Diane Sawyer of ABC News on Jan. 25, 2010, that he was going all-out in his attempt to solve the nation's domestic and war problems from the start, as soon as he could. "I'd rather be a really good one-term president, than a mediocre two-term president," Obama told Sawyer.

In February 2009, after Obama took office, his administration and Congress passed and implemented the $787 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, stimulus legislation that provided $288 billion in tax cuts and benefits for working families and businesses; $224 billion in federal funding for education, health-care, and entitlement programs; and $275 billion for federal contracts, grants and loans.

Refusing to admit and say that Obama's recovery act had prevented an economic depression, the Republicans hated it. They called it wasteful spending. Of course, if President Obama had not pushed for a stimulus program to re-start the economy and the nation had slipped into another Great Depression, Republicans would have criticized him for doing nothing. In representing their main supporters (the oil industry, big corporations, the mega banks, and Wall Street investors), the GOP's people in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives opposed Obama on all issues in his first three years as president.

In 2010, Obama and the Democrats succeeded in passing the biggest health-care reform bill since the adoption of Medicare. The president signed the legislation into law on March 30. Again

the Republicans hated it, saying it would endanger and damage health insurance companies, driving up their premiums, even if it provided patients better care, brought down overall health care costs, and provided Americans additional, cheaper ways to buy health care insurance.

Congressional Democrats passed the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act on July 21, 2010. It was the most sweeping overhaul of U.S. financial regulations since the Great Depression. Again, the Republicans hated it, complaining it put too much regulation on banks and Wall Street investors. In July 2010, Obama signed into law legislation that added more law enforcement officers to secure and protect borders in the states of the Southwest. Once more, and for the remainder of Obama's first term, Republicans opposed it, but offered no plan of their own to solve the country's complex immigration problem.

Obama remained on schedule in withdrawing American combat troops from Iraq. He made a major Middle East foreign policy speech, canceled the F-22 jet fighter program, allocated limited U.S. aid to Pakistan with the caveat it would be used exclusively in anti-terrorist efforts, required Homeland Security Department funding to be allocated on the basis of risk, not regional politics, fulfilled healthcare promises to veterans, banned torture of terrorist prisoners (though not the practice of extraordinary rendition), provided a child tax credit for middle class families, and led an effort to cut health care costs by computerizing health records.

However, Obama suffered several major setbacks. His effort to enact a new energy policy for the United States failed. He also had promised his administration would deliver on a pledge to build a high speed rail system, and invest $150 billion over 10 years for renewable energy facilities. Most of his original program of infrastructure improvements was blocked in the U.S. Senate. Without Republican support, both of those ideas failed to reach fruition. Obama also failed to get "cap and trade" legislation discussed. (The latter, which languished and died in the Senate, was unrealistic and would have increased the costs of electrical power for coal producing states like Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia.)

In retrospect, as the 2012 presidential campaign approached, I thought Obama should have postponed getting healthcare reform legislation passed in his first term, and concentrated on rebuilding the economy, creating more jobs for Americans and repairing the damage done by the 2008 Recession.

I did not support everything that Obama did. I thought he made some serious mistakes during his time in office. I agreed with his Democrat critics that the Wall Street reform bill that he signed was not nearly tough enough. From what I read about the new law, I thought the big bankers and investors could continue being as unethical and greedy as they wanted and still wrack up big annual bonuses for themselves.

And, after his first year and a half in office, I thought Obama had made imprudent choices in appointing Larry Summers as his chief economic advisor and Tim Geithner as Secretary of the Treasury. Instead, he should have appointed in their place people like former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker and Joseph Stiglitz, the latter a Columbia University economics professor and Nobel Prize winning economist. Both of these men were older, more experienced, and I thought understood the causes of the financial crisis better. They were not so sympathetic and lenient toward Wall Street as Summers and Geithner had been before the 2008 financial collapse. Summer resigned in 2010, but Obama continued to show confidence in Geithner for his expertise in the financial system.

Also, I wished that Obama had introduced his own smaller, less complicated health care

reform bill and been more involved, showing more "hands-on" leadership, instead of letting House Speaker Pelosi and the Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid develop the legislation and spearhead the effort to pass it. Pelosi and Reid made a mess of the legislation that finally was signed by Obama. In my view, the House bill was too long (1,200 pages) and full of political deals that triggered public opposition that led to the creation of the Tea Party. It was the worst procedural error of Obama's administration, something that really hurt him politically in Democrat and Republican states.

And through no real fault of their own, Obama's economic advisers made one miscalculation in late 2008. The Republicans would use the mistake to dog Obama through the first three years of his administration. It started six weeks after the 2008 election, when the new Obama major advisors met in Chicago and the president elect asked how bad the economy was going to get. Christina Romer, an expert on the Great Depression and chair of Obama's economic advisors, researched the numbers to see how quickly the economy was deteriorating and what the the federal government could do to respond to the emergency.

Romer's assessment of the damage done by the financial crisis was grim and not entirely accurate when she briefed the president, Ezra Klein, a columnist for the Washington Post, wrote in October 2011. "Afterward, Austan Goolsbee, Obama's friend from Chicago and eventually Romer's successor, remarked that 'that must be the worst briefing any president-elect has ever had.,' "

Using models from such forecasting firms such as Macroeconomic Advisers and Moody Analytics, plus data from the Bureau of Labor Statitics, the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the Federal Reserve, Romer's predictions were very pessimistic, Klein declared. "By that point, the shape of the crisis was clear: The housing bubble had burst, and it was taking the banks that held the loans, and the households that did the borrowing, down with it. Romer estimated that the damage would be about $2 trillion over the next two years and recommended a $1.2 trillion stimulus plan. The political team balked at that price tag, but with the support of Larry Summers, the former Treasury secretary who would soon lead the National Economic Council, (Romer) persuaded the administration to support an $800 billion plan."

Obama was already in a tough spot; Congress had never been asked for stimulus of that size. His economic advisors thought such a stimulus would bring the unemployment rate down to 8 percent in 2009 and below 7 percent in 2010. But that did not happen. In late 2010, the unemployment was at 9.6 percent. (By Oct. 17, 2011, the rate was still 9.1 percent.)

The figures that Romer was given were not up to date and they were flatout wrong. The Bureau of Economic Analysis which measures the size and growth of the U.S. economy initially projected that the economy shrank at an annual rate of 3.8 percent in the last quarter of 2008. "Months later, the bureau almost doubled that estimate, saying the number was 6.2 percent," wrote Klein. "Then it was revised to 6.3 percent. But it wasn't until 2011 that the actual number was revealed: 8.9 percent." That made it one of the worst quarters of economic decline in American history. Obama's advisors could see that the economy had taken a hard, right cross to the jaw, but "they didn't know that it had been run over by a truck," as Klein described it.

By at that point, the shape of the crisis was clear: "While Republicans say the stimulus failed, their notion doesn't find much support even among Republican economists," Klein wrote. Doug Holtz-Eakin, who was Sen. John McCain's top economic adviser during the 2008 presidential campaign, was "no fan of the stimulus, but he has no patience with the idea that it made matters worse," Klein stated. "The argument that the stimulus had zero impact and we

shouldn't have done it is intellectually dishonest or wrong," (Holtz-Eakin) told Klein. " 'If you throw a trillion dollars at the economy, it has an impact. I would have preferred to do it differently, but they needed to do something.' "

It is fair to say that the stimulus re-booted the economy much more than its opponents admitted, but did not have the strong effect as Obama and his economic team expected. It was a fact that the rate of job losses slacked off after the recovery bill was enacted and job numbers began an upward climb. Then the stimulus began sputtering, nearly all of it spent. The job increases began to level off. The initial stimulus should have been much bigger, close to what Romer advised. She resigned from her role as chair of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers on September 3, 2010.

It was evident that by September 2010, Obama had been successful in honoring most of the promises he made during the 2008 presidential campaign. Obama had kept or was still working on keeping 20 of his 25 most significant promises, according to Polit.Fact.com, a data base for the St. Petersburg Times. Overall, he kept 91 of the total of 285 promises he made in his presidential campaign, broke 14 of them while 87 are stalled.

Despite the Republicans' opposition, the President showed determination in bailing out the banks, saving the auto industry and passing the economic stimulus package. He came to the country's rescue at a time it needed someone with his leadership ability. But he paid a big price in the process as the government's budget deficit increased.

It seemed that the economy was making a weak recovery in the spring of 2010, but banks were still not lending money to small businesses who subsequently were not hiring new employees. Consumers were not spending. There was always fear among them that the economy would slide into another recession. And they feared they might lose their jobs. Everyone with money invested continued to keep an eye on the stock market each day.

By August, 2010, people appeared to be losing confidence in the recovery that the economy appeared to be making two or three months earlier. Most people in Owensboro, Daviess County and Kentucky still thought the country was in a recession.

On Aug. 5, 2010, The Associated Press reported that 14.6 million Americans were unemployed in July 2010, more than double the number since December 2007 when economic analysts say the Great Recession began. On Aug. 11, 2010, the national unemployment rate remained at 9.5 percent, same as it was in the previous month. The number of "under-employed" workers in the United States was 25.8 million. Only 559,000 jobs had been added by August 2010.

First-time claims for jobless benefits increased by 2,000 to a seasonally adjusted 484,000, the highest since February 2010, the Associated Press reported. "Initial claims have now risen in three of the last four weeks and are close to their high point for the year of 490,000, reached in late January," AP noted. The news report added that 131,000 jobs were lost in July 2010, with most of those layoffs occurring in construction and manufacturing. Small companies were reducing their staffs. Imports of American goods jumped but exports dropped, increasing the trade gap to its widest point since October 2008.

The Dow Jones Industrial averages dropped 300 points in the week of Aug. 8-13, 2010. The Federal Reserve admitted the economic recovery forecast in the spring was more modest than anticipated.

As months of hard economic times continued, some critics of President Obama and congressional Democrats continued to assert that President Bush's policies bore little responsibility for the deficits the nation will face over the coming decade, and that instead, the new policies of Obama and Democrats in Congress were to blame.

The conservatives' Heritage Foundation paper downplayed the ill effects of Bush-era policies. But, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington, D.C., the deficit was the result of costs run up by the financial crisis, the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts and the borrowing of money to pay for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The deficit for fiscal year 2009 was $1.4 trillion. At nearly 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) at that time, it was the largest American deficit relative to the size of the economy since the end of World War II.

If those current policies continued without changes, deficits would likely approach those figures in 2010 and remain near $1 trillion a year for the next decade, CBPP analysts noted in June 2010. Events and policies that pushed deficits to these high levels in the near term, however, were largely beyond the control of the new Obama administration. "If not for the tax cuts enacted during the presidency of George W. Bush that Congress did not pay for, the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that were initiated during that period, and the effects of the worst economic slump since the Great Depression (including the cost of steps necessary to combat it), we would not be facing these huge deficits in the budget," CBPP declared.

In February 2009, when Obama's stimulus program was enacted to stop the economy's plunge, mainstream economists overwhelmingly argued that, to combat the recession, the federal government should loosen its purse strings temporarily to spur demand, with a mix of assistance to the unemployed, aid to strapped state and local governments, tax cuts, spending on infrastructure, and other measures.

"By design, this package added to the deficit. Since then, policymakers have enacted several smaller measures to spur recovery and aid the unemployed. By our reckoning, the combination of ARRA and these other measures account for $1.1 trillion in deficits over the 2009-2019 period (including the associated debt service)," the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities concluded. "Their effects are highly concentrated in 2009 through 2011 and fade thereafter, delivering a boost to the economy during its most vulnerable period."

In the June 2010 article, the CBPP summarized current conditions: "Some commentators blame recent legislation, the stimulus bill and the financial rescues for today's record deficits. Yet those costs pale next to other policies enacted since 2001 that have swollen the deficit. Those other policies may be less conspicuous now because many were enacted years ago and they have long since been absorbed into Congressional Budget Office and other organizations budget projections.

"Just two policies dating from the Bush Administration, the tax cuts and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, accounted for over $500 billion of the deficit in 2009 and will account for almost $7 trillion in deficits in 2009 through 2019, including the associated debt-service costs. The prescription drug benefit enacted in 2003 accounts for further substantial increases in deficits and debt, which we are unable to quantify due to data limitations. These impacts easily dwarf the stimulus and financial rescues. Furthermore, unlike those temporary costs, these inherited policies (especially the tax cuts and the drug benefit) do not fade away as the economy recovers. Without the economic downturn and the fiscal policies of the previous Administration, the budget would be roughly in balance over the next decade. That would have put the nation on a

much sounder footing to address the demographic challenges and the cost pressures in health care that darken the long-run fiscal outlook."

By the end of 2010, the economic recovery lumbered along at a very slow pace. The unemployment rate was 9.6 percent, there was an insufficient creation of jobs in the private sector and the federal deficit had increased.

Obama's problems as president began to appear insurmountable. Because in November 2010, 85 new hard right conservative Republicans were elected to the House of Representatives, giving the GOP control with a 242-193 majority for the first time in four years. Democrats in the U.S. Senate managed to hold onto a 53-46 majority while they won 16 seats and Republicans edged closer winning 10 seats.

The extremist conservative ideology of the Republican Party was thought to be dead after Democrats maintained their majority in the House of Representatives with Obama's election in 2008. But when Obama and the Democrats pushed through the historic health-care reform bill, there was so much opposition to it in the U.S. Senate that conservatives found a means to resurrect their forces of the Republican Party. The Tea Party movement was born, and members of that far right, radical minority group started showing up at townhall meetings in the fall, shouting down Democrat members of the Senate and House, voicing their opposition to the health-care law. Moderate and conservative extremists in the GOP found an issue to resuscitate their party, as they proceeded to oppose Obama and the Democrats on everything in the president's economic recovery program. The battle was joined and Washington gridlock had returned in full bloom.

Despite the House Democrats suffering what Obama called a "shellacking" on Nov. 2, 2010, in the congressional election, the president made a quick and surprising comeback in December during the lame-duck session of Congress. In what was the first attempt at reaching common ground by either political party, Obama shifted to governing from the left to the middle, agreeing to a compromise bill with Republicans. I thought it was a bad political move. It made him look passive and weak, I thought. Bending more than I think he should have, he agreed to extend all of the Bush tax at least until after the 2012 presidential election, continued unemployment insurance benefits; passed a one-year reduction in the payroll tax, gave more tax cuts to the middle class; trimmed the estate tax percentage; secured ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in the Senate, and abolished the "don't ask don't tell" policy for gays serving in the U.S. military.

Obama took his family to his native Hawaii for the Christmas vacation holiday, looking ahead with hope and bracing for further battles with the Republican House of Representatives. He began 2011 with the government in trillions of dollars of unprecedented debt. The compromise bill in December had added another $800 billion to the deficit, and a day of reckoning seemed to be on the horizon. Critical, painful decisions would have to be made about raising taxes and cutting the deficit, maybe as soon as the middle of 2011.

The fact remained that unless the national economy improved significantly and businesses and industries began to hire more workers in 2011, and if the Republicans continued to block the president's economic proposals, Obama would be vulnerable in his campaign for re-election in 2012. While there was renewed hope for the economy in the first months of 2011, the first half of the year turned out to be a real rollercoaster ride in the worldwide stock markets.

Despite 8.9 percent unemployment, and Democrats and Republicans arguing in Congress

about how to cut spending and add jobs in the United States, Wall Street continued its big comeback. The Dow Jones Industrials finished above 12,000 on Feb. 1, 2011, for the first time in 2 ½ years, up 148 points at 12,040.16, as The Associated Press reported. Standard and Poor's 500 Index rose 21 points to close above 1,300 (1,307.59) for first time since Aug. 28, 2008.

In those first months after the Financial Crisis in the fall of 2008, the Dow had fallen to 6,547 on March 9, 2009, its lowest closing figure in 12 years. But by February 2011, it had risen 84 percent, the fastest recovery recorded since the days of the Great Depression.

The Dow had been at its highest in October 2007 when it closed at 14,168. At that point, unemployment rate was 5.6 percent. The Associated Press reported that the February 2011 surge in the stock market was attributed to the rise in corporate profits, a resilience of consumer spending, and the bond-buying intervention by the Federal Reserve that made stocks more appealing.

Everyone was again hopeful that this upturn would continue through the spring and summer, and maybe by the end of the year, the economy would finally start to show a more significant, permanent upward rise. However, a natural disaster in Japan and violent political uprisings in the Middle East both affected the global economy and damaged the U.S. recovery. Dangers of a second economic recession suddenly appeared on the road ahead.

Then on March 11, 2011, world markets were jolted again in the week after Japan suffered the largest earthquake in its history, a catastrophe that triggered a partial meltdown of one of several nuclear power plants in the province of Japan nearest the epicenter of the quake 15.2 miles deep in the ocean off the Oshika Peninsula, on the east coast of Tohoku. The quake created a tsunami wave of up to 33 feet high. Thousands of Japanese were killed by the quake and the wall of water that roared ashore.

After the calamitous event at nuclear energy plant, stocks in the United States lost nearly all of their gains made during the first quarter of 2011. The Dow Jones Index dropped 242.12 points and lost 2 percent, finishing at 11,613.30, the worst since Aug. 11, 2010. The March slide had begun earlier with more political unrest in the Middle East, which was exacerbated by the first three weeks of an citizens revolt against Muammar Qaddafi's regime in Libya. Those events caused a 3.6 percent loss in the three days, the stock markets' biggest loss since July 2010. The S&P fell 24.99, or by 1.9 percent to 1,256.88. NASDAG composite index fell 50.51 or 1 percent to 2,610, down 1.4 percent for the year.

Another downward trend had started, and again, no one in Washington or on Wall Street could do anything about it. The markets entered another of its volatile, totally beyond control, stages. Food and energy costs were the triggers that time. On March 18, 2011 the Labor Department reported food prices in the U.S. had risen 3.9 percent in February, their biggest increase since 1974. Consumer prices for gas and food had increased 1.1 percent in the past 12 months. Prices of wheat, corn, soybeans and vegetables had all increased. (Owensboro restaurant owners reported prices for pork up 25 percent and mutton 30 to 40 percent.)

And the price of oil inched up because of the political unrest and riots in the Middle East. It was listed at $101 a barrel on March 17, 2011. On Friday, April 8, 2011, crude oil was selling at $110 a barrel, and gas was $3.65 per gallon at the pump in Owensboro, The price per gallon average was $3.50 nationwide. The private sector added more than 200,000 jobs in February and March, 2011, and unemployment rate fell more than a full percentage point, to 8.8 in just four months.

Consumer spending accounted for up to 70 percent of the economy in the spring of 2011, and according to a very optimistic news report, the 90 percent of the Americans still employed no longer believed that their jobs were at risk, breathed a sigh of relief and had begun spending more money. That willingness had changed compared to six or nine months ago, economists noted. Ajay Banga, the CEO and president of Master Card Inc., said revenue at most retailers rose 2 percent over March 2010, when most analysts thought it would be flat.

Obama knew he would face a battle with Republicans about raising the nation's debt ceiling by summertime. So on April 13, 2011, at George Washington University, the president set a goal of reducing federal deficits by $4 trillion over the next 12 years. He planned to ask Congress to establish a mechanism that would trigger across-the-board spending cuts in 2014 if the nation's debt as a share of gross domestic product did not stabilize.

While knowing that members of his party would object, Obama showed his willingness to compromise with Republicans, proposing spending cuts of Medicare and Medicaid, two entitlement programs held near and dear by Democrats. Obama's hand was forced by congressional Republicans who were moving their own long-term budget plan through the House that week.

The president also addressed the necessity of raising the federal government's debt limit. "Many Democrats—as well as quite a few Republicans—want some sort of framework in place to reduce future deficits as a condition for any vote to increase the limit, which currently is $14.3 trillion," according to one news report. "Failing to increase the debt limit would lead the government to eventually default on its obligations, which would result in higher interest rates for the government and the private sector. But even if today's speech was forced upon him, the president came out swinging. He drew a sharp contrast between his deficit reduction plan and that of Republicans. His blueprint calls for both spending cuts and tax increases, including a call for wealthy Americans to face higher tax rates in 2013."

The GOP plan by contrast, called for $6.2 trillion in spending cuts over 10 years. But Republicans not only rejected raising taxes on those in high-income brackets, they insisted on reducing taxes—a stance that would lead to only $4.4 trillion in deficit reduction. "This is a vision that says even though America can't afford to invest in education or clean energy, even though we can't afford to care for seniors and poor children, we can somehow afford more than $1 trillion in new tax breaks for the wealthy," Obama declared. "Think about it. In the last decade, the average income of the bottom 90 percent of all working Americans actually declined. The top 1 percent saw their income rise by an average of more than a quarter-of-a-million dollars each. And that's who needs to pay less taxes?"

In April 2011, while Americans were pleading with both political parties to work together to create more jobs, Republicans in Congress and the president were locked in a verbal scrum over raising the nation's debt ceiling and determining just how much federal spending could be cut in the process.

Robert Reich, former Department of Labor secretary in the Clinton administration, said it was the worst time ever to cut public spending or reduce the money supply. April 2011 was not the time to be worrying about it, he asserted in a weekly opinion column published in the Messenger-Inquirer, "Over the long term, the budget deficit does have to be tackled, but not now. When job growth remains tepid, when wages are dropping, and when the value of most households' major asset (their homes) is declining, government has to step in to maintain overall

demand."

Later on May 8, 2011, Reich wrote: "The biggest irony is that the Wall Street is doing wonderfully well right now in contrast to most Americans. Corporate profits for the first quarter of the year are way up, largely because corporate payrolls are down."

What Reich was describing had been occurring in the U.S. since 2000. It was at the crux of America's manufacturing problem. Payrolls were down because big companies had been shifting much of their work overseas where business was booming, Reich noted. The Commerce Department reported that over the past decade American multinationals, essentially all large American corporations eliminated 2.9 million American jobs while adding 2.4 million abroad. That pace had increased, Reich said. "In 2000, 30 percent of General Electric's business was overseas and 45 percent of its employees; now, 60 percent of its business is outside the U.S. as are 54 percent of its employees."

Between 2003 and 2008, U.S. companies more than doubled their employment rolls in China. In the past decade, some 42,000 factories closed in the United States. A third of all manufacturing jobs in the U.S. disappeared during that time span. "As profit margins get tighter in finance, law, or any number of other sectors, rational economic actors will move money abroad," Newsweek reported in an analysis column headlined "Americans Get Stiffed Again," written by Jennifer M. Granholm and Daniel G. Mulhern

"Here is the tragedy: by insisting on a small-government, tax-cut-only solution to produce jobs, we are living by an outdated map of the economic world. Indeed, we may be accelerating the job losses as our competitors take advantage of our passivity," according to the Newsweek article. "Other countries are aggressively planning, developing economic clusters, partnering and creating jobs in new sectors, only too pleased that the U.S. is stuck in the starting blocks. China, for instance, clearly has every intention of leading the world in job creation in the clean-energy sector, pleased that we (the United States) are a sleeping giant….The invisible hand is working overtime these days, grabbing American corporate profits and putting them to work in other economies. Cash—whether from improved operations or tax cuts—continues to flow abroad, adding jobs and pushing up foreign income. Countries like China, Singapore, and India aggressively partner with their companies—and ours—to support further production and jobs for their people."

My questions at that time were, will the United States ever replace those jobs lost? What is going to happen to America's middle class who need those types of jobs? I did not see those jobs ever returning, unless America re-educated it work force."

The rollercoaster ride in the American economy continued in 2011. The Labor Department reported Friday, May 6, that private employers hired 268,000 people in April 2011, the most since February 2006. Taking into account the number of job cuts of government workers, the economy added a total of 244,000 jobs overall in April, well above the 185,000 jobs that analysts had predicted. It was the third straight month with an increase of more than 200,000 jobs. The unemployment rate rose, however, to 9 percent from 8.8 percent in part because more people who resumed looking for work.

Gas prices remained high. A barrel of crude oil rose to its peak price of $115 on May 2, 2011, and dropped to $109 on May 6, when the price of a gallon of gas was $3.98 in Owensboro. That was the same as the national average and one dollar higher than it was in May 2010.

With summer 2011 weeks away, the economic news was good one week; bad, the next. On

June 1, the Dow Jones industrials fell 280 points, erasing more than a quarter of the stock market gains made during the previous months of the year. Treasury bond yields fell to their lowest level. By June 10, the Dow dropped below 12,000 again. The level of confidence on Wall Street dropped. Consumer sales dropped because people were paying more for gasoline and food. The newest job report was discouraging and the housing market was flat-lining. Americans expressed fear again that the economy was plummeting into a second recession.

"Double dip is not a term that a government keen to extricate itself from the economic-crisis-management business likes to hear," Rana Foroohar reported in the June 20, 2011, issue of Time Magazine. "A couple of weeks ago, the Obama Administration was poised to switch to growth mode. Then the ugly data started pouring in like the overflowing Mississippi. First-quarter Gross Domestic Product (GDP) numbers showed a measly 1.8 percent increase, well short of the expectations of above 3 percent, and second-quarter estimates are not much better. Then a report on housing-price declines came out that have not been seen since the Great Depression, followed by reports of consumer spending at six-month lows and weak manufacturing survey."

"And the unemployment figures were enough to make you cry, " Foroohar exclaimed. "A mere 54,000 jobs were created in May (2011), less than half of what was expected and less than a third of what is needed to lower a 9.1 percent unemployment rate." And corporations in the private sectors had all the money and would not use it to add jobs in the United States. "Half of Americans say they couldn't come up with $2,000 in 30 days without selling some of their possessions," Foroohar wrote. "Meanwhile companies are flush: American firms generated $1.68 trillion in profit in the last quarter of 2010 alone. But many firms would think twice before putting their next factory or R&D center in the U.S. when they could put it in Brazil, China or India. These emerging market nations are churning out 70 million new middle-class workers and consumers every year. That is one reason that unemployment is high and wages are constrained here at home. This was true well before the recession and even before Obama arrived in office. From 2000 to 2007, the U.S. saw its weakest period of job creation since the Great Depression."

Big business corporations responded to that criticism saying they could not spend their profits adding new jobs in the U.S. because there was still too much uncertainty about tax code reform, health care costs and government regulation. And Republicans in Congress continued to complain that lack of job growth problem in the U.S. could no longer be blamed on George Bush's eight-year reign. It was up to Obama to find an answer and he had failed, they said.

Mean-spirited and uncompromising as this new crisis about raising the debt ceiling approached, Republicans, led by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan, chairman of the House Budget Committee, used the sputtering economy and the budget deficit to attack Obama, hoping to win back the Senate for Republicans and destroy the president's chances of reelection in 2012. In his rhetoric, McConnell seemed almost personally dedicated to ousting Obama from office.

Both McConnell and Ryan cynically set out to convince nervous voters that the only way to jump-start the economy was to slash taxes on very wealthy individuals and corporations (who had trillions in their coffers) while also cutting future entitlement benefits for millions of middle class Americans. Ryan's GOP budget included a proposal that would by 2021 eventually abolish Medicare as it has been known since 1965, substituting a voucher payment for those future retirees still under age 55. Polls in June 2011 showed most middle class Americans opposed both.

A rebound in U.S. manufacturing surprised investors Friday, July 1, sending the Dow Jones industrial average up nearly 170 points. The Dow had risen 648 points, or 5.4 percent, for the week. It was the index's best week in two years.

That Saturday, President Obama said nothing was off the table in final talks scheduled between him and Congress to raise the debt ceiling by Aug. 2.

"Nothing can be off-limits, "said Obama. He included changes in the tax code, and the elimination of tax loopholes that benefit very few individuals and corporations. Lawmakers and the administration were seeking deficit cuts in the range of $2.4 trillion over the coming decade to balance a similar increase in the debt limit — one that was large enough to keep the government afloat past the November 2012 election.

In July 2011, the debt limit was $14.3 trillion, and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said it should be raised by Aug. 2 to avoid the government defaulting on its financial obligations for the first time in the nation's history. With both sides dug in and holding their positions like opposing armies, it was unclear who would move first. How could a compromise be reached, even though the Senate canceled its plans to recess in the week of Independence Day and stayed in Washington to work on the problem.

As the Fourth of July holiday approached, the economy continued in its precariously slow recovery and few Americans felt like celebrating.

"Two years after economists say the Great Recession ended, the recovery has been the weakest and most lopsided of any since the 1930s," The Associated Presse

News reports thereafter were good one day, bad the next. No one knew what to expect or believe. No one knew what would happen next.

The biggest portion of the economy's gains was going to investors in the form of higher corporate profits. "The spoils have really gone to capital, to the shareholders," said David Rosenberg, chief economist at Gluskin Sheff & Associates in Toronto, who was interviewed by The Associated Press. "Corporate profits are up by almost half since the recession ended in June 2009. In the first two years after the recessions of 1991 and 2001, profits rose 11 percent and 28 percent, respectively," according to that news report. And an AP analysis showed that the typical CEO of a major company earned $9 million in 2010, up by a fourth from 2009.

The Great Recession maybe was no longer being felt on Wall Street and the boardrooms of corporations across America but the middle class Average Joe on Main Street was withering under the pressure. Unemployment was still at 9.1 percent in spring 2011, the highest after any recession since the end of World War II. At the same point after the three previous recessions, unemployment averaged just 6.8 percent, according to newspaper reports.

Workers' wages and benefits that made up 57.5 percent of the economy were at all-time low in 2011. Until the mid-2000s, the percentage had been remarkably stable — about 64 percent through boom and bust times alike. The average worker's hourly wages, after accounting for inflation, were 1.6 percent lower in May 2011 than a year earlier.

Rising gasoline and food prices continued to neutralize any pay raises for most Americans. And jobs created since the beginning of the recovery paid far less than the ones that disappeared in the recession. "Higher-paying jobs in the private sector, the ones that pay roughly $19 to $31 an hour, made up 40 percent of the jobs lost from January 2008 to February 2010 but only 27 percent of the jobs created since then," according to AP.

In a detailed report July 1, 2011, The Associated Press declared, "Hard times have made Americans more dependent than ever on social programs, which accounted for a record 18 percent of personal income in the last three months of 2010 before coming down a bit this year. Almost 45 million Americans are on food stamps, another record."

Ordinary Americans were suffering because of the way the economy ran into trouble and also how companies responded when the Great Recession hit. Soaring housing prices in the mid-2000s made millions of Americans feel wealthier than they were. They borrowed against the inflated equity in their homes or traded up to bigger, more expensive houses. Their debts as a percentage of their annual after-tax income rose to a record 135 percent in 2007. Then housing prices started falling rapidly, helping cause the great financial crisis in the fall of 2008.

A recession that had begun in December 2007 was the deepest downturn since the Great Depression, economists said. Kenneth Rogoff of Harvard University and Carmen Reinhart of the Peterson Institute for International Economics analyzed eight centuries of financial disasters around the world for their 2009 book *This Time Is Different*. They found that severe financial crises create deep recessions and stunt the recoveries that follow.

Other news reports noted that the anemic economic recovery in mid 2011 was following economists' analysis to the letter. Federal Reserve numbers analyzed by Haver Analytics suggested that Americans had "a long way to go before their finances would be strong enough to support robust spending: Despite cutting what they owe from the past three years, the average household's debt equaled 119 percent of its annual after-tax income. At the same point after the recession of 1981-82, debts were at 66 percent; after the 1990-91 recession, 85 percent; and after the 2001 recession, 114 percent. Because the labor market remained so weak, most workers could not demand bigger raises or look for better jobs. In an economic cycle that is turning up, in a labor market that is healthy and vibrant, you would see a large number of people quitting their jobs. They could quit and seek a job elsewhere that would pay better.. That was not happening in the spring of 2011. Workers were toughing it out, thankful they still had jobs at all. Some 1.7 million workers were unemployed each month in the first half of 2011, which was down from 2.8 million a month in 2007."

On Nov. 3, 2011, the Associated Press reported that the ranks of America's poorest of the poor increased to 1 in 15 people, as the result of the downturn in the economy. About 20.5 million Americans or 6.7 percent of U.S. population made up the poorest of poor, defined as those at 50 percent or less of the official poverty level. Those living in deepest poverty represent nearly half of the 46.2 million people scraping by below the poverty line.

In 2010, the poorest poor meant an income of $5,570 or less for an individual and $11,157 for a family of four. The 6.7 percent share was the highest in 35 years that Census Bureau had maintained such records surpassing previous highs of 2009 and 1993 of just over 6 percent.

There was really no unaffected group except maybe the very top income earners. New census data painted a stark portrait of the nation's haves and have-nots at a time when unemployment remained persistently high at 9 percent. The government's first-ever economic data showed more Hispanics, elderly and working-age poor have fallen into poverty.

"In all, the numbers underscore the breadth and scope by which the downturn has reached further into mainstream America," the report said. "Recessions are supposed to be temporary, and when's its over everything returns to where it was before. But the worry now is that the downturn which will end eventually will have long-lasting effects on families who lose jobs

become worse off and can't recover," said Robert Moffitt, professor of economics of Johns Hopkins University.

Forty states and the District of Columbia had increases in the poorest poor since 2007, and none saw decreases. The District of Columbia ranked highest at 10.7 percent, followed by Mississippi and New Mexico. Nevada had the biggest jump, rising from 4.6 percent to 7 percent.

Concentrated poverty also spread wider. After declining during the 1990s economic boom, the proportion of poor people in large metropolitan areas who lived in high-poverty neighborhoods jumped from 11.2 percent in 2000 to 15.1 percent in 2010, according to a Brookings Institution analysis released in November 2011.

Such geographically concentrated poverty in the United States in 2011 was the highest since 1990, following a decade of high unemployment and rising energy costs.

Extreme poverty in 2011 was prevalent in the industrial Midwest, including Detroit, Grand Rapids, Mich., and Akron, Ohio, due to a renewed decline in manufacturing. But the biggest growth in high-poverty areas is occurring in newer Sun Belt metro areas such as Las Vegas, Riverside, Calif., and Cape Coral, Fla., after the plummeting housing market wiped out home values and dried up construction jobs.

The economic conditions in the United States in 2011 were the worst I had seen in my lifetime, much worst than when I was last unemployed in the recession of 1981-82. I saw no end in sight to hard times. At the heart of the problem was the manufacturing jobs that had been lost in the United States over the past decade. Those jobs were not coming back. The United States was in dire straits. (Messenger-Inquirer, Nov. 5, 2011)

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Gridlock or Compromise?

"America was once the great middle class society. Now we are divided between rich and poor, with the greatest degree of inequality among high income democracies. The top one percent of households takes almost a quarter of all household income --- a share not seen since 1929. An economy this lopsided cannot prosper. The poor and working classes are squeezed. The rich are increasingly absenting themselves from the country's troubles. Their businesses sell goods and outsource jobs to China; their homes are behind gated walls; much of their corporate income is in offshore tax havens," *Time Magazine,* Oct. 10, 2011, by Jeffrey D. Sachs, director of Columbia University's Earth Institute and special adviser to UN Secretary-General, author of The Price of Civilization.

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner had first given Congress notice in January 2011 that the country's debt load was nearing its cap. In early May 2011, he reiterated to them that by Aug. 2 the Treasury could no longer guarantee that it would be able to pay all the country's bills without borrowing money. In 2011, the government was borrowing more than 40 cents of every dollar it spent, and without any increase in borrowing authority, the government could face an unprecedented default on U.S. loans and obligations.

Geithner's words prompted Republicans to still vow they would not vote to raise the debt ceiling unless spending cuts were included in any such legislation. In May 2011, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner accentuated the GOP's demand during a speech in New York, insisting on spending cuts greater than any debt ceiling increase. And Republicans also reaffirmed that there could not be any tax increases in any Democrat plan.

Urged by Obama, Democrats pushed back hard. Any debt-reduction bill that was part of a measure raising the debt ceiling should include both spending cuts and tax increases, they demanded. It was then that weeks of frenetic negotiations began on a frustrating path leading seemingly to nowhere. One deal after another broke down with Republicans walking out of talks as the clock ticked off the minutes until the Aug. 2 deadline.

It was clear to many of rational citizens of both political parties that the nation would have to raise the debt ceiling or risk default. Money would have to be borrowed to pay the government's bills. I thought that everyone involved in the government --- both Republicans and Democrats --- should set aside personal ideology and political interests, and work together to do what was right to save our country's credit standing. FDR and Republicans and Democrats had worked together in 1933 when they began the mammoth task of battling their way out of the Great Depression. But in 2011, America's political system did not work that way anymore. There was virtually no hope of bipartisanship in Washington, and it seemed it would be impossible to bring the two sides together to solve any national problem. The Republicans' intent was very clear to us. Anyone who saw and heard the debate in the House and the Senate knew. The GOP's main goal was to regain the majority in the Senate in 2012 and destroy Obama's chances for re-election. But, that said, the United States could not abide any more gridlock in Washington. Compromises had to be made. As a nation, the United States was standing on the edge of

economic and financial disaster, flirting with default. All of us were looking into the abyss, playing a game of chicken as time was running out.

In the last three weeks of July 2011, the Republicans and Tea Party members mixed it up with the Democrats once again with their irrational, irresponsible "no prisoners, my way or the highway" strategy. All this at the same time that most of the Tea Party members said raising the debt ceiling was not necessary. The Tea Partiers, a radical extremist minority of conservatives making up the base of the Republican Party, dismissed Geithner's warning that the U.S. would lose its AAA credit rating if the debt ceiling were not raised. It just would not happen, the Tea Party leaders said. It was a depressing situation, and too risky to gamble. No one who was rational wanted to take the chance of economic default.

Throughout the last weeks before the debt ceiling deadline, the Republicans still argued that tax hikes would kill jobs, that jobs could not be created in the turbulent atmosphere of "uncertainty" they continued to say existed in the national economy. Avoiding the truth, they accused Obama again of creating this "uncertainty" with what they called his failed stimulus program. While corporations had billions of profits stashed away, they were not investing their cash in creating jobs mainly because they had learned that they could produce more with fewer employees. Or as they had proven much earlier, they could expand their manufacture of products outside the United States, and avoid paying the corporate tax.

The Republicans in Congress again ignored and stubbornly rejected any attempts by the president to include tax hikes and reform of the tax code in the debt ceiling legislation. Both of these recommendations were first proposed in December 2010 by the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles commission and in July 2011 by the Gang of Six, a group of three Republican and three Democrats from the U.S. Senate.

In late July 2011, the Republicans in Congress held tightly to their position, and it was assured that the showdown between Obama and the GOP would go down to the last minute before some kind of compromise deal prevented the U.S. government from facing an economic Armageddon.

At the time, I believed the debt ceiling could have been raised in a few hours by a one-sentence piece of legislation, or the president could use his constitutional power to raise the debt ceiling on his own in a time of national economic crisis. It seemed to me the simplest thing to do. I even e-mailed the White House urging the president to do so. I'm sure I was thinking the same as many other Democrats in making the suggestions, which I thought were perfectly legal. After all, a president's action in such an emergency is authorized by the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, But Obama passively declined to use that power. Both sides, including the president, were determined to fight it out and reach some sort of compromise, choosing to do it the conventional Washington way.

After three weeks of wrangling, more delay tactics, political posturing, bickering and theatrics by the Republicans and, of course, the hurling of charges and counter charges by members of both parties, the debt ceiling crisis perpetrated by Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill ended.

On Sunday afternoon July 31, 2011, two full days before the foreboding Aug. 2 deadline, the president and leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives reached an agreement to raise the debt ceiling. It appeared the United States had been saved from its first-ever financial default. However, the Senate and rank and file of the House of Representatives still had to vote on the agreement.

An AP report in that Monday's papers noted, "The dramatic resolution lifted a cloud that had threatened the still-fragile economic recovery at home — and it instantly powered a rise in financial markets overseas."

The agreement would cut at least $2.4 trillion from federal spending over a decade. The Treasury's authority to borrow would be extended beyond the 2012 elections, a key objective for President Obama. Passage of the legislation would trigger $1.2 trillion in spending cuts over a decade as well as a $900 billion increase in the government's borrowing authority, news services reported.

"The spending cuts would come from hundreds of federal programs across the face of government — accounts that Obama said would be left with the lowest levels of spending as a percentage of the overall economy in more than a half century," the AP stated in an analysis of the proposed legislation. "The increased borrowing authority includes $400 billion that would take effect immediately, and $500 billion that would be permitted after Congress had a chance to block it. In the second stage, a newly created joint committee of Congress would be charged with recommending $1.5 trillion in deficit reductions by the end of November and put to a vote in Congress by year's end. The cuts could come from benefit programs such as Medicare, Social Security of Medicaid as well as from an overhaul of the tax code."

Media reports noted the committee proposals could trigger a debt limit increase of as much as $1.5 trillion, if approved by Congress. "But if they do not materialize, automatic spending cuts would be applied across government to trim spending by $1.2 trillion. Social Security, Medicaid and food stamps would be exempt from the automatic cuts, but payments to doctors, nursing homes and other Medicare providers could be trimmed, as could subsidies to insurance companies that offer an alternative to government-run Medicare."

Reaching the final deal was a nerve wracking, messy process. As usual, the U.S. public again wondered why it had taken so much time for the Democrats and Republicans to agree on anything. Subsequently, Congress's approval ratings dropped to all-time lows. Americans were finally fed up. I thought the final legislation was a sellout by the Democrats. It was called a classic compromise by political pundits and editorial writers. They saw it as "a triumph of divided government that would let both Obama and Republicans claim they had achieved their objectives." The deal gave the president what he had demanded, and it allowed the debt limit to rise by enough to tide the Treasury over until after the 2012 elections, according to press reports.

While Democrat and Republican politicians debated passionately in the final week before the legislation passed, the Dow Jones Industrials dropped 868 points. The Dow finished Aug. 2 at 11,866.62, falling 266 points on Aug. 2. It was the first time the market had closed below 12,000 since June 24. Major economists feared that the AAA credit rating of the United States might still be downgraded in the next six months of 2011.

The House of Representatives passed the debt ceiling legislation on Monday, Aug. 1, 2011, by a 269-161 vote; the Senate approved it by a 74-26 margin before noon Tuesday, Aug. 2. The bill went to the president for his signature 12 hours before the debt limit deadline.

Before the deal was struck and nearing the end of his daily frustrations with the Tea Party, Boehner and McConnell, an exasperated Obama said, "The American people may have voted for divided government, but they didn't vote for a dysfunctional government" But that is what Americans had been thinking all along.

I thought Obama was hurt badly politically during his negotiations with Boehner and McConnell. He appeared to be timid and afraid of hand to hand, legislative combat, letting

Boehner and the House Republicans disrespect him and his office. The Tea Party Republicans won that fight by their unwillingness to compromise on anything. Boehner even bent to their demands. And the country suffered for it, then voiced its displeasure with the Obama and Congress in opinion polls.

The big, more important issue of creating more jobs and improving the economy remained after the debt ceiling fight. At that time, it was reported again that big corporations had 2.5 trillion in profits available to use in creating new businesses and adding jobs. But they were still stuck on zero in taking action; there was still too much uncertainty in the economy, corporation CEOs told national business news reporters.

The Dow continued its massive drops in the days to come. On Aug. 4, 2011, two days after the debt ceiling crisis ended in the U.S. Congress, the stock market reacted with shock. The DJI dropped 512.76 points, well below 12,000, losing 11 percent and wiping out all gains made in 2011. In the preceding two weeks, the DJI had dropped 1,200 points. The drastic plunge in the Dow grew out of fear of the weakening growth of the U.S. economy and concern in Europe for the future of the troubled, debt-ridden economies of Italy and Spain. Standard and Poor's dropped the U.S. rating to AA+ on Friday, Aug. 5.

On Monday, Aug. 8, 2011, the market dropped another 684 points for the worst single day fall since Dec. 1, 2008. Stocks lost 5.5 percent percent of their value that day, having dropped 15 percent in 2 ½ weeks. When trading ended Aug. 8, the market was under 11,000 for first time since November 2010. It was the 6th worst one day decline in history. The market had fallen 2,000 points in two weeks.

In one week of the market's manic swings of volatility, stocks dropped 635 points on Aug. 8, 2011, rose 430 Tuesday Aug. 9, dropped again 520 points on Aug. 10, and soared 423 points on Thursday, Aug. 11, plus 126 points on Aug. 12. The DJI had lost 2,000 points since July 21, 2011; there was a 829-point drop or 6.5 percent in nine days in August, 2011. In the first three weeks of August stocks were down 11 percent overall.

The housing crisis in America was worse in 2011 than when the massive downturn began in 2008. Home sales were still falling, and the number of people behind on mortgage payments was rising after the market had shown a modest improvement. There was $9.12 trillion of consumer real estate debt in 2011. It was down 10 percent since the 2008 record, but still triple of what it was in 1999. Home prices by September 2011 were down 40 percent from their high five years earlier; their worst ever drop since the Great Depression. A total of $7.1 billion in housing wealth had been lost, according to private sector and government economists. That left 14.6 million American homeowners in the U.S. with mortgage debt greater than their houses were worth at that time.

Those homeowners who were underwater in mortgage debt hampered the economy in several ways. Those who were employed could not walk away from their homes to find jobs elsewhere, and home prices dropped 4.4 percent in the last month of August 2011.

Since the beginning of 2007, 5.2 million homes were lost to foreclosure or were in distress, according to Moody Analytics. Another 5 million homeowners were on the brink of losing to foreclosures, Also because of the slump in construction, 1 million people lost their jobs in housing industry. That included construction workers, real estates sales, and assessments. Also contributing to the housing crisis was the $430 billion drop in consumer spending since 2008 peak or 3 percent of economy. For every $1 drop in home values, only 6 cents is spent on other

consumer goods. That translated to a collective drop of $430 billion in consumer spending since the crisis began in 2008,

In the weeks after the debt ceiling debacle was averted, while the stockmarket was so volatile, and Republicans and Tea Party representatives in Congress were excluding raising taxes in any form, conservative talk radio pundits and candidates for the GOP nomination for president in 2012 were voicing a new Republican talking point --- that half of American wage earners do not pay income tax.

In Iowa on Tuesday, Aug. 16, Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who had announced his candidacy for the GOP nomination for president the previous Saturday, was asked what could be done about what the Wall Street Journal called the "entitlement culture" in the United States? The question gave the ultraconservative Perry a chance to talk about class warfare and take a potshot at the working poor. "We're approaching nearly half of the United States population that doesn't pay any income taxes," he responded. "And I think one of the ways is to let everybody, as many people as possible, let me put it that way, to be able to be helping pay for the government that we have in this country. Having more people who are outside the wagon pulling," since too many people in the wagon are being pulled, Perry answered. The previous week in Nashua, N.H., former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney said something almost identical. "We want to make sure people do pay their fair share. Half the people in this country pay no income tax at all," he said, although later, he added, "I don't want to raise taxes on middle Americans."

The third GOP candidate Rep. Michele Bachmann echoed the same argument to conservative South Carolinians in July. "Part of the problem is today, only 53 percent pay any federal income tax at all; 47 percent pay nothing." She added, "We need to broaden the base so that everybody pays something, even if it's a dollar."

I thought their responses about the poor paying more taxes were peculiar, tricky campaign talk, almost schizophrenic in nature, especially in lieu of a recent Republican debate, in which each participating candidate raised his or her right hand and vowed to reject a deficit reduction deal that raises any taxes, even if every dollar of tax increases would be matched by $10 of spending cuts.

When I heard this reversal of the Republicans' latest campaigning message in 2011, I found mindboggling. I could not believe it ---- because I knew I had been in the lower half of American workers throughout my career as a writer and journalist, and had paid about 30 percent of my income in taxes to the federal, state and local government, including payroll taxes.

But when I did the research I learned that each of the three Republican candidates was correct in their statements. While contradicting themselves in demanding no new tax revenue to help balance the federal budget, they said those Americans not paying income tax should do their share in paying tax increases.

In 2011, the facts were that more than 93 percent of families earning less than $16,812 – the poorest 20 percent of households in America – paid no federal income tax, according to the credible, nonpartisan Tax Policy Center. In addition, more than 60 percent of families earning between $16,812 and $33,542 paid no federal income tax in 2011. In many other cases, even members of the solid middle class – those earners just above the median family income --- would pay no income tax, 30 percent of families earning between $33,542 and $59,486, the Tax Policy Center figures revealed.

The Tax Policy Center, said nearly half of American tax filers paid no federal income taxes. Seventy-six million tax filers in 2011, or 46.4 percent of the total, were exempt from federal income tax that year.

In my research, I learned that the phenomenon of low-earning Americans escaping the federal income tax burden wasn't a new one. In 2002, The Wall Street Journal coined the term "lucky duckies" to describe people who were exempt from income tax because they didn't make enough money.

The Wall Street Journal drew no end of ridicule from the New York Tiimes, the New Republic and other publications for the "lucky duckie" term. "Had the editors ever met a person of little means?" wondered Farhad Majoo in Salon. "Did they realize that being poor, while perhaps an attractive tax shelter, tended to come with such hard-to-bear downsides as not knowing where your next meal will come from?"

Of course, in the majority of cases, employed poor people who don't pay federal income tax still paid other taxes. They still were responsible for payroll taxes withheld from their paychecks, and for excise taxes on gasoline, tobacco, alcohol, and other goods. And they may have to pay income tax at the state level, and state sales taxes in states that assessed them.

In 2010, 45 percent of households paid no federal income tax, according to the Tax Policy Center. In 2009, it was about 47 percent. In 2008, 49 percent were exempt from federal income tax. All in all, according to the Tax Policy Center, in 2011, there would be 76 million nonpaying individuals or married couples who filed a tax return jointly along with all dependents of that individual or couple.

And finally, not all of those tax units represent the working poor or middle class. Nine million nonpayers, or 12.8 percent of the total, are in the middle income quintile. Another 1.9 million -- 2.6 percent of the total -- are in the second-highest quintile, and some 443,000, or 0.6 percent of the total, are in the top quintile.The Tax Policy Center's research statistics also showed that 105,000 Americans in the top two tax brackets paid no federal income taxes.

The Bush tax rates, which Republicans vowed to extend and make permanent in the spring of 2011, were responsible for taking half of working Americans off the hook for paying income taxes during the decade of 2000. And it had put the United States on the brink of bankruptcy. When Bush's administration squandered a surplus and borrowed money to pay for two wars, Bush never thought about the possibility of the United States suffering a disastrous financial crisis and Great Recession by the end of the decade. No matter how many Republicans want to blame the grave conditions of the economy in 2011 on Barack Obama, it was George Bush that put us in that disastrous position.

"Ever since the Bush era tax cuts of 2001 and 2003, the government has suffered from self-induced anorexia," said Roger Lowenstein, a director of the Sequoia Fund and author of The End of Wall Street, in a column in the Aug. 22-29 issues of Newsweek magazine. "Those oft-debated but never rescinded tax breaks have steadily drained the Treasury and added to its borrowing."

Lowenstein noted that in 2000 the national debt was $3.4 trillion; in summer 2011 it was $11 trillion. Ordinarily when the national economy slows down, debt constricts America's options, Lowenstein stated. "The normal response to a bad jobs market is for the Treasury to increase deficit spending. But in 2011 the government was already operating at a $1.5 trillion annual deficit that equal to a tenth of the GDP," said Lowenstein. "It is borrowing half of what it spends that is enough to spook S&P and remind the stock market a bit too much of Europe."

The federal budget was in balance for the last time in 2001 when the government was collecting about 19 percent of the GDP in taxes. It was spending slightly less, Lowenstein pointed out in his article. But after the Bush tax cuts, that balance shifted and the money was no longer coming into the Treasury. Spending soared to 25 percent of GDP and tax receipts dropped to 15 percent of GDP, the lowest since World War II. "Everyone, Democrats included, recognizes that spending must come down," Lowenstein continued, but the Republicans insist that taxes (any taxes) are off limits.

The tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 cost the Treasury $3 trillion, as opposed to the $1 trillion spent in President Obama's 2009 stimulus program, Lowenstein wrote. "If the tax cuts are extended in the next 10 years, the Treasury will lose another $5.4 trillion.

"Deficit doves will say the economy still needs stimulus," Lowenstein said. "They are right that anti-recession measures such as the reduced payroll tax should be extended. If employment doesn't pick up, I would favor a targeted jobs program too. But a little patience is in order. The economy is sluggish because consumers have been repaying their debts. That always takes time after a financial crisis. The good news is the typical house's debt service as a percentage of income is now nearing record lows. Mortgage debt is still falling but credit card borrowing is ticking up. Translation: spending should pick up soon."

"The larger point is that federal programs must be paid for,' Lowenstein wrote in August 2011. "Taxes are the friend of responsive government. Without revenue, government is merely a shell game."

"That kills confidence --- it already has --- and freezes investment and jobs. Eventually it buries the economy in debt. But if you combined expiration of the tax cuts with phased in cuts on entitlements, plus the smaller budget cuts Congress just legislated, and wipe out the freebies like the mortgage reduction, the budget could be fixed. And that's no fantasy," Lowenstein declared.

In a late summer series of odd events, Warren Buffett, America's number two billionaire after Bill Gates, showed his patriotism again with a surprise statement in an op-ed piece Aug. 15, 2011, in the New York Times. What he wrote seemed to disprove the GOP's claim that all the rich investors who create most of America's jobs surely should not be made to pay higher taxes.

Buffett facts made a different case for Republicans to consider. "Our leaders have asked for 'shared sacrifice,' "he wrote. "But when they did the asking, they spared me. I checked with my mega-rich friends to learn what pain they were expecting. They, too, were left untouched. While the poor and middle class fight for us in Afghanistan, and while most Americans struggle to make ends meet, we mega-rich continue to get our extraordinary tax breaks. Some of us are investment managers who earn billions from our daily labors but are allowed to classify our income as "carried interest," thereby getting a bargain 15 percent tax rate. Others own stock index futures for 10 minutes and have 60 percent of their gain taxed at 15 percent, as if they'd been long-term investors.

"These and other blessings are showered upon us by legislators in Washington who feel compelled to protect us, much as if we were spotted owls or some other endangered species. It's nice to have friends in high places."

Buffet, himself a Democrat who supported President Obama, said the federal income tax and payroll tax he paid for 2010 was $6,938,744. That was a lot of money, he said, but what he paid was only 17.4 percent of his taxable income, which he admitted was a lower percentage than was paid by any of the other 20 people in his office. "Their tax burdens ranged from 33 percent to 41

percent and averaged 36 percent," Buffett wrote in the Times op-ed. "If you make money with money, as some of my super-rich friends do, your percentage may be a bit lower than mine. But if you earn money from a job, your percentage will surely exceed mine — most likely by a lot."

To understand why, Buffett noted, one needs to examine the sources of government revenue. In 2010 about 80 percent of revenues came from personal income taxes and payroll taxes, he said. "The mega-rich pay income taxes at a rate of 15 percent on most of their earnings but pay practically nothing in payroll taxes. It's a different story for the middle class: typically, they fall into the 15 percent and 25 percent income tax brackets, and then are hit with heavy payroll taxes to boot."

Buffett pointed out that tax rates for the rich in 2011 were much higher in the 1980s and 90s when his percentage was in the pack. "According to a theory I sometimes hear, I should have thrown a fit and refused to invest because of the elevated tax rates on capital gains and dividends. I didn't refuse, nor did others."

Buffett, who had worked with investors for 60 years, said he has yet to see anyone, not even when capital gains rates were 39.9 percent in 1976-77, shy away from a sensible investment because of the tax rate on the potential gain.

"People invest to make money, and potential taxes have never scared them off. And to those who argue that higher rates hurt job creation, I would note that a net of nearly 40 million jobs were added between 1980 and 2000," he wrote. "You know what's happened since then? --- lower tax rates and far lower job creation."

Since 1992, the I.R.S. has compiled data from the returns of the 400 Americans reporting the largest income, Buffett declared. "In 1992, the top 400 had aggregate taxable income of $16.9 billion and paid federal taxes of 29.2 percent on that sum. In 2008, the aggregate income of the highest 400 had soared to $90.9 billion — a staggering $227.4 million on average — but the rate paid had fallen to 21.5 percent.

Buffett continued: "The taxes I refer to here include only federal income tax, but you can be sure that any payroll tax for the 400 was inconsequential compared to income. In fact, 88 of the 400 in 2008 reported no wages at all, though every one of them reported capital gains. Some of my brethren may shun work but they all like to invest. (I can relate to that.)

"I know well many of the mega-rich and, by and large, they are very decent people. They love America and appreciate the opportunity this country has given them. Many have joined the Giving Pledge, promising to give most of their wealth to philanthropy. Most wouldn't mind being told to pay more in taxes as well, particularly when so many of their fellow citizens are truly suffering.

"Twelve members of Congress (the Special Committee) will soon take on the crucial job of rearranging our country's finances," Buffett wrote. "They've been instructed to devise a plan that reduces the 10-year deficit by at least $1.5 trillion. It's vital, however, that they achieve far more than that. Americans are rapidly losing faith in the ability of Congress to deal with our country's fiscal problems. Only action that is immediate, real and very substantial will prevent that doubt from morphing into hopelessness. That feeling can create its own reality.

"Job one for the 12 is to pare down some future promises that even a rich America can't fulfill. Big money must be saved here. The 12 should then turn to the issue of revenues. I would leave rates for 99.7 percent of taxpayers unchanged and continue the current 2-percentage-point reduction in the employee contribution to the payroll tax. This cut helps the poor and the middle class, who need every break they can get.

"But for those making more than $1 million — there were 236,883 such households in 2009 — I would raise rates immediately on taxable income in excess of $1 million, including, of course, dividends and capital gains. And for those who make $10 million or more — there were 8,274 in 2009 — I would suggest an additional increase in rate.

"My friends and I have been coddled long enough by a billionaire-friendly Congress. It's time for our government to get serious about shared sacrifice."

I bet the Republicans in Congress never thought they would hear such truth and blunt frankness from an American billionaire. Some, including Sen. Mitch McConnell, himself a millionaire, responded weakly by suggesting that if Buffett felt ashamed or guilty that he had not paid his fair share of income tax that he should write a check to the U.S. Treasury to ease his conscience. But what Buffett said also perfectly refuted the GOP argument that increasing taxes for the rich kills job creation. It was my opinion that the United States tax code had to be reformed to free up money for job creation, the corporate tax should be reduced to keep manufacturing jobs in the United States, and tax loopholes and federal government subsidies to big oil companies and other large corporations, eliminated. And Warren Buffett's words of wisdom and call for patriotism from the "mega rich" should be considered and included in any tax reform program that President Obama offers.

As for me, I thought all of us from the richest to the lowest of middle class taxpayers should pay our fair share together to protect the working poor, grow our nation's economy and restore its fiscal integrity.

After legislation was passed ending in the debt-ceiling debate, Congress took a month-long recess, and President Obama went on a three-day bus tour in the Midwest, aimed twofold at getting citizens ideas of what needs to done to create more jobs in the economy, and also launching his campaign for reelection in 2012. Then he took his family to Martha's Vineyard for a 10-day vacation.

The president said he would announce a new, major plan to revive the weakening economy on the Thursday after Labor Day. While on vacation in Martha's Vineyard, Tuesday, Aug. 23, President Obama revealed plans to cut or roll back hundreds of federal regulations. It was his latest gesture to reach out to a business community that Republicans said felt alienated by Obama. Administration officials said their plans included 500 regulatory reforms, including more than 100 from the Department of Transportation and more than 70 from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Many of the regulatory reforms were designed to help small businesses spur job growth and save about $10 billion over five years, the administration announced. Those included accelerating payments to as many as 60,000 small businesses that had contracts with the Department of Defense, and requiring the Small Business Administration to adopt a single electronic application in order to reduce paperwork burdens.

According to AP, Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke's speech on Friday, Aug. 26, 2011, came shortly after the government said the economy grew at a scant 1 percent annual rate in the April-June quarter. That was even slower than previously estimated. The economy was hobbled by the depressed housing market, high oil prices and fears that the European debt crisis would deteriorate into a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis. The DJI had lost about 11 percent of its value since late July, 2011, mainly on fears that the economy might slip back into recession. On that Friday, Bernanke blamed the summer's political squabbling over raising the federal debt

limit for undermining consumer and business confidence. And he warned that further gridlock in Washington would "pose ongoing risks to growth."

According to an Associated Press story Sept. 2, 2011, employers stopped adding jobs in August, 2011. That created an alarming setback for an economy that was struggling to grow. The government also reported that the unemployment rate remained at 9.1 percent. That jobs report was the weakest since September 2010.

On Friday, Sept, 2, 2011, as the Labor Day weekend began, the DJI fell 253 points on Sept. 2, 2011, finishing at the end of trading at 11,240. Also, total payrolls were unchanged in August, the first time since 1945 that the government has reported a net job change of zero.

On Labor Day, 2011, economist columnists and private sector analysts speculated on what it would take to bring the United States economy to full employment. The future appeared bleak. To lower unemployment from 9.1 percent to 5 percent in five years and put 16.9 million people back to work would require addition of 282,000 jobs per month. An average of 105,000 jobs was added per month since early 2010. That compared the 240,000 jobs added each month from the U.S. economic boom from 1993 to 2000. Many economists believed in 2011 that unemployment would remain high indefinitely. Analysts noted that an average of 4.5 applicants was competing for one job in September 2011. Fourteen million people were unemployed in the nation on Sept. 4, 2011. There were nine million part-time workers looking for full-time jobs.

In its Sept. 5, 2011, issue Time Magazine reported that only 47 percent of African American males have graduated from high school. In 2009, 2.58 percent of black Americans lived below the poverty level while 9.4 percent of whites lived below poverty. In August 2011, unemployment among of black American workers was 17 percent.

Economists warned that the economy could not feebly growing indefinitely if hiring remained stalled. Fears that the United States will slip back into recession which had been rising since the government reported over the summer that the economy barely grew in the first half of the year. Consumer and business confidence was stalled by the political standoff over the federal debt limit, a downgrade in the U.S. government's credit rating and a debt crisis in Europe. Analysts said the economy could not continue to expand unless hiring picked up.

In the first six months of 2011, growth was measured at an annual rate of 0.7 percent. Companies are mostly keeping their payrolls intact. They were not laying off many workers. But they were not hiring, either, according to AP reports. Without more jobs to fuel consumer spending, economists said another recession would be inevitable. When growth is slow and unemployment high, companies feel little pressure to increase pay and benefits. In August, 2011, for instance, hourly wages fell, according to media reports. And when unemployment is chronically high, even many people who have jobs worry about losing them. So they're less likely to spend. Eventually, as consumers cut back, corporate sales decline. Companies scale back hiring even more. Weak spending and hiring can feed on each other and edge the economy closer to recession. When the economy is barely growing, it's also vulnerable to shocks like natural disasters and political upheavals. An economy growing 5 percent a year can absorb more punishment than one growing at 1 percent before it would slip into recession.

Consumer and business confidence was shaken in summer 2011 by the political standoff over the federal debt limit, a downgrade of long-term U.S. debt and the financial crisis in Europe. Tumbling stock prices escalated the worries. Job growth had been sputtering. The economy

added 166,000 jobs a month in the January-March quarter, 97,000 a month in the April-June quarter and just 43,000 a month in the July-September period.

"Underlying job growth needs to improve immediately in order to avoid a recession," said HSBC economist Ryan Wang. The dispiriting job numbers for August would heighten the pressure on the Federal Reserve, President Barack Obama and Congress to find ways to stimulate the economy. So far, the Fed had been reluctant to launch another round of Treasury bond purchases. Its previous bond-buying programs were intended to force down long-term interest rates, encourage borrowing and boost stock prices.

On Sept. 8, Obama gave a televised address to a joint session of Congress to introduce a plan for creating jobs and spurring economic growth. "The importance of job growth cannot be overstated," said Joshua Shapiro, chief U.S. economist at MFR Inc. The economy needs to add at least 250,000 jobs a month to rapidly bring down the unemployment rate. The rate has been above 9 percent in all but two months since May 2009. Roughly 14 million Americans are unemployed. An additional 11.4 million are either working part time but want full-time jobs or have given up looking for work and aren't counted as unemployed.

The weakness was underscored by revisions to the jobs data for June and July. Collectively, those figures were lowered to show 58,000 fewer jobs added than previously thought. The downward revisions were all in government jobs. The average workweek declined in August. Cutbacks by federal, state and local governments had erased 290,000 government jobs in 2011, including 17,000 in August. "There is no silver lining in this one," said Steve Blitz, senior economist at ITG Investment Research. "It is difficult to walk away from these numbers without the conclusion that the economy is simply grinding to a halt."

The unemployment rate for black men jumped a full percentage point in August to 18 percent. That's the highest level for that group since March 2010. And unemployment for black people as a whole surged from 15.9 percent to 16.7 percent even as unemployment for white Americans ticked down to 8 percent from 8.1 percent.

Obama faced doubts within his own party, including black lawmakers who said he wasn't doing enough to help chronic unemployment in black communities. Yet Obama was unlikely to win support for any new stimulus spending from congressional Republicans, who opposed further spending and argued that the president's economic policies had failed. They still favored spending cuts and less government regulation.

On Friday, Sept. 2, 2011, Obama took a step toward winning their support. He directed the Environmental Protection Agency to abandon rules that would have tightened health-based standards for smog. Republicans and some business leaders have said the proposed rules would have cost jobs.

Kurt Karl, chief economist for the Americas at Swiss Re, said the August jobs report "implies a rising probability of recession." Still, he noted, employment fell for 18 months after the 2001 recession - and the economy kept chugging along at an annual rate of 2.1 percent over that time. The economy's 0.7 percent growth rate in the first half of 2011 was the slowest six months of growth since the recession officially ended in June 2009.

Most economists expected growth to improve to about a 2 percent annual rate in the July-September quarter, but latest, bleak report might cause some economists to downgrade their forecasts. Consumers got some relief from lower gasoline prices, and factories are revving up again after being interrupted by Japan's earthquake and nuclear crisis. Before that jobs report, the economy had been showing signs of better health. Consumer spending was strong in August

2011. Auto sales were brisk. Manufacturing expanded. And fewer people applied for unemployment benefits, according to Labor Department reports, yet even 2 percent growth isn't fast enough to generate many jobs. And the economy remains vulnerable to outside shocks - a worsening European debt crisis or more political brinkmanship in Washington.

Fears of a second recession continued. "The economy's perforated at this point," said Sean Snaith, director of the University of Central Florida's Institute for Economic Competitiveness. "Any additional strain on it will tear it apart."

The Obama administration estimated that unemployment will average about 9 percent in 2012, when Obama would seek re-election. The rate was 7.8 percent when he took office. The White House Office of Management and Budget projected overall growth of just 1.7 percent in 2011. "The economy continues to stagger," said Sung Won Sohn, economist at California State University Channel Islands. "It wouldn't take much (of a) shock to tip it onto a recession."

In a column, Monday, Sept. 5, Robert Samuelson of the Washington Post wrote: "Unemployment has exceeded 8 percent since February 2009; many forecast expect it to stay there until at least 2014. Nothing like this has occurred since World War II. Will job fears compound consumer cautiousness, retard recovery and perversely worsen unemployment? How many workers will cling to jobs they despise because they can't find anything else? Will economic frustrations feed a populist backlash? Of left or right? Can America's leaders cope? On this Labor Day, questions are clearer than answers."

On Labor Day before a boisterous crowd in Detroit, Obama put Republicans on the spot challenging them to place country above all else and vote to create jobs and put the economy back on a path toward growth. "Show us what you got," he said.

Roads and bridges nationwide need rebuilding, and one million people are ready to go to work to fix them, Obama declared. Workers are "itching to get their hands dirty." He portrayed the Republicans in Congress are the only obstacle in the way of gettng that work done.

"We've come through a difficult decade in which those values were all too often given short shrift. We've gone through a decade where wealth was valued over work, and greed was valued over responsibility. And the decks were too often stacked against ordinary folks in favor of the special interests," Obama stated. "And everywhere I went while I was running for this office, I met folks who felt their economic security slipping away, men and women who were fighting harder and harder just to stay afloat. And that was even before the economic crisis hit, and that just made things even harder. That's the central challenge that we face in our country today. That's at the core of why I ran for president. That's what I've been fighting for since I've been president. Everything we've done, it's been thinking about you. We said working folks deserved a break -- so within one month of me taking office, we signed into law the biggest middle-class tax cut in history, putting more money into your pockets " he said.

"We said working folks shouldn't be taken advantage of -- so we passed tough financial reform that ended the days of taxpayer bailouts, and stopped credit card companies from gouging you with hidden fees and unfair rate hikes, and set up a new consumer protection agency with one responsibility: sticking up for you."

"Im going to propose ways to put America back to work that both parties can agree to, I still believe both parties can work together to solve our problems," he said. "Given the urgency of this moment given the hardship that many people are facing, folks have got to get together. But

were not going to wait for them. We've got to see if we have got some straight shooters in Congress. We're going to see if congressional Republicans will put country before party."

Lawmakers need to act quickly, Obama continued. "The time for Washington games is over. The time for action is now." Pending trade deals needed to be passed to open new markets for U.S. goods. He called for the Republicans to fight as hard to cut taxes for the middle class as they were for profitable oil companies and the wealthiest Americans. He wanted to continue a payroll tax cut for workers and job benefits for unemployed workers.

Released Sept. 6, 2011, a Wall Street Journal/NBC poll showed Obama's approval rating at an all-time low during his administration of 44 percent. It dropped to 37 percent on his handling the economy, worst ever. He had a 70 percent likeability rating. Fifty four percent said the odds were against him making a comeback. However, the approval rating for Congress was 18 percent. Against his potential Republican presidential opponents in the 2012 election, Obama led Mitt Romney 46-45 percent, and Rick Perry 47-42.

On Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011, days before the national commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washingon, President Obama introduced a $447 billion plan to Congress to produce more jobs in the staggering economy. Fifteen times he asked the senators and representatives to pass the legislative proposal quickly. The plan included $253 billion in tax cuts and a total of $194 billion in federal spending.

"The people of this country work hard to meet their responsibilities," said Obama. "The question tonight is whether we'll meet ours. The question is whether in the face of an ongoing national crisis, we can stop the political circus and actually so something to help the economy."

The president's American Jobs Act of 2011 proposed cutting payroll taxes to 3.1 percent for workers. Those taxes had already been whittled for individuals from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent earlier in 2011 but were slated to go back up unless Congress took action. The president said he would also apply the payroll tax cuts to employers, halving their tax payments to 3.1 percent on the first $50 million in payroll. Companies that hired new workers or gave raises to those they already employed would get an even bigger benefit, Obama said. On payroll increases up to $50 million, employers would pay no Social Security tax.

Obama also proposed spending to fix schools and roads, hire local teachers and police and extend unemployment benefits. He proposed a tax credit for businesses that hired people out of work for six months or longer, plus other tax relief aimed at snaring bipartisan support in a time of divided government.

Obama was more passionate in that speech than any other I had heard. His tone forceful and his demeanor forceful, he was in his preaching groove as he spoke, raising his voice to a shout and demand action. Stop the political circus that had occurred between him and Congress during the debt ceiling debate, he said. The people need help now. Obama threatened Congress that he would take his case to the people immediately, putting himself as the only one on the side of voters.

The president came out of his corner fighting, sounding like Harry Truman campaigning against the GOP Congress in 1948. The Republicans were either going to have to see the light, in Truman's words, or take the heat if they rejected Obama's plan. The president appealed to people watching the speech on television to lobby lawmakers to take action. He said people could care less about the political consequences of his speech. "The next election is 14 months

away," he asserted. The people need help now." Fifteen times Obama punctuated his speech with the demand that Congress "pass this bill now."

"I know some of you have sworn oaths to never raise any taxes on anyone for as long as you live," he said in reference to the conservative Tea Party influence on many House Republicans. "Now is not the time to carve out an exception and raise middle class taxes which is why you should pass this bill right away." He also revealed his intention to propose legislation reforming the tax code, ending subsidies to oil companies, and raise taxes on the wealthiest Americans who were not paying at all.

Pass this bill now, we need to jolt this economy that has stalled, he said. A lot of what Obama proposed were ideas Republicans had suggested in the past year, so the ball was in their court now. They could either go along and pass the president's proposed legislation or reject their own tax cut proposals. If they did so, then the President could say, see Republicans don't care about you the taxpayers and they do not want to create jobs. They just want to oust Obama in 2012 and regain power majorities in the House and Senate, maintaining the status quo of stagnation.

Then on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2011, news agencies reported surveys disclosing that one in six Americans or 49.9 million people were living in poverty in the United States; that was 15.1 percent of the national population. It was the highest rate since 1983, up from 14.3 percent or 46.2 million people living in poverty in 2010. Those 2011 numbers included 26.6 percent of Hispanics and 27 percent of blacks. The percentage of Americans without healthcare insurance rose from 16.1 to 16.3 percent or 49.9 million people, according to U.S. Census records.

On Sept. 15, 2011, after the poverty figures were announced, Speaker of the House Boehner, in a speech to the National Economic Club, as expected, flatly rejected President Obama's jobs bill which he said contained tax increases. Instead he said he would leave it to the 12-member Super Committee selected after the debt crisis debate to reform the present tax code and find more ways to cut the burgeoning deficits.

In a speech in White House Rose Garden on Monday, Sept. 19, 2011, Obama announced his deficit reduction plan and drew a line in the sand, declaring war on the Republicans in what was the beginning of his campaign for re-election. In the 20-minute speech, the president announced what spending cuts he wanted and how he planned to raise new revenue to pay for them. He said rich Americans should pay their "fair share" of federal income taxes.

He even suggested a special new income tax (5.6 percent) on billionaires and millionaires. "It is wrong that in the United States of America a teacher or a nurse or a construction worker who earns $50,000 should pay higher tax rates than somebody pulling in $50 million," the president said. "Anybody who says we can't change the tax code to correct that, anyone who has signed some pledge to protect every single tax loophole so long as they live, they should be called out."

As I watched the speech on television and took notes, Obama made it clear that he had given up trying to bargain and compromise with the Republicans in Congress. "And you're already hearing the moans and groans from the other side about how we are engaging in class warfare and we're being too populist," he said, "If we don't succeed, then I think that this country is going to go down a very perilous path. And it's not going to be good for those of us who have done incredibly well in this society, and it's certainly not going to be good for the single mom who's working two shifts right now trying to support her family."

A new feisty, combative version of Obama backed up his assertions with a veto threat to the anti-tax Republicans. "I will not support — I will not support — any plan that puts all the burden

for closing our deficit on ordinary Americans. And I will veto any bill that changes benefits for those who rely on Medicare but does not raise serious revenues by asking the wealthiest Americans or biggest corporations to pay their fair share," Obama said. "We are not going to have a one-sided deal that hurts the folks who are most vulnerable."

Obama's plan would reduce the deficit by $4 trillion, mainly by closing tax loopholes for oil companies and hedge fund managers, raising $1.5 trillion in new tax revenue by letting the Bush tax rates expire for those families making $250,000 a year, by limiting deductions by wealthy tax filers and ending corporate loopholes and subsidies for oil and gas companies.

The spending cuts would also include $480 billion in mandatory benefit programs, $248 billion in Medicare and $72 billion in Medicaid and other health programs; and eliminate government benefit programs like farm subsidies and federal employee retirement pension programs. The president's proposal would reduce federal workers pay checks by 1.2 percent over three years, saving $21 billion over 10 years. And there would be $430 billion in savings from lower interest payments on the national debt, and $1.1 trillion in savings by ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The president called for Congress to undertake comprehensive tax reform to simplify the system, making it more efficient and fair, laying a stronger foundation for economic growth.

"It comes down to this: We have to prioritize," Obama said. "Both parties agree that we need to reduce the deficit by the same amount -- by $4 trillion. So what choices are we going to make to reach that goal? Either we ask the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share in taxes, or we're going to have to ask seniors to pay more for Medicare. We can't afford to do both. Either we gut education and medical research, or we've got to reform the tax code so that the most profitable corporations have to give up tax loopholes that other companies don't get. We can't afford to do both. This is not class warfare. It's math."

"The money is going to have to come from someplace," Obama continued, "And if we're not willing to ask those who've done extraordinarily well to help America close the deficit and we are trying to reach that same target of $4 trillion, then the logic, the math says everybody else has to do a whole lot more. We've got to put the entire burden on the middle class and the poor. We've got to scale back on the investments that have always helped our economy grow. We've got to settle for second-rate roads and second-rate bridges and second-rate airports, and schools that are crumbling. That's unacceptable to me. That's unacceptable to the American people. And it will not happen on my watch."

In the Rose Garden speech, I could see that Obama knew the Republicans would reject his plan. If they wanted to call it "class warfare," let them do so. If the Republicans wanted to continue to abandon the American middle class, and represent the interests of big corporations, oil companies, health insurance companies and millionaires and billionaires, let them do so. Essentially Obama left it up to ordinary middle class people in the United States to decide whether they favor his deficit reduction plan over any the Republicans had yet to propose. The president had stated his case. He was saying let the battle begin. His campaign organization was prepared to unleash electoral hell on the Republicans.

The first two weeks of the third quarter of 2011 were promising for the U.S. stock market. The Dow Jones Industrials increased by 2.5 percent. But then the weakening economy led to selling and volatility that was last seen during the 2008 financial crisis in America. The Dow ended the quarter with a 12.1 percent loss, the worst performance since the first quarter of 2009.

In the week ending Friday, Sept. 23, 2011, the Dow plunged 748 points or 6 percent in the worst week performance since December 2008.

President Obama was traveling all over the United States still proposing a special new tax that would require millionaires to pay at least the rate paid by average taxpayers. He reminded Americans that his jobs plan also proposed the closing of some loopholes and deductions for people making more than $250,000 and would end the portion of the Bush tax cut going to higher incomes. Republicans continued to accuse President Obama and the Democrats of instigating class warfare. If anyone was declaring warfare it was the people in the top tiers of the richest Americans. It is not class warfare to expect America's most prosperous citizens to pay their fair share of taxes to bring down America's long term debt.

Economics analysts like Robert Reich agreed in a column Oct. 2, 2011: "This lopsidedness harms the economy by robbing the vast middle class of the purchasing power it needs to keep the economy going. The only alternative is to sink even deeper into debt, but we know deepening debt could not last. It ended in 1929 when a debt burst, plunging the nation into the Great Depression; much the same as it ended in much the same way in 2008 as the nation sank into a recession that continues for most of us.."

Still the middle class was getting the shaft while the richer were skimming profits off the top and getting richer. In October 2011, the facts were that the wealthy, who accounted for one percent of the U.S. population, took home more than 20 percent of U.S. income. The last time the wealthy got that kind of share happened in the 1920s, economic analysts reported. The super rich were also paying taxes at the lowest top rates in half a century. The top rate they are paying in 2011 was 35 percent on only incomes over $379,000. But most of them were paying at a much lower rate. The Internal Revenue Service figures showed the 400 richest people in the U.S. were paying 17 percent in federal income taxes. Most of that income was classified as capital gains, which was a rate of only 15 percent. That was a good size loophole in itself.

Anyone who says the American economy suffers when the rich pay more in taxes just does not know history. Since 1981, wages of most of America's working class have gone nowhere when adjusted for inflation. The ratio of corporate profits to wages in 2011 was higher that it had been since the Great Depression, economist noted in media reports. Salaries and perks for executives kept rising. Wages continued to drop. While so many poor working families were living in poverty in 2011, the chairman of one of America's largest pharmaceutical companies took home $17.9 million while his company laid off 13,000 employees.

To put it bluntly, the big moneymakers at the top who have never had it so good should sacrifice a lot more so my employed friends and colleagues who were struggling would not have to sacrifice so much. By the first weekend of October 2011, hundreds of Americans, who were unemployed or could not find jobs, took to the streets in New York City and cities in several other American states, protesting the greed of Wall Street, mega banks and large oil companies.

This Great Recession was getting longer and deeper, and people were getting desperate. What economists and politicians were calling a very possible, second recession seemed more like a depression to most of us living on Main Street America. Hard times were still here. A nightmare was becoming reality.

The gap between wealthy Americans and the poor and the dissolving middle class had widened more than I had ever seen it when I wrote this in October 2011. As a person who felt the pain of recessions during 50 years of public employment, I thought to myself: history tells us that

we've seen this movie before. Just remember, it was in the first three decades of the 20th century when new fortunes in industry pushed up incomes and wealth at the top while the earnings of workers fell to the lowest floor.

Republican presidents Harding, Coolidge and Hoover, and the Supreme Court went to bat for the big corporations, striking down labor standards, minimum wages and other social protections. But the bottom was out of the tub in 1929 when Republicans ---- just like George Bush in 2007 --- did not see the disastrous financial crisis coming. The Great Depression that ensued sent millions of middle class Americans to the poor house and soup lines. When Franklin Roosevelt announced his New Deal in 1933, he railed loudly against "a small group who had concentrated into their own hands an almost complete control of other people's property, other people's money, other people's labor, other people's lives."

When I was growing up, it was a time in the United States when we enjoyed prosperity without such a large scale inequality. The 1950s and '60s was an era of rapid economic growth and narrow differences in income. It was partly the result of a more robust social safety net built by Roosevelt. The New Deal, World War II and the vigorous postwar recovery reversed the outlandish inequalities of the 1920s. Top tax rates were 70 percent or higher --- till the Reagan years --- and the economy grew robustly nonetheless. Social Security, the GI Bill, interstate highway construction and many other programs ensured that the elderly were protected, high education was increasingly attainable and the business sector had the modern infrastructure needed to prosper. In this highly effective mixed economy one bolstered both by business and by activist government, the gap between rich and poor narrowed substantially.'

Things began to fall apart badly in the 1970s. "The U.S. dollar was toppled from its unique perch; oil and food prices spiked; Japanese automobiles imports began to challenge the Big Three automakers and inflation soared. America was experiencing its first taste of the new globalized competition," Jeffrey Sachs wrote in the Oct. 10, 2011, issue of Time Magazine. "But American politicians failed to diagnose the real problems, instead of concentrating on the overseas challenge to U.S. competitiveness."

Ronald Reagan declared in 1980 that government was not the solution to our problems. Government was the problem, he said. "The key to re-establishing a sound economy he claimed was to slash taxes, reduce government programs like energy research and social insurance and generally adhere to a free market course. The Reagan Administration failed to grapple with the even bigger upheaval of globalization, Sachs wrote.

After 2009, while Obama's stimulus bill gave only a temporary boost of relief to the struggling economic recovery, Republicans remained fixated on only one idea: make tax cuts permanent to revive the economy, cut all government spending to end the need of taxation. It's the same argument they've been trying to sell for 30 years with, as Sachs noted, poor and worsening results. While they provided no evidence to prove their case, they contended that taxes and regulations were killing job creation, though many countries with much higher taxes and much stiffer corporate regulations had much higher employment than the United States. Republicans were stuck in their dreamland that the Reagan years were GOP Utopia. They did not understand that U.S. businesses in the 21st century were investing abroad not because of taxes but because higher wages in the United States were not sufficiently matched by higher skills as they were in countries like Germany or Sweden.

In 2011, the Republicans had not gotten the message that the U.S. was simply uncompetitive in many industrial sectors. From the offices of the president and Congress to the governing

bodies of the smallest communities, the United States would have to make decisions about retooling its economy, and find answers to how the country was going to fund its future competitiveness. As Sachs suggested, it would take spending in short-term public investments in education, infrastructures and human capital. I thought the problem would possibly take years to solve and our nation would have to endure hard times for possibly the longest period of low economic growth since the Great Depression. It would require patience, deep thought, ingenuity and hard work by government leaders at all levels to get the United States out of its economic mess. The nation would keep its high living standards only if governments and corporations recognized, embraced and managed the complexities of a technologically advanced and globalized economy, as Sachs declared.

On Nov. 3, 2011, a *Messenger-Inquirer* story by business writer Joy Campbell reported that the unemployment rate in Owensboro and Daviess County had dropped from 10.2 percent in 2010 to an encouraging 8.1 percent by October 2011. The local economy was on a "favorable track," said Ron Crouch, director research and statistics in the Office of Employment and Training, Kentucky Education and Workforce Cabinet. "He's more optimistic than a month ago when some analysts feared a double-dip recession." Campbell wrote.

In keeping with the national trend Daviess County lost 1,061 manufacturing jobs from 2001 to 2011, a 16.4 percent drop over that decade. "You're shifting from blue collar to a service economy with more health care and service jobs," Crouch told Campbell. Daviess County added 1,005 jobs in health care and services, an increase of 27.9 percent. Other service jobs (excluding public administration) have gone from 1,340 in 2001 to 1,475 in 2010.

In the past few decades, the U.S. economy switched from making things, building things and inventing things to a financial economy. Through history, he said, countries with financial economies decline.

"He advocates for a return to an innovative economy that makes, builds and invents things. Costs of shipping and transportation could play a role in making the shift back," he told Campbell. "I think we could see manufacturing jobs come back, but as advanced manufacturing with a higher skill level required. We need to make sure we continue to produce that work force." Owensboro's public and private colleges and universities will provide an edge for that, he said. At the same time, an aging population means that health care will continue to be a growth industry, Crouch said.

Eighty thousand jobs were added to the national economy in October in what was the fourth straight month of modest hiring and 13th straight month of overall growth of the economy. The unemployment rate still remained high, dropping from 9.1 percent in September to 9 percent.

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Keeping a Promise

While trying to find solutions to create jobs and pull the American economy out of the Great Recession of 2007, President Obama's successes in foreign policy and as commander-in-chief of our military forces were subtly overshadowed by events here in the United States.

Obama quickly signaled a new American foreign policy that he hoped would improve relations with Muslims and the U.S. in a speech in Egypt on June 4, 2008. Seeking what he called "a new beginning between the United States and Muslims," the president reached out to the world's 1.5 billion followers of Islam as he spoke to an appreciative, friendly crowd at Cairo University.

"We meet at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world --- tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate," Obama said in his opening remarks. "The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars. More recently, tension has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations."

The sweeping change bought by by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam, Obama said. "Violent extremists have exploited these tensions in a small but potent minority of Muslims. The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the continued efforts of these extremists to engage in violence against civilians has led some in my country to view Islam as inevitably hostile not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights. All this has bred more fear and more mistrust. So long as our relationship is defined by our differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace, those who promote conflict rather than the cooperation that can help all of our people achieve justice and prosperity. And this cycle of suspicion and discord must end."

The president said his address was an attempt to "speak the truth" about U.S. relations with the Muslim world. Quoting from the Quran, the Talmud and the Bible, and closing to a standing ovation, he said he sought a new relationship with Muslims "based upon mutual interest and mutual respect" and "based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not to be in competition."

"I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly the things we hold in our hearts, and that too often are said only behind closed doors," said Obama. "There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another, and to seek common ground."

Throughout the speech, the president touched on elements of his own life story that many analysts say are advantages in his dealings with the world beyond America's borders." I am a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims," he said. "As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and the fall of dusk. As a young man, I worked in Chicago communities where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith."

The White House hoped the speech would project a positive image of the U.S. and make recruitment by extremist groups, which rely on public anger toward the U.S., more difficult. Obama did not use the word terrorist, in marked contrast to his predecessor, George W. Bush, who defined much of his foreign policy as a "war on terrorism." Obama noted a common enemy in extremism of all stripes. "None of us should tolerate these extremists," Obama said. "They have killed people of different faiths -- but more than any other, they have killed Muslims. Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations, and with Islam. The Holy Quran teaches that whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind." The president used his own biography -- the son of a Kenyan Muslim -- to identify with his audience. And he quoted from the Quran and recited Muslim contributions to the world and to America.

When he finished speaking, Obama got a standing ovation from his Muslim audience.

Almost as if it were a catalyst, Obama's Cairo speech was followed in the next six months by what soon became known as the "Arab Spring," defined as the wave of revolutionary demonstrations and protests occurring in the Arab world after Dec. 18, 2010, They included revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, civil war in Libya resulting in the fall of Moammar Gaddafi's regime, civil citizens' demonstrations in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Oman, minor protests in Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Western Sahara. Clashes at the borders of Israel in May 2011 were also inspired by the regional uprising.

"It's been one of the most tumultuous times since Islam was founded in the seventh century," said Robin Wright in her September 2011 book, *Rock the Casbah, Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World*. Wright is an acclaimed foreign correspondent and television commentator, author of six books on international affairs and has covered the Middle East for four decades reporting from 140 counties.

"But after a decade defined largely by the 9/11 attacks, the region is moving toward a different denouement," Wright wrote. "Two dynamic twists are changing the plotline, From mighty Egypt to Islamic Iran, tiny Tunisia to quirky Libya, new players are shattering the old order. Uprisings in the Middle East --- breathtaking in scope and speed, if unnerving in their uncertain futures --- represent the greatest wave of empowerment worldwide in the early 21st century."

"The transformation did not happen suddenly. Stirred by the young and stoked by new technology, rage against both autocrats and extremists have been steadily building within Muslim societies," Wright wrote "Today the Islamic world is in the midst of an extreme makeover politically. Its diverse societies are also moving to a different rhythm culturally. Together they are now inspiring an array of imaginative rebellions. Rage and rebellions are visible for all to see."

But Wright warned that al Qaeda is not dead and remains a threat, but the terrorists group is out of touch with its events and its audience. The political uprisings and the broader culture of change have demonstrated how much al Qaeda has miscalculated beginning with the 9/11 attacks that scared and alienated many Muslims too, Wright stated. "A decade later its strategic goal of seeing a Muslim state and recreating the old Caliphate --- seemed almost silly. They have killed many of their brethren, and achieved nothing," she added.

Wright stressed that terrorism cannot win a war in the end. It only scares people enough into complying with extremists or making concessions, Using the new social communication technology of Facebook and Twitter to organize their protests, young revolutionaries in the Middle East in 2011, most of whom were Muslim, were rejecting jihad and violent movements to achieve their goals. They wanted democracy and freedom. They no longer wanted to be subjects of autocrats, Wright wrote, they want to be citizens of their countries. There was no guarantee that they will succeed, and what they want to achieve would not happen quickly or without pain.

"Many of the new movements will face staggering obstacles… Wright continued. "Countries may face long periods of political uncertainty and economic stability along the way. Transformation is messy. In the Islamic world it is complicated by the price of and access to oil, sectarian and ethnic divisions, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran's controversial nuclear program, Pakistan's nuclear capability, border disputes and poverty."

On Sunday, Aug. 21, 2011, Libyan rebels liberated their capital city of Tripoli, ousting Moammar Gaddafi. The liberation proved to be a significant victory for Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East. Led by U.S. air support under the direction of Obama, NATO successfully stretched its mandate to protect Libyan civilians and provide direct support to opposition forces on the ground. According to news reports, the alliance suffered no casualties and the cost of U.S. operations was relatively minor --- estimated at a little more than $1.2 billion so far, less than the cost of a single week of the war in Afghanistan.

In the end, the United States, using Libyan guerrillas to call in targets for air strikes, flew more air missions than it wanted, mostly because its allies kept running out of planes, pilots and munitions, but the American role in the civil war was accomplished without putting any U.S. ground forces, as Obama had pledged.

The civil war in Libya began in late February 2011 and would take six months for the rebels to gather strength and take Tripoli. The rebels victory took longer than NATO had expected, but it was a short war by standards set in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Perhaps most important, the Libya campaign now looks like a success for one of the Obama administration's biggest foreign policy ideas: that an important goal of U.S. diplomacy, especially in a time of economic austerity, is to persuade others to help bear the burden of quelling the world's dangers," said Doyle McManus, columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 28, 2011.

McManus noted: "This is as close to an Obama doctrine as exists, even though an incautious administration official nearly discredited the concept at the start of the Libya campaign by calling it "leading from behind." The phrase is from Nelson Mandela, who often said he learned as a young goat herder that organizing a social movement means allowing others to take the lead.

"But the concept may have sounded wimpy to American ears after 70 years of defining ourselves as the leader of the free world. Besides, in the case of Libya, it wasn't entirely accurate. The United States wasn't exactly leading from behind; it was simply leading jointly with France, Britain and others. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton framed the action in those terms this month. "This is exactly the kind of world that I want to see," she said, "where it's not just the United States and everybody is standing on the sidelines while we bear the costs, while we bear the sacrifice," McManus wrote.

"When he faces the voters next year, Obama can make a credible argument that in foreign policy, he's done most of what he promised," said McManus. "He said he would wind down the

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and U.S. troops are slowly disengaging from both countries. He promised to maintain the war against Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups; he's done that. And he promised to renew U.S. alliances so we could draw on more help from others; the NATO campaign in Libya, with much of the burden borne by Europeans, is proof that the doctrine can work.

"Obama's foreign policy has fallen short of its goals on other counts, most notably in Israel and Iran, but on balance, it's not a bad record. Will that count for much in November 2012, when voters decide whether to give Obama another four years? Not a chance. Just ask George H.W. Bush."

But President Obama quietly prevailed in Libya when Gaddafi was captured and executed by Libyan rebels on Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011, in the dictator's hometown of Surt. Obama embraced the news, saying: "Today, we can definitively say that the Gaddafi regime has come to end."

"One of the world's longest-serving dictators is no more," said Obama, claiming no vindication for his approach to the U.S. intervention in Libya but hailing the success of the NATO effort that was intended to protect Libyans and oust Gaddafi from power.

"The dark shadow of tyranny has been lifted," Obama said from the White House. "And with this enormous promise, the Libyan people now have a great responsibility, he said, urging a smooth transition to what he hoped would be "fair, free elections."

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon stunned me. I was still in bed at 8:30 on that sunny, crystal clear blue Tuesday morning in Owensboro when my sister Shirley phoned, telling me what had just happened. Both towers of the World Trade Center had already been hit by jetliners, the first at 7:46, the second at 8:03. I wasn't due at the newspaper office until 10, so after I hung up the phone, I rushed to the living room, turned on the television and tuned to the Today program as Matt Lauer, Katie Couric and NBC Nightly News anchor Tom Brokaw were providing wall to wall coverage of the event that changed 21st century America forever.

I guess the whole experience of seeing it on TV was so surreal that it was just difficult to process something that had happened so quickly and was totally unexpected. It never touched me emotionally like the Cuban Missile Crisis or JFK and Bobby Kennedy's assassinations. On 9/11 I felt provoked, but was calm and steady as I saw the unfathomable events unfolding live and in video replays before me. It did not make me angry but I felt resolve and determination. I was rationally vengeful, ready to go into action and retaliate against whoever this new enemy was. It was like I was a young sailor, ready at battle stations, bracing himself and preparing mentally for the next attack, when and from wherever it would be coming.

The first tower had fallen just before I turned on the television set. I could not believe my eyes when I saw the second tower of the World Trade Center just dissolve and fall to the streets far below in a huge cloud of yellow-white ash, enveloping and shrouding an 11-block area of lower Manhattan like a vast tornado wall cloud touching down to earth. The video we saw on television later was horrific. As all daylight began to disappear and turn to black on the streets, people were running frantically down streets, covered in thick layers of white silt, trying desperately to escape the monstrous, tsunami-like cloud billowing faster behind them. You just knew that hundreds, possibly thousands of people in the buildings had died when the towers fell, and the first responders inside trying to rescue them had also perished. And there were haunting sights of people, mentally shaken and struggling to breath, likely inhaling toxic air as they tried

to get away from the debris and the acrid smelling smoke from above.

The most disturbing moment for me days after 9/11 was seeing video of people who had jumped to sure death from the towers rather than being burned alive. Hearing their bodies hit rooftops of buildings or walkway canopies below the two towers was horrifying.

As he was reporting, Lauer, a native of New York City, said what he was seeing was something so severe it was beyond belief. Just think how many people were trying to walk down the steps of the two towers when they collapsed, Lauer said. Brokaw was the first to say that what they were witnessing was a massive, carefully coordinated attack ---- a declaration of war against America by terrorists. Brokaw and Andrea Mitchell, the NBC State Department in Washington, were the first to report that Osama bin Laden was the only radical in the world who could plan and launch such attacks. They said there had been a report by Reuters in London three weeks before 9/11 that Bin Laden had warned the West that an unprecedented attack was coming. Brokaw described bin Laden as a "zealot of great dark passion" with a hatred of the United States.

Everyone on the Today Show anchor desk that morning ---- especially Couric, Brokaw and Mitchell --- reported what they were seeing calmly and professionally in low key tones. There was no confusion among them. They reported facts as they came in and tried to confirm everything they were told. If they made errors, they quickly corrected them. Cameras were recording the fires in the towers as they burned, and then the collapse of the buildings in the streets below. What viewers were seeing was ghoulishly self-explanatory.

At about 8:30 CDT, reporter Jim Miklaszewski in Washington, interrupted Lauer, Couric and Brokaw, stating that he had just felt some kind of explosion that shook the building and rattled windows at the Pentagon. A third jetliner used in the attacks had crashed into the Pentagon on the opposite side of the building from which Miklaszewski was reporting.

Then came the bulletin from the Associated Press that the fourth passenger jet had crashed about 10 a.m. about 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Although it was not clear the crash was related to the other attacks, it was soon confirmed that the plane was Flight 93, which had been heading to Washington but forced to crash by a heroic group of passengers.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 surprised and galvanized Americans everywhere, including in Owensboro. Many of us, even I, rallied around President Bush and were ready to strike back at the enemy whoever they might be. Many young men and women joined the armed forces in the months and years later to get payback for those men and women killed in New York, Arlington and Shanksville.

It seemed as though everyone bought cell phones after 9/11 and have been using them more since September 2001, always checking their loved ones everywhere in the United States. On a more personal level, families were drawn closer, many ending conversations with "I love you" just in case something tragic like the 9/11 attacks happened and they never got to speak to their wife, husband, son, daughter or friends again. The phone and e-mail conversations seemed to re-unite us in one common cause.

On Friday, Sept. 10, 2011, just I was preparing to attend my 50th high school class reunion, there was a news report that of a specific, credible but unconfirmed threat of a terroristic attack in America during the commemoration of 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

That same Friday night, a decade after the attacks, President Obama told NBC television news anchor Brian Williams that he was driving on Lakeshore Drive in Chicago when he heard a

plane had struck one of the towers of the World Trade Center, first thinking it was a small aircraft like a Cessna. When he learned that the plane was a jetliner, Obama went to his law office to see the news reports on television. Obama saw the WTC towers come down, the people falling from the buildings, and tiny particles of concrete dust covering everyone on the ground.

As he was 2-month-old daughter Sasha to sleep that night, the president said he thought of the many victims of the attack. “I think that for me, like most of us, our first reaction was --- and continues to be --- just heartbreak for the families involved. The other thing we all remembered was how America came together… Ten years later, I’d say America came through this thing in a way that was consistent with our character.”

We have made mistakes, Obama added, and “some things haven’t happened as quickly as they needed to, But overall we took the fight to al Qaeda. We preserved our values. We preserved our character.”

On Sept. 11, 2011, President Obama and former president George Bush each spoke at the new World Trade Center memorial during a solemn ceremony in New York City. The two men made appropriate remarks for the occasion. Obama quoted Psalm 46 about perseverance: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,” as the Scripture reads. “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah,” the passage from the Old Testament continues, reports AP. Referring to God being a refuge for all those affected by the attacks, Obama also read, “God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.”

And Bush read the letter that President Lincoln wrote to a mother in Boston who had lost five sons in the Civil War. “I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save, I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom,” Lincoln wrote in the one passage quoted by Bush.

In video shown on national news telecasts, Obama and Bush, joined by their wives, Michelle and Laura, then walked up to one of the pools, touched the names of those Sept. 11 victims etched into a bronze memorial amid the rush of its waterfalls.

In Shanksville in western Pa. the president walked along a marbled wall of names that honors the 40 people who fought the terrorists in Flight 93, crashing the plane, and preventing a second attack on the nation’s capital. Obama seemed to shake the hand of every person he could reach, reporters wrote that day. One man shouted to Obama, “Thanks for killing bin Laden.” Then back in Washington Obama put a wreath at a memorial for the 184 victims of the attack of the Pentagon.

Later that evening President Obama spoke of the pride of our nation at the Kennedy Center. The speech would be one of the most inspiring in the years of his presidency.

“These past 10 years have shown that America does not give in to fear, nor to suspicion or mistrust or sacrificed values,” Obama declared. “Our people still work in skyscrapers; our stadiums are filled and our parks full of children playing ball…. This land pulses with the optimism of those who set out for distant shores, and the courage of those who died for human freedom.”

“Ten years ago, America confronted one of our darkest nights. Mighty towers crumbled. Black smoke billowed up from the Pentagon. Airplane wreckage smoldered on a Pennsylvania field. Friends and neighbors, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters – they were taken from us with heartbreaking swiftness and cruelty. On September 12, 2001, we awoke to a world in which evil was closer at hand, and uncertainty clouded our future. In the decade since, much has changed for Americans. We've known war and recession, passionate debates and political divides. We can never get back the lives that were lost on that day, or the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars that followed.

“And yet today, it is worth remembering what has not changed. Our character as a nation has not changed. Our faith – in God and each other – that has not changed. Our belief in America, born of a timeless ideal that men and women should govern themselves; that all people are created equal, and deserve the same freedom to determine their own destiny – that belief, through tests and trials, has only been strengthened.

“Two million Americans have gone to war since 9/11. They have demonstrated that those who do us harm cannot hide from the reach of justice, anywhere in the world. America has been defended not by conscripts, but by citizens who choose to serve – young people who signed up straight out of high school; guardsmen and reservists; workers and businesspeople; immigrants and fourth-generation soldiers. They are men and women who left behind lives of comfort for two, three, four or five tours of duty. Too many will never come home. Those that do, carry dark memories from distant places, and the legacy of fallen friends. The sacrifices of these men and women, and of our military families, remind us that the wages of war are great; that while service to our nation is full of glory, war itself is never glorious. Our troops have been to lands unknown to many Americans a decade ago – to Kandahar and Kabul, to Mosul and Basra. But our strength is not measured in our ability to stay in these places; it comes from our commitment to leave those lands to free people and sovereign states, and our desire to move from a decade of war to a future of peace.

“Decades from now, Americans will visit the memorials to those who were lost on 9/11. They will run their fingers over the places where the names of those we loved are carved into marble and stone, and they may wonder at the lives they led. Standing before the white headstones in Arlington, and in peaceful cemeteries and small-town squares in every corner of our country, they will pay respects to those lost in Afghanistan and Iraq. They will see the names of the fallen on bridges and statues, at gardens and schools. And they will know that nothing can break the will of a truly United States of America. They will remember that we have overcome slavery and Civil War; we've overcome bread lines and fascism; recession and riots; Communism and, yes, terrorism. They will be reminded that we are not perfect, but our democracy is durable, and that democracy – reflecting, as it does, the imperfections of man – also gives us the opportunity to perfect our union. That is what we honor on days of national commemoration – those aspects of the American experience that are enduring, and the determination to move forward as one people. More than monuments, that will be the legacy of 9/11 – a legacy of firefighters who walked into fire and soldiers who signed up to serve; of workers who raised new towers, of citizens who faced down fear, most of all of children who realized the dreams of their parents. It will be said of us that we kept that faith; that we took a painful blow, and we emerged stronger than before.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." With a just God as our guide, let us honor those who have been lost, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals that define

our nation, and let us look to the future with hearts full of hope. May God bless the memory of those we lost, and may God bless the United States of America."

In the weeks leading up to the commemorative ceremonies on Sept. 11, 2011, I remembered what President Bush had said and did not do when American patriotism was at its peak in the months following the terrorist attacks on the United States. He did not ask Americans to share the sacrifice our troops would be making in taking our fight with al Qaeda to Afghanistan. *Support Our Troops* bumper stickers were just not enough. Many of us thought that some personal sacrifice by non-military families back here in the states would be a unifying ideal that would emerge from the rubble of the Twin Towers. It was there that so many first responders, firefighters and policemen had given their lives to save others.

Instead Bush blew off and scuttled any such idea, probably never even thinking about it. He said it was his hope they we "make no sacrifice whatsoever" beyond tolerating stepped up airline security check lines. While no one in Washington from either political party disagreed with Bush, he implored us to go to Disney World in Florida, or just go shopping in our local mall. Our Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen and their families could handle the problem. Let these poor folks in the military do all the fighting, he seemed to be saying. Let them make the sacrifice. They signed up for the job. They took the oath.

Frank Rich almost seemed to share my decade long viewpoint in an opinion piece in New York Magazine on Sept. 5, 2011. From Sept. 11, 2001, Rich said: "It was a given that any human losses at wartime would be borne by a largely out-of-sight, out-of-mind, underpaid volunteer army and that the expense would be run up on a magic credit card. Even as the rising insurgency in Iraq began to stress American resources to the max in 2003, Bush doubled down on new tax cuts and pushed through a wildly extravagant new Medicare entitlement for prescription drugs to shore up his reelection prospects with elderly voters." David Walker, then the comptroller general of the United States, called it 'the most reckless fiscal year in the history of the republic.' But we Americans took the tax cut checks of $200 or $400. Back then the same partisan voices who now complain about deficits in Washington said nothing as the debt of the United States rose into the multi-trilliums.

"By portraying Afghanistan and Iraq as utterly cost-free to a credulous public, the Bush administration injected the cancer into the American body politic that threatens it today," Rich wrote. "If we don't need new taxes to fight two wars, why do we need them for anything? But that's only half the story in this alternative chronicle of the decade's history," he continued. "Even as the middle class was promised a free ride, those at the top were awarded a free pass—not just with historically low tax rates that compounded America's rampant economic inequality but with lax supervision of their own fiscal misbehavior. It was only a month after 9/11 that the Enron scandal erupted, kicking off a larger narrative that would persist for the rest of the decade. The Houston energy company (the biggest contributor to Bush's political career) was a corporate Ponzi scheme that anticipated the antics at financial institutions, mortgage mills, and credit-rating agencies during the sub prime scam."

Rich declared that Bush had promised a big crackdown on corporate fraud, but once the Enron scandal was no longer big news, all those federal regulatory and law enforcement agencies were encouraged to stand down while the housing market bubble inflated beyond belief and banks manufactured toxic paper that sent the American financial system in a nose dive into a national economic disaster beyond Bin Laden wildest dreams after 9/11.

"It is that America—the country where rampaging greed usurped the common good in wartime, the country that crashed just as Bush fled the White House— that we live in today," Rich said. "It has little or no resemblance to the generous and heroic America we glimpsed on 9/11 and the days that followed. Our economy and our politics are broken. We remain in hock to jihadi oil producers as well as to China. Our longest war stretches into an infinite horizon. After watching huge expenditures of American blood and treasure install an Iran-allied "democracy" in a still-fratricidal Iraq, Americans have understandably resumed their holiday from history where it left off, turning their backs on the Arab Spring. Thanks to the killing of the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks and the scattering of Al Qaeda, at least no one can say, ten years later, that the terrorists won. But if there's anything certain about the new decade ahead, it's that sooner or later we will have to address the question of exactly who did."

Reading Rich's narrative was just another noxious reminder to me hat that George Bush had unwittingly put the United States through a decade of hell, and caused damage to the American economy that appears will take decades to repair. It was the nation's bad luck that Bush was elected president in 2000, and now we all have to pay for his ineptitude.

As Commander in Chief, and not having Republicans in Congress harassing and challenging ever phase of his decision making, Obama was free to conduct two wars as he saw best, and in the process, destroy Al Qaeda and gradually bring our military men and women home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the first three years of Obama's first term, I felt assured and confident with his leadership commanding our Navy, Air Force, Army and Marine men and women. As a former Navy petty officer, I thought Obama fulfilled his role as CIC in a much more forceful manner than presidents Bush or Clinton. Moreover, Obama had the strongest advisory support possible in fighting two wars from an incomparable team of Democrats and Republicans that included Chief Counter-Terrorism Advisor John Brennan, National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, Defense Secretary Bob Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, head of Central Command Gen. David Petraeus, head of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen and CIA Director Leon Panetta. No better group of civilian and military leaders could have been assembled than those seven patriotic, Republican and Democrat Americans.

With the advice of Gen. Petraeus and after a deliberate, long review and analysis in late 2009, Obama acted with precision in implementing a surge strategy for the war in Afghanistan, ordering 40,000 more American and NATO combat troops to the theater, bringing the total forces there to 100,000. Obama also ordered 50 Predator drone strikes on al Qaeda targets in the Middle East in the first year of his presidency, more that George Bush directed in his eight years in office.

I thought Obama showed physical courage and a killer instinct when it came to executing military orders. If all three men were snipers and I was the target in their cross hairs, I would fear Obama much more than Bush or Clinton, if I knew they were trying to kill me. I believe Bush would be angry and aggressive, rush the shot, and miss, Clinton would have second thoughts and not take the shot, but Obama would check his windage and elevation precisely, adjust his scope, then squeeze the trigger with no hesitation and make a cold-blooded kill. He first showed evidence of his icy, lethal side when he ordered the shots by Navy SEAL snipers who killed three Somalian pirates during the hostage situation at sea in April 2009.

What I liked most about Obama as commander-in-chief was the way he looked out for the

safety and welfare of our service men and women while they were in danger in the war zones. Like any good officer or top NCO, he had their back. Obama gave his military men and women what they needed to complete their missions, and did not forget about providing the best of care for them and their families when they came home with physical and mental wounds.

President Obama rightfully fired Gen. Stanley McChrystal, his top commander in Afghanistan in June 2010, for the condescending, insubordinate remarks McChrystal and his staff carelessly made and then approved in an article that appeared in Rolling Stone magazine. Obama quickly appointed Gen. Petraeus, the architect of the Iraq surge counterinsurgency plan, as McChrystal's successor.

In Afghanistan in August, 2010, Petraeus told news correspondents that he planned to show by December that 100,000 U.S. forces would be shutting down a violent insurgency and giving the Kabul government of President Karzai space to grow. He said he had already seen progress there, albeit slow, according to press reports.

President Obama set a goal of July 2011 of beginning the withdrawal of American forces in Afghanistan, if sufficient progress was made.

In 2010, as commander-in-chief, Obama realized that the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan was too expensive to continue, that the Afghans had to defend themselves, and he pledged to begin pulling all American troops out of Afghanistan by July 2014. U.S. forces had driven most Taliban fighters into the tribal region on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and joined Pak troops to fight them there. The U.S. continued drone attacks and Special Ops and CIA combat missions against the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in the tribal areas.

Concurrently, Gen. Petraeus' strategy continued to use American troops to force hardcore Taliban out of Afghan cities and villages that they had once controlled, while the U.S. State Department partnered with the U.S. military to build infrastructure and improve Afghanistan's agricultural economy. Unfortunately, slow progress was made to train Afghan soldiers and police so they could defend and provide security for their own citizens when American troops finally leave. There was little improvement made in eliminating corruption that was still rampant in President Karzai's government. In the end, it would be up to the Afghan government to restore peace and stability to their country.

Before the fear of another recession surfaced in June 2011, President Obama’s likeability rating remained high among Americans. While his overall job approval rating dropped by the end of April 2011, it improved at least in the first half of May after he kept the promise he made during a presidential debate on foreign policy in October 2008: “What I have said is we're going to encourage democracy in Pakistan, expand our non-military aid to Pakistan so that they have more of a stake in working with us, but insisting that they go after these militants. And if we have Osama bin Laden in our sights and the Pakistani government is unable or unwilling to take them out, then I think that we have to act, and we will take them out. We will kill bin Laden. We will crush al-Qaeda. That has to be our biggest national security priority.”

The President was true to the promise he gave as a candidate. Obama proved to be smarter and tougher than Bush, demonstrating his cold steel side as commander in chief, when on Sunday night, May 1, 2011, he announced on national television that Navy SEAL Team 6, an American special operations unit, had killed Osama bin Laden.

Acting on Obama’s order as CIC, the SEALs conducted a night raid on the Al Qaeda leader’s suburban compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a town about 35 air miles from Islamabad, the Pak capital. Obama made the decision to send a ground team assault instead of making a missile

strike on the compound where bin Laden was hiding. Obama wanted to be positive that bin Laden was killed and that his body brought to a U.S. aircraft carrier for identification.

When bin Laden launched his “holy war” against the United States in the 1990s, his hate-filled jihadist mission was to remove all American troops and civilians from Saudi Arabia and throughout the Middle East. He failed and then was dead, and al Qaeda organization was critically injured.

Obama proved to be extremely aggressive and efficient with the drone aircraft strikes, which operated like human snipers quietly sneaking up on their prey and firing from the sky. The covert operations Obama ordered and the CIA carried out were devastatingly effective.

In the summer of 2011, more of the terrorists organization’s top leaders was killed in a drone attacks. Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, who ranked third in al Qaeda’s after bin Laden’s death, was killed Aug. 22 by a missile strike in the village of Machi Khel in North Waziristan, part of the lawless tribal region of Pakistan.

Then on Friday, Sept. 30, 2011, Obama and his Central Intelligence Agency team made their biggest hit since bin Laden’s death when a missile fired from a U.S. drone aircraft in Yemen killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the radical American-born cleric who was the leading spokesman for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The United States had been hunting for al-Awlaki in Yemen for more than two years before a Predator drone tracked him down and killed him as he was traveling in a convoy. The terrorist leader was known as an eloquent preacher who spread English-language sermons on the Internet calling for "holy war" against the United States. Al-Awlaki's role was to inspire and, the CIA believed, even directly recruit militants to carry out attacks against the United States and countries in Europe. It was Yemen’s Defense Ministry that confirmed Mr. Awlaki’s death, and both Yemeni and American officials hailed the strike as a significant success in the campaign to weaken Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which American intelligence operatives considered to be the most dangerous Qaeda affiliate.

Born in New Mexico to Yemeni parents, Al-Awlaki, was believed to be key in turning al-Qaida's affiliate in Yemen into what American officials called the most significant and immediate threat to the United States.

“American officials say he inspired militants around the world and helped plan a number of terrorist plots, including the December 2009 attempt to blow up a jetliner bound for Detroit. American counterterrorism officials said his Internet lectures and sermons inspired would-be militants and led to more than a dozen terrorist investigations in the United States, Britain and Canada,” according to the Oct. 1, issue of the New York Times. “Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, who is accused of killing 13 people in a shooting rampage at Fort Hood in Texas in 2009, had exchanged e-mails with Mr. Awlaki before the shootings. Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani-American who tried to set off a car bomb in Times Square in May 2010, cited Mr. Awlaki as an inspiration.

The 40-year-old al-Awlaki had been a target placed on the CIA “kill or capture” list in April 2010. At least twice, air strikes were called in on locations in Yemen where al-Awlaki was suspected of being, but he wasn't harmed.

Also killed with Al-Awlaki in the Sept. 30 drone strike was Samir Khan, who published the al-Qaeda Web magazine, Inspire, which was used as a recruiting tool that spouted terrorist ideology to Westerners and included instructions on how to make bombs.

AQAP’s top bomb maker in Yemen, Ibrahim al-Asiri, remained at large along with Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden’s longtime deputy and second in command. Zawahiri was believed to be

somewhere in the Middle East in October 2011. He was at the top of the FBI"s Most Wanted List.

By Oct. 7, 2011, American military forces had been in Afghanistan for 10 years. It had been the longest war in U.S. history, taken the lives of nearly 1,800 U.S. troops, wounded and maimed thousands of others, and had cost $557 billion, at a rate of $9 billion a month, according to the Congressional Research Service. From 12,000 to 15,000 Afghan civilians had been killed.

The once vanquished Taliban had been pushed out of their stomping grounds in the south and east parts of Afghanistan, and their birthplace Kandahar. The White House was desperately trying to show progress in Afghanistan so the withdrawal could begin in 2014 as the president had pledged. The main Taliban incursions were coming from across the border in Pakistan.

President Obama had walked a diplomacy tight rope in 2011, trying to balance the encouraging progress of the Arab Spring and nurturing the spread of democracy into more Middle East countries while supporting a new movement toward a peaceful solution of security differences between the governments of Israelis and the Palestinians.

Many Jewish Americans and Republican and Tea Party conservatives in Congress thought Obama faltered in a statement he made about the ongoing Israel-Palestinian crisis in a major speech at the State Department on May 19, 2011. In that speech Obama made official the long-held but rarely stated U.S. support for a future Palestinian state based on borders that existed before the 1967 Middle East war. In the past, the United States had unofficially supported a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict based on the borders in place prior to the war 44 years ago in which Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula.

Obama became the first president to formally endorse the policy, but he also acknowledged the need for modifications through the negotiating process due to conditions on the ground. Israel's government in 2011 objected to Obama's controversial statement, but as I saw it, maybe it was a tactical thrust by Obama to jump-start the stalled peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians.

"The United States believes that negotiations should result in two states, with permanent Palestinian borders with Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and permanent Israeli borders with Palestine," Obama said in the concluding section of his 45-minute address that provided an overview of the new political and social change sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa. "We believe the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states," Obama declared.

In an article reported by Mark Landler and Steven Lee Myers, the *New York Times* stated that the U.S. agreed with the Palestinian negotiating stance on border issues in a peace process that had halted again by disputes over Israel settlements in the West Bank and the role of Hamas -- a terrorist group in the eyes of the United States and Israel -- in the Palestinian leadership.

At the same time, Obama reiterated unwavering U.S. support for Israel's security, and he endorsed major negotiating positions of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, including an incremental handover of security responsibilities by Israel when conditions on the ground allow it. Obama declared the U.S. commitment to Israel's security "unshakable," and said "every state has the right to self-defense, and Israel must be able to defend itself -- by itself -- against any threat."

Obama's statement came at a time when the euphoria of popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt had given way to violent crackdowns in Bahrain and Syria, a civil war in Libya and

political stalemate in Yemen, the Times reported. “The president offered a blunt critique of Arab governments and, without promising any changes in policy to confront repressive ones more aggressively, sought to assure protesters that they were squarely aligned with democratic American values in a region where the strategic interests of the United States have routinely trumped its values.”

Those issues were delicate enough, but the diplomatic argument with Israel highlighted the “acute sensitivities” that Obama faced in trying to link the changes in the Middle East with the conflict at the region’s heart, according to Landler and Myers’s article. “At a time when the people of the Middle East and North Africa are casting off the burdens of the past, the drive for a lasting peace that ends the conflict and resolves all claims is more urgent than ever,” the reporters wrote.

Obama said it was necessary for Israel and the Palestinians to swap territory on either side of that border to account for large Jewish settlements that have taken root in the West Bank since 1967. But that shifted the United States a step closer to the position of the Palestinians, and was viewed as vital to them because it means the Americans implicitly would back their view that “new Israeli settlement construction will have to be reversed, or compensated for, in talks over the borders for a new Palestinian state.”

Some foreign policy analysts saw Obama’s speech as an attempt to rekindle the flame of diplomacy and coax the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, and to head off the Palestine Leadership Organization’s campaign to seek international recognition of a Palestinian state at the United Nations General Assembly in September, 2011.

Obama spoke with frustration that peacemaking efforts so far had failed, the Times article stated.. “How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist?” Obama said, referring to Hamas, which the United States has designated as a terrorist organization. “In the weeks and months to come, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question.”

“The international community is tired of an endless process that never produces an outcome,” Obama said to an audience that included George J. Mitchell, who was his special envoy to the Middle East until resigning in May 2011. “Beyond the stalled peace process, Mr. Obama celebrated ‘a moment of opportunity’ after six months of political upheaval that has at times left the administration scrambling to keep up.”

In the speech, Obama warned Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad that he would face increasing isolation if he did not respond to demands for a transition to democracy. “President Assad now has a choice,” Obama said. “He can lead that transition, or get out of the way.” Obama was no less blunt in the case of Bahrain, a close ally that has brutally cracked down on protests there.

“While the 1967 borders have long been viewed as the foundation for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Mr. Obama’s formula of land swaps to compensate for disputed territory created a new benchmark for a diplomatic solution,” the *New York Times* article noted. “Mr. Obama’s statement represented a subtle, but significant shift, in American policy. And it thrust him back into the region’s most nettlesome dispute at a time when conditions would seem to make reaching a deal especially difficult.”

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu learned about Obama’s prepared remarks, he immediately objected to the president’s statement in an angry phone conversation with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, asking that Obama’s reference to 1967 borders be cut from the

speech, calling those lines “indefensible.” Obama did not alter anything about the borders in the speech.

“Peace based on illusions will crash eventually on the rocks of Middle East reality," an unsmiling Netanyahu said as the president listened intently beside him in the Oval Office after they met for talks. Netanyahu insisted that Israel was willing to make compromises for peace, but made clear he had major differences with Washington over how to advance the long-stalled peace process. Netanyahu said Israel would never withdraw to its 1967 borders, or agree to such big concessions of occupied land. That part of the solution which Obama proposed could not be negotiated, Netanyahu made abundantly clear, according to news reports.

Obama, meanwhile, was calm despite Netanyahu’s anger. “Obviously, there are some differences between us in the precise formulas and language, and that’s going to happen between friends,” Obama said. But, he added, “I think that it is possible for us to resolve what has obviously been a wrenching issue for decades now.”

After the meeting, Obama told reporters he had reiterated to Netanyahu that his goal was to negotiate a peaceful settlement which achieves a secure Israeli state, living side by side in peace and security with a contiguous, functioning and effective Palestinian state. Obama firmly embraced a long-sought goal by the Palestinians: that the state they seek in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip should largely be drawn along lines that existed before the 1967 war in which Israel captured those territories and East Jerusalem.

On Sept. 20, 2011, during the week when Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas spoke before the UN General Assembly, seeking statehood for Palestine, a frustrated Obama also addressed the General Assembly, declaring that “there are no shortcuts” to peace. And he implored Israelis and Palestinians to resume direct talks. His influence limited and his hopes for a peace deal long stymied, Obama didn’t directly call on the Palestinians to drop their bid for recognition from the U.N. Security Council, but the U.S. threat to veto any such U.N. action loomed unmistakably.

“Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations,” Obama told delegates. “If it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now.”

At the heart of the fight, Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pursued support from other leaders but not each other, the New York Times reported. “Various mediators searched for consensus for a diplomatic solution to preclude the showdown and revive peace talks.”

Netanyahu thanked Obama for defending Israel, which fears that a Palestinian state drawn by the U.N. would include borders leaving the Jewish state vulnerable to attack. “The United States is Israel’s staunchest defender in demanding that direct talks are the only means to Palestinian statehood, a position that leaves Obama arguing against fast world endorsement of a Palestinian homeland he has repeatedly said he supports.”

Netanyahu told Obama after his speech that his opposition to United Nations recognition of Palestinian statehood was "a badge of honor."

"I want to thank you Mr. President for standing with Israel and supporting peace," Netanyahu told Obama before their private meeting at the United Nations. "We both agree that Palestinians and Israelis should sit down and negotiate. ... This is the only way to get a stable and durable peace."

For his part, Obama told Netanyahu that "the bonds between the U.S. and Israel are

unbreakable. Peace cannot be imposed on the parties. It's going to have to be negotiated. ... The ultimate goal of all of us is two states side-by-side living in peace."

On the night of Sept. 25, 2011, as I watched Charlie Rose interview Netanyahu on *PBS,* I concluded there was only a slim chance that Abbas could ever secure a peace settlement with Netanyahu because the Israeli prime minister would never make any concessions to the Palestinians.

Though he said he was ready to negotiate "now with no preconditions," Betanyahu came across to me as overbearing, arrogant and condescending in his references to the Palestinian and most Arab leaders. The Palestinians "never lose an opportunity to lose an opportunity," Netanyahu said of the PLO's reluctance to talk about peace. The Israeli prime minister was a militant hardline conservative, the kind of man who will negotiate only if he gets exactly what he wants while giving little in return. I thought Obama had really no chance of playing a significant role in any potential peace talks, because the forceful Netanyha was unyielding and demanding, a man who would treat Obama with as much disrespect as the Republicans in the Senate and House of Representatives had in the summer of 2011.

On Monday, Oct. 3, 2011, President Obama called himself an "underdog" as the faltering economy continued to drag down his presidency and seriously impair his chances of winning again in 2012.

"Absolutely," he said in response to a question from *ABC News'* George Stephanopoulos about whether the odds were against him come November 2012, given the state of the economy at that time. "I'm used to being the underdog," Obama said. "But at the end of the day people are going to ask -- who's got a vision?"

Obama conceded, the American people are not better off than they were four years ago. "The unemployment rate is way too high," he said of the 9.1 percent jobless rate, the highest in more than half a century. He said his proposed American Jobs Act will put construction workers, teachers and veterans to work and give "more consumers more confidence."

Foreign affairs, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and social issues like gay marriage will all be issues to be debated when Obama campaigns in 2012, but the economy and how to find for the 15 million unemployed in the United States will be the biggest.

The jobless rate was not expected to improve in October 2011, and by the fall election in 2012 could be at its highest level since 1940.

Republicans, he said, stood in the way of working with him time and again to fix the economy. "At every step of way, I have tried to get the Republican Party to work with me on the biggest crisis of our lifetime. And each time we've gotten 'No,'" he said.

With his approval rating hovering around 40 percent, Obama called the 2012 race a "contest of values and vision" and a referendum on whether Americans believed the government should invest now in long-term improvements in education and infrastructure.

As I finished hearing what President Obama said in the Oct. 3, 2011, interview with Stephanopoulos, I remembered that in the week following the killing of bin Laden, as many Americans were celebrating the demise of the master planner of the 9/11 attacks on the United States in 2001, Obama's approval rating as president rose to 57 percent in one poll and 60 percent in another. That was Obama's finest hour. I thought his gutsy, successful order to kill bin Laden was Obama's achievement as president. He did what Presidents Clinton and George W.

Bush could not, and he would always be remembered by historians for accomplishing that mission.

Maybe the deteriorating state of the national economy and the recalcitrance of Congressional Republicans will be too much and pull him down to defeat after all, I mused. Or maybe the Republicans will not find a candidate strong enough to defeat Obama. He was the best campaigner in politics in those days.

On Oct. 3, 2011, thirteen months before the 2012 presidential election as I wrote this, I thought Obama had been a good president in the first three years of his administration. He had governed under the most intense political conditions that he could have possibly inherited from a previous presidential administration. He had been successful as a leader, passing a stimulus plan that saved the American economy and Wall Street from falling into a depression in 2009, bailing out the "Too Big to Fail" banks, rescuing the major auto companies from bankruptcy and passing into law a monumental, cost saving health-care reform bill.

And also in those three years, as the nation's chief executive, Obama assisted and stood up for the people whose fishing businesses and tourism jobs were severely damaged/or lost by the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. He led the American effort to help victims of the Haiti earthquake. And he was the tip of the spear and on the scene in providing federal government aid to those Americans who had suffered and died in the unprecedented number of tornadoes, devastating floods, wild fires in the West and an earthquake in the Northeast in 2011.

He would have to persuade American Democrats and Independents that he had done a good job, and that he was a smarter, stronger leader than any of the candidates the Republicans nominated. In the final analysis, I think he knew there was no way he could persuade the Republicans in Congress to pass his jobs bill, and forsake the big corporations, Wall Street investors and health insurance companies that they represent in Congress. He would have to convince voters that all the Republicans wanted to do was defeat him, return their party of reactionary conservatives and tea party extremists to power, and repeal the healthcare reform bill and all the Wall Street regulations that he had signed into law.

Obama would have to campaign against a Do-Nothing Republican Congress. It would be up to the American voters to decide. Would they pick Obama or the Republicans? Would Obama return for four more years, or go home to Illinois? Fighting 9 percent unemployment (Nov. 5, 2011) was the tallest of orders. But I thought he had the courage and conviction to persuade the Democrats and Independents to give him a second term. Obama keeping his promise to kill Bin Laden and the other top al Qaeda leaders was way beyond good enough to get my vote.

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Epilogue

When I finished this manuscript, I sat back from my keyboard, figuratively feeling bruised and bloodied like I was the only man left on this battlefield that has been my life. But I expect that is the way we all feel as we edge closer to the finish line of our existence. Life throws all the punches and we have to learn to roll with them. I have tried to weather the many storms of my life, and surprisingly realized that I have survived with my sanity intact.

My most important work is finished now. In the previous pages are the stories of my adventures through seven decades. I began writing about them on Aug. 31, 2008, but completed about 75 percent of the work after I retired from the *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer* in April 2009. That is when I finally had the time to write on a daily basis. What I have chronicled here is also an important record of how my family and I lived through the good and bad times of our lives. These chapters bear my signature straightforward style of writing. I have tried to speak with total frankness, honesty, sincerity, clarity and emotion. This book is my journalistic and personal legacy. Maybe the narrative of these pages will let me live on in the memory of others.

Writing this book was an arduous, sometimes numbing task, as I summoned back to the surface of my consciousness the tragic, life changing events that I had stowed for years in faraway corners of my mind. Recalling and writing about my painful past was never cathartic, just the opposite. At times, it was a very gut wrenching process, as I thought again about the tragedies of my life once again, so many years after they occurred. Sometimes I struggled to keep my composure when I thought of those times; sometimes I cried. Often this work became so profoundly overwhelming emotionally that I had to stop writing for several weeks, just to compose myself, raise my spirit, refresh and recover before I could begin again.

But then there was such joy in remembering the good times. What a wonderful life I have had. Sometimes it makes me sad to recall those gloriously happy memories that I now treasure so much. I learned while writing that we must strive to recognize and savor the little joyous, pleasurable moments of life while we are experiencing them --- so we will always remember them when hard times come knocking again.

As I grow older, I find it threatening to visualize with dread that maybe the best of those times may be all over for me. But I have been part of a loving, caring and courageous family; heard John Kennedy and Martin Luther King speak; saw Mickey Mantle hit a homer and Secretariat win the Kentucky Derby; watched a man walk on the moon; lived to see an African American elected president of the United States; and fell in love with the woman of my dreams. How could I possibly have done any better than that?

As I took an overview of my life, it was an educational experience. In writing this, I found answers to a lot of questions I had about myself before I began this project. I know now why I was so inquisitive as a child. Why I loved reading the newspaper at such a young age. Why I was running off alone exploring something that drew my interest. Why I loved hearing my parents, grandparents, my uncles and aunt and my much older cousins talk about the hard times that they experienced living through the Great Depression and in fighting World War II. Why after I conquered my initial fears, I was always raising my hand in class at school to ask a question or

show my knowledge in giving the answer. Why I have always been so quietly, but intensely competitive. Why I always wanted to learn something new every day. Why, despite the many hard times I have experienced, I have enjoyed my life so much.

It has always been thrilling for me to make the extra effort, investigate and write about what I saw and heard in my life. That excitement has never grown old or dull for me. My love for reading, learning and writing remains and has always kept me going. I hope I never lose my great curiosity or my desire and ability to be as good of a storyteller that I can be. I was given my talent as a writer to tell true stories that I felt needed to be told, stories so compelling and poignant that the reader either learns something new or is moved by the experience. A novel, movie screenplay or a book of nonfiction are only as good as the quality of the story the writer tells. A well told story is everything to me.

What first amazed me when I began writing this book was looking back and realizing how quickly the last 50 years have passed. Time just gets away from us. I was so busy fighting life's skirmishes one day at a time as the years sped by. My life did not turn out like I had planned and hoped, but I guess no one's does. I have many regrets, a few of which I have already voiced here. I have not married yet but I still have hope. I regret not being able to have children and grandkids. I lost the girl friend I loved the most. All these disappointments gave me pause to reflect. In the last year, I have had enough down-time to look back and think about how and why events happened in my life as they did. I then asked myself how and why I have endured and prevailed. What was the meaning of my life? Does everything in our lives really happen for a reason? Why have I always let my mind overrule my heart? Where do I go from here? What do I do with the time that I have left in this life? I did not find *all* the answers, just a few.

I immersed myself in long hours of soul searching and self examination as I wrote this book. I thought about all the turning points in my life and the personal choices and decisions I made. In my contemplations, I also thought: If only at the age 30 I had possessed the wisdom and mental clarity that I have now in my 60s, and could combine both of them with the passion and energy I had in my 20s. Would my life have been different? In retrospect, what if I had stayed in the Navy, become an officer and gone into naval intelligence as I thought in second guessing my career choices in the 1990s? Or should I have become an accountant, lawyer or a politician? Would I have been more successful financially? But I found all three of those occupations boring, and realized that I took the path of life that I believe I was destined to follow. When I was a newspaper reporter, it was great having something new to write about each day. It was a thrill getting up each morning, fired up and ready to go. After I felt I had mastered writing about sports, I moved on to subjects more challenging. Like government, crime and politics. I have loved being a journalist and historian. In one way, being both of them and enjoying my work, has kept me alive through the worst of times. I wanted to tell my story here. As I finished chapter after chapter, I knew in my heart I was destined to record what I have seen and done over all of these years.

I have always thought of myself as a solitary man, an observant outsider, even perhaps a loner. So it turned out that being a journalist and historian were the perfect vocations for me to pursue. He who travels on his own, travels fastest, I have believed. I have used the solitude of being alone to think and create. For me, writing and reporting have the drama and dash that few other professions have. Many public figures, especially politicians, prefer to steer clear of journalists. They are wary, cautious, and some times even fearful, of what a journalist will write about them. I like it that way. Reporters are not in their profession to make friends. Reporters are

the sentinels of truth, and the public's watchdog. What made me love being a journalist, especially in my younger years, was my unquenchable thirst for the truth, as well as the heart-pumping race against time that is required, and the satisfaction of seeing my words come out in the next day's paper just as I wrote them. And the excitement of that sudden rush of adrenaline and the "high" we reporters feel running through our veins when we sometimes go into dangerous situation, risk being hurt, and come out alive and unscathed.

In my senior year at Daviess County High School in Owensboro, I was inspired by the words of President John Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural address. In my own way, I have tried to heed the president's call to action as he concluded his historic speech on that bright, frigid January day with the following words:

"..In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it, and the glow from that fire can truly light the world. And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country. Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

JFK's inspiring words have stayed with me throughout my life, and I have always taken them very seriously. In the 1960s, I embarked on my life's odyssey with youthful enthusiasm and a religious fervor, dedicated to finding a career in public service. I fell far short of some of my goals. I did not achieve my dream of being a speech writer or a press secretary in the White House. And, when I was still very young in the 1970s, I learned that I was too honest and forthright in character to be a politician. I witnessed and was appalled by too much of the petty cronyism, back-stabbing and corruptive stench of politics in Frankfort, and was unwilling to sell out and play small men’s games, compromising my moral principles. I no longer envisioned of some day running for the U.S. Senate, a fantasy of my youth that I sincerely, secretly coveted and longed for in the late 1960s when Bobby Kennedy was campaigning for the presidential nomination. I did what I thought was the next best thing. I decided I could be more useful as a journalist, in reporting, writing and recording the events of the history of my county, state and nation. I tried to use the full extent of my gifts of intelligence and creativity, and worked hard each day to carry out what became my mission in life. In the end, I just drew the simplistic conclusion that I lived my life as best I could with the time I was given, and decided looking back was no good for me, I just kept moving forward.

Even though I am "retired" (a word still hard for me to grasp), I still wake up each morning eager to learn what happened overnight. I miss the action of the news gathering business. I am not a recluse or someone who craves privacy. I love personal face to face conversations with all my friends and former colleagues. I live, work, take long walks and, sometimes watch sunsets, especially in the fall. I try to read and write each day. Maybe I will teach a history research at a local college, or travel more in the United States or go to London, Paris and Rome for the first time. As I approach old age, I perform mental gymnastics to keep my brain alert to avoid becoming senile in my final years, which is my greatest fear at this point in my life. I hope I can

live to be 100 so I can witness many more history-making events and see what other wonderful changes we will experience as Americans.

During 1976, at the lowest point of my first and very worst episode of clinical depression, I did not believe that I would ever be happy again or could live to the age of 40, feeling like I did. I was in such a woeful state of mind that I wrote my own obituary, stating that I hoped I had made a positive and lasting impression on my peers. So for those who have known me, here with a few additions written in more recent years, is what I hope is said of me when I'm gone:

I hope the writer says that, as a man, journalist and historian, Glenn wanted to be remembered for his relentless search for a good story, his unquestionable integrity and sense of fair play, his unflagging dedication to accuracy. He had a reverence for the written word. That he valued hard work, truth and honesty among men. He was a plain, soft spoken man, but passionate in his pursuit of excellence, who thought of himself as a gentle, free spirited person, as scholarly but yet a romantic. He loved history, music, poetry, the company of his family, the camaraderie of his team-mates, colleagues and friends, and all little and lovable puppies and kittens. That he was also an easy, soft touch for beautiful women and little children. That he was never the same person after he made it through the worst three years of his mental illness, Early in life, he had been an idealist and very optimistic; later, he became a pragmatist and, on his worst days, a pessimist. At times when he was mentally and physically exhausted, he still tried to be at the top of his game, striving to be a man who always rose to the occasion when he was needed most, a man who responded quickly to the pressure of a crisis and reveled in the intensity of the moment. He set goals, strived to always be prepared and to expect the unexpected. He became a cautious planner who anticipated trouble and danger in his life, and always tried to protect his flanks. He was complex and often mystifying, a man of many moods who felt very deeply about life's issues. He could be smiling, jubilant and loquacious most of the time, but often cold and impersonal, rigid and intimidating when he was sad and depressed. Yet to those who knew him best, he was kind, considerate and loving. To a fault perhaps, he was too self-critical, too analytical and too reflective. Good at one-liners, he had a wry, self deprecating sense of humor, which he should have used more.

He also had learned three of the most important lessons of life: that there are things we don’t want to happen, but have to accept; that there are people we cannot do without but have to let go; and that there are crises in life that cannot be resolved, only endured. He would also want to be remembered by his family and friends that, as a human being, that Glenn was not infallible. He had several character flaws and made many mistakes. After his first bouts with mental depression, and as he got older, he became more defensive. He could be outspoken, brusque and abrasive to those people he did not trust or respect, but was extraordinarily compassionate and empathetic to those he did. He was hard-nosed, tough-skinned and restless, always searching for three-dimensional answers when only faith would satisfy.

He would want people who read this to know about the crises and challenges he faced and withstood in his life. In his lowest moments of brooding, he thought that he must have done something really bad in his life to have suffered such heartbreak, frustration and failure. But, no matter how heavy his burden was to bear, he felt it was somehow his karma to suffer so many disappointments. He was paying for his sins and shortcomings, like the Bible says, working out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He took the pain, never complained or squirmed in self-pity. He accepted the bad luck as his fate and tried to make the best of the bad times that

came his way.

Struggle, survival, victory and defeat: That's what his life was to him. He suffered quietly through personal losses, but was always resilient, battling back when he wanted to quit. He took a lot of dangerous risks in his public and private life, many more than his family ever knew, and he tried to live every day of life to the fullest. He felt it was better to burn out than fade away. He was a patriot who loved his family, friends and country. And he tried to make the world a little better place for his having been here. He would have wanted to reach his final hour, knowing with confidence that he had achieved what is said in 2nd Timothy: that he had fought the good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith.

But most of all, he would have wanted to be remembered as the smiling, happy, shy but curious little kid from Maceo who grew up to be a good writer and historian, and a man of elegance and integrity. Leaving that memory in the minds of his family and friends, he could slip away peacefully while in his dreams, knowing that he had always given maximum effort, done his sacred duty and completed this life honorably. He could cast off on his voyage to the afterlife, sailing far toward the horizon with fair winds and following seas, his missions in life accomplished and his work well done.