

Plainsman Press ends print publication after 62 years

By Kati Moody
2010-2012

After 62 years of informing, entertaining and making connections with readers across South Plains College and the Levelland community, the Plainsman Press is printing its final edition.

The difficult decision to stop printing a physical copy of the Plainsman Press was made by Charles Ehrenfeld, chairperson of the Communications Department

and advisor for the campus newspaper, when there simply weren't enough students enrolled in the class to continue producing a print publication.

"Long story short, we're simply running out of students to do it," Ehrenfeld explained. "Students didn't sign up for the class."

Ehrenfeld said the situation was the result of a "perfect storm." He said a combination of the political environment during

President Donald Trump's administration, combined with a general lack of interest in communications from incoming students contributed to the decline in enrollment.

"A president who says the media is the enemy, and any news stories he didn't agree with he derided as fake news, combined with large newspapers across the country having layoffs or stopping their presses altogether; and parents likely

discouraging students from going into that field because they think it's a dying field," Ehrenfeld said.

Along with these obstacles, Ehrenfeld said the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board did not help the situation by doing away with Publications I, II, III and IV, which used to be required one-hour courses for all communications majors.

"Though they were one-hour credits, it helped to ensure continuity, that I would

have students for four semesters," Ehrenfeld said. "But, they did away with those classes. If it's not listed in the common course manual, there's no funding for the state."

In response to this decision, college staff created a new vehicle for students to put out the Plainsman Press through the News Reporting class, which is also required for all communications majors. Unfortunately, this class is neither offered four

consecutive semesters nor did it garner the enrollment as Publications I, II, III and IV had.

Upon informing South Plains College President Dr. Robin Satterwhite of the decision, Dr. Satterwhite requested Ehrenfeld put out one last edition. Ehrenfeld said since the publication has always been student-led, it was only right for the last edition to be as well.

Thus, he reached out to previous students through social media to solicit stories and help in producing the final edition.

"It was bittersweet," Ehrenfeld said. "They were very sad to hear that it was ending because they had such a love for the print edition and great memories of what it meant to them and their life. They were sad about that... and at the same time, happy that I asked them and that they would have one more chance to talk about it what it meant to them and their lives."

The final edition was originally supposed to be put together in the spring 2020 semester, but then Covid-19 happened, forcing the previous students to hold off their efforts until an unforeseen time in the future.

Ehrenfeld said he was then faced with the decision to forget the last edition altogether and simply move on, or to see what the students wanted to do. He felt it only right to find out what interest was there, only to find out the interest persisted.

"Even after all that, they were still interested in doing it," Ehrenfeld said.

Ehrenfeld said it was one of the most difficult decisions he had to make in choosing to discontinue the print product, but that it was the only decision he could make with what he had at the time.

"Up to that point, I had put 16 years of my life into that publication," Ehrenfeld said. "Many nights of sacrificed sleep and personal time at home to put out that publication. We were up here in bad weather, when the college was shutting down for snow days, putting out a newspaper."

Ehrenfeld said the Plainsman Press will live on, but in a different format—online. The Plainsman Press has maintained an online presence for more than 10 years, but now it will be provided exclusively online.

Ehrenfeld has been the advisor for the Plainsman Press for 18 years, and said through those years, the technology changes that he has seen have been immense, beginning with the introduction of color on the front and back pages in 2004 and now to a fully online publication.

"We started with something similar to wax and paste, then started taking it to a printer in Lubbock that shot the pages," Ehrenfeld said. "Then, we started emailing the files to the press."

The changes in technology were apparent prior to Ehrenfeld's reign, as John Sparks, a former Plainsman Press advisor, recalls a time when the news room only provided four electric type writers and two cameras (only one of which worked.)

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Charlie's name is synonymous with Plainsman Press



Charles "Charlie" Ehrenfeld has overseen the publication of about 200 editions of the Plainsman Press and has contributed to the education of hundreds of South Plains College students.
Joshua Harris

By Ellysa Harris
2009-2011

For the past decade-and-a-half, the name Charles "Charlie" Ehrenfeld has been synonymous with the Plainsman Press.

Since taking the helm of the publication as its advisor in 2003, Ehrenfeld has overseen the publication of about 200 editions of the South Plains College publication and has contributed to the education of hundreds of students.

Now, in 2021, he's decided the publication of this edition of the Plainsman Press will be his last and will mark his final semester as a full-time employee of SPC.

Upon deciding to make this the final printed edition, Ehrenfeld called on former students to share memories of their time on the Plainsman Press staff. His call yielded contributions from students whose memories are intertwined with each other and with Ehrenfeld, himself. Their accounts highlight his impact as more than a teacher.

"Charlie goes the extra mile for you," said Jordan Irvine, a former Plainsman Press staff member who later returned to SPC to take the position of sports information coordinator for the college.

Irvine's experience at SPC

culminated from a whim. At the time, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life and he didn't know much about the college. He knew it only as a feeder school. Looking back, he said, it "worked out for the best."

Meeting Charlie marked a turning point.

Irvine describes writing as one of the things he's always excelled at. That's what drew him to the newsroom and to Charlie, who taught him how to combine his talent with his passion – sports – and make a career out of it.

Similarly, that's what Ehrenfeld did setting the track for his career.

He started writing sports for his high school paper in Parsippany Hills, New Jersey and enjoyed it. He chose to pursue that interest at the University of Arkansas (partially motivated by warmer temperatures) where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism. He returned briefly to New Jersey after graduation and sent out his resume hoping to net a job in the south closer to where he'd gone to college.

A small publication in Denver City answered his call so he picked up his life and moved 1,300 miles Texas. He spent a few years there covering a variety of beats gaining experience in virtually every aspect of

creating a publication.

After two years, he commuted to Lubbock covering sports for the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal. He covered athletes at every level from little league, high school, college to Olympic sports.

His next career move landed him back in Denver City with the same publication he'd left a few years prior. He was married by then and he and his wife, Cathy, were still drawn to opportunities in Lubbock.

By 1991, he'd racked a decade in journalism and came to South Plains College in Levelland for the position Irvine holds today.

Toward the end of the decade, he'd earned a Master's Degree from Texas Tech and returned to being a reporter while balancing occasional teaching opportunities at his alma mater. By the early 2000s, he was back at the Lubbock AJ as a medical writer where he earned accolades, including seven state awards for his work reporting on cancer and stem cell research.

In 2003, he received the opportunity to teach full-time – and he took it.

"It's the most rewarding thing I've done in my life," Ehrenfeld said as he sat in his corner office in the SPC Communications building looking over stories written for this publication.

He enjoyed sharing his experiences of being out in the field with young minds eager for a career in which they'd do the same. Many of his students followed journalism career paths, at least briefly. Some of his students have gone into the world as photographers, journalists, public relations personnel, educators, athletes and business owners. Others have followed their passions elsewhere.

Whatever their chosen path, he's supportive, according to Irvine.

"He vouches for you when you're looking for jobs," said Irvine. "He's someone you can always look back to and ask questions. He's a resource and a friend."

That's what he is for most of his former students, including Skyler Hernandez. After graduating from SPC in 2015, Hernandez moved on to do some photography and to pursue a teaching degree.

She recalled her time sitting in Ehrenfeld's classroom at SPC and said that's the type of educator she aims to be.

"He made a really big impact on my life – more than I think he knows," Hernandez said.

She's always sought Ehrenfeld's advice when faced with a problem or with life's stresses. A traditional

degree track at SPC is the length of four semesters or two years. For that relatively short time, Ehrenfeld is more than a professor or an advisor.

"He was just like a dad to me," said Hernandez, who was one of his former student assistants.

That's a sentiment echoed by many more of his former students, including Joshua Harris.

"He's always there," Harris said, noting Ehrenfeld's support during some of life's low points and encouragement during the many positives. Following his graduation, Ehrenfeld has been a constant presence.

Like Irvine, Harris said Ehrenfeld's lessons go beyond the classroom through every stage of life.

Ehrenfeld has helped celebrate birthdays and he was there when Harris got married (to another of Ehrenfeld's former students).

Harris thinks back on his SPC experience fondly and said he's sad future students won't get the chance to know Ehrenfeld the way he does.

"It's good for him because he's had a great career and he's influenced so many people, but it's not for future students that'll never get the opportunity to be influenced by him," Harris said.

End of printed edition marks bittersweet milestone

By Charles Ehrenfeld
Advisor, 2003-2021

So suffice it to say, I never thought this day would come ... at least not while I was still gainfully employed at South Plains College.

I just had a feeling that the college's administration would have to be the ones who told me it no longer was economically feasible to continue printing the Plainsman Press. And I just had this scenario pictured in my head that when that day came, I would turn in my keys to my office and the Communications Building and gracefully make my exit from the campus and job I have loved so dearly for 25 years – the past 18 having been spent as a journalism professor and advisor to this award-winning campus newspaper.

But that's not how it went. Maybe that would have been easier for me to deal with. I had to be the one who told Dr. Robin Satterwhite, the college president, on that dark day in December 2019 that I no longer had a cadre of devoted journalism students who would pack the Newsroom on the first day of classes each semester, eager to work toward a common goal of producing a newspaper while also getting their names in print. Sure, some were there just for the course credit or to check it off their degree plan. But for a smaller roomful of dedicated others, it became a lifestyle – and yes, a life-changing experience – that involved sacrificing personal time, theirs as well as mine, including sleep, with many long nights and sometimes early mornings spent in the Newsroom (Room 130 in the Communications Building) every other week during each semester. Dark day, indeed.

Finding students with that kind of drive and determination became harder and harder. For that, I point my finger of blame at a perfect storm of ruination. A few years ago, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board decided to delete Publications I, II, III and IV, the courses that had been used for decades at SPC to attract students and produce the Plainsman Press, from the state's common course manual. These courses had been used to maintain some semblance of retention and staff continuity from semester to semester as students progressed toward graduation. Then came a U.S. president who viewed journalists as the enemy and told that to anyone who would listen. That same guy rejected and derided any news stories

that he did not agree with as “fake news.” A few large newspaper conglomerates had to either stop their presses or layoff a large number of staff members across the country. Some were bought by Wall Street hedge funds that didn't think twice about slashing budgets and laying off long-serving staff members, including friends who worked for my former employer in Lubbock. And I can't leave out the parents who likely were telling children not to major in something that they viewed as a dying career field.

No, this is not a problem unique to our journalism program or South Plains College. A dwindling number of journalism students is being experienced at colleges and universities across the state and across the country.

Likely gone too are the days when we would roll through a small town on a full SPC bus, with Danny Vest at the wheel most often, on the way to a Texas Intercollegiate Press Association competition and conference each spring in the Metroplex, Corpus Christi, San Marcos or some other city with a university in the state. Sometimes we were joined by Billy Alonzo, John Sparks and some broadcast journalism students too. If we stopped for a meal, to get gas, or for a bathroom break, it was as if rock stars or a big sports team had come to town, judging by the inquisitive and admiring looks we would get after exiting our giant billboard on wheels. For a time, we were the envy of many collegiate journalism advisors who had driven students to the conference in passenger vans or private vehicles.

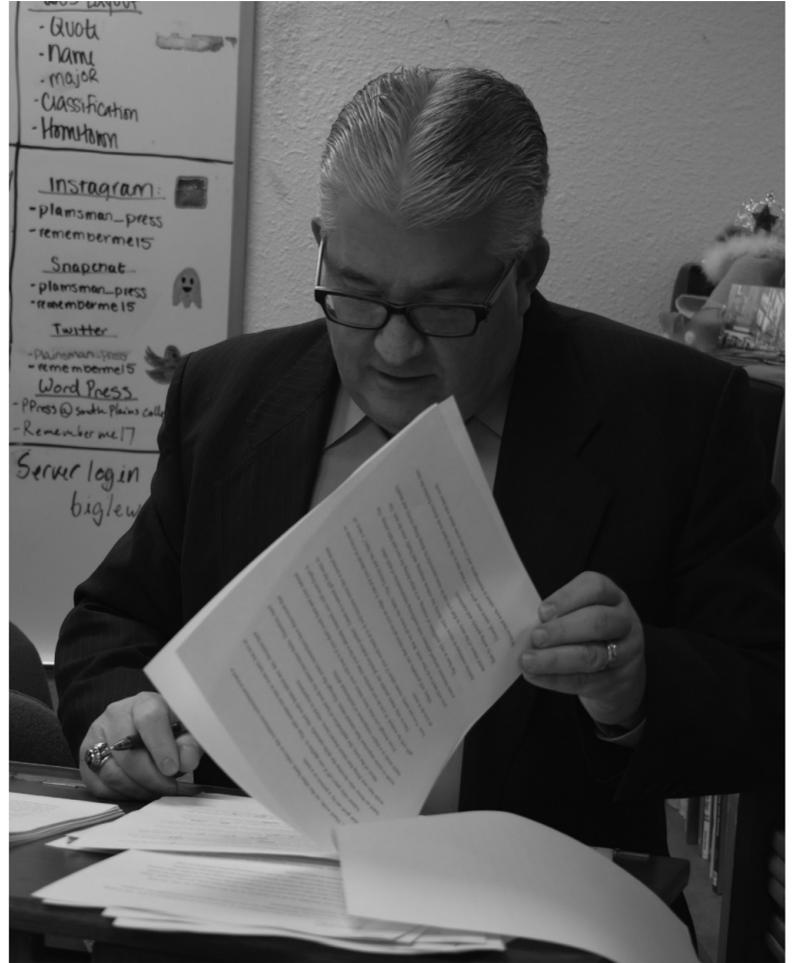
After attending a conference, I always returned to the Levelland campus feeling tired – because more times than not we had traveled the farthest to get there – but also feeling very blessed and grateful to South Plains College for having provided resources, such as the bus, our driver, and most of the funding (the students did pitch in some), and for the tremendous support we received (myself included) from college administrators and the Board of Regents through the years. I would hear horror stories from other advisors at these conferences about their jobs, funding or existence of their publications being threatened by administrators because they objected to a story printed that someone viewed as unfavorable.

Through the years, my students have covered and

written about a stabbing that occurred on campus, a bomb threat, students and faculty members dying, prostitution, drug culture, a student who threatened the president of the United States and had assembled bomb-making materials, along with other unpleasant (and pleasant) incidents and topics, winning many awards for their efforts. And NOT ONCE did I ever receive a phone call, email or stern word from a college administrator or a regent, demanding a story not be printed, demanding a retraction, or questioning my judgement, or lack thereof. They recognized the articles for what they were – strong journalism – and that the students were doing what they were being trained to do as young journalists. We don't make the news; we report on it. That kind of support and encouragement from college administrators cannot be found at many institutions. For that, I will always be grateful and appreciative.

As for those aforementioned awards, from time to time I have circled the Newsroom, gazing up at the frames that adorn every wall. I read the names, recall the faces and the stories, hear their voices and the laughter. In my mind's eye, I can see the tears welling up in their eyes and recall the pride and joy they felt when they received one, knowing someone besides me appreciated their outstanding work. Many of these students had never received an award before, because, more often than not, they were not the valedictorians or salutatorians of their senior classes, or the most involved in extracurricular activities when they were in high school. I think the Newsroom was even once referred to by someone as “The Land of Misfit Toys” (a reference from one of those animated Christmas specials) for the varied and diverse students who found that it was where they did fit – a home away from home for students, who, for a short time, became more of a family than a class. A few even met their future spouses there.

During the past 16 years, Plainsman Press staff members have received 194 awards from the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association and 128 from the Texas Community College Journalism Association for



News Writing, News Feature, Sports News, Sports Feature, Feature Story, News Photo, Feature Photo, Sports Feature Photo, Sports Action Photo, Breaking News Photo, Photo Page, Sports Column, General Column, Single Subject Presentation, Headline Writing, Critical Review, Ad Design, Information Graphic, Sports Page Design, Page One Design, Op/Ed Page Design, Feature Page Design, Photo Illustration, Editorial Cartoon, In Depth/Investigative Reporting, Overall Excellence for Website, and Overall Excellence for Newspaper. Of those 322 awards, I'm most proud of the fact that my name is not on a single one. For the past 18 years, this campus publication has always been student driven, student focused, produced by students.

Former Plainsman Press staff members have gone on to serve as reporters, photographers and copy editors at the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, Dallas Morning News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Muleshoe Journal, Breckenridge American, Fangoria horror magazine, and Duncan (Oklahoma) Banner, among others. Ellysa (Gonzalez) Harris is the editor for the Plainview Herald, Kati (Walker) Moody is the news editor of the Levelland & Hockley County News-Press and Derek Lopez is the sports editor for the Lamb County Leader News. Jordan Irvine serves as the sports information coordinator at SPC, Jonathan Seaborn has

directed two documentaries for Texas Tech Public Media, Jayme Lozano reports for Texas Tech Public Media and Evelyn (Garcia) Mianowski works as a copywriter at Nintendo of America, success stories one and all. I am equally proud of the nurses, mothers and housewives, husbands and fathers who have been on the newspaper staff as well. It's hard to name all of you, and I'm likely forgetting someone, but do know that you matter to me still. To have an opportunity to have impacted someone's life, even in some small way, is the most rewarding part of it all for me. I couldn't be any prouder!

Two Plainsman Press staff members – Tausha Rosen and Chesanie Brantley – were selected to receive the Vera Sue Spencer Award, one of the top honors for a female student graduating from SPC, three were chosen to carry the Arts and Sciences banner in a graduation ceremony, one President's Student of the Year (Jason Hartline), one (Jaycee Caldwell) won Miss Caprock and later Miss Lubbock, and three went on to be the top graduates of their colleges at Texas Tech University in 2016.

Also due some credit is my wife Cathy, who sacrificed many Valentine's Days and other personal time, while putting up with the many late Paper Nights, including a few when I could get only a few hours of sleep, shower and change clothes before

returning to the campus for a 9 a.m. meeting or something on a Friday. She understands that it was all part of the job, and that it took a toll. For that, I will always be grateful and appreciative for her love, support and patience.

I don't – and won't – miss those late nights and early mornings. I do miss the “family dinners” that were a part of Paper Nights, Sonic runs, explaining how to make chicken salad out of chicken (poop), “Bohemian Rhapsody,” inside jokes, newsroom sarcasm and laughter. There were times I wouldn't trade for anything. Learning has taken place!

The idea for this last printed issue came about in December 2019 and was put in motion in January 2020. Then came a global pandemic, forcing us off the campus for months. As good journalists, we could have persevered in the face of danger as it was thought to be at the time. But I made the decision to put the project on hold until the time was right.

A decision also was made that this wouldn't be like a regular issue, with news, features, entertainment and sports stories. It would be written and designed by those who helped make it what it has been for the past 18 years – former staff members of the award-winning Plainsman Press (along with a few former advisors and faculty). This is your campus newspaper ... and it always will be! I owe it all to you! God bless you all!

EDITORS



Left to right: Gabby Perez, Katherine Sommermeyer, Joshua Harris, Ellysa Harris, Kati Moody and Charlie Ehrenfeld

CONTRIBUTORS

Laura (Cain) Ray
Devin Hargrove
Sierra (Taylor) Greenslade
Ellysa Harris
Joshua Harris
Jacob Tucker
Ron Presley
Caroline Basile
Tausha Rosen
Rebeka (Rutledge) Miller
Sawyer Thomas
Brant Thurmond
Evelyn (Garcia) Mianowski

Adan Rubio
Jayme Lozano
Kati (Walker) Moody
Lisa (Hernandez) DeClerk
Brittany Brown
Katherine Sommermeyer
Brittany Ward
Ed Marsh
Kelly Buckner
Dr. Billy Smith (former advisor)
John Sparks (former advisor)
Charles L. Ehrenfeld (advisor)

Former advisor reminisces about early days of Plainsman Press



By John Sparks
Plainsman Press
Advisor, 1979-1983

When Stephen Henry, the publisher of the Levelland News Press, called me on a hot summer afternoon in 1979, I really didn't want to take the call. I always loved visiting with Stephen, but right then I was halfway through mowing the yard, and my old lawnmower was finally running right.

My wife, Olga told me that Stephen said it was important, and I knew him well enough to know that if he said it was important, it was.

My old friend had called me to say that I needed to "talk to the people at South Plains College about a journalism teaching position." I remember thanking him for the vote of confidence, but telling him that I didn't think I was ready to jump from teaching in public schools into the world of higher education.

Stephen Henry can be persuasive, so it is not surprising that after I made a phone call to the SPC Dean of College Relations, I was on my way to check things out on the Levelland campus. I was not expecting the interview to lead to much, but I was dead wrong.

Before my visit ended, I had met with three deans, the Chair of the English Department and the president of the college. As I left to drive back to Lamesa, I was told, "Talk it over with your wife, because the job is yours if you wanted it." After meeting the folks in charge, I knew I wanted the job.

My duties at the college would include advising the Plainsman Press and the college yearbook. I would also teach an Introduction to Mass Communications class and a basic photography class.

My first Plainsman Press staff had only three students. One of the students had received a scholarship and had been named the newspaper's editor by the previous advisor. She was a nice kid, but before classes began, she told me that she had never written a story and really didn't have much interest in journalism. I was down to two students.

During registration, I recruited some more students to join the newspaper staff, and by the first day of class, we were off and running with a staff of about eight. It seems like I asked every student I saw if they wanted to be a newspaper reporter. Most just laughed and said no thanks, but the kids who signed on were outstanding.

Back then, the Plainsman Press Newsroom was located in the attic of the Student Center. Yes, there was an attic in the Student Center until it was remodeled a few years later. We only had four electric typewriters and two cameras, only one of which worked. That was the sum total of our equipment.

The students would type their stories and, after editing, we would take them to Nock's Print Shop downtown. Nock's was a busy shop that boasted a brand-new type setting machine. The only problem was that the process required a full day for type setting before we could have the proofs back to proofread. Another day would pass before the corrections were made and the paper was ready to "paste up."

The production process took three days between the reporters' deadline and printing. So much for "news." Our first few issues required the staff to work all night, finally finishing at 7 on Friday morning. After class (yes, we had Friday classes), I had to drive the "camera ready" materials to Slaton, Texas, for printing. Distribution of the newspaper had to wait until Monday morning.

Despite our limitations, we had a group of students who would sacrifice many good nights of sleep to produce the best student newspaper possible. The Plainsman Press began to win awards in

statewide competition and, before long, we needed a bigger newsroom. We were also starting a television program that we called telecommunications.

Our tiny television studio was located in a room located on the first floor of the Library. The room was very crowded, and we did not even have a control room. The first telecom class was taught by Pat McCutchin, but after one semester, he resigned to enter the restaurant business. I added teaching television production to my list of duties.

Dr. Marvin Baker was the president of the college in those days, and he was instrumental in building much of the campus infrastructure still serving SPC today. One afternoon, he called me to his office, where, to my surprise, I was introduced to Frank Wilson, the architect who would design a Mass Communications Building. We would move from the attic into our very own building.

The plan was to convert a building that had been used to teach welding classes into a structure to house a television studio, control room, darkroom, newsroom and offices for two teachers. I recall feeling like we had won the lottery with the news that the college was committing resources to provide the instructional facilities we so badly needed.

At the same time, work began on a massive reconstruction project designed to expand and upgrade the Student Center. As a result, we had to vacate our little attic newsroom and move to the second floor of the Library. We would set up shop there and produce the Plainsman Press for a little more than a year. We were even more cramped than before. In fact, we had to set up a makeshift darkroom in a custodial closet. Even so, we were excited to know that across campus, work was underway on the new Mass Com Building.

We were also excited about a new technology that was sweeping the newsrooms of American newspapers: Electronic typesetting. This technological revolution was allowing small news-



John Sparks is a former professor, advisor and chairperson of the South Plains College Communications Department. He is also a former Plainsman Press advisor.

File Photo: Brandon Alvarado/Plainsman Press (2012)

papers (including college publications) to use personal computers to control typesetting machines.

Our administration authorized me to explore how South Plains College could join the revolution. Not only would such a move allow us to produce our newspaper more quickly, it would provide our journalism students the real-world experience of working in a computer-based newsroom.

One of the best systems being used in a college environment was located at Southwest Texas State University (now Texas State) in San Marcos. The faculty there allowed us to "test drive" their newsroom so that we could fully understand the new technology.

We decided to install a smaller version of the system being used in San Marcos. In 1986, we purchased four Apple II computers and a re-conditioned typesetting machine the size of a kitchen refrigerator. The computers had no hard drives, and only 4K of RAM. Students stored their stories on 5.25-inch

floppy disks that had a capacity of only 140K. We were rocking and rolling in the digital world!

By the time the new Mass Communications Building was ready to occupy in 1983, the enrollment in the television program had grown to about the same size as the print journalism program. It was time to add another instructor, and I had a tough decision to make. I made the decision to concentrate on teaching broadcast courses and developing a curriculum for a radio, television and film program. Sadly, that meant I would no longer have time to advise the Plainsman Press, so we began the search for a full-time print journalism instructor and student publications advisor.

We were fortunate to hire long-time journalism teacher Betty Stanley away from Monterey High School in Lubbock. She was the fifth advisor to lead the Plainsman Press. All told, the publication has had 11 advisors.

Over the years, Apple II's were replaced by Macs and old film cameras were

replaced by their digital successors. Technology changed the way the student reporters did their jobs, but it did not change the dedication and outstanding work ethic required to produce an award-winning publication.

Along the way, I had the chance to work with some wonderful students who went on to become quality reporters, editors, news anchors, photographers, doctors, lawyers and educators. Many never went into media careers, but I know, without a doubt, that the work ethic, time management skills and self-discipline they found in our newsrooms and television studios served them well in many walks of life.

Although I spent the rest of my SPC career down the hall in television land, my immense respect for the kids on the newspaper staff never waned. I will always be proud that I was part of the Plainsman Press story.

John Sparks is a former chairperson of the South Plains College Communications Department.

Rich history of Plainsman Press will live beyond print



By Billy L. Smith
Plainsman Press
Advisor, 1986-1987

Nothing accentuates the weathered creases of time more than the things that go extinct during your own lifetime.

You're old--dinosaur old--when things become defunct while you're still grazing from topsoil. I'm a good example:

The name of my bachelor's degree university. Extinct.
A few horses. Extinct.
More than a few dogs. Extinct.

My 1967 Chevy long bed pickup. Extinct.

Carburetors. Extinct.
Standard transmissions. Endangered.

And now, the Plainsman Press (print edition). Extinct.

But just like the other extinguished chapters of the past, the Plainsman Press is vivid, crisp and fully alive. For me, it's one of the richest threads of memories that make up my own tapestry. Each gossamer thread represents one of the pitiful, awful, nearly illiterate writers who first took a stab at storytelling in the Plainsman Press. Pitiful, then a little less pitiful. Awful, and then a little less awful. Illiterate and then slowly, gradually, a little more literate.

Like Kevin Smith, whose wry wit sharpened in the pages of the Plainsman Press and helped blend his British birth and Plains, Texas upbringing into first a masterful journalism career and then to the Leland J. and Doorthy



Dr. Billy Smith is a former Plainsman Press Advisor.

Provided by Billy Smith

H. Chair of Political Science at the University of Nebraska.

Or the timid, eloquent Mark Olden, who trekked

half way around the world to run track for the Texans and ended up writing "Murder in Notting Hill," as a spring-

board to his documentary film making career in London. He's chronicled everything from terrorism to Metallica. His work is painstaking and beautiful.

Then there was Robin Fred, whose prose sent chills up my spine and at least on one occasion may have coaxed a tear. About the same time was the brilliantly funny student author who I'll keep nameless and whose clear march to literary greatness was cut short in the miserable grip of AIDs.

All were stars who twinkled in its pages and left literate enough to climb a little closer to the stars.

We were all students of the softly persuasive "Chispa Maravilloso," who is John Sparks. He read through volumes of only serviceably literate work without corrosive critique. I heard, "Are you sure you want to write it that way?" more times than I can

remember. I rewrote more times than I cared to, naively convinced that my first draft was always my best. He nurtured us, allowing us to splat occasionally in its pages. He allowed us to do dumb things in ink for the sake of doing fewer dumb things down our career paths. I'm sure he took a whipping for our stupidity from administrators and other faculty who were convinced he was churning a cesspool of irreverent oafs, but I never saw it, and he never let on.

When he was convinced that we couldn't write more mindlessly, he somehow convinced us that one more rewrite might make us enough.

Dr. Billy L. Smith graduated from South Plains College in 1982. He later joined the SPC staff.

Media shift means new learning opportunities



By Caroline Basile
2006-2008

When I heard that the Plainsman Press was switching to online-only publishing, I can't say that I was surprised. But I am sad to see such a long-standing print tradition change.

As it is, this particular change is seemingly inevitable. Journalism has been shifting and changing for years, trying to keep up and keep people informed as the world around it moves faster. Along the way, journalism



(and how it is taught) must change course as well.

In 2006, I was just a homeschooled kid from Denver City who wasn't quite sure what I would do after high school, but I liked writing and knew I needed to go to college if I wanted to get out of Small Town, Texas. Thanks to a fateful introduction during Fall 2016 orientation, I found much of the direction I needed from professor Charlie Ehrenfeld and in the Newsroom of the Plainsman Press.

I started as the co-sports editor and finished my time at SPC as the editor-in-chief. I experienced a lot of firsts in the two-and-a-half years I was at the Plainsman Press, and it helped me grow to be the writer I am today. Nowhere else did I get the chance to cover local bands, bomb threats and presidential primaries. I interviewed an Oscar winner and participated in a ride-along with the United States Border Patrol. More importantly, I was learning communication skills and strategies that have helped me succeed, even while travelling along the rocky news media landscape.

What I gained from Charlie and the Plainsman Press is invaluable. The experiences that came with managing a publication, coordinating

stories and writers/photographers, organizing issues, sticking to deadlines, laying out copy and all things in between, prepared me more than I ever expected in my post-graduate career.

After I graduated from SPC, I finished my Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of North Texas. After finishing that degree, I took the first job I was offered, ending up as a marketing copywriter for a western wear company and writing freelance articles and features in my spare time.

A few years and a lot of hard work later, I was doing the thing! I was employed in journalism full-time, working as an editor for a business-to-business

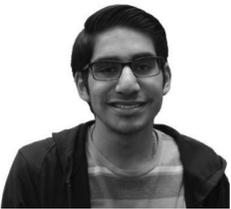
publication that covers the housing industry. Currently, I am freelancing as both a marketer and a business journalist. My jobs and to-do lists may change, but I continue to build on the skills I first picked up in the Plainsman Press Newsroom.

Journalism is best served when journalists are well-rounded, diverse, and can meet readers where they are. Instead of hours spent

with long paper nights, the next class of students in the Plainsman Press Newsroom get to use the time focusing on in-depth reporting, crafting a new podcast or video series. They might also learn how to build websites, use content management systems and analyze website traffic and SEO data. No matter what, learning will take place.



Second goodbye brings bittersweet memories



By Adan Rubio
2017-2018

I never thought I would have to write another article like this one.

With the pace at which society is changing, print journalism has faced many obstacles, and print publications continue to struggle. It pains me to think that the print edition of a paper I consider to be my journalistic lifeblood has come to an end.

I have said farewell to the Plainsman Press once. However, it is not time to say goodbye. It is time to remember why I am the journalist, worker and person I am today.

In a similar fashion to how I started my farewell to the paper, I want to start by saying that I never thought I would pursue journalism. Having always loved writing, I wanted to get into creative writing, but I always thought there could be more to my skills. After one high school journalism class as a sopho-

more and having written one full story, which consisted of interviewing my friends, I decided that I would enter a field that people still are unsure about.

Fast forward to the fall of 2017 when an unconfident college freshman, who signed up for the News Reporting class during orientation, walked into the Plainsman Press Newsroom for the first time. I was overwhelmed to say the least.

Whether it was because I was surrounded by people with more journalism experience, seeing my name written next to my first story assignment (covering the Lubbock Downtown Farmers Market) or simply being a small fish in the big pond known as college, there were a lot of factors that made me feel unsure of myself. Once class began, I took a seat at the back table and tried to keep to myself like the introvert I was and still am.

Charlie Ehrenfeld, a person who I would later owe a lot to, stepped up to his podium and said a lot of things. But the one phrase I and, I am willing to bet, most Plainsman Press veterans still remember is "This newsroom will change you for the better if you let it."

Like most past staffers,

I did not know what this meant until after I wrote my farewell opinion story at the end of my sophomore year. This publication has given me so much that I will never be able to pay back. Because of the word count maximum, I will not go too much in depth about how my journalism skills have expanded. But I have never really discussed how the Plainsman Press has helped me as a human being.

To sum me up as a person prior to working at the newspaper, I did not like talking to people, I did not like attention, positive or negative, and I did not want my name to be known by strangers. I could not have chosen a worse career based on my personality at the time.

Thankfully, my experience in the Plainsman Press Newsroom changed these qualities. In addition to preparing me for my former news editor position at The Daily Toreador newspaper at Texas Tech University, my time at the Plainsman Press helped me get out of my comfort zone in more ways than one.

As mentioned before, I sat in the very back of the Newsroom to avoid people and awkward small talk. It was not until class started that I realized not only would

I have to talk to people in the Newsroom to get my assignments done, but I would have to walk up to strangers at events to get quotes, interview sources who are far more intelligent than I am and provide updates on my story assignments in front of all those in the Newsroom.

Regarding the second quality, I wanted to be able to get my work done with as little attention from other people as possible. If you would have told me before college that I would be the butt of countless inside newsroom jokes, called on to cover multiple events and be named a Homecoming king nominee, I would have laughed in your face. For those interested in these tidbits I just mentioned, feel free to reach out, as I have many more examples I could have used.

As for the third quality, I never wanted my name out in the world. I almost lost it when my name was once put in The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal for being named teen of the month when I was in seventh grade. But look at me now. I am on multiple social media accounts, I have been featured in at least three different publications and my frumpy headshots can be seen online by

a lot of people.

Suffice it to say, the Plainsman Press changed me for the better, even if I was not willing to let it at times.

I never really knew what I wanted out of life after high school. Being a first-year mass communication master's student at Texas Tech, I still am unsure of what my purpose is in life. But the Plainsman Press gave me the experiences necessary to traverse this journey into the unknown.

If it was not for the people at the Plainsman Press who pushed me to escape my comfort zone, I would not have realized my potential. Before South Plains College, I always would question whether I was making the right choice for my career path and overall future. Now, I can face challenges, risks and the unknown knowing that I have the experience to back me up.

I have faced too many blue scribbles on my critiques, too many long nights at the Newsroom and too many grunts from Charlie for my bad headlines to quit now and forget what has led me here today.

Granted, a lot of experiences have led me to this point, and no one should forget where they came from, the

people who have impacted them and the experiences that have helped them grow. But this is about the Plainsman Press and the people it has cared for.

To past Plainsman Press staffers and editors who have stuck with me and cared for me—you know who you are—thank you for taking the time to talk to someone who clearly was uncomfortable in a new, fast-paced work environment.

To Charlie, even after years of not being on the staff, I continue to heed your advice to be the best journalist and worker I can be. You do not know this, but when you texted me after my stressful first few weeks at The DT telling me how proud you were of me, I was able to put my fears aside and overcome the new challenges I faced. There is nothing I can do to repay you.

Whether I stay in journalism or not, I will never forget the Plainsman Press. As much as I love the feel of a printed newspaper, I know the physical copies are not what made me the journalist I am today.

The Plainsman Press always will be present regardless if it is printed. This is not farewell, this is thank you again.

Plainsman continued from Page 1

At that time, when Sparks was advisor in 1979, the newsroom was located in the attic of the Student Center building. He also remembered that the process to actually produce the publication took about three full days, as compared to the two paper nights that recent students experienced.

Sparks said Dr. Marvin Baker, president of SPC at the time, was instrumental in building much of the campus infrastructure that exists today and introduced Sparks to the architect for the new Communications Building.

"The plan was to convert a building that had been used to teach welding classes into a structure to house a television studio, control room, darkroom, newsroom and offices for two teachers," Sparks said. "I recall feeling like we

had won the lottery with the news that the college was committing resources to provide the instructional facilities we so badly needed."

Sparks also remembered when the Plainsman Press was introduced to electronic typesetting, a revolutionary technology that was allowing small newspapers to use personal computers to control type-setting machines.

When the new Communications Building was completed in 1983, Sparks was faced with a decision—take over as the instructor for the new television program or continue as the Plainsman Press advisor.

"I made the decision to concentrate on teaching broadcast courses and developing curriculum for a radio, television and film program," Sparks said. "Sadly,

that meant I would no longer have time to advise the Plainsman Press."

Betty Stanley was hired as the fifth advisor to lead the Plainsman Press. In total, the newspaper had 11 advisors, including the most recent advisor and current chairperson of the Communications Department, Ehrenfeld.

Along with changes in technology, Ehrenfeld said students and their approach to the Plainsman Press changed, too.

"Students were a different breed," Ehrenfeld said. "They were more focused on working together to produce a product they could be proud of and take part in an opportunity most didn't have because most of their small high schools didn't have a newspaper, or even their town."

Through the years, Ehrenfeld said staffs varied in size, but mostly grew until recent years. Several students in their reflections recall a packed room on the first day of classes with only standing room in the back.

"It created camaraderie, a place to belong, a place where they fit," Ehrenfeld said. "My students weren't hardly ever valedictorian or salutatorian, nor were they very active in extracurricular activities in high school. They found in the Newsroom a place where they fit and where they could contribute without any sort of judgment, and where they received feedback and support."

For the past 17 years, the Plainsman Press printed 12 issues per year, six per semester. The press week always consisted of two press nights, the first on Tuesday until 10 p.m. and the second

on Thursdays until the newspaper was finished and all the pages had been sent.

Although Ehrenfeld might not miss the 4 a.m., all-nighters, he says he will miss the relationships and friendships that were developed through the Newsroom. Despite this, he says journalism and good writing will always be necessary.

"Someone has to keep watch on the government, that is one of the original focuses of journalism," Ehrenfeld said. "Journalists are the watchdogs of the people, one of those checks and balances on government and elected officials. Regular people, average citizens, can't find out for themselves."

Also, there will always be a desire in people to know the news and to know what is going on in their communities.

"There's always going to be a need for good writing,

whether it be online or in print," Ehrenfeld said.

And, with larger newspapers shrinking and many newspapers merging, Ehrenfeld said he sees smaller market, local journalism growing in importance.

"I see the growth of small-town newspapers," Ehrenfeld said. "People still want to know what's going on in the schools, what their elected officials are doing in government, and have an interest for crime reporting."

As far as the answer to a lack of interest from current and potential students in pursuing journalism as a major, Ehrenfeld said he doesn't know the answer. But he would encourage any student who has an interest in writing to try it out.

"I don't know the answer," Ehrenfeld said. "But, do what you love. If you do something you love, you never work a day in your life."

Walking into newsroom marks pivotal moment



By Laura Cain-Ray
2006-2008

We all have had pivotal moments in our lives, those moments when we made a choice, a decision, good or bad, that resulted in paving the way for our future.

It becomes an undoubtedly defining moment within us. Some pivotal moments are immense, where you know you are making a large and life-changing decision. But often it feels small and normal, almost routine, as if you are trying out a new blend from your usual coffee house. It is only after you have traveled the path and take time to reflect that you realize the true weight these moments held and its trajec-

tory for you. Walking into the Plainsman Press Newsroom was mine.

In the fall of 2006, I was beginning my first semester at South Plains College (SPC). I was coming off a particularly terrible first year of college at another university. I had made poor choices, felt like a failure. Any confidence was non-existent, and was truly lost. I knew I needed an education, but had no clue what to do with my life and lacked any decisive ability that would steer me any sort of direction. I had transferred to SPC to continue basic coursework, figure myself out, and essentially hit the reset button. When signing up for classes, an advisor asked about my interests. I told her I enjoyed writing and thought journalism could be fun. She said if I really wanted to gage my interest that enrolling in a news writing course would be the best way to do it. Her confidence gave me assurance that this class would assist with my desire to figure things out. Anxious to get my schedule set, it took me no more than 20 minutes to decide to enroll in News Writing and Pub-

lications, along with other basic courses.

Walking down the hall towards the Newsroom that first Tuesday (or was it Thursday?), you could hear voices. Lots of them. And they were loud. Students were lively and vivacious. There was a constant flow of students walking in and out of the room. I had to flatten myself against the wall to make my way through. When I entered, I was surprised it did not look like a typical classroom, with lines of separated desks and a large teacher's desk at the front. The Newsroom (admittedly small for all of its functions) was separated into two spaces, a layout and storage space at the back and rows of computers tightly lined together in the front section. On the side of the room by the door was a simple, wooden podium and



stool. There were more students than I had anticipated. Many seemed to know each other. They filled the seats at the computers, laughing and visiting, while other students gathered around towards the back of the room. At the podium was a slightly salt-and-pepper-haired man, whom I assumed was the teacher, visiting with a couple of students, chatting and joking around. Though I

was nervous, as I always was when entering new places or starting new things, I felt home. While I did not know a single soul in that room, I was comforted by the comradery I witnessed. The energy was contagious, and I felt a strong longing to be a part of it. As I found a spot to stand in the back of the room, I noticed how the students and teacher interacted, and I thought how neat it was. I had no idea what to expect, but sensed this could be the place for me.

During the next year and half, I spent the majority of my time at SPC in the Newsroom. The first semester I spent writing, learning newspaper layout, and design programs. One of my first articles was a movie review of "Alpha Dog," which was based on a true story and one of Justin Timberlake's first movies. (I thought he was great in it!) Seeing my writing printed in a publication was a feeling I will never forget. It gave me an incredible sense of pride and accomplishment. The following two semesters I was an editor, spending countless Thursday nights finishing layouts and sending the newspaper to print. I cannot believe the shenanigans that went on in the newsroom at 1 a.m.! Listening to Britney Spears while working on layout (#freebritney), to watching Rascal Flatts music videos that had me bawling (and had NOTHING to do with work), to all of the loud noises (because I am just not a quiet person). I still cringe at some of the words that came out of my mouth. But I also remember how much fun I had.

My writing qualified me to compete at the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association (TIPA) in San Antonio in 2007, where I did not win anything but it grew my confidence in knowing I was good enough to compete. I was able to get a private press tour of the George H. W. Bush Library in College Station, question a politician running for office, and hear author Daryl Davis speak.

The skills I developed, the focus, self-assurance, and determination I gained, the mistakes I learned from, the Newsroom allowed for all of it. When I transferred to Texas Tech University (TTU), my dad took me out for breakfast one Saturday morning and told me he finally felt confident I was going to graduate. I distinctly remember thinking, "the newspaper did that for me."

I graduated from TTU with a degree in public relations and have worked at various jobs in Lubbock. At each professional job I have had, I have applied the skills I learned in the Newsroom. Every. Single. Job. At my current one, I am the Communications and Marketing Director at the Museum of Texas Tech University. I am responsible for any and all communications and marketing materials from the museum, promotion of exhibitions, collections, and the museum as a whole, and serve as editor of the Museum's magazine publication, M. I do not think I could dream up a job I love more. I have been married for seven years to my husband, J.W., who is a Captain on the Lubbock Fire Department. We have two children, son, Jackson (5), and daughter, Kimber (2).

That Newsroom changed my life. And I know for a fact it changed many others. While I believe in evolving with our ever-changing world, a part of me is unbelievably saddened that this class will not be there in its original form to catch wandering, curious souls, searching for a sense of belonging and looking for their road to travel. I am a big believer in always remembering where you came from and acknowledging the people and places that built you into your current self. It keeps you grounded and connected to the truest parts of yourself, and it reminds you of how far you have come. I am thankful for the opportunity to write for the Plainsman Press one last time and say thank you, Charlie.

To Charlie, the leader, teacher, advisor, listener, friend, and most patient person on Earth, thank you for creating an environment for myself and so many others where we could develop into our best selves. It was a place where I could truly learn, make mistakes, be vulnerable, build, and grow. Thank you for coloring my articles with your damn blue pen to make me a better writer. Thank you for not giving up on me when I had an attitude and was less than respectful. Countless students of all ages, from all walks of life, walked out of your doors, better and stronger than when they walked in. Please know that everything the Newsroom and Plainsman Press is, is because of you. It exists because of you. You and the Newsroom are my pivotal moment, and I am and will always be grateful.

Plainsman Press was part of SPC poem



By Ron Presley
Professor of Agriculture
SPC graduate, class of
1978

My experience with the Plainsman Press began in September of 1976.

I was a farm boy freshman from Abernathy and very apprehensive regarding confidence in being able

to achieve college level work. I had been reading newspapers since Junior High, so it was very natural to read the school paper. Through it, I was able to stay current with events at the college, editorials by other students, faculty news and the wonderful experience of having a poem that I wrote for the English Department's Poetry Contest published.

As I see the changes being made toward digital delivery, I swell with pride! We at SPC are willing to change as our students change. I personally will have to become accustomed to not holding the paper issue while drinking tea between classes, but the change will do me good.

This college is a poem. Each course offered is a stanza, carefully crafted to

communicate a great new experience for a student. We represent more than just data. Each stanza is a launch and each graduate a vibration, like a pebble dropped in water, rippling out into the world, making it better. We are always one uneducated generation away from the loss of culture and civilization. Helping students realize that they can succeed, then nurturing that success, is what SPC does best. I was one!

In the fall of 1976, I was walking from the Library to my dorm room at McGee Hall. It was dark and there was a basketball game being held in Texan Dome. A car with two couples parked to my side. I was wearing what we considered "Gonzo" or "Punchy" clothing, boots and a bull rider hat.

As both of the men got out of the car, both rolling their "Sansabelt" pants back up over their bellies, one said, "How would you like to have about 30 of those in a classroom?" They and their wives laughed.

I wasn't embarrassed, but I have thought about that night many times since.

Jim Jenkins, Jim Leggit, Bob Beck, James Carroll, Lee Weldon Stephenson, Bill Billingsley along with many other great SPC faculty, certainly didn't mind me being in their class. In fact, they nurtured me, put wind in my sails, and while I have failed at some endeavors, SPC launched me. Thank you Plainsman Press, for being part of my poem.

As William Blake wrote, "We become what we behold."

End of printed copy not goodbye



By Jacob Tucker
2005-2006

Hey there folks! I wrote for the Plainsman Press from the Spring of 2005 to the Fall of 2006, and the time I spent on that staff shaped me into the writer that I am today.

I moved on to Texas Tech University from South Plains College and completed my Bachelor's Degree in News Editorial Journalism. After graduation, I worked for the Levelland Hockley County News-Press for a few years as a staff writer and Sports Editor. From there, I dropped out of writing for a five-year stint in youth ministry, and now I'm plugging away in

the oil patch and whipping up beard oil to pay the bills.

When Charlie posted that the Plainsman Press would cease printing, I would love to say that I was surprised. I was saddened, but not surprised.

We are living in a time when information is instantaneous. People lap it up like dogs at chow time. "Who did Kanye marry? What did Trump say?" The questions just go on and on.

As journalists, we have tried to keep up with the trends. Convergence is what they called it when I was going to Tech. That was the next big thing. It was being taught that broadcast, print and digital media were on a collision course and nothing could stop it. CNN had come out with iReport, so anyone could write a story. The print writer in me refused to believe it.

During the next 11 years, I watched as my beloved former profession struggled to find its place in the ever-changing landscape. The question when I was on the

Plainsman Press staff was, "How do we write for digital, but still make it so that people buy the physical paper?"

Time marched on. Dailies turned into bi-weeklies. The small-town paper went from print to completely digital. Printers closed their doors or re-adjusted their presses to thinner-style sheets to save money. The "microwave masses" demanded their information sooner, and journalism got sloppier.

These are all reasons that print is dying. Heck, even broadcast is dying. They are both being killed by social media and fake news sites. And people are lapping it up.

There are a few out there in the national media who try to be fair with their writing and reporting, but they are cast to the side because they might have said something to offend the masses. Who wants to be vilified by your constituents, politicians and the general public day in and day out? Forget it! What's being reported is no longer "the truth," rather it's "my truth."

I pray that there is a turn once again for journalism. That somewhere, a student is sitting in a board meeting or an office, ready to press and ask the hard questions. That a newspaper embraces the digital age and saves their family-owned publication by offering online subscriptions and social media content.

The halt of printing the Plainsman Press is definitely the end of an era. Charlie has been the best mentor any writer can have. He has always pushed his students to ask the hard questions and think of the best headlines. I'm proud to call him my friend.

I know that he will figure out a way to continue to teach students the love of print journalism, it will just look different (and he will get a little more rest on Tuesday and Thursday nights!)

So, let's not see this as a "goodbye" per se. Let's consider this a "see you later" for The Plainsman Press. And thanks for the memories and all the blue marks, Chuck.

Former editor reflects on countless memories of newsroom



By Jayme Lozano
2011-2015

The newsroom will change your life.

That was the first thing Charlie said to me, and hundreds of other students, when we would all get our introduction to the Plainsman Press Newsroom. I didn't get it then, and a lot of people still wouldn't now - it's just an experience you had to have for yourself.

I started with the Plainsman Press in 2011 as a photographer, and with some not-so-gentle pushing from Charlie about trying my hand at writing. So I wrote movie reviews, a game review, and I was



eventually convinced to cover an appearance by Dr. Travis Stork in Lubbock. I still smile when I



remember how surprised Charlie was that I already knew how to structure that feature story.

My time at South Plains College got even better with the newspaper, especially while I was able to move up as an editor every semester until I was finally editor-in-chief. The newspaper gave me free-range to explore any topic for our in-depth series, including gun control, NSA surveillance programs and police brutality. In between all that, I was still writing movie reviews and interviewing people such as comedian Dane Cook, Steve Aoki, and even President Barack Obama at one point.

Some of the best times at SPC came directly from staff trips to the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association and the Texas Community College Journalism Association

conferences and competitions. A lot of memorable moments happened during those trips, such as then-associate editor Tausha Rosen being stung by a jellyfish in Corpus Christi after I finally convinced her to swim with me, and a scary, barefoot walk at midnight to Whataburger with Sierra Taylor, Devin Reyna, Skylar Hernandez, Nicole Lopez and Geoffrey Nauert in San Antonio, where I almost had to use my taser on a stranger.

I would be lying if I said the best part of those trips weren't the awards, because it felt like our



staff would walk away with more than a dozen awards every time we went to TIPA. In that time, I earned multiple awards for Critical Review, In-Depth Reporting, News and Feature stories, and even feature photo, somehow.

I'd like to think that since college, I've been able to keep surprising Charlie with my professional career.

Four years ago, I accomplished a big goal of mine, which was to work for the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal. After starting out on the copy

desk, I later became a regional reporter and an agriculture reporter.



I covered everything from the historic run by the Texas Tech Men's Basketball team, climate change, mental health and entertainment. Writing movie reviews was my starting off point, so it feels more rewarding that my first professional award was for a review I wrote for 2019's "Joker" from the Texas Associated Press Managing Editors.

Now, I'm reporting on healthcare for NPR's Lubbock station, Texas Tech Public Media, much to Charlie's dismay. I love the challenge of switching to radio, but I'll always be a printie at heart.

Being on the Plainsman Press staff was one of the best experiences of my life. I can't explain enough how being in that Newsroom gave me the courage to find myself, the confidence to stand strongly behind my work, and the happiness that comes from being

someone who truly loves what they do for a living. It's a real tragedy that fu-

ture South Plains College students won't have that experience.

The magical Newsroom also brought a lot of amazing friends, one in particular is my lifetime photo editor Sierra Taylor. Since graduation, moving and becoming real adults, Sierra has stayed by my side.

She listens to me rant, tells me when I'm wrong, and still reads everything I write. And in that time, I've gotten to see her grow as a photographer and test her creativity in new ways, and I'm amazed with how far she has come.

She was an incredible photographer and person then, and she's even better now. That's one friendship that I'll treasure forever, and I would've never met Sierra if it weren't for the newsroom that was a second home for us.

Charlie never stopped

believing in me and he still does, even if he's a little mad that I switched mediums. He showed all of us on the staff what a true mentor is supposed to be - supportive, caring, funny, and encouraging.

It didn't matter if we were at the BSM for lunch, or if he was talking to colleagues without us, Charlie was always bragging about us, the hard work we put in, and how we managed to put together great issues every two weeks. No one could convince him otherwise.

I'm not being dramatic when I say it's an inconceivable loss that the printing of the Plainsman Press is coming to an end. Every semester, talented budding journalists would come here, learn from Charlie's expertise, and leave feeling more prepared. It didn't stop there, as he keeps track of all of us and gives advice

in a way that the majority of professors don't do past graduation day.

This newspaper was the most helpful part of my college career - at SPC and Texas Tech. If the college is lucky, maybe someone will be able to bring it back one day and encourage a whole new group of young journalists the way Charlie always did.

In the meantime — thanks, Charlie. The Newsroom changed my life.

Plainsman photo editor shares snapshots of time at college paper



By Sierra (Taylor) Greenslade
2012-2015

Putting out a newspaper sometimes takes an act of God, but other times it just takes a few dedicated students and one wonderful professor.

With the news that the Plainsman Press was publishing its final print edition and that any former staff members were welcomed back to make it, tears escaped my eyes. The Plainsman Press will never simply be a college newspaper to me. It's the



reason I have a college degree and why I work with images every day. But most importantly, it's the reason I have Charlie Ehrenfeld in my life.

Charlie and I have always had a great relationship, but I suspect it is because of what he saw in me when I was just 18 years old. When I first moved on-campus, I was a young girl with a passion for photography and a drive to learn everything I could about it. My very first college class on that August Monday morning was the photography class Charlie teaches. The room

was filled with kids who were only there for the credit, but I had waited for most of my life to take a photography class. So when it was my turn to stand-up and introduce myself to the class and tell why I was taking the course, I simply said that I had a "Passion for Photography," and right then Charlie offered me a job.

Being Charlie's "Photo Assistant" was a bit of a rollercoaster, but the most important thing that hap-

pened was that he made me a member of the editorial staff that I laid out the newspaper outside of class. This is where I really bonded with him and the other members of staff. Something about being stuck in a building until 4 in the morning, writing headlines, and squirting ketchup on yourself just brings people together.

The Newsroom was such a perfect place for my first "home away from

home." I had always loved photography, but it was not until I became a staff member that I knew I could really do it as a career. My time there included plenty of mistakes from me, but it is where I started to become the person I wanted to be. Trying to sum up what I learned during my two years on staff is difficult. Somehow while teaching us how to layout newspapers and write articles, Charlie showed all of us



how to be a good person.

Since I have left the staff, Charlie has continued to be a champion for me. Just like when I was on the staff, he celebrates my highs with me and offers support during the lows. When I transferred to Texas Woman's University in 2015, he pressured me to join their on-campus newspaper. He lis-

tened and offered advice to me when I complained about not being able to find employment I liked after I graduated. He celebrated with me when I was offered my first full-time photo editing job. Charlie is still one of the first people I want to tell when something really good happens to me. He was the first person outside of my family to see how much I loved

photography, to tell me I was good enough and to push me to do it for a living. His support in my life since 2012 has been incredibly impactful.

When I look back at my time on staff, I can't help but look back with wistfulness. I found lifelong friends in the Newsroom, and I will love the family I made there forever. There are too many to list, but I could not write this piece without talking about Jayme Lozano. She was the first person I connected with in Room 130 in the Communications Building, and she is still one of my favorite people. Jayme had a passion for

journalism that rivaled anyone on staff, and I still see that love when



reading her published pieces today. No matter where life takes us, we still seem to be calling each other while hiding in photo closets.

Charlie's famous line is: "This room will change your life if you let it." And I cannot express how true that is. That room changed my life, journalism changed my life, and so did Charlie. While the Plainsman Press is changing with the times, the room will be the same. It will just have a few less newspapers, but it will still have passionate students and one tremendous professor, Charlie Ehrenfeld.



Paper experience leads to start of fulfilling career



By Evelyn Nicole (Garcia) Mianowski
2011-2012

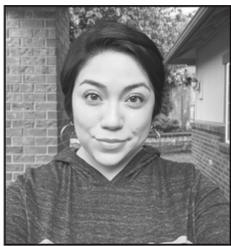
I remember the day I walked into the Newsroom of the Plainsman Press. There, I met Charles Ehrenfeld, whom would become my biggest cheerleader and mentor.

In Ehrenfeld's first lecture to us, he explained how the Newsroom worked and said, "This experience will change your lives."

I rolled my eyes and scoffed at the idea. I'd never heard anything so dumb and presumptuous.

Many years after that fateful day, I can tell you that I was completely wrong.

As a member of the Plainsman Press, I had the



privilege of writing about what I love – video games – along with the opportunity to hone a skill that I had been told by a previous teacher that I didn't have. That, dear readers, is a story for another day.

During my time in the Newsroom, I wrote about games such as "Skyrim," "Torchlight," "Diablo III," and many others. I eventually became the entertainment editor for the paper and did my fair share of page layouts. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to meet and interview my childhood idol, John Quinones (of ABC-TV).

As a member of Ehrenfeld's news team, I became an award-winning writer. This started me on the path that I never imagined – I became a professional writer.

After graduating from South Plains College and leaving the Plainsman Press, I moved to Seattle, Wash., to continue my education at the University of Washington, Seattle. While attending the university, and for some time after graduating, I worked as a freelance writer for several different publications and YouTube channels. Some of my clients included The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Zam.com, Indie MEGABOOTH, and the YouTube Channel, "Did You Know Gaming?"

After leaving the freelance life, I fell into the position of editorial content coordinator for a Seattle-based lifestyle magazine. There, I had the opportunity to write reviews and opinion pieces for the magazine, which was distributed in a number of states.

While I enjoyed all the clients that I had the opportunity to work with, there was still something missing; something that I had been tenacious in obtaining. I wanted to work full-time in the video

game industry. Little did I know, that dream of a young girl from Lubbock, Texas, would come true.

In 2018, I accepted a job at Nintendo of America. As a copywriter, my current responsibilities include writing and editing across Nintendo of America platforms, including Nintendo.com, some social posts, and on the Nintendo Switch system.

However, my primary duty consists of working on Switch News, the on-device news source for Nintendo Switch users. If you see a bad pun (or as I call them, funny punnies), chances are I wrote that.

While I cover the recent game releases, I also compose our curated lists and provide event coverage for industry shows, such as the Game Developers Conference, the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), and the Penny Arcade Expo (PAX).

One of the best experiences that I've had working for Nintendo of America came at E3 2019. I helped our team with real-time coverage, surprise announcements, and had

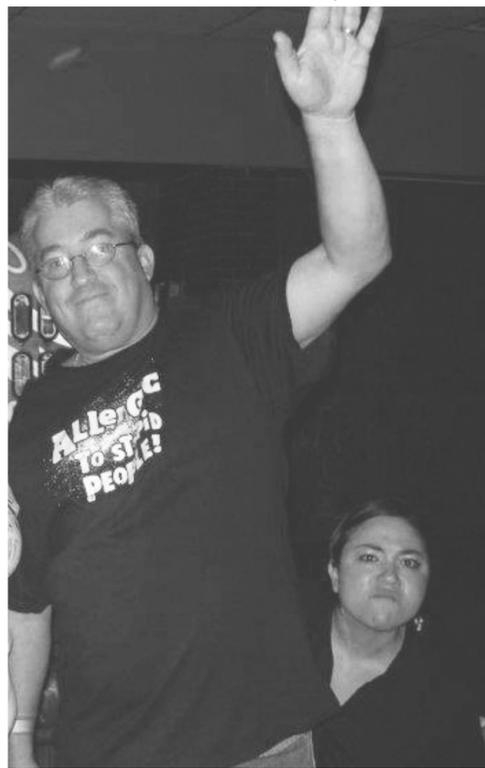
the opportunity to meet people that I wanted to emulate as a child.

I had the opportunity to meet the voice of Mario, Charles Martinet, for the first time. My boss, Doug Bowser, would check in periodically and we would ask each other how the show was going. Finally, I met the man, the myth, the legend: Shigeru Miyamoto. After this, I would tell everyone that my E3 was a success, because I got to meet Mario, hang out with Bowser, and meet Mario's dad. How amazing is that?!

Somehow all the stars aligned, and I landed my dream job. To be honest with you all, I don't know

how I got here. What I do know is that I owe it all to Ehrenfeld and my time at the Plainsman Press.

So, as you read this last printed issue of the Plainsman Press, I hope you understand the importance of it. The Plainsman Press offered me an outlet to refine my skills and gain confidence in a career that I didn't think was possible. I know, for a fact, that I wouldn't be where I am without this paper and Ehrenfeld. He has been an amazing mentor. He believed in me, even when I didn't, encouraged me to take risks... and of course, offered the occasional job reference (thanks, again, Charlie!).



Experience taught editor to talk to anyone



By Devin Hargrove
2011-2012

Regardless of where I go and who I meet, I never forget the lessons I learned under Charles Ehrenfeld.

The most important of those lessons was that I could go anywhere and talk to anyone to find the truth. The first time I realized this was in the beginning of the Fall 2012 semester. Charlie, dressed in one of his black suits and sporting his trademark grin, told the class he looked forward to some interesting articles for the semester.

I'm sure he meant some great local stories and interesting interviews with students and faculty. I had something a bit different in mind. With the internet and a bit of creativity, I figured I could talk to anyone. So, I did.

Some of the names that popped into my head were Mick Jagger, Dr. Philip Zimbardo, and Brad Pitt. To someone who had spent his life in Lubbock, Texas, all these people seemed unapproachable. But after being around Charlie long enough, I



realized all you had to do is ask, and the worst you would be told was no.

I still have the rejection letters from the dozens of names I sent emails too. Mick Jagger's management sent me a polite "sorry." Dr. Zimbardo sent me a personal letter of rejection, and Brad Pitt's people didn't even respond.

It wasn't all for naught. I scored one of the best interviews of my life from those dozens of emails, former crack kingpin Freeway Rickie Ross. I am still proud of that interview.

Looking back at that time, I can't help but be amused. My thinking was so small it's almost laughable now. It would take a few extra years of experience for the value of what Charlie was teaching us to really sink in.

When I first began attending his classes, I fit the mold of many university students. My hair stopped just short of my shoulders, and you could spot the usual Pink Floyd and Bob Marley posters on my bedroom walls at home. My biggest aspiration would be to follow in the steps of Hunter S.

Thompson and publish some earth-shattering stories.

As the years have gone by, and my breadth of knowledge and experience has widened, I have thankfully grown more ambitious.

I owe so much of where I am today to Charlie and his famous Paper Nights. He taught us to think outside the box, and to ask the right questions. He also taught us that with concentrated effort and persistence, you can ac-

complish quite a bit. The SPC Newsroom was the beginning of an amazing journey which I am still on to this day. That spark of curiosity that Charlie planted in many of his students, myself included, has guided me through 17 countries, across three continents and a multitude of experiences.

ries-old temples in some of the most remote jungles of Cambodia and been scuba diving next to whale sharks in Thailand. I've fought in martial arts tournaments in Tokyo and trained with some of the world's best fighters in Bangkok.

All along the way, I've never hesitated to speak to anyone who had something interesting to say. From slums in the Philippines to ultraluxury shopping malls in Dubai, what Charlie taught me

institutions with a monopoly on information.

There was a conversation we had in one of Charlie's classes. We lamented on blogs and online-only publications ushering in the downfall of journalism. Thankfully, we weren't entirely correct.

Traditional journalism, big businesses that hold the majority market share, are going by the wayside. But journalism is most certainly not dead. Instead, opportunities have

bytes of data to process through daily.

But time keeps moving forward. Even though the shuttering of the print version of the Plainsman Press marks the end of an era, so too does it mark the beginning of a new one. An opportunity has been presented for the Plainsman to come back in digital form, where a wider audience can now be informed and entertained by the prose and witticisms of its rotating door of writers.

There will certainly be a void left by the camaraderie of the editors trying their best to keep themselves awake to make deadlines. But in its place is the opportunity to create something entirely new that has the potential to have an even greater impact. As the physical pages close on the Plainsman Press and the digital ones turn on, it will be exciting to see what happens moving forward.

What's even more exciting, I will be able to follow along. It's hard to read a newspaper from 8,845 miles away. But from my condo in the middle of Bangkok, I will soon be able to keep up with one of my favorite publications.

Regardless of how things turn out, I am confident that with Charlie at the helm, the ship will be steered in the right direction and new generations of curious and information-hungry students will make their way into the world better than when the first entered his class.

come about for more stories to be reported on and a more diverse group of people to join the narrative.

News is no longer limited by page length, and editorial boards no longer get to silence stories they don't wish to get out. Pandora's box has been opened. Instead of malaise and disease, we have been given thousands of tera-

about asking questions and listening has never steered me wrong.

I no longer write for traditional print publications. Instead, I chose around four years ago to focus on digital marketing. Just as the Plainsman Press will soon be online, I saw the writing on the wall at the time. The new frontier will be paved by individuals instead of

come about for more stories to be reported on and a more diverse group of people to join the narrative.

News is no longer limited by page length, and editorial boards no longer get to silence stories they don't wish to get out. Pandora's box has been opened. Instead of malaise and disease, we have been given thousands of tera-



Editor remembers friends, good times



By Brittany Brown
2014-2015

What did the newsroom mean to me? The world. I'll never forget the first time I walked into that room and I looked around thinking, "this is such a random mix of personality types."

Everyone took turns saying how the Newsroom "changed their lives," which seemed a bit dramatic to me. Not for a second did I think that these would become MY people, but it didn't take long for the room to have its affect on me.

Being a part of the Plainsman Press truly helped me discover who I was after struggling to find my niche. I had just given up the only one I thought I had, basketball.

Charlie being Charlie pushed me to be a better



writer, student and overall individual, and I am forever grateful for the energy he invested in each and every one of us who came into that room. Being on the newspaper staff pushed me outside of my comfort zone and forced me to have an open mind about so many different aspects of the world.

The Newsroom also brought me my SQUAD! To my girls, Jayme, Nicole, Devin and Skylar (UA also, but he's a man, so not an official member) I know for a fact we probably would not have crossed paths if it weren't for the Plainsman Press, and I am forever

grateful for our friendship!

During my time on the staff, I faced some of the most difficult challenges, at least at that point in my life. My uncle was murdered, I lost my grandfather and my parents divorced. Writing and my fellow staffers truly helped me keep my head on straight.

One of my favorite things about the experience was reading all the comments written in blue on my pieces, whether they were words of encouragement or a ton of corrections letting you know that Charles knew you tried to throw it together at the last minute. It was just something

about that blue pen that made you feel like you had someone in your corner, no matter what. I have most of these in a folder that I skim through if I'm having a rough week for a quick pick me up. Some other memories that I will cherish forever include, #thingsUAsays.

We started a hashtag on Twitter to document all the wild things that JoshUA said outloud. Then there's the look Sierra would give to me when she knew I was avoiding eye contact so they wouldn't give me assignments, and the feeling I would get when I finally finished laying

out a page after fighting with InDesign for hours.

Oh, and when Charlie called Jayme and I after we transferred to let us know we had placed in a contest, first place in Sports News Writing for me. Honestly, never in a million years did I think I wrote well enough to place first in anything, but Charlie always believed in me.

Saying farewell to some-

thing that had such a huge influence on your life is never easy. But all good things come to an end, right?

I am so thankful for the Plainsman Press and Charlie. I hope that everyone finds their Newsroom that pushes them to become who they are meant to be. I hope everyone finds at least one Charlie who will believe in them no matter what!

Former editor reflects on fond memories

By Kelly Buckner
1983-1986

My years at South Plains College were years I look back on fondly, and my time working on the newspaper and yearbook were especially good.

I learned a lot, and I won many awards for photography, design, and writing... but it was the teachers, Betty Stanley and John Sparks, who made it a special time. I know the students during recent years feel the same way about their instructor.

I am the last living editor from the 1983-1986 years. We used an old

Compugraphic typesetter, black-and-white film, manual 35-millimeter cameras, and a darkroom. We also had lots of fun.

As a high school Journalism teacher, it has been great seeing some of my ex-students go on to work with Charlie and go on to be professional journalists. It makes me proud.

First, SPC did away with yearbook. Then Levelland High School did away with their newspaper. Now, they are printing the last Plainsman Press. It makes me sad, but I know SPC will continue to train great journalists.

Plainsman Press instigates passion for writing



By Brant Thurmond
2006-2008

Months ago, while scrolling through Facebook, I came across a post that caught my attention. That particular post said in part that the Plainsman Press at South Plains College would stop its production of the student newspaper after nearly 50 years and pursue a more digital format.

Current Plainsman Press Advisor Charlie Ehrenfeld asked that former staff members (if they wanted to) contribute an opinion story for the final printed issue with reflections on time spent on the staff, among other suggestions. So, with that, here we go.

From 2006-2008, I was a member of the staff. I started out as the guy who hung out behind the wall (in the old Newsroom), did research for stories, turned them in on time and went about my merry way.

Little did I know that a few months into my first semester I would create a bond with a very special man I have looked up to ever since.

"Who is that person?" you may ask. The answer to that question is very simple: Charlie.

Charlie was able to take a broadcast journalism student like myself - one who needed an extra class - and brand and mold me into a skilled and quality print journalist. Charlie saw potential in me from the get-go and helped me work my way up the chain from an Editorial Assistant in the Fall of 2007 to eventually being Sports Editor of the Plainsman Press throughout my final semester in 2008.

From my time on the

staff, I created several friendships. I also came away with memories of those late "paper nights," mostly of Charlie shooting down headlines at 1 in the morning. But it wasn't just because Charlie didn't like the headline or was being a pain in the rear, as it might have seemed at the time, but rather teaching all of us at the time what quality journalism should be like and how to create a strong headline to catch the reader's attention.

The same could be said for the dreaded blue pen that he used to edit our stories with. I will never be able to count the number of times I have had my story ripped to shreds by the "blue pen of death." But I am a better writer and journalist because of it.

Charlie isn't just an instructor. He has a unique ability to create a professional relationship and friendship with students, and he impacts young students in several different ways.

I have always looked

at Charlie as a "friend" who happened to be a "few years older." The two of us played intramural sports together, along with other instructors. Yeah, we never won the league or tournament at the end of it, but the memories created will always exist. In the spring of 2008, I was selected to travel with the Broadcast program at the college to New York City.

Charlie, being the "Yankee" that he is, having been raised in New Jersey, really looked out for me and told me "where not to be" after dark in NYC or in Newark, where we were staying.

He really took me under his wing on that trip, and I will forever be thankful. Charlie has truly been an inspiration to me from the start and has always been in my corner through good times and bad.

I could go on and on about the impact Charlie has had on my life since SPC, but I will not bore you with long

stories of how great Charlie is.

One of the biggest memories that stands out to me is my first semester on the staff. Using an Apple computer was foreign to me, and for the first two or three weeks, I didn't have a clue how to get on the internet.

So, needing to look something up, I finally worked up the courage to ask the associate editor at the time, Jacob Tucker, how to get on the internet. And he proceeded to tell me to click on the compass-looking icon at the bottom.

Jacob also helped me get my first big break of getting into the journalism world. In 2010, Jacob worked at the local newspaper in Levelland as the sports editor. He was covering an agricultural event at the local cotton seed company, All-Tex, and I asked him if he could "hook me up with a job at the newspaper?"

Yes, I was just kidding and was perfectly happy with where I was, but a couple months later my phone

rang. It was him telling me that he knew of a great opportunity that I wouldn't be able to pass up at the Levelland News-Press. I took his advice and put everything together to apply and got the job on the spot.

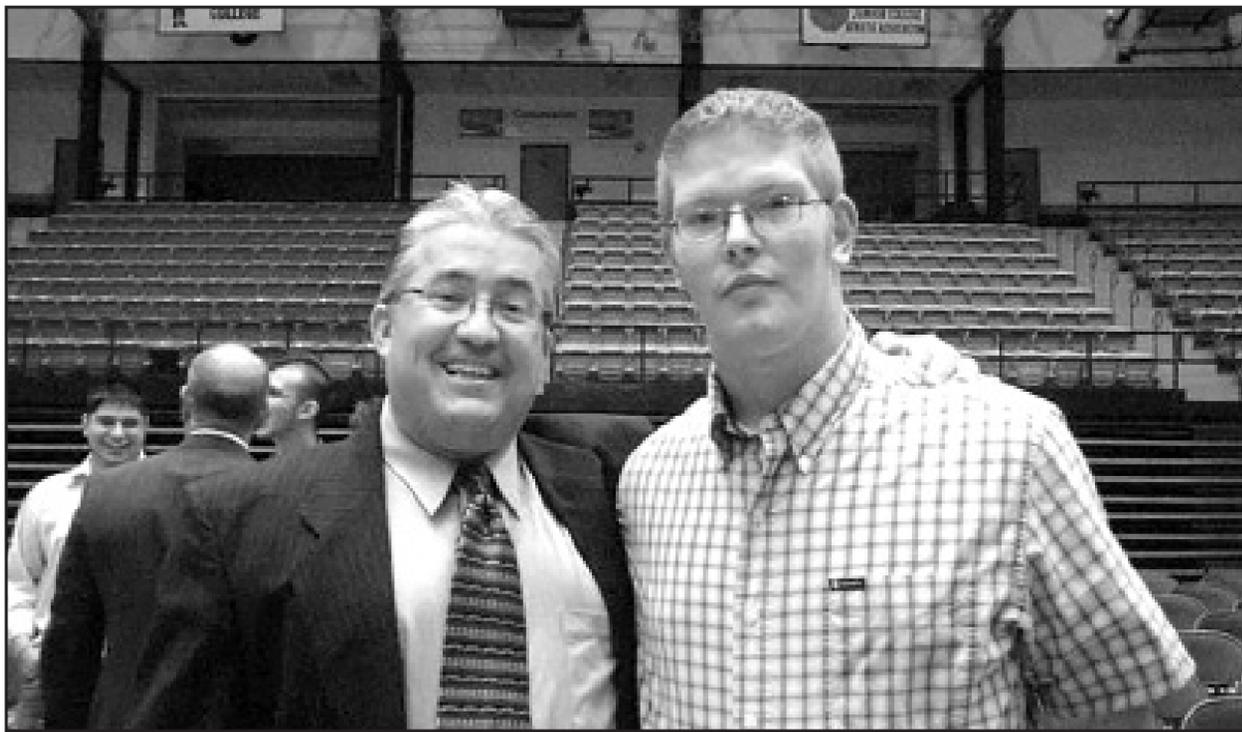
So, I guess, in part, I owe some of where I am as a writer to Jacob and mostly to Stephen Henry at the News-Press for taking a chance on me and helping mold me into what he expected me to be.

Another big memory I have from the Plainsman Press is attending the George Strait concert in Lubbock with a media pass. After some thought and making sure I had a photographer to go with me, I began the process of requesting credentials.

It took several phone calls before I finally got approval the day before the concert from Strait's promoter at the time, Front Page Publicity. Homer Marquez and I attended the concert, and I wrote a concert review for it. It was a good concert, and the best thing was, I didn't have to pay for anything other than gas.

I moved to Woodson in 2011 and covered sports for the Throckmorton Tribune. In 2013, I got a job at the Breckenridge American as Sports Editor and moved to Breckenridge in 2014, where I have lived since. I left the American in the fall of 2016 to work for the City of Breckenridge, where I am currently working. I also contribute sports stories to the Breckenridge Texan online publication when I can.

I'm not a full-time journalist anymore, but every day I still rely on the lessons I learned at the Plainsman Press. And, I still enjoy great journalism and try to find opportunities to write whenever I can.



College newspaper molds students into professionals



FALL 2010



FALL 2011



SPRING 2012

By Kati Moody
2010-2012

Life's workings are not ones that we will ever understand, especially at the time at which they are occurring.

For every experience in my life, I didn't quite understand its importance until I reflected on the experience in retrospect. When I first wrote my reflections story last year, I was not very happy about the Plainsman Press printing its final edition. Honestly, it felt like a personal attack on print media and journalists, and reminded me that we have to start to do a better job at recruiting future journalists.

But since then, I've taken a fresh perspective and now see it as a challenge. I see it as an opportunity to rediscover my love and passion for journalism and figure out a way to impart that love on to individuals who would make great journalists. I haven't yet figured out how to do that, but it's at the forefront of my mind.

The Plainsman Press had a huge impact on what led me back to Levelland after graduating with my bachelor's degree in digital (print) journalism from the University of North Texas. The college newspaper taught me how to work with others to put out a product and how to utilize people's strengths in order to make the publication the best it could possibly be. It gave me the leadership skills I needed in my current position and the teamwork skills I struggled with, and still do. It also forced me

to work with others and trust others to get their jobs done.

As we were putting together the final edition, I got the opportunity to go back to the archives and look at old issues of the newspaper at the SPC Library. I have to admit, I got pretty emotional looking at the newspapers through the years, even in the 1960s. This college newspaper has covered the goings-on at the college for more than 60 years, and I know that many people will miss and remember those old, past issues.

The Plainsman Press was my first introduction into how important South Plains College actually is to the local community. The college adds a new level of diversity to our community, and without it, Levelland wouldn't be near the town it is today.

For decades, the Plainsman Press has brought together future journalists from across the South Plains and has produced many of those who are in the industry today. My fear is that without it, the South Plains, as a whole will suffer moving forward without well-educated journalists to take up the torch as the older generation reaches retirement.

Let me reflect on how that journey began. In 2008, I was a sophomore in high school taking my first-ever journalism class at Levelland High School, learning about Catherine Leroy, a female photojournalist during the Vietnam War. From then on, I was inspired.

I was about 16 years old at that time and was in need of a part-time job to pay for gas. Of course, I looked to my local newspaper, the Levelland & Hockley County News-Press, to see if they needed someone.

Now, when I applied for the job, I had hopes I would be



and every time I had a chance to take an assignment, I did and I did it to the best of my ability. I took every short feature, every tiny bit of news I took on seriousness and purpose as if it were going to be a Pulitzer nomination.

This is why I think, because I cannot figure out why otherwise, the "News-Press" gave me a chance.

When I turned 18, they let me be a sports writer, knowing full well I had no experience in sports. But I was willing to learn. They entrusted that I would be able to do the best to my ability with what I was given.

At this same time, I became a staff writer for the Plainsman Press at South Plains College. Of course, coming into the staff, I thought I knew more than everybody because, look at me, I'm already working as a writer for an established newspaper! However, I had no idea.

Through my time at South Plains College, I not only made friends with other students, but I made friends with my mentors, who now I consider my colleagues. I thoroughly enjoy getting to catch up with Charlie Ehrenfeld and discussing the struggling journalism field any time I see him, and I love getting to reach out to Billy Alonzo any time I ever need anything from him. And, even though he isn't in Levelland any more, I get excited when I see John Sparks walk into my office for a chance to visit.

All these people, plus many more, played a role in my decision to continue pursuing journalism and make me want to instill in others the passion for the field that they imparted onto me. And now, more than ever, that is uniquely important to our field, and I hope we all are able to show others what a fulfilling career journalism can be.

While at the Plainsman Press, I served as associate editor, news editor, opinion editor and editorial assistant. My first semester, I fully emerged myself in the paper and process of putting it together, despite also having a part-time position as a sports writer at the Levelland News-Press and taking 12 hours of college courses.

every press day, even though I have no regrets and fully believe whatever I printed that day was accurate and well-reported, I still struggle with this. As a journalist, I think it is important to have that internal struggle, and I believe it's the only way you know whether you still have a heart.

It's easy to get caught up in the day-by-day news cycle and

my friends, family, neighbors, mentors, and even building relationships with elected officials and local leaders.

Someone asked me the other day what my "ambitions" are, or where I hoped to end up. I told them that I am exactly where I want to be, and it's the truth. Yes, Levelland is a small town with not a whole lot to do for fun, but it



I was so excited to be given the opportunity to see what it was really like to put out a full newspaper, from beginning to end, while working with others who were there for the same reason. I made some great friends, and probably some enemies, too, but mostly I remember those fun-filled evenings of putting the paper together that included a ton of laughs and Charlie saying, "get to work!"

I developed a relationship with one of my fellow editors during my second semester, which didn't last more than a couple months, but ended up turning into a friendship that has persisted more than 10 years. I also made friends who have since turned into colleagues who I communicate with on a semi-regular basis regarding overlapping stories between our different markets.

One of the most influential things I learned during my time at South Plains College was the ethics of journalism. In Charlie's classes, he presented us several "situations" and we

had to decide what the ethically correct response was. He didn't give us choices to choose from, he just asked us what would we do.

These "conversations" would turn heated quickly. Most students would take the side of the newspaper and readers, saying but if it's news, the readers should know. But, how about when that news affects the person's future? Or their families? What is privacy, and do everyday people have the same guarantees to privacy as me or you? Do elected officials have the same guarantees to privacy as everyday people?

There is a quote from "Jurassic Park" that Charlie uses in his class every year—"You were so preoccupied with whether or not you could, you didn't stop to consider if you should."

This is the bottom line in our industry, because even though it might be perfectly legal to do some of the things we do, it isn't always right. At the end of

radio scanner traffic. It's easy to fall in and out of not even feeling what you're covering. But at the end of the day, these are people's lives we're reporting on, and they should be treated with respect just like everyone else.

We will always need journalists, regardless of what anyone says. Without journalists, average, everyday citizens wouldn't know what's going on in their local community. They wouldn't know who or what their city council members are doing, what changes are being made to school policy that could impact their children's futures, and they wouldn't know what great events are happening right in their own neighborhood.

Even though larger media publications may be suffering, small town media is thriving. Personally, I love covering this community as the news editor, and I love getting to write about

has great potential. The only way to make it a better place is to get involved and help make those decisions.

Charlie has said this is the last print edition of the Plainsman Press, but I still have a glimmer of hope in that when students realize the need for journalists, they will discover their own desire to put their thoughts onto paper as so many students have done before. I believe that if Charlie had enough students enroll in News Reporting, he would be making a call to the press to say there will be a newspaper, once again.

So, I encourage all of you, if you know a young person who is planning to attend South Plains College who is a compelling writer and is very observant, send them Charlie's way. We need a future generation of journalists, and students need Charlie.





Experience on paper staff helped shape former editor



By Rebeka Rutledge Miller
2006-2007

There are few life experiences I can genuinely credit with helping to shape me into the person I am today, and it is an honor to say one of those experiences was the two years I spent on the Plainsman Press staff.

It all began when the paper's fantastic leader, Charlie Ehrenfeld, invited a high school senior,

who was uncertain about the direction of her college career, to a Paper Night. It was a privilege to be the first (and only) high schooler invited to do so. After an evening spent watching the paper's staff at work while thoroughly enjoying each other's company, I made the decision to jump fully into print journalism.

I spent as much, if not more, time in the Newsroom as in my dorm during my South Plains College experience. There I found my people, my place, my voice. I had been a quiet, timid person in high school, and in that space I began the transformation into a more confident and outspoken personality.

Through Charlie's guidance, I was pushed out of my comfort zones personally as well as professionally and polished skills such as written and verbal communication, organization, and social engagement. I learned how to be a better leader through my position as an editor.

Other nuggets of wisdom came directly from Charlie himself, such as "Be safe, buckle up, don't smoke." To this day, I think of Charlie as much more than a former teacher but also a friend, confidant, and cheerleader. He truly has a shining passion for teaching and openly cares about each of his students.

The friends I made during those years are so incredibly special to me, and despite not seeing them

for years now, my heart still warms over specific moments. Nights spent laying out pages while agonizing over finding the right headline and blaring "Bohemian Rhapsody" when we hit midnight are memories that will stay with me forever. I also learned some of the perks of journalism included being on "the list" for a concert and conducting my first celebrity interview.

I went on to West Texas A&M to complete my bachelor's degree in December 2010, following graduation from SPC in May 2009. After spending two and a half years as a reporter for a daily county newspaper in Duncan, Oklahoma, I decided that the world of journalism was not for me. However, I will always cherish that job for in-

troducing me to fellow reporter and love of my life, my husband Derrick.

We wed in September 2013, and shortly after our marriage, I spent several years in the banking industry before entering graduate school. I graduated in May 2020 with my Masters

of Science in Behavioral Science from Cameron University, and I began pursuing licensure as a Licensed Professional Counselor. We continue to reside in Duncan with our two dogs, Whiskey and Huck, and will be welcoming our first child in June 2021.

I definitely attribute much

credit to my experiences on The Plainsman Press for where I am presently. Though it saddens me that this is the final printed edition of this precious paper, I know that its future is bright and will continue to shape those who write for it. I am humbled to be able to contribute one last time.



Time on paper staff full of unforgettable memories



By Sawyer Thomas
2006-2007

Never in a million years did I think I would ever write another piece for the Plainsman Press.

Nor did I think I would be doing so for its last hurrah in print as we steadfastly move ever onward to a digital age. Yet, the stirrings of memories, the rush of feelings and emotions that I felt when I read it was ending compelled me to come back for one final piece.

I remember my first semester at South Plains College. It was



August of 2006. I had just moved to Lubbock and was starting college in a new city, two months after my mom had passed away. I had signed up for print journalism. One reason was because I enjoy writing, and the other was because I guess I needed an outlet to deal with the grief I was overcome with. I didn't even know about working on a college newspaper staff. I was just some plucky upstart from Austin, try-

ing to figure out his way in the world.

When I met Charlie, it was the universe giving me a mentor, somebody to provide a little structure in what was my world falling apart. He surrounded me with people whom I share the fondest of memories, including one very fun and at times a little out of control trip to TIPA in San Antonio.

I'll never forget the late nights, us laughing and ordering food in, and Charlie yelling at me because he hated when I sang the "Charles in Charge" theme song and constantly distracted everyone around me...so much so I was banished to his office to work as Online editor.

I'll always remember coming to just hang out in the room, surf Youtube and Facebook, hangout with Amelia, Taylor, Hillary, the whole crew. I'll remember the club sandwich from that little snow cone place, and I'll remember always being the one to come up with the clever headline, or

come in late on a deadline.

I was very technology oriented, and Charlie let me write my own column for a technology review. I had the first iPhone when it came out -- huge deal at the time -- and got to review it in the paper. I remember feeling that the Newsroom was my home away from home. It was the place I could go to be away from what I was feeling, and the place where I could be safe surrounded by people who I knew weren't there to judge me.

I remember everything about that first year, ending when Amelia and the other upperclassmen left and everything changed... It was like a scene from the movies. A scene that plays out again and again in my memories, colored with a rose hue and always making me feel good. You didn't want it to end, but eventually we had to go our separate ways.

Sure, we would keep in contact through the years. The first few years it would be random text messages or Facebook posts. We

might run into each other, if we had not moved away or make the effort. But it was never going to be the same as it was in those days/nights in the Newsroom. Late, late nights, with 16-page issues. There was something about that group of people. Our personalities meshed so well, and I feel that bond still today.

Nostalgia is a tricky thing. While it is good to reminisce on the past, it's entirely another to live in it. While I am grateful for my time on the press staff, I'm glad for the things that I learned, and glad that I was molded and structured in a way that I could move on with my life. I needed a place where I could be expressive, and learn new skills, and I found that on the press staff.

I don't think that I would be the man who I am today had Charlie not been there to make sure that I stayed focused and concentrated not only on being a good journalist, but a good classmate, a good example, and a good friend. His are some lessons that last, and to

be able to have had the privilege of being in his class is something I will treasure forever.

As I revisit this now, with the Plainsman Press closing on one last chapter, the overwhelming warmth and love that I feel from the memories in that Newsroom carry with me to this day. I will always be Miss Congeniality Chi Chi Rodriguez (in the contest once held by the Student Activities Office), and the song "Bohemian Rhapsody" will never be the same after being in that class during my time at South Plains College.

Thank you to the continuing generations of Plainsman Press staff members who were there after I left, continuing the great tradition and following the examples from those who came before you. Thanks to the Plainsman Press, Charlie, and everybody who was on staff with me for the unforgettable memories, the friendships, and the wonderful laughter that we shared whenever we came together. Gone but not forgotten.

Former editor finds life path with change in major



By Katherine Sommermeyer 2012-2014

Going into my freshman year of college, I had already changed my major twice.

I was 17 years-old, I had graduated from high school a year early, and I had no idea what I wanted to do as a career. On top of that, I decided to move 900 miles away to go to South Plains College.

Image how this shy, young freshman felt walking into the Newsroom on the second day of college in 2012 and seeing some guy just taking a nap on top of one of the tables. In that moment, I was instantly wondering what I had signed up for, and already thinking about how I needed to reevaluate my schedule. After the first class, I could tell the Newsroom was a safe place for many, and that Charlie Ehrenfeld was someone who made everyone feel comfortable.

It was during that first couple weeks of classes I believe I shyly went up to Charlie to ask about joining the editorial team. If



open arms. As someone who used to eat lunch in the library alone in high school (shocking, I know), I was really stepping outside of my comfort zone going to that first paper night. I felt like an outsider, but luckily there

think you're crazy." They probably did, but that didn't matter because I was finally breaking out of my shell and becoming comfortable around the people I would later consider my print family.

I became the Opinion Editor, wrote a fashion column, found my best friends, and finally felt like a part of something bigger. The Newsroom had a special way of making you feel like you mattered. After my first semester, I changed my major another time just so I could stay in the Newsroom. Jayme Lozano, Sierra Taylor, Victoria

reading pages while my contacts were so dry I could barely see, and attending TIPA, where I won an award for my very first page design layout.

My favorite early college memories are all from the Newsroom, and I can't count the number of times I almost peed on myself from laughing so hard. I'll always cherish the weekly trips to Pizza Hut with Jayme, sleepovers writing articles, doing the cinnamon challenge with Sierra, and sending Vine videos back and forth.

On the first day of every semester, Charlie tells the class that the Newsroom will change your life if you let it. It was cliché to hear,



University of North Texas, where I earned a Master of Science degree in Merchandising. I worked in retail for a few years and then as an assistant buyer, but currently work

on my confidence, pursuing what I wanted, and the importance of supportive people in your circle. The Newsroom changed my life, as well as many of my fellow staff members,



were other new students who were more outgoing and I could do what I did best in the background.

However, that was short lived, as I tend to get a little delusional when sleep deprived and will laugh at just about anything. It was either the first or second paper night

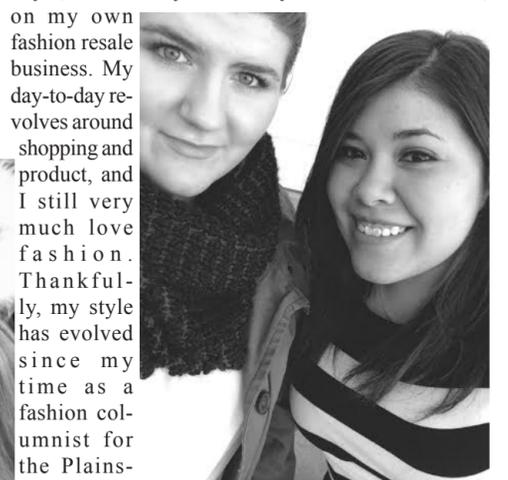


Landers, Caitlin Hamilton and I quickly became friends, and thus, Charlie's Angels was formed. We were "mean girls" in a way, but mostly because we were always together and always laughing. Jayme nicknamed me "Young Katherine," and now I smile when people call me by my formal first name because it reminds me of my Young Kath-

erine days. Some of my fondest memories on staff are doing Man on the Street with Jayme and Sierra, eating lunch at the BSM as a big group, Sonic runs, past midnight paper nights, trying to write headlines, making eye contact with Charlie and laughing because we both knew we were thinking the same thing, proof-

but absolutely true. I try not to regret much, but one of my biggest regrets was ending my time as an editor a semester early in 2014. I pushed away the people closest to me. But almost nine years later, I know if I needed anything those people would still be there.

I went on to transfer to Texas Tech University, where I changed my major one last time to Retail Management. Not a huge surprise for anyone who read my fashion opinion articles, but I have always had an interest in shopping and fashion. I graduated in 2016 with my Bachelor of Science degree and furthered my education at the



and I know the Plainsman Press legacy will continue to live on at SPC as journalism evolves.

South Plains College and the Plainsman Press will always hold a special place in my heart as a reminder to never stop taking chances, because trying new things can turn into the biggest blessings.

Deep down, I knew I probably would not pursue journalism past graduating from SPC, but my time in that program had a large part in shaping who I am today. That environment and the people had a large impact



I remember correctly, he was kind of taken aback, most likely because I might have spoken two words up until that point. Nevertheless, he invited me to paper night with

when Sierra Taylor spilled ketchup all over herself and I lost it. I remember laughing uncontrollably and thinking to myself, "Wow! You barely know these people; they must

erine days. Some of my fondest memories on staff are doing Man on the Street with Jayme and Sierra, eating lunch at the BSM as a big group, Sonic runs, past midnight paper nights, trying to write headlines, making eye contact with Charlie and laughing because we both knew we were thinking the same thing, proof-



Newsroom was like home away from home



By Lisa DeClerk
2008-2010

I didn't know what I wanted to do when I grew up. Well, that's a little over-dramatic, but it's true. Growing up I had dreams of being a famous singer/actress. But as I got older, I decided that I needed to come up with a back-up plan, just in case I wasn't winning Oscars or Grammys within the next few years. The only problem was...I didn't know what I wanted to do.

During my senior year in high school, I had floated the idea of going to medical school and being a doctor (Thanks a lot, "Grey's Anatomy"!). But after really thinking about it, I realized that it wasn't for me. I also served as a student teacher for first-grade in high school, and as much as I loved it, it wasn't a good fit for me either. After graduation, I decided that I wanted to major in music, but as my indecisive self would have it, my major changed again when it came time to register for classes. My first year was pretty much a bust, as my major changed three or four times.

By the time it came to register for the following semester's classes, I STILL had no idea what I wanted to do. That was until I met

two of the people who would change my life forever. While waiting in line at open registration at South Plains College, my parents and I were talking about how I used to write for the teen section of the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal. I guess we were talking loud enough because Mr. John Sparks and Mr. Charlie Ehrenfeld soon came up to us and offered some information on the Broadcast and Print Journalism programs. Both programs seemed like such a great fit for me. Broadcast Journalism would be great, as I love being in front of the camera and I figured if I couldn't BE in the entertainment industry, why not report on it? Plus, I loved to write, so Print Journalism would be great for me too. Now I was faced with the question of which program I should actually choose? I decided to sign up for both and see which one would actually end up being a better fit. The answer? Both! Both programs fit me so well that it was so hard to choose one over the other.

During the next couple of years, I stayed dedicated to both programs. I spent more time in both the SPC TV 10 studio and the Plainsman Press Newsroom than I did anywhere else on campus. I went from being a staff writer for the Plainsmen Press, to being an Editor. I dedicated so many long hours to writing my articles and into actually laying out the paper. Although we were tired, and let's admit it, a little frustrated at times, it never felt like a burden. Even when frustrations came because we couldn't get the article to fit just right on the page, or we spent HOURS trying to come up with a headline. I loved every single minute I was in there, and I loved everything



that I got to do. I got to experience so many amazing things that I wouldn't have been able to actually experience if I wasn't involved in the journalism program. I was able to go on trips to Washington, D.C., and Chicago. I competed in a competition at the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association (TIPA), where I placed. I ran for Homecoming Queen but lost by just a couple votes. I even got to interview a few celebrities, including Tyler Perry, Alexa Vega and Kevin Smith. I was even blessed with the opportunity to join the band Flyleaf on their tour bus when they stopped in Lubbock for a show.

The people who came into my life during those years were some of the most amazing people I have ever met, and some of those friendships still remain to this day. I still look back on all those wonderful memories, many of them still so fresh in my mind that you would never have thought that a decade has passed since my time there. Memories of those lunches at the BSM, bowling, pizza and Sonic drinks during those long paper nights, and so much more. "Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen just hits on a whole other level if you ever worked in the Newsroom on a paper night. And I will never forget us dancing to Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance."

I really considered The Newsroom and the SPC-TV 10 studio my safe and happy places. They were my homes away from home. I felt complete. I lived, laughed, loved and learned so much, and I wouldn't change a single thing about my time there... Well, aside from getting just a few more votes for Homecoming Queen. I just couldn't imagine how my life would be if Sparks and Charlie hadn't found me. I owe them so much, and I'm eternally grateful for everything. I also have to mention Billy Alonzo,

who was also an absolutely amazing mentor to me and who also played a huge role in my life while I was at SPC.

Time has passed and things have changed. I'm now working for the Texas Tech Health Sciences Center. I am married to a wonderful man named Douglas, who is a veteran of the United States Army and is currently a History major at SPC. We have a beautiful baby girl, Mia. While I still have those dreams of being a singer/actress, I'm keeping pretty busy with community theater (CATS Playhouse)

and I'm still singing. Although a decade has come and gone, I will always remember the people and the experiences that helped shape my life during those years at SPC. I honestly can't wait to share some of those stories with my daughter. I'm older now, I have a new career, a new family and even a new name. But no matter what happens or what changes come my way, I will always be "Lisa Mija," Opinion editor for the Plainsmen Press newspaper, and Anchor for the SPC-TV 10 newscast.



SPC experience leads long-time professor to 'Texify'

By Ed Marsh
Professor of Commercial Music

I grew up in Blacksburg, Virginia. My family lived two blocks from the campus of Virginia Tech, where my father was a professor.

The first 18 years of my life centered on that small town with a growing college. Now I live in Levelland, Texas. My home is two blocks from the campus of South Plains College. The last 43 years of my life have centered around this small town with a growing college.

My first trip to Texas, and to Levelland, was in late August of 1978. I flew to Lubbock from Nashville, Tenn., to interview for a job at South Plains College. The college had advertised for a fiddle instructor in the new country-music program; the department head was John Henry Hartin. He picked me up at the Lubbock airport on a late August afternoon, with the outside temperature about 100 degrees.

We drove the 25 miles to Levelland in John's Dodge pickup truck. It was red and white, and old the air conditioner was dead. The windows were down, country music blared on the radio, and the cotton fields and cow pastures streamed past my squinting eyes. Every time a song with a fiddle came on (which was mostly), John would say, "Do you know who that is?" I guess I passed the test... maybe.

I was expecting one or two buildings on a downtown street... but I was surprised to see an expansive, well-maintained campus. I saw uniform yellow-orange brick architecture, laid out around a central quadrangle,

and much new construction to the south. All conveyed a sense of permanence and good management. I had grown up near such a campus, and recognized the signs of academic seriousness and community support.

The country music program was located in the old dance studio. This area is now the student health center. The day I arrived on campus, Mr. Hartin took me directly to that facility and showed me the three rooms that constituted the entire department - one rehearsal room and two offices for instructors.

Mr. Hartin regaled me with his master plan to grow this program: hire more teachers; build an entirely new building with sound and television studios; and cultivate national media exposure and recognition. This plan seemed wildly overambitious at the time, yet Mr. Hartin achieved every item on this list in his tenure at the college.

After a brief tour, we uncased our instruments and commenced a classic "jam session." He requested some fiddle classics; I played them all. He sang some songs; I accompanied him. He played some jazz standards; I improvised solos.

A few minutes later, Dean Nathan Tubb came into the room. I'm sure his arrival was planned. Mr. Hartin introduced me to this academic leader, whose sobriety reminded me of my own father. Hands were shaken, and greetings were exchanged. Then the concert continued. I played a few Bob Wills fiddle favorites; the dean tapped his toe and smiled.

The meeting was adjourned, and reconvened in the dean's of-

fice in the Administration Building. After a while, I was asked to wait outside. When I was invited back in, I was offered the job. I flew back to Nashville, packed two suitcases, and moved to Levelland. Just like that, my life in the Eastern United States ended, and I began to "Texify" myself.

Day-to-day life through the next five years - 1978 to 1983 - was a whirlwind of growth in faculty and the student body. Any church or civic group, banquet, car show, rodeo, rally, or charity telethon that needed a band got "The Pickin' Professors." Literally every day, we professors finished classes and then traveled to surrounding communities.

On the broader national stage, Mr. Hartin continued to develop contacts in media and the music business. One such relationship was between SPC and Tom T. Hall - a renowned singer/songwriter, TV & radio personality, novelist, and influential Nashville senior statesman. Mr. Hall travelled to Levelland with a video crew and filmed footage for his upcoming PBS television special about bluegrass music.

Live on TV during that show, Dean Tubb presented Bill Monroe, the founder of commercial bluegrass music, with an honorary SPC degree in bluegrass.

Within a year or two, the New York Times featured a story about the program in their Sunday section: "Bluegrass Goes To College."

These were exciting years! Each summer, the music department presented a 90-minute musical revue that toured all throughout Texas and eastern New Mexico. The cast consisted of about 12 talented students and most of

the music faculty, including SPC President Dr. Marvin Baker and his wife Mildred. Dr. Baker ran spotlights and sometimes even drove the bus. Over time, the demand for the group led to bookings nearly every night from mid-May to July 4th. The group also toured nationally - from Florida to California.

These tours advertised SPC to a national student talent base. Students from Europe and even Asia began arriving in Levelland to study a uniquely American form of music. Today, many former student performers have achieved national success as performers and in various technical areas of the music industry. For example, Leann Womack - Grammy winner & CMA Performer of the Year - was a student-performer on the SPC touring stage.

As the programs of study, student population, and faculty grew, it became clear we had outgrown the label of "country music." Sadly - for many of us - we said farewell to our rural namesake and became the Creative Arts Department. Under this umbrella, there are degree programs in music performance, sound-recording technology, live sound reinforcement, music-and-television production, and graphic-design communication.

The 21st century is well begun. The Creative Arts Department keeps pace - but I wish to look backward, fondly.

In the 1970s, "back-to-school" picnics were held on the quad during faculty in-service week. Serving tables were festooned with red-and-white-check tablecloth. Administration members were flipping burgers and serving

plates. My first year, 1978, Mildred Baker (wife of SPC president Marvin L. Baker) introduced me to every faculty member, most of their husbands or wives, and a good number of their children.

This campus scene was festive and celebratory. Colleagues enthusiastically greeted their friends, and shared tales of summer school, camps, travel, etc... Toddlers toddled; teens congregated awkwardly with their peers; and I marveled at the similarity between this event and those I knew in my childhood when Virginia Tech faculty members convened for such events. Some participants cranked ice cream freezers, pies and cakes appeared from the kitchens of the academic family, and the sunset shadow climbed the west tower wall of the theater.

I was 25 years old, and intoxicated by the familial tone of this event. One somehow knows when life has thrown him a golden horseshoe, and I grabbed it!

I can see the faces of the "old-timers," citizens who were born during the Great Depression and forged in the Second World War. One such character was born in a "half-dugout" on a ranch in New Mexico; another had arrived in Levelland on horseback.

Many on the senior faculty were military veterans; several were country preachers before joining academia. One elderly history professor shared his pictures of the town in its infancy; "that" Levelland had few streets - and they were dirt. Cotton rows stood nearby the town square. He told tales of a pea patch that grew where the courthouse stands today. These good people accepted

me, shook my hand, and shared their life stories.

Levelland, in those days, was "dry;" Lubbock was the nearest town where a drinking person could acquire "firewater." One wise old administrator advised me to carry such beverages into my home under cover of darkness.

In order to facilitate the alcohol-free celebration of New Year's Eve, the college hosted a big party in the Student Center. As a member of the music faculty, I was expected to provide music for dancing and listening entertainment. Attendees visited and danced together until midnight, when a nice breakfast was served by the SPC food service. This was my first contact with the tradition of eating black-eyed peas "first thing" on January 1st.

A few years ago, I was in the Kroger store in Taos, New Mexico, on New Year's morning; I was there to buy the obligatory black-eyed peas. A man walked up to the pea shelf, and we reached out simultaneously for the last can on the shelf. When our gazes met, we broke out in laughter!

This gentleman had attended SPC in the 1970s; we recognized each other.

He was raised in Lubbock; his father was on the faculty of Texas Tech. He had been a runner on the SPC cross country team, and he had taken courses in the music department when I was a new instructor. As the gentleman I knew him to be, he deferred to my seniority and handed me the peas.

This story is a beautiful example of my experience and treatment among west Texans: peas and love!



Writer reflects on lessons learned through Plainsman Press



By Brittany Ward
2006-2008

I find it such a bittersweet opportunity and surreal experience to be writing words I know will be printed on paper again.

I walked away from South Plains College in 2008, without a degree but with prospects of an engagement ring. I wanted to be married and begin my future. However, it had also become very apparent to me that my major, Print Journalism, would land me on a very narrow and rocky job path. I was the last of a dying breed. What learning and what my parents were paying for was a future in a field that was transforming before my eyes. Writing has been my passion all my life, and I can't imagine myself doing anything else. Be that as it may, it didn't stop me from realizing a hard truth. I didn't need to go to journalism school whenever anyone could be a journalist. The terrifying and thrilling thing is, I was right.

At that time, blogs were exploding. Traditional newspapers were piling up in yards. Social media was getting its legs, while forums and YouTube were becoming more than funny cat videos. I'll always remember the day I went to apply for an internship at the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal. Everything felt "old" and smelled musty, and the computers had that yellow tone. I was, by far, the youngest person there. What I had imagined as my bright future was actually a graveyard of the old technology that was struggling to stay alive, to stay relevant, to stay on morning coffee tables.

I did go on to get married and have kids and while my passion for writing never changed, the world of journalism had. Just as televised news went from one hour a day to all hours every day, so followed the printed papers. What once was a 24-hour production and turnaround time became a limitless medium that was available and updated 24 hours a day. No longer were newspapers limited by the number of pages printed, and accessibility did not require a trip outside, in a robe, through the morning dew of the front yard. It was all just a click away. Yet, with limitless space and access came what ultimately was the downfall of the traditional news- limitless competition. As the competition changed, so did the mindset of the consumer. Not only were there so many new avenues to get news, but people could now decide how they read it and what kind of news they saw. The goal of news morphed into an industry that now seeks the reader, rather than the story.

The journalism principles I learned as the rule have become the exception. I remember sitting in Charlie Ehrenfeld's class as he taught us about headlines. He said a headline should never make one "choke on their Cheerios," meaning, that shocking the reader should never be the goal. However, as I scroll down my Facebook feed, every headline I see is attempting to shock me. Now, not only is news in competition with each other, they are all competing for my attention.

Once my dad had the paper in his hand, he would skim for things to read that he might like to know. The paper sought to create a calm, daily experience and routine. Today, news must convince the reader that this is something they have to know, and they need to be aware of it right now. Unfortunately,

work, or the store, or a walk to the neighbor's house before we had a chance to tell anyone else what we thought of the news. It was reliant on that person also reading the article as well.

In face-to-face interactions with members of our community, there was a pretense of respect because we all lived and worked in the same spaces, so cordiality was the priority. For the most part, we really didn't have much pretense to know how others felt about different issues or stories. We had to be vulnerable to have those conversations. While we may have had an initial reaction, often, by the time we sat down to write a letter to the editor, our words were much more levelheaded than if we had an instant comments section right below.

I had many "letters to the editor" addressed to me during my time on the Plainsman Press. Most were good, but one had a profound impact on me. One of my biggest regrets came from an article I wrote highlighting the violent nature of the religion of Islam as compared to my own Christianity. With years of hindsight, learning and growing, it is not an article I would write today. My perspective on my own faith was limited to what I had been told, rather than what I had experienced. I had yet to learn that an unconditional love of all people was my primary call as a follower of Jesus. After that article was published, I received

power of their words had had a remarkable effect. Had that club been able to publicly comment on my story, they would have been in a place where their views couldn't be ignored. Unlimited news now is received with unfiltered awareness of an endless audience, with public accountability for the words that they write and opinions they share.

With that accountability in place, we no longer watch the news, the news watches us. With the rise of Twitter and the smart phone, no longer do we wait for a news crew to arrive because "there are cameras everywhere." Anyone can be a witness, and we can publicly share our own accounts and photos. The most important stories are determined by what's trending, not what is on the front page. Stories now can even bypass an actual news outlet and simply go "viral" straight from the source. This has allowed those feel-good moments we love to see make their way to our newsfeed. Yet, it has also allowed us to hear and see those stories that may have never made it to the pages of print before.

This phenomenon has never been more apparent than when our world changed forever in March of 2020. Collectively, we have watched a pandemic ravage our country and world with most stories coming straight from those in the middle of the storm. We saw nurses with their faces bruised from

stay-at-home orders came down. Although, we were less physically connected than we have ever been in our lifetimes, we were able to see the real stories behind the Covid headlines.

In 2020, we also heard and saw the voices of minority groups around the world, and a movement not seen since the time of Dr. Martin Luther King rose from these stories. This became center stage, not because of images a news camera saw, but because of one video, from one phone. But that one video put flesh and blood to what would maybe have never been a story in the days of print. This is the massive shift in media that has made all the difference.

Now that we all have become journalists, we are able to see the humanity in these stories, and we can respond to them in real time. Our awareness of each other has been opened up massively. Whether that is a benefit to our society or not is yet to be determined. Our responsibility of our contributions may have become just as vital as that of a CEO of any major news network. We are the news, so now we must hold truth as our highest goal.

What might be the biggest difference between the news as I used to write it and "news" as it is today - no one has an editor. One of the greatest threats we face is the increasingly rapid spread of misinformation. Without an editor, the drive to be the first has overridden

hope these stories are true.

One of the most profound phrases Charlie taught us in regard to journalism was actually borrowed from the cinematic treasure that is "Jurassic Park," "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether they could, that they didn't stop to think if they should." In the pursuit of the real story, the unfiltered, raw, unedited, unlimited news coverage, we have regenerated the old fossils known as traditional news. Still, it happened so fast and without boundaries that now we have created a world of journalism where all the electric fences are down. Like wild reptiles, we are reacting, scaring, devouring each other and constantly searching for fresh meat.

In my two years in that Newsroom, I learned that just because you can publish something, doesn't always mean you should. As a journalist, I realized the weight my words carried and the responsibility I had to be sure all information I shared was true, not just true to me. Unlike my words here in print which will be put away in a box and slowly disintegrate, our words are now timeless, and we are creating our own newspaper every day. Everything we post, say, share or comment on can and will be seen for years to come. We must resist going for the shock value. It's OK to take our time responding when we do not agree. Read the stories, not just the headline, and be ready to be held accountable. We have been given the opportunity to be the first on the scene, but how and what we decide to report must be done with grace and dignity for others. Now, more than ever, what we don't say and post is just as important, if not more important, than the words we do.

In the Plainsman Press Newsroom, I was challenged, edited and held accountable. It not only made me a better writer, but in those years, I became a better person. I consider myself privileged to learn from those who had the weight of the next print issue on their shoulders and had an immense responsibility to society to get the story "right."

It's an artform I hope will make a resurgence as we continue the relentless and necessary pursuit of facts. I left college, but I never stopped writing, because I love to tell stories. As a journalist yourself, may you go out and tell your stories and lift up the stories of others. Because no matter how we get our news now, all news has ever meant was just that, our stories. News is merely people coexisting and trying to understand the unique perspectives we all have. The times we fail will always be on the front page, but once we have knowledge and we know better, we must strive to find a new way to highlight the times we succeed as a society.

As a writer, I know that actions show your character, but your words show your heart. Let us use them for good. Take my word for it.

once the content is "clicked," the money is now made and the reader's experience means little.

In recent years, this concept has taken a step further as precise algorithms can predict what news will peak our interests. We are all now merely fish to bait and be hooked. Headlines are no longer a tool of organization on a page, but rather they must evoke emotion. Though the news is limitless, our time isn't. In a world where we have all the content but not a lot of time, headlines have gone from peaking interest in a story to being the story.

In my two years on the staff of the Plainsman Press, I often wrote opinion articles like this



one. I knew my articles wouldn't make the front page and not everyone would choose to read them, but I loved the freedom the opinion section offered. The opinion section is where bias could exist and my perspective was the value, not my ability to find or interview primary sources. It was about how I felt, not necessarily what was true. But the reader knew that was the case, because they had turned to pages with the little text "OPINION" in the top corner.

However, with the loss of print or any deciphering transitions between 24-hour newscasts, we have created an experience where we no longer know what "section" we are actually in. This has become a structure where both facts and bias can exist. Since the consumer, not the story, is the driving force, we actually can seek those news sources that give us that bias and choose what "facts" we will want to know. Our culture wants more than the facts of the news now; we want to be told how we feel about it. Again, since our time is limited, we have created spaces where we can have the front page and the back pages at the same time. Are the facts the value, or the perspective of the author, or rather do we seek news that uses facts to validate our own perspectives?

With unlimited resources, we have unlimited outlets in which to respond to what we see and read. While we only had some large newspapers as our sources at one time, we had the benefit of time to process what we had read. Snarky comments over the breakfast table happened, but the newspaper itself couldn't hear us. It would take a drive to

an invitation from an Islamic club on campus. They merely wanted to meet with me and wanted me to see that the violent view I had did not represent who they were as individuals. Not only did I decline the offer, out of fear of being challenged, but I didn't even respond.

While the response to the news comes in as fast as it is written, the rise in instant accountability for those using the

PPE and patients sitting alone in hospitals rooms. Nevertheless, we saw hope as well when strangers were offering up their own campers for these medical personnel and some were making masks for free. In one of the most inspiring videos from that time, we had a front row seat to hear entire cities cheering for medical teams as they went to work every day. The news was trying to organize itself once the

obligation to be accurate. The ground we have made up in using technology to put humanity into these stories has also simultaneously stripped us of that very humanity. Just by the mere saturation and overload of the information we are constantly taking in, the search for the truth has become exhausting and has led some of us to retreat to our own safe echo chambers where we can



Previous Staffs

The Last Issue

Plainsman Press



