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**STEVE McNAMARA**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Michelle Petersen in 2014**

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In this oral history, writer and publisher Steve McNamara recounts his life in the newspaper business. Born in Chicago in 1934, Steve grew up in Urbana, Illinois. After graduating from high school, he attended Princeton University, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. Steve recalls that he initially planned to pursue a career in the Foreign Service, but then decided to go into the newspaper business. He got his start as a reporter working for the *Twin-City Sentinel* in North Carolina in 1955. He moved out to California in 1960 and got a job at the *San Francisco Examiner*, where he eventually became the Sunday editor. Three years later he moved to Mill Valley and in 1966 purchased the *Pacific Sun*, which for several decades lived at 21 Corte Madera Avenue, across the street from City Hall. Steve describes the pleasures and challenges of running this iconic Marin newspaper, which he and his wife Kay sold in 2004. He also discusses his involvement since 2008 in the revival of the inmate-produced *San Quentin News* and the non-profit Prison Media Project, which he founded. Throughout this oral history Steve balances his account of the various phases of his professional life with an account of his ancestors and his extended family of children and grandchildren.

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## Oral History of Steve McNamara

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**Oral History of Steve McNamara  
January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Editor's note:** This oral history transcript differs in minor ways from the recording. It was reviewed by Steve McNamara, who made corrections, clarifications, and additions.

**Steve McNamara:** Today's date is January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I am going to follow this list of questions you gave me, if that is workable for you?

**Michelle Petersen:** Absolutely.

**Steve McNamara:** My name is Steve McNamara, no middle name. Actually, the legal first name is Stephen, but that is not a name that appears anywhere except on my birth certificate, driver's license and passport. I was born in Chicago on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1934 in Henrotin Hospital. Ethnic background: mostly Irish descent, but a bit of Scottish in there.

**Michelle Petersen:** Is the name McNamara Irish or Scottish?

**Steve McNamara:** Irish. The reason I am fairly firm on ethnic background is that I just got under the wire with the 23andMe DNA analysis program run by the wife of one of the founders of Google. She had problems with the FDA, but before they came down on her if you'd spit into a tube that her company sent you and give them \$99, they would trace your ethnic background. Mine is, according to their diagnosis, pretty strongly Irish. Mom's family, Ireland and Scotland; dad's, Ireland.

My paternal great-great-grandfather James came over around 1837, before the potato famine. He came to work on what was then the big industrial event in America, the Erie Canal. The canal was to enable the businesses and factories and farms in the Midwest to have access to the markets of the East Coast. They needed to get through the Great Lakes and down the Hudson River and they did it through the Erie Canal, which was a big event back then. James McNamara had a little farm in Redfield, a small town in the Syracuse area. My great-grandfather Thomas was born there in 1844. In 1871 he married Mary Ann Comiskey, who had emigrated from Ireland with her family in the 1850s. Thomas and Mary Ann had 11 children, of whom the middle one was my grandfather, Robert Charles, born in 1881.

Thomas was a carpenter when he was sober, which was not all the time, and one of the people for whom he did work was the daughter of John Grier Hibben, who was a professor at Princeton University and later became its president, succeeding Woodrow Wilson. Hibben took a fancy to my grandfather and encouraged him to continue his education, an unusual thought for poor Irish families of that era.

Grandpa got himself a job as a part-time janitor at a little academy, the Pulaski Academy, 16 miles down the railroad line, and managed to graduate from high school there. Hibben encouraged him to apply to Princeton, which was mostly unheard of back then. But

grandpa did apply and somehow made his way through the entrance exams, which were oral in those days. He graduated from Princeton in the class of 1903 with modest grades. He was one of the very few poor kids in a school which back then appealed to aristocratic southerners who wanted to send their sons — it was sons only — about as far north as they dared, which was to Princeton, New Jersey. There was grandpa, a poor Irish kid, in a school that was full of aristocratic southerners. Woodrow Wilson was the president.

Grandpa graduated in 1903, exactly 100 years before one of his great grandsons, my son Morgan, graduated from Princeton. Kind of cool. After grandpa graduated he went to work for Hinds & Noble, a book publishing company in New York City. After two years he had the idea to start a university store back at Princeton. Most anyone who has gone to college in the last hundred years knows that the university store is a staple of the school, but back then it was quite rare. My grandfather convinced the university to let him start the Princeton University Store in a dorm room he was given for that purpose. The store flourishes today in a different place but with about the same business plan he put together in 1905, when he was 24.

Grandpa did that for a while, and then went to work for Scott Foresman, a budding textbook company in Chicago. Scott Foresman grew to be the biggest textbook company in America and maybe the world. It did so pretty much because it had pioneered the teaching of reading with the Dick and Jane books. Some older readers of this account will remember Dick and Jane books. For a while, every school kid in America, practically, was learning to read with Dick and Jane books.

They were so successful because they linked the words that you were going to learn with pictures. Prior to that, books that taught reading were just plain text. You were supposed to sit there in a classroom and memorize words without being able to link them to any activity. In a Dick and Jane book, it would read, “See Spot run,” and this little cocker spaniel would be seen running across the lawn. It sounds pretty elementary right now, but back then it was a dramatic breakthrough. Sort of the iPhone of its era, the brand new idea. In this case you taught reading with visual images. So at any rate, grandpa was at Scott Foresman. The story goes that he kept asking for raises and instead they kept giving him stock and so finally he had enough stock to elect himself president. It wasn’t quite that simple. There were two families, the Scotts and the Foresmans, that settled on grandpa to run the company, which he did for a good deal longer than they had expected.

In the process he made a lot of money. It wasn’t evident that he made a lot of money until the company went public many years later. He used to say he couldn’t afford a new hat, and he did have a very old hat. Despite the fact he had been the poor kid at Princeton, he became the class president for years and years. He was also president of the Chicago Red Cross and the Chicago Crime Commission and the Princeton Club of Chicago. He founded a scholarship that today sends about a dozen kids to Princeton each year. He was in many ways the most illustrious member of that generation of my family. He had managed to pull himself up by his bootstraps. I tell people that his life illustrates that old maxim that the people who have all kinds of good luck are usually the ones who work their asses off, and he did. He was incredibly hard working but always cheerful and nice.

However, he scared the pants off me as a kid because he was an imposing figure. I could see a lot of people were deferring to him, which was a scary thought. So that's the story of my background there.

My mother's family I believe came some from Scotland, some from Ireland, and they all lived in Chicago. My mother and father met at high school, Nicholas Senn. I have no idea who Nicholas Senn was, obviously somebody of some significance or they wouldn't have named a high school after him. My mother went to the University of Illinois, my father went to Princeton with his brother, and my mother and father were married, I think, in 1932. I was born in 1934 and my mother and father were divorced, I think, two years later. After the divorce my mother moved down to Urbana, Illinois, which is where she had gone to the university.

**Michelle Petersen:** Did you go with her?

**Steve McNamara:** Yes. Her parents moved to Urbana to help take care of me while she worked. Actually what she did was pretty brave for her era. She had no marketable skills, she wasn't a brain surgeon or a PhD in classics or something that would put her in a good position in the job market, but she was determined to get out of that marriage and she did. In Urbana, after I don't know how long, it couldn't have been very long, she met this charming instructor in English named Charles Shattuck. Like most instructors in English then he was paid a ridiculously small sum of money. So my grandparents, my mother's parents, had a pretty dim view of her relationship with him. They thought, good Lord, here she had been in a marriage in a family that was doing very well, to put it mildly, and now she has taken up with this college professor, not even a professor, an instructor, who as the saying goes, probably didn't have a pot to pee in.

But he was very handsome and charming and it turns out that he was an absolutely wonderful, wonderful person. And as it also turned out, very accomplished. He became over the years the world's leading authority on Shakespeare in America and wrote two books that are the basis of all studies in that area. The two volumes are "Shakespeare on the American Stage," published by the Folger Library, which is the American center of important things Shakespearean.

**Michelle Petersen:** What was this charming gentleman's name?

**Steve McNamara:** Charles Shattuck, like the street in Berkeley, although not connected, I don't think. I was brought up by them. My mother and stepfather.

**Michelle Petersen:** So they did marry.

**Steve McNamara:** They got married and subsequently had two children.

**Michelle Petersen:** Were you the only child of your mother and father?

**Steve McNamara:** Yes, I was. My father subsequently remarried twice. The first time around he had three other children, two half-brothers who were fraternal twins and a girl.

**Michelle Petersen:** What are their names?

**Steve McNamara:** The girl's name is Cornelia McNamara and she lives in Fort Lauderdale. Of the twins, one survives, the other died of a heart issue some years back. The living half-brother is Norris McNamara and he lives in Chicago. The two half-sisters on my mother and step-father's side are Kate Green, who lives in Trinidad, the Trinidad up the coast near Arcata, and the other half-sister, Judy Shattuck, lives in Berkeley, where she worked for a long time for the University of California and is now retired. She was a big power in the union movement in the East Bay. She seems like a very mild-mannered person but I have heard from all sorts of places that she used to strike fear into the hearts of university administrators when she would come to a meeting because they knew there was no messing with Judy Shattuck. She was a powerful person.

**Michelle Petersen:** How old were you when they were born, do you remember?

**Steve McNamara:** Well, I was born in '34 and they were born — Kate, '37, and Judy, '41.

**Michelle Petersen:** Okay, so you were all very young.

**Steve McNamara:** Yes, we were reasonably close together. I grew up in Urbana with my mother, stepfather, and half-sisters. I went to grade school there, high school, University High School, and then went to Princeton.

**Michelle Petersen:** Long line of Princeton grads.

**Steve McNamara:** Yes, and two of my sons went to Princeton. One of them could deal with it for only 16 days and came back and went to Berkeley. He is a quite famous big wall rock climber and BASE jumper and he couldn't deal with being 3,000 miles away from El Capitan, so he came back. Also, Princeton was full of Easterners, which is not his approach to life. It turns out that coming back was exactly the right thing for him. The other son is more into computers and he didn't need El Capitan, he just needed wall plugs for his computers. He found several at Princeton and graduated.

**Michelle Petersen:** What year did you graduate from Princeton?

**Steve McNamara:** In 1955. Same year as Ralph Nader and Peter Lewis, the guy who made Progressive Insurance the giant insurance business that it is and gave a ton of money to Princeton, more than \$230 million.

So looping back, I'm in Urbana, Illinois, with my mother and stepfather. One part of the family lore is kind of charming. Here is my mother, freshly divorced with a small child in tow, and she began to hang out with this handsome but impoverished English instructor.

Her parents, who were tending me, were horrified. They thought she had really jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. Well, years later, after my mother's father died, her mother came back and lived with us until the end of her days. I was in grade school and high school at the time. We used to tease Granny a bit about her early feelings about Charles. She would kind of grow red in the face, because her thoughts had been way off base. Absolutely the best thing that could ever have happened to my mother was to meet and marry Charles Shattuck. Granny knew that; she really got tired of hearing how her earlier thoughts on the subject had been so misguided. But we did kid her a bit about it.

**Michelle Petersen:** What were your grandparents' names?

**Steve McNamara:** My mother's father was Duncan MacArthur Deuel, and her mother's name was Sadie Rankin Deuel.

Urbana, Illinois, was an interesting little town. There are two towns, Urbana and Champaign, the twin cities, back to back, with one street, Wright Street, separating the two. The University of Illinois straddles the street; the university is mostly in Urbana but some of it is in Champaign. We lived on the Urbana side and at the time I think it had something like 7,000 people. Both Urbana and Champaign were interesting combinations. On the one hand they were farm towns in corn and soybean country, but on the other hand there was a significant university in their midst. So you had both farmers in overalls and college professors riding bicycles to teach classes. There weren't all-out battles between the two; I don't mean to suggest that. But there was a definite town and gown split, which is often the case in a college town. In this case, the split was between academics and actual farmers or people who serviced and sold stuff to farmers. And there was a definite small town aura to the place back then.

**Michelle Petersen:** What would you do for fun back then when you were in high school or grade school?

**Steve McNamara:** In high school, drive around and drink beer, throw beer bottles out the car window. There wasn't much. This was, mind you, mostly during the Second World War. A lot of recreational opportunities that have since developed were not present then. Riding your bike was something to do, and there were school sports, but I don't believe Little League had been invented then. There were not the organized kids' sports that you have today. There was no thought of going out for the peewee soccer team; it didn't exist. In grade school all the kids played games in the neighborhood after dinner, kick the can and things like that.

Younger kids would assemble over at the high school and play touch football or pickup games, but organized sports were not much in evidence. I envied my own kids for having opportunities that weren't present when I was growing up. I wish there had been rock climbing, I wish there had been dirt biking, I wish there had been a lot of the recreational opportunities that are present now. In part it was because no one had invented them, though there wouldn't be a whole lot of rock climbing in the middle of Illinois. It was flat, I'll tell you that. Cornfields, soybean fields, they were the big scenic wonder of that



part of Illinois. But once I start to feel sorry for myself for having missed out on dirt biking, I realize that by virtue of having been born in 1934, I was not only present for the '60s and '70s but managed to play an interesting role in that era by living in San Francisco and Marin.

When my kids think about the '60s or '70s, it is to them like things that were happening on Mars. There's a saying that "If you claim to remember the '60s, then you weren't really participating in them." I do remember them and I did participate — a lot. I have a written record since I owned a newspaper that was up to its armpits in the events in the '60s and '70s. If my mind grows really fuzzy in that area, I find an old copy of the *Pacific Sun* and it's, "Whoa, that indeed was the day."

So what were opportunities when I was a kid? Well, I went to an interesting little high school called University High School that was an adjunct of the Department of Education at the University of Illinois. It was a quasi-private high school in the sense that you weren't just automatically admitted after having graduated from grade school or middle school. You took an entrance exam. There was tuition. I think it was \$200 a year. The school had an element to it that was a little unusual. It was called sub-freshman year. Somebody in the university's Education Department had decided that while elementary school up through the sixth grade made sense, seventh and eighth grades were duplicative: they were teaching the same things over and over again. So they combined those two years into something called sub-freshman year. I don't think they do that anymore, but they did for quite a while. So I went from sixth grade at Leal School to becoming a sub-freshman at University High School. There were five classes there: sub-freshman, freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. Five classes, a total of 200 students, so it was small.

But it was a very good school. It has produced three Nobel Prize winners, including one guy who won two Nobel prizes. It has also produced, to my eternal dismay, George Will. He was in my sister Judy's class and he had a crush on Judy, something that makes her shudder when she thinks about it. We do not think a great deal of George Will and his political views, but there it is, there is nothing we can do about it. After Uni High, as it was called, I went to Princeton. It was a scary experience, frankly. At the beginning; not at the end.

**Michelle Petersen:** How often would you see your father when you were still in Illinois?

**Steve McNamara:** Not often. Maybe once or twice a year. Once a year I'd get on the train at the Illinois Central station in Champaign and go 136 miles up the line to Chicago where I'd be met and stay there. It was a traumatic experience because I was young, very young, and frankly it took me a while to get used to the fact that this was my actual birth father. I think the first time he showed up I thought he was some uncle or something like that. Who was this person? He had a car. Back in those days, mind you — this is during the Second World War — not everybody had a car. Gasoline, tires, whatever, it was all rationed, so you had to be a postman with a rural route or have some sort of an excuse to

get enough gas to drive a car around. My father did, he was working for Scott Foresman, the publishing company, and he was traveling around selling Dick and Jane books. He showed up in his car, it was a Pontiac. For a long while his presence was baffling. It was awkward. I was much more comfortable with my grandfather. A grandfather I could comprehend but for the longest time I had thought the person at the dining table, Charles Shattuck, was my father.

The reason my father's presence was kind of scary was that he was a stranger. Although nothing bad was ever said about him in the household, I later learned that the reason my mother and father went their separate ways was that he was cheating on her. Back in those days, as now, lots of husbands cheated, but lots of wives just swallowed it, especially those without any good employment prospects. But my mother was a pretty determined sort, and when she figured out her husband was cheating with a friend of theirs, she said, "Enough!" and took a hike, which all worked out perfectly well for her. For him, not so good.

But where was I? Oh, so my birth father remarried and had three children. Two of the children were boys, fraternal twins, who were big lugs and they scared the pants off me. The household was very disorganized. So when my father would come down to Urbana, it became okay; kind of like a visit from a distant uncle. But on the annual visits to go visit him and his family in Chicago, it was scary. I was used to a calm, organized, rational, predictable environment; and that was not the case in my father's household.

They all lived very well. My grandfather lived in Winnetka on the grounds of the Indian Hill Club and my father lived in a wonderful old house in Evanston and then later on the Gold Coast in Chicago. It wasn't as though I was being shipped off to eat gruel. On those trips, I'd often come back with a whole new set of clothes, which miffed my mother. It was as though, "I sent him off in a perfectly good pair of blue jeans and he comes back with all these fancy clothes from Brooks Bros." It was kind of a rebuke as to how I was being raised at home. But aside from the clothes and the fancy dinners, life in Urbana was vastly more agreeable.

**Michelle Petersen:** What made you decide to go to Princeton? Is it the history of your family going to Princeton?

**Steve McNamara:** Well, I knew I wanted to get out of town; I didn't want to go to the University of Illinois. A lot of my friends did because it was nearby and there was no problem getting in in those days, but I wanted to go somewhere else. I applied, I think, just to two schools: University of Wisconsin in Madison, because I'd seen a picture of the campus with a lake in evidence in some of the photos and I thought "Wow, that is cool" — not a lot of lakes in the middle of Illinois. Then I was kind of nudged towards Princeton. I don't remember being pushed, maybe I was. Anyway, I applied and got in. It was a lot easier in those days to get in to any college. Princeton especially since my grandfather had been quite generous to the university and he was the president of the Princeton Club of Chicago. Even though he had been the poorest kid in his class, he

became the president of his Class of 1903 and stayed that way practically forever; they kept re-electing him. There was a current that moved in that direction. So I went.

I had been there on the campus before, once or twice. My stepfather, Charles Shattuck, was rising up the ranks and writing books about Shakespeare and directing the theater at the University of Illinois. He went to Vassar for a year and directed the theater there. While he was there we took a couple of trips down to Princeton. He was connected with the theater at Princeton and I remember staying in a dorm, Patten, which is where one of my sons lived later. So when I got off the train in Princeton as a freshman it wasn't as though I had landed on Mars. I had been to Princeton before. I had heard good things about it from my father, grandfather, uncle, cousins — a lot of people in the family went there. So it wasn't scary that way, but it was scary in the sense that back then it was much less diverse. Mainly guys from Eastern prep schools. Now it's a much more diverse, inclusive school. Half of the students are women; that's a big step forward.

**Michelle Petersen:** How many were women when you went there?

**Steve McNamara:** None.

**Michelle Petersen:** None!

**Steve McNamara:** Zero. It wasn't until the mid-'70s that women were admitted. At the time some old fart graduates — I think they are all dead by now — but back then they were outraged at this. Needless to say, it had to happen and it did. As for diversity, when I went an awfully high percentage of the students were prep school graduates. Only one or two African-Americans and very few Jews. Even though I had gone to Uni High, this quasi-private selective high school, I had not gone to Exeter, Andover, Lawrenceville or Choate. Those kids had two advantages; one is that they had a better high school education. They went into freshman year at Princeton quite well prepared. I was not that well prepared. The other advantage is that they had an attitude, an entitlement attitude, which was a little off-putting. No, not a little bit, *very* off-putting to me initially. Later, not so much. My best friends to this day had gone to Choate and Andover. So it wasn't as though people who were produced by those prep schools were jerks forever, they were just jerks in their freshman year at Princeton. Sophomore year they became my roommates. So the jerkness washed off. Well, I hope it wasn't that I got to be as much of a jerk; I don't think so. The guys who bothered me at the start of freshman year are to this day really dear, close friends. So where was I? I went to Princeton. I had the same kind of track record that my grandfather did. Bs, occasional A, occasional C.

**Michelle Petersen:** You lived on campus? Do you remember what dorm you lived in?

**Steve McNamara:** Oh yes. Back then you only had an option of not living on campus if you got permission to marry, which one of my roommates did, and then you could live off campus. I lived on campus. My freshman year, my grandfather thought he was doing me a big favor, and maybe he did. He pulled a string or two; he had some strings to pull. There were about 850 members of our freshman class and maybe 40 of us got to live in

Holder Hall, which is the dormitory nearest what was then the place everyone ate their meals, it was called Commons. The advantage was that you didn't have to walk so far to go to your meals. Mostly sophomores lived there, so it meant you got thrown in with a bunch of sophomores and you didn't get to be as interactive with other members of your freshman class. The big upsides were not only the closeness to the meals but also the fact that by knowing sophomores, you sometimes got towed along by them on one very important thing, which was what sort of eating club you joined.

At Princeton, eating clubs took the place of fraternities, which had been banished by Woodrow Wilson when he was Princeton's president. These days fraternities are back, but unlike fraternities at say Berkeley or Stanford, they don't have houses that people live in. Eating clubs, of which there were then 17, were the social locus of seniors, juniors, and sophomores the last half of their sophomore year, and you got picked to go into one of these. This has been a huge source of controversy at Princeton — still is. Because for years and years your whole social life derived from membership in one of these private eating clubs. Needless to say, they were ranked in terms of desirability.

The university doesn't control them. They are all located down one street, Prospect Avenue, private property, and the university works with them to try and have a say about their role in social life. Today it's not nearly as narrow. There are a lot of other facilities run by the university for hanging out and having parties and whatnot that are not strictly run by these private eating clubs. But back then the clubs were the whole deal. This is a long-winded way of saying these sophomores that I got thrown in with towed me into one of the better eating clubs, Cap and Gown. A lot of other freshmen never had a chance to meet some of these sophomores socially and get that leg up in the selection process. The process was called "Bicker," still is. Strange word, but that's where your social life could be determined.

**Michelle Petersen:** So what would you guys do in eating clubs?

**Steve McNamara:** During the week you ate there, hung out and played cards or watched TV. Maybe even studied. On the weekends they would have all the parties.

**Michelle Petersen:** Was there a local women's university or anything from where you guys invited the girls over, maybe from the across town?

**Steve McNamara:** No girls from across town. There was a very, very dysfunctional social life that involved connecting with girls at girls' schools, often from the Seven Sisters schools, which were the female equivalent of the eight schools in the all-male Ivy League. The girls' schools were Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Sarah Lawrence and three others. The setup was as artificial and strange as you can imagine. You would go on weekends to one of those schools and get drunk out of your mind and then come back. Or the girls would be imported; they'd come down on the train and you'd put them up in little houses around town that rented out rooms over the weekend to these girls.

So what evolved of course, you could predict this, is that the students at an all-male school would study reasonably hard for four days a week and then on Friday, they'd be either going to a girl's school or they'd be getting ready to have a girl come down and visit them. She'd be there on Saturday and Sunday and then she'd leave. Those two days would be mindless pleasure seeking. It was weird, but it was what it was. The idea of separating the sexes with hormones raging and then throwing them together for two intensive days is not really preparing people for the real world. At any rate, there I was at Princeton, doing okay. Majored in history.

**Michelle Petersen:** What made you decide on history?

**Steve McNamara:** I just liked it. I had to pick something and that struck me as an interesting thing to do. I was always interested in history. Also, I had decided for some reason that I wanted to be a Foreign Service officer. I'm still a little perplexed as to where I came up with that idea, but I did want to be a diplomat. So I was pointing myself in that direction. Meanwhile, I'd found a girlfriend, a girlfriend who went to Vassar. Vassar, believe it or not, had two competing student newspapers and she was the editor of one, which I thought was very cool.

**Michelle Petersen:** What was her name?

**Steve McNamara:** Annesley Howland, an old Southern name. And this is how we met: I was the publicity manager of the Princeton Triangle Club. Probably no one reading this has ever heard of the Princeton Triangle Club, but it was pretty famous. It was a theatrical group that put on an annual student-written musical in which the gag then was that men took women's roles. Jimmy Stewart and José Ferrer were its most notable alums. The high point of the Princeton Triangle Club season was an appearance on the Ed Sullivan show. Nobody remembers Ed Sullivan today, but that was the big entertainment show back then. Our appearance on the Ed Sullivan show preceded a trip in private, leased Pullman cars. During Christmas vacation we traveled throughout the eastern United States to 10, 12 cities where the Triangle Club put on a show for a group that was organized by the local alumni association. The tour was awesome. We'd start with shows at Princeton and then put on a couple of shows in New York City, then go to Baltimore, then Washington, Richmond, Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Buffalo. A show nearly every night, with a few days off for Christmas.

**Michelle Petersen:** How often did you do a show?

**Steve McNamara:** Nearly every night. It was a big loop around the eastern United States in these rented Pullman cars and a baggage car that had the scenery in it. After the show there would be a big party put on by the alumni and then we'd pile into the Pullman cars and sleep until we got to the next city. And do it all over again the next day. Pretty much non-stop partying. In the course of the tour in my junior year, I met Annesley, who lived with her family in Atlanta. Her father was the Time Life bureau chief there and had gone to Princeton, which is why she was at the after-party.

The parties were quite impressive. Live bands, lots of great food, the wives and girls wore fancy gowns and dresses. All the guys wore dinner jackets, which were fairly grungy by the end of the tour. The alumni competed to see who could throw the best party. Atlanta alumni wanted to have a better party than New Orleans or Birmingham. The alumni would bring out their daughters because this was a great opportunity to shop their daughters to Princeton guys. At the party in Atlanta I met this girl in a red dress, Annesley Howland. And as happened on many occasions for guys on the tour, I looked her up when I got back to school in January and we became an item.

Back to why I switched from wanting to go into the Foreign Service to being a newspaperman. At Princeton — and I think this is unique among all American universities — in order to graduate you must write a senior thesis, which is a piece of original research that you are given class time in your senior year to write. It scares the pants off every Princeton senior because you put it off, put it off, and then you have to do it. If you don't do it with a good grade, you don't graduate. It strikes terror into the hearts of every Princeton senior. To this day, I have a member of my family who can describe the terror that was still alive in 2003. My own thesis wanted to be something that was related to this career I was building, which was supposedly in the Foreign Service. So I chose to write my thesis about the integration of the Foreign Service and the Department of State.

It was bizarre, but for many years beforehand people in the Foreign Service, which is the people that go abroad to the American embassies, and the State Department, which is people that stay in the offices in Washington, were separate universes. They barely spoke to each other. There was a huge pecking order differential. Foreign Service officers considered themselves to be vastly more sophisticated and upper class than those clunks back in Washington at the State Department who were just pushing papers around and speaking English all the time. This was not a good way to conduct foreign policy. So somebody decided that they ought to do something about it. A group headed by Henry Wriston proposed that the two groups be integrated and that the personnel swap postings between Washington and abroad. There was a lot of resistance at first.

I wrote my senior thesis about this move. In the process I had to do original research. I remember I talked to Dean Acheson, who had been Secretary of State. My uncle was a well-known newspaper guy and he knew some of these people I talked to. I talked to Edward R. Murrow. I don't know why I talked to him — just because I could, I guess. If in your thesis footnotes you had some big names, it was a help. It's no matter whether they just talked about the baseball season, but the point was, you went and talked to them and could put them in a footnote. That really moved your thesis ahead. One of the guys I talked to was a friend of the family who had been in the Foreign Service in Oslo and London. He was now doing his tour back in Washington in the State Department. I remember sitting in his office and running through and across the ceiling were these pneumatic tubes. That's how stuff used to be moved around in department stores and big offices; you had brass cartridges the size of water bottles that were shot through tubing that ran through the building.

**Michelle Petersen:** Yeah, vacuum.

**Steve McNamara:** So we are sitting in this guy's office. He has been in the Foreign Service for 10 years or so and he is reasonably high up. But his office is kind of cramped and constantly we hear this "shoop, shoop" as cartridges go racing through the vacuum tubes running through his office. It's pretty distracting. I asked him, "How do you like the Foreign Service?" His answer was a muted, "Well, you know, it has its upsides and its downsides." I went home and thought, this guy has had great postings. Even then I knew you could go to terrible places. I have a son who was a Marine security guard at the embassy in Chad. I mean, talk about a terrible posting; Chad is terrible. But this friend of the family I had talked to at the State Department had been in Oslo and London, great postings, and yet he was not very up on his experience. So the wheels began to turn. I thought, you know, I don't think this is for me. I thought, "The Foreign Service is sounding like my introduction to Princeton, where forces were beyond my control." Back when I was a freshman it was, "Did you go to Exeter or Andover or did you not?" Now, as it so happened, by virtue of being a Princetonian I would have that problem resolved within the Foreign Service.

My uncle, the newspaper guy, Wally Deuel, had joined the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] and then the CIA and had been eternally pissed off because the fact that he had gone to the University of Illinois had held him back. It used to really grind him that he'd be standing at the urinals in a CIA men's room and the two guys next to him would be talking about the Yale game. He realized that their position in the CIA was derived in large part from their Ivy League credentials. He never got over that.

I had that handled by virtue of having gone to Princeton. But I thought, "I don't like this culture, it doesn't work for me, there is too much Urbana in me." So with the Foreign Service off the table, I was out of a career. I'm not so sure I could have gotten past the Foreign Service entrance exams, but I didn't want to try. All the way through high school and college when anybody asked what I would do after college I said, I'm going into the Foreign Service. Well, now I wasn't. And I thought, "Uh, uh, what am I going to do?" Then I thought, "Well, I admire my uncle. He was in the newspaper business since before the CIA. It would impress my girlfriend and maybe her father if I went into the newspaper business."

Mind you, I had never worked for a newspaper, ever. Not in elementary school, not in high school, not in college. Princeton had a very good daily newspaper, but I'd never gone near the office. I had not worked in the summer for a newspaper. I had no idea of how you worked for a newspaper. So where I got this idea in my head is a little bit nuts. But somehow I thought I'll do it, I'll impress Annesley. Mind you, no training or anything, but I was going to do this. I did have a couple of contacts. My father's Princeton roommate, Price Day, was the editor of the *Baltimore Sun*. I went to talk to him and he was very nice, took me home for dinner and to stay the night. But you could tell that he wasn't buying it. He could stretch his friendship with my father only so far and giving a kid with no experience a job was too far. I wasn't going to the *Baltimore Sun*.

So I graduated from Princeton. I had a big hangover from partying the night before, I remember that. I did not want to go back to Illinois and work for Scott Foresman. I could have done that. My grandfather was chairman and my father and uncle had good jobs there, but again that just didn't smell right. So I was screwed.

My father was quite nice about it at Princeton graduation. He said, "What are you going to do now?" I forget my answer, but I'm sure it was not a very impressive answer. I thought maybe I might go into advertising; I'd be like somebody out of *Mad Men*. But I had no experience there, either. So my father said, "Tell you what, while you work this out why don't you go stay at the Princeton Club of New York. I'll pay for your room for a while." And he gave me, I think, about \$100; that's about \$1,000 today. He said, "If things really turn bad for you, you can always come home and we will find something for you." I said "No, no, I don't want that."

So I took my suitcase with all my worldly possessions to the Princeton Club in New York on 39<sup>th</sup> Street and moved into one of what were then awful little hot rooms. I don't know whether it took me one day or four days, but pretty quickly I threw myself on the mercy of a wonderful family friend named Mac Lowry and his wife Elsa. Mac had been head of the United Press bureau in London during World War II and had been a close friend of my uncle, the newspaper and CIA guy. He and Elsa took mercy on me. After the UP [United Press] in London Mac worked at the *Washington Post* and then he worked for the Ford Foundation. He became the guy in charge of handing out Ford Foundation culture money and among the culture money he handed out was support given to the San Francisco Ballet. He later came out and was head of the San Francisco Ballet. I mean, he didn't dance, but he was the person charged with putting it in good shape organizationally. He did a wonderful job and is I think is still very much revered by the people at the San Francisco Ballet.

**Michelle Petersen:** How did you know him?

**Steve McNamara:** My uncle was in London, after having been in Rome and Berlin during the rise of Mussolini and Hitler. He wrote a book called *People Under Hitler* that really scorched the Nazis. Then he and Mac were newspaper guys in London during the blitz. So I guess my uncle put in a good word about me with Mac and Mac said I could come stay with them. So I went and lived with the Lowrys for maybe a week, slept on the couch in their living room. Needless to say, they were anxious for me to find something and move off their couch. Luckily, Mac had a friend from his days in London with United Press, Wally Carroll, who was the executive editor of the *Winston-Salem Journal*.

**Michelle Petersen:** Where was that?

**Steve McNamara:** North Carolina. Back in those days, North Carolina was a very liberal state. It is no more, but it was then. It had had a Senator named Frank Graham who had been president of the University of North Carolina and was very much a pioneer in race relations and education and who really built the university. North Carolina was a



good place to go. It used to call itself a vale of humility between two mountains of conceit. The mountains of conceit were Virginia and South Carolina. North Carolina had several really great, moderate-sized daily newspapers in Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh and Winston-Salem.

So North Carolina was a good place to go. Mac Lowry implored Wally Carroll to get me a job, get this kid off his couch. Wally Carroll offered me a job as a reporter. I remember showing up in Winston-Salem and reporting to Sherman Shore, the city editor of the afternoon paper, the *Twin City Sentinel*. Mr. Shore was a nice man, ex-military, a little gruff, but a really nice man. So he says to me, "Tell me a little about your background." Well, I'd gone to Princeton. "No, I mean your work in newspapers." Of course I had nothing. "So," says Mr. Shore, "you've never written anything for anybody ever in a newspaper?" No, that's right. I'm sure he shook his head at that. "Oh Christ, what have they done to me now, what has Wally gone and done, hired this kid who doesn't have a clue."

There were two newspapers, the morning *Journal* and the afternoon *Sentinel*, and a TV station and radio station, all in one building. So I sat down at a desk and did my best to write obits on the first few days. Then I got handed a story off the AP wire about a local family that had gone on vacation up in the Tennessee Valley area. They had gone out in a rowboat in one of the lakes and the boat had tipped over and some of them had drowned. So you get handed a little bulletin about this from over the AP wire and your job is to localize it, flesh it out for the local paper.

I'll backtrack here and explain that Winston-Salem where they then made Winstons and Salems, the cigarettes. We're in tobacco country and the whole town smelled of tobacco, especially when it was hot and humid in the summer. Some people up north would say, oh, they named Winstons after Winston Churchill. No, they named the cigarettes after the town, same with the Salems.

Back to the drowning story. I asked the city desk, "What do I do now?" "You call the Park Service, because they are the people in charge of the rescue efforts." So I call the Park Service and get some information and I get ready to start writing. And then I realize, "Uh oh. How far was the boat from shore when it capsized?" So I call back again, hang up and start to write. "Uh oh. How deep was the water where the boat capsized?" And on and on; all these things you have to know to write a half-ass decent story. It took me fucking forever. And I'm writing for an afternoon paper where the deadline pressure is ferocious. I'm surprised they didn't walk me out the door right then. But they didn't. And the story got written and I'm sure it got massaged at the copy desk and it appeared on the front page with my name on it.

That was it. I was done. When that paper came off the press an hour later with my byline on page one I knew this was my life. I don't know the name of that family; you could look it up. They drowned in the summer of 1955 in a lake in the Tennessee Valley and I feel very sorry for them. But it changed my life forever.

**Michelle Petersen:** Do you still have a copy of that story?

**Steve McNamara:** No, I don't.

**Michelle Petersen:** I'll try to find it.

**Steve McNamara:** The *Twin City Sentinel*. It would have been in June, late June of 1955.

**Michelle Petersen:** So do you think that your thesis prepared you a little bit to write that article?

**Steve McNamara:** No.

**Michelle Petersen:** No? Not at all? I mean, the thesis, it sounds like that was your big first writing project.

**Steve McNamara:** Hmmm. Maybe. I'm not a great writer. There are great writers and I'm not one of them, but I'm a good writer. One thing I'm very good at, and maybe this is it, I'm a great explanatory writer. There are a lot of people who can do the bells and whistles better than I can, and I admire them. But if you really want to read a story in which you understand what has happened, I do that well. I was called upon to describe what had happened to this poor family when their boat capsized and I couldn't do it at the beginning. But then I could. Maybe that sort of stuck with me, because that has become my hallmark over the years. If you really want to know whether having a desalination plant for Marin's water supply is a good idea, you should read the story I wrote in the *Sun* about it. You'd come away from that story knowing what you need to know.

**Michelle Petersen:** The details.

**Steve McNamara:** Not just the details, but the meanings. Stories in many papers never get to the actual meanings. At the *Pacific Sun* we used to laugh at the *IJ* stories. They would tell you the middle initial of everybody in the story but wouldn't tell you what the damn story meant. Why did this event happen? What is going to happen next? The explanatory side of it. For me, maybe because of that poor family and the capsized boat, I learned to dig into a story.

Plus, I have always known that I was better at writing than talking. I had a great history teacher in high school named Tex McClellan and he tried an experiment. He said the way we give out grades is based on your ability to write well. We measure on an exam whether you students can write a cogent and persuasive answer to a question. This shows not just knowledge of the subject but writing skills. But this isn't a writing class, this is a history class, so I am going to see if I can do a little alternative. For next week's test, instead of asking you to write the answer, I'm going to sit down in my office and have you come in by turn and I am going to give you five minutes to answer the exam question in your own words. This sounded good to me. I was a talker; I sure didn't shut up or hide

in back of the class. We all came in to Tex's little office, did our five minutes and left. He said to me later, you know, Steve, you surprised me a little. I know you are a talker, but your written answers are way better than your spoken answer was. I am not going to flunk you or anything, but you didn't do as well with this. I thought, "Huh, really?"

So that was a first inkling I had that one of my skills was the ability to organize, which you need to write well. Writing is kind of like riding a unicycle; once you master it, it is not that hard. But you have to put a little work into getting it right, learning the skills the first time. So that is something I guess I had somehow or other picked up. Because writing is an interesting exercise in this sense: what you are doing is taking a piece of life that is nonlinear — there are things happening all the time. Right now you are I are sitting at this kitchen table talking and we saw a blue jay out there and I went and got a cup of coffee and meanwhile the sun was coming out from behind the trees. There were a lot of things happening at the same time. To communicate all this in written form you have to convert it to a linear experience, a sequence where the marbles are lined up one after another. In this linear form you have to be able to convey the totality of the experience: the blue bird and the cup of coffee and the sun coming out. For some people it's not that hard, and for some people it is nearly impossible. What comes out is a jumble.

That's why I think it is a hoot that Twitter's tweets are only 140 characters long. You can only give these little segments of stuff, so you are excused from the real challenge of writing, which is to have a coherent body of words that stretch over a long period of time and convey a variety of thoughts. What Twitter suggests is that humans today are basically too stupid or too talentless to be able to do this weaving of words together. We are going to see if they can cough up 140 characters and not lose their train of thought. We have invented a system whereby we can serve people with this rather limited brain capacity. I think, "Well, hey, go for it guys, whatever works."

So there I was in North Carolina, working for the newspaper. I never got great, but I got pretty good. I started covering the police, which is the bottom of the pile, and then I worked my way up, talked them into letting me cover the Democratic National Convention in 1956.

**Michelle Petersen:** Were you still seeing Annesley at the time?

**Steve McNamara:** Annesley and I went our separate ways about a year into this. She took up with an old boyfriend, Bobby Spears, who claimed he was going to be a lawyer and a federal judge, and he was both. They got married. She, unfortunately, became an alcoholic like her mother and she died of cancer several years ago.

I moved from the *Sentinel*, the afternoon paper that was less prestigious, to the *Journal*, the morning paper. The *Journal* decided they wanted to open a one-person Washington bureau and they asked people on staff to apply. I think three of us applied and it came down to me and this one older guy who worked in the sports department and they picked him. I was devastated. He was Tom Wicker, who later went to the *New York Times* and won a Pulitzer Prize for covering Kennedy's assassination and became a good friend of

mine. Wally Carroll, the person who had given me a job, went to the *New York Times* Washington bureau and became its news editor. There were a lot of people from the *Winston-Salem Journal*, which back then was a very, very good newspaper, that went to the *Times*. Even though the *Journal* had clearly made the right decision when it picked Tom, I was miffed. So I began looking for another job and was offered a job with the Knight Newspapers, the best newspaper chain in America.

They owned the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Miami Herald*, *Charlotte Observer*, and *Dayton Daily News* — really good papers. There are lots of chains with bad papers, but this was the chain with the best papers. They offered me a chance to go where I wanted. I picked Miami because it was then on the forefront of newspaper technology, which was suddenly changing. Up until the mid-1950s, if Abraham Lincoln had walked into the back shop of a newspaper it would have looked about the same as it had looked when he was president. Then it began to change, and change a lot.

**Michelle Petersen:** In the late '50s is when it began to change?

**Steve McNamara:** Yes. First it was punched tape fed through automated linotype machines, which cast hot lead into pieces of type. Then came photocomposition. It was based on shining flashes of light through a negative onto photographic paper that would be assembled or pasted up like a finished page. The next jump was the laser printer. By today there isn't even a full-size mockup of a newspaper page you work with. You just have a page on a computer screen and a computer file that goes to a printing plant. At the plant the file used to be turned into a negative that was used to make a plate for the press. Now the computer file is made directly into a printing plate, skipping the negative step. So anyhow, this wave of change started in the 1950s. I went to the *Miami Herald* and worked first on the copy desk, then as a sports writer. Then I started covering motor sports.

**Michelle Petersen:** How did that start?

**Steve McNamara:** I was always very fond of cars and in North Carolina I bought a sports car, an MGA that I drove to Miami.

**Michelle Petersen:** An MGA?

**Steve McNamara:** MG made very cool little British sports cars. The MGTC, TD and TF were boxy. The MGA had smoother lines. Sports car racing was just taking off in America and I convinced the sports editor that because I owned a sports car, I knew something about the subject. Which was not true. But I learned pretty fast and covered road racing at Sebring, Indianapolis, Nassau, and Havana. Places like that. I became a friend of a then-famous, still-famous, driver named Stirling Moss who kind of tutored me. Then I wanted to go to Europe, which was where the real racing was happening, so I wangled a job as a contributing editor for a magazine. The name of the magazine is a little confusing; it is now called *Car and Driver*. It used to be called *Sports Cars Illustrated*. Then Time Inc. started a sports magazine called *Sports Illustrated*. They

approached the owners of *Sports Cars Illustrated*, which was a company named Ziff Davis, and they paid them a lot of money, I'm sure, to relinquish the name *Sports Cars Illustrated* and change their magazine's name to *Car and Driver*. That way people wouldn't confuse the two. So when I say to people I wrote for *Sports Cars Illustrated*, they think I mean *Sports Illustrated*. No, I wasn't quite that high up the line. I covered auto racing in Europe for that season, married to a Danish girl I had met in Miami. I don't think I thought through that marriage very well; I was 26 and lonely.

**Michelle Petersen:** What was her name?

**Steve McNamara:** Hanne Mogensen. I covered the races in Europe — sports car races and Formula I and II races, the Grand Prix races for single-seat racecars. And I wrote profiles of people — wrote a profile of Enzo Ferrari, which is interesting because when I talked with Enzo Ferrari he didn't speak English and I didn't speak Italian. We carried on this joke of a conversation in my terrible French. I guess his French was just as bad, I couldn't tell you. But my Ferrari cover story was a good story. One reason it was a good story is that a friend in the business had told me that *Time* had planned a cover story on Ferrari — the company, the man, whatever, and the story had actually been nearly completed when there had been some sort of terrible accident and they shelved the story. But the story still existed, although it had never been published, in the Rome bureau. So I went to the Rome bureau with a friend of a friend. I sat down in the library of the Rome bureau of Time Inc. and wrote copious notes from this unpublished *Time Magazine* cover story on Ferrari. That was a great resource. It wasn't the only resource, but it was a wonderful one. So my story, I still have a copy, was a success. I did a lot of other stories, but that was maybe my better one.

I came back to San Francisco as the racing season in Europe wound down. Freshly married, I decided that I didn't want to be in the newspaper business because the hours are terrible, especially for a morning newspaper. The saying used to be that, "In the newspaper business the hours are terrible and the pay is poor, but at least it's better than working for a living." And that's true. You don't really think you are working if you are into it. But I decided, now that I am freshly married, I want a job that pays more and has better hours. So through some family connections I got a job with a bookbinding company. It sounds boring but I thought, "Well, I'll work my way up." In bookbinding you take the printed sheets, fold them, put them together, make a book out of what starts out as sheets of paper. It was awful. I don't know how long I'd been at that job, probably three hours, before I thought, "Oh God, this is awful." So I began the process of applying to get a job at a San Francisco daily paper, of which there were then three: the *Examiner*, the *Chronicle* and the afternoon *News-Call Bulletin*, which had just been combined from two papers.

**Michelle Petersen:** What made you decide on San Francisco?

**Steve McNamara:** I'd just heard good things about it. I didn't want to go to Miami or New York or Chicago, so I was running out of interesting places to go. I'd been here once during high school vacation with a friend and thought it was a magical place and

wanted to get back. So I began applying for a newspaper job. It was during the Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley so the sports departments were hiring extra people. Every day I'd get off work at the bookbinding factory, take the trolley car up Market Street, walk to either the *Chronicle* or the *Examiner*, go in, present myself again, begging for a job. The first bite I got was at the *Examiner*, which then was a bigger paper than the *Chronicle*. Unlike now, the *Examiner* was a real newspaper. First I filled in at the sports department and, as I had hoped, was hired as permanent staff.

**Michelle Petersen:** Where were you living at the time?

**Steve McNamara:** First living on Pine Street right between Mason and Powell in San Francisco. Ding, ding, ding. Hear the cable cars. Then we moved to Sausalito.

**Michelle Petersen:** What year did you move to San Francisco?

**Steve McNamara:** End of 1960. I was in the sports department at the *Examiner* and then I moved to the news desk and then I became assistant news editor and then I went back to the sports department as executive sports editor.

**Michelle Petersen:** What did that entail, what is a sports editor?

**Steve McNamara:** Executive sports editor?

**Michelle Petersen:** Yes, what was your day to day?

**Steve McNamara:** Well, you go to work and you put out a sports section. You manage the writers and their stories, decide what goes where.

**Michelle Petersen:** Are you still writing?

**Steve McNamara:** I wrote a little bit, I covered car racing, sort of created the job in both Miami and San Francisco. Road racing in those days was brand new and often what would happen, in these two places it happened, the sports editor wouldn't have a clue. He knew established sports like football, basketball and baseball, but nothing about car racing. So who would end up doing the motor racing coverage would be the guy who sold ads to car dealerships. In Miami it was a guy named Ned something-or-other and in San Francisco a guy named Jerry Diamond. They would be miffed when I would show up and get what was to them the prestige part of their job. I was a real newspaper person. I didn't sell ads; I was a newspaper person, and the fact that they had lost this gig, lost their byline, it pissed them off. Jerry and I became okay friends later on but he didn't enjoy having his rug pulled out from under him.

Putting out the daily sports section is a trial and here's why: On the city side of a newspaper the bottom job is usually covering fires, local events of a non-critical nature. Nobody roots for fires. But in the sports department, everybody has a beat. No matter how low in the pecking order your beat is, you have an audience. If you are covering prep

swimming, which is pretty far down the list, there are still swimmers and parents of prep swimmers who think there should be more coverage of prep swimming in your newspaper. You have this great panoply of people who think there should be more coverage and they of course pump up the reporter who covers prep swimming. He is at the bottom of the pile, but he'd love to have more space in the paper for prep swimming, so he is always pushing.

Running the sports section you have all these freaking reporters on your case all the time to give them more space and you can't. It's not a bad job, but it's a job with a certain downside to it. So I did that for a while and then I went to the Sunday department. The daily *Examiner* was being overtaken by the daily *Chronicle*. But the Sunday *Examiner*, it was a big paper then, it may have had 800,000 in circulation on Sundays, a lot of papers. I became the editor of the Sunday magazine, which was then called *California Living*. Then I became Sunday editor, not editor of the Sunday news sections, but of all the inside sections: Travel, Real Estate, Fashion, Sunday magazine, all that.

But here's what led to my next move. You remember what had happened back when I sat in that fellow's office at the State Department and heard those tubes whizzing over my head. I was getting a sense that this man is not in charge of his life. Decisions are being made about what his next posting is, whether he gets a raise, whether he gets a big office or small office, they are being made by people he may have never met or, in the case of the Foreign Service, may be thousands of miles away. You may find yourself moved from one post to another by somebody you never had a chance to plead your case to or show your stuff. I said to myself, I don't like that; I really want to be closer to the levers of power.

So here I was at the *Examiner*, which is a Hearst paper, and because I was now Sunday editor I was invited to the Wednesday cold cut lunches in the office of Randy Hearst, who was the local Hearst in charge. The feeling often among newspaper people then, probably still, is that stupid decisions get made but it happens because the stupidity is concentrated at mid-level. You think, if only the owners knew what was going on there would be more rational decisions. I get to the cold cut lunch and there were five or six of us in charge of various aspects of the paper: the women's editor — they called it women's editor then — the sports editor, the news editor, me the Sunday editor, the executive editor, the publisher, and Randy Hearst. Right away I realized that, no, the stupidity isn't at mid-management level; the stupidity is up here at the top.

One question and answer made me aware of this. They went around the table talking about this and that and Charles Gould, the publisher, or Randy, somebody said, "So, Steve, welcome to our group, glad to have you aboard, heard good things about you. Is there anything you would like to know from us?" I said, "Well, yes sir. In order that I can make intelligent decisions, I need to know what is our audience, our target market? That will help me make the appropriate decisions." There was silence, just dead silence. I realized, they are not thinking through an answer, they don't understand the question. So I said, "What I mean is, there are millions of people in the Bay Area, some of them can't

read, that is obviously not our market, but of those who can read and can afford the paper, what subset of these are we aimed at?”

See, the daily *Chronicle* was busy overtaking the *Examiner* by virtue of the fact that it knew all the people moving to the suburbs were its market. Not the core city, but the suburbs. That’s where the money was. The city back then was kind of wobbly. It was losing its industrial base and nothing like high tech had arrived to replace it yet. So if you lived in Terra Linda and called up the *Examiner* circulation department and said, “I’d like to get your paper delivered,” they’d say “get four more people on your block and we will send the paper to all of you.” But if you called up the *Chronicle*, they’d say, “We’ll be out in the morning with the paper.” So daily *Chronicle* circulation was growing and the *Examiner* was not. This group in Randy Hearst’s office running the *Examiner* had no clue as to the meaning of demographic changes. As far as they were concerned, everybody who could breathe in Northern California was their target audience. Right then I decided, “I don’t think I want to work here forever,” even though I was moving up pretty well.

So I began looking for another job. A friend of mine who had been the other assistant news editor at the *Examiner* had moved to the *LA Times*. I went down there to have a look. Just casing the joint. I thought this is awfully quiet. And my friend Lou Allison said, “Yeah, not long ago we had some riots in the city. The newspapers that you I were used to being at, the whole place would have erupted, reporters running around, bells ringing, whatever. But here at the *LA Times*, it was quiet as a mortuary. They handled the story beautifully but there was no excitement.” I later learned that they called the *LA Times* newsroom the “Velvet Coffin.” I don’t know if they’d offered me a job that I would have gone, but I didn’t even apply.

At that time there had been a newspaper strike in San Francisco and KQED had started a program called “Newsroom.” It was run by the general manager of KQED named Jim Day, very smart, very nice man. I had thought about maybe going there because it was real journalism. But then the third thing happened. I had been living in Mill Valley since 1963 and had been involved in political stuff. There had been a bond issue to build another school in Marin City. I don’t know if it was a high school or a middle school — it obviously never happened — but I believe the bond issue passed and they bought land, which they owned until fairly recently. I had been on a publicity committee, been in charge of getting printed a little four-page newspaper that we were to distribute to all of the households in the Tam district to get them to vote Yes on this measure. I was told that a place we might get to print our campaign newspaper was this new little newspaper that started up in ’63 called the *Pacific Sun and Tamalpais Times*. So I went and talked to the owner, a guy named Merrill Grohman. I hadn’t been aware of the paper. But this guy and his wife and their 11 kids had started this paper out in Stinson Beach.

**Michelle Petersen:** What year was this?

**Steve McNamara:** 1966.

**Michelle Petersen:** And you were still married to —



**Steve McNamara:** Still married to Hanne, had three children. So that was my first encounter with the paper. I said, “Wow, this is cool, this is a liberal paper that has a nice voice to it.” Mind you, there were hardly any papers like that then; actually only one before the *Pacific Sun*. It was the *Village Voice*, started in 1955 in New York City and quite famous. I read it a lot and loved it. The *Pacific Sun* was a paper with the same idea: magazine style journalism in newspaper form. The only bad thing about the *Pacific Sun* was that it was pretty ratty looking. Writing was good, heart was in the right place, but kind of ratty looking. And I had a big thing about good design. In fact I was teaching magazine editing part-time at San Francisco State and I focused a lot on compelling design.

I said to this fellow, Merrill Grohman, “If you ever get this thing grown up to the point where you could take in an equity partner, I’d be glad to think about it.” This would have been in early fall of ’66. Not much later, I remember it was Big Game Day and it was raining like a son of a bitch, Merrill called and said, “I’d like to talk to you about something.” We met and he said, “I remember what you said to me about maybe you could be involved with this paper and its ownership.” I said “Right, but you aren’t there yet, are you?” He said, “Actually, Joann and I would like to sell the paper.” His excuse then, which was partly true, was that among all the children in their blended family they had some teenagers, and this was the beginning of the Summer of Love and all that. Their teenagers were racing across the bridge to the Haight Ashbury to get stoned and hear the music. The parents kind of lost control.

So they had all these kids they couldn’t manage plus some goats and a newspaper that was losing money. They wanted out. So they’d sell the paper to me. They were going to move to Washington State and a blackberry farm, far away from the Haight Ashbury. I bought this story hook, line and sinker. I was so anxious to do my own thing I didn’t pause to check things out. Also, I knew zilch about reading a balance sheet or an income statement. It turned out the financial statements I was given to look at were not correct, but I didn’t know that. I didn’t know enough to find that out. If there had been big red arrows pointing at wrong numbers, it wouldn’t have meant anything to me. I must say, my lawyer, who is still a good friend and a partner in a big law firm in the city, he didn’t catch it either. I think he was swept up by my enthusiasm as well. So I bought the paper, or made a down payment on the paper, took it over in December of ’66 and soon discovered this damn thing was practically defunct. I’d been told the circulation was 10,000 and it was actually about 2,500, we owed a ton of money and the place was running in the red, very much in the red. By then, of course, the Grohmans and their goats were long gone.

**Michelle Petersen:** Where was the office, was it in Stinson Beach?

**Steve McNamara:** No, it had moved from Stinson Beach, from a back room at Ed’s Superette, which was what the town grocery store was called back in those days, first to their house which was up on Panoramic Highway not too far from the Mountain Home Inn, then to San Rafael. Merrill was an interesting guy. I am financially prudent, one

might say stingy, and he was the exact opposite. If he were losing money on something, he'd start or buy something else to lose money on. At one point, because the *Pacific Sun* was losing money he started two other papers in Fairfax and the San Geronimo Valley. They lost money, too. Well, he'd also gone and bought a printing press. It didn't make sense for him but it turned out to be a very fortuitous move from my perspective. He had moved his printing press and his office to 1817 Fourth Street in San Rafael. That's just before you get to the IHOP, before Fourth Street and Third Street converge at that Shell station. In a year we moved to Northgate Industrial Park and a year or two later moved to downtown Mill Valley, across from City Hall. After Kay and I sold the *Sun* in 2004 the *Sun* moved back to San Rafael.

**Michelle Petersen:** What was the Mill Valley address?

**Steve McNamara:** 21 Corte Madera Avenue, across from City Hall. We still own the building and it has now been converted into four or five quite nice offices. It is right in back of the Masonic Hall and Sweetwater Music Hall. The property is L-shaped. It wraps around and is three shops on Lytton Square: 68, 70, and 74 Throckmorton. They are The Store run by Evan Wetmore, very nice lady's clothing store, and an optical shop called Wink, and Julia Danison's Liberty hair design.

For years and years 74 was David McDonald's Pleasure Principle. You may remember that he got into a little trouble selling fake drugs and real porno films. It wasn't illegal to sell the porn. But how he could sell porno VHS tapes always struck my wife and me as almost laughable. You don't have to buy VHS tapes to watch porn; it is all free on the Internet. How can you possibly make any money selling it? He had crappy jewelry there, too. And as it turned out, those weren't the only things he was selling, which led to some problems with the narcs. He had stopped paying his rent and I had tried to find him an alternate space. One of my daughters-in-law, Lita Collins, is a real estate person and she found five places in Mill Valley, San Rafael and Fairfax where David could pay way less rent and have as much or more space. We offered to pay his moving costs. But he would have none of it. We said, David, you either have to move or pay the rent. We were in the process of evicting him for not paying the rent when the narcs swooped down and off he went.

It was sad. There were people who used to be critical of Kay and me for keeping him in there because it was a pretty scuzzy operation. If you had ever been in it, it was amazingly scuzzy. But we thought, you know, it is what it is, so stop bugging us. Kay belongs to the Outdoor Art Club and some of the ladies there would say, "Oh, you own that space?"

That problem took another direction when he went to jail. One of the weird aspects of the thing is that when he was busted he had \$37,000 in his pocket. "Dude, why didn't you pay your rent? All of this would have not happened." Because in the course of the trial, it turned out that narcs swept down on him because they'd read about him or seen him on TV. Once we started the eviction process he went to the papers and TV stations, and they did little standups in front of this poor beleaguered guy's shop in Mill Valley. "He's

being evicted after all these years.” So the narcs in East Bay who are running this investigation say “Holy shit, this guy is about to bail on us. He may wind up in Belize or who knows where, let’s go get him.” So they did.

If David had just shut up and paid his rent out of that money in his pocket he would have been in much better shape. But at any rate, he didn’t. We had to spend quite a bit of money to clean up the place. I mean, the place was unbelievable. I really mean unbelievable. The deputy sheriff who came around to serve the eviction papers was astounded. What the sheriff must do before he allows the owner to change the locks is check inside the property to make sure there are no bodies in there. So the deputy went in, stays a long while and finally comes out shaking his head. He said, “I can’t believe it!” He ran to his patrol car, got his camera, came back and said, “The guys will never believe this!” He took pictures all over the place to show the incredible mess to his buddies back at the Hall of Justice. It took us quite a long time and a lot of money to fix it up. We rented the space to a nice Tibetan group. But it turned out there is not that big a market for inexpensive Tibetan stuff in Mill Valley. Now there is this amazing hair place there run by Julia Danison. She grew up in Mill Valley, lives in Mill Valley, and is doing great and we are very happy. So where was I? I buy the *Pacific Sun* in ’66 and —

**Michelle Petersen:** You had it during the ’60s, the ’70s, the ’80s, the ’90s. There was a lot going on during all of those decades. Do you have a favorite story? Is there something that you really enjoyed covering during those times?

**Steve McNamara:** Man, there were so many of them. Well, when Barbara Boxer and I organized the San Francisco edition that was fun. We needed to sell some stock in the *Sun* to finance the expansion so Barbara and I would contact people. People like to give advice; they don’t like to give money. So we had a list of all the Democrats of note in San Francisco, people ranging from Willie Brown to Richard Goldman, the big environmental family, and other people of that ilk. We would say we are thinking of starting this paper in San Francisco. Mind you, Barbara wasn’t a Congressperson, she was just a reporter for the *Sun*. But she knew a lot of people in the Democratic circles. So we said, “We’d like to take you to lunch and ask your advice.” We wouldn’t mention money, just advice and lunch. At lunch we’d give a good story about our plans and ask, “By the way, would they care to invest in this wonderful opportunity?” Almost invariably, they would. When we were making the initial phone calls for the lunch date, if they agreed we would smile to each other because we knew that if they agreed to lunch, they were going to write a check. They didn’t know it, but we did.

The paper only lasted a year but in the process Armistead Maupin came on board to write *The Serial*, which later became *Tales of the City*. The *Chronicle* used to claim that Armistead’s wonderful saga began in the *Chronicle*. Of course it didn’t, it began in the *Pacific Sun*, where it was called *The Serial*. Armistead’s own website makes it clear that he started off the story in the *Pacific Sun*. The first five episodes of *The Serial* in the *Pacific Sun* were identical to the ones in the *Chronicle*. He just picked them up and reprinted them. When he started with the *Sun* it was heterosexual; Mary Ann Singleton looking for love among the frozen peas at the Marina Safeway on Wednesday night.

Armistead was in the process of coming out and it was a very scary time in his life. As the story began to include gay people in a supportive way, we sensed that there is something happening we hadn't expected. He had told us it was going to be like the French sex farce called *La Ronde* in which a man and a woman separate, connect with new partners who connect with new partners and eventually the man and woman come together again. Armistead had something else in mind that he neglected to mention to us, but it was fine, it worked out well.

And then Cyra McFadden appeared. The San Francisco edition died after a year and Armistead wanted to continue writing it for us based in Marin. But we asked him, "Do you ever go across the bridge to Marin?" He said, "Well, actually no." We had to say that having him transplant *The Serial* to Marin wouldn't work because his success derived in large part from his intimate knowledge of the locale. He didn't just say grocery store, he said the Marina Safeway. He knew where it was, what it looked like, could picture the frozen foods section and knew that Wednesday was pickup night. He couldn't do that in Marin, so we said no. Then along came Cyra and made it very real for people in Marin.

**Michelle Petersen:** When was your first child born?

**Steve McNamara:** Lise was born February 20, 1961.

**Michelle Petersen:** So you were still in the city at the time.

**Steve McNamara:** No, we had just moved to Sausalito. Lise's mother is Danish; Lise lives there now in Denmark, as does her mother. Lise's wife Birgit just died; they had been married for 15 years. In Denmark being married if you are gay is no big deal. In the Bay Area it is no big deal now, but for a long time it was. Birgit had MSA, which is Multiple System Atrophy. It's like Parkinson's only way worse. With Parkinson's there are treatments, but with MSA there are no treatments.

My second child, Natalie, was born September 23, 1963. She lives in the East Bay with her husband, Todd Kniess. Todd is a chef and has worked at a variety of places, including the Ritz-Carlton in New Orleans, Ritz-Carlton in San Francisco and Left Bank in various places, including Larkspur where he was general manager. About 11 years ago he and Natalie opened a restaurant in Gourmet Gulch in Berkeley called Bistro Liaison, on the corner of Shattuck and Hearst. It has done very well. Recently they opened an adjunct to it called Le Petit Cochon, which is a place to get take-out or stand around at little tables or sit outside. Todd also does tours of France, truffle tours where you can watch Kiki the pig sniff out a truffle. Unfortunately, truffle season is in February when it is cold and rainy, a bad time to be in southern France, but that is when the truffles are there. Todd also does wine tours at more agreeable times and they also do a lot of wine dinners and wine club events at Bistro Liaison. Natalie and Todd have one child, Adeline.

The next offspring is Kevin, who was born September 26, 1964. Kevin was in the Marines for six years. The Marines go all over, but if you are a security guard you are attached to the State Department and you spend a year, a year and a half, two years, at

each posting. They have divided all of the embassies in the world down the middle, good side and bad side. So you go to one on the good side, then one on the bad side, and so on. His good side posting was Madrid. We visited him there, a very nice place to visit. His bad side posting was Ndjamena, Chad, which was by many counts the worst posting in the world. We didn't visit him there. He left the Marines, came back, went to College of Marin, went to Berkeley, went into the film business. He was a second assistant director and decided after several years he couldn't deal with it. Film and TV production is not a settled life, not for somebody with a wife and three children. Now Kevin works for Kaiser in administration and is in the process of becoming a radiation technologist. Kevin and his wife, Sarah, live in Petaluma and have three children, Maeve, Aine and Liam. Those are my three children by my first wife.

**Michelle Petersen:** You said when you were working for the Winston-Salem paper that you wanted to get out of it because you felt the hours were bad and the pay was bad. Did you think that the hours were a better here in San Francisco?

**Steve McNamara:** Oh no, they were still terrible.

**Steve McNamara:** But the pluses are way better. I mean it is kind of like, "Get over it dude." Sure, the hours are terrible, because on a morning newspaper, generally, you start work at 3 in the afternoon, work until midnight. If you are beginning, you work weekends, too. So you may be off on a Tuesday and a Thursday or something like that. But you know what, you swallow it.

**Michelle Petersen:** You enjoy the job.

**Steve McNamara:** Yep, as they say, "It's better than working for a living."

**Michelle Petersen:** When did you and Hanne split up?

**Steve McNamara:** In 1969.

**Michelle Petersen:** Did you get remarried?

**Steve McNamara:** Yes. There was a wife between Hanne and Kay. I think back on that marriage as a long, misguided date. Kay is 12 years younger than I am. The even younger woman was Gaye.

**Michelle Petersen:** Kay is your current wife?

**Steve McNamara:** Yes. Gaye was 18 years younger than I was. She was closer in age to the children from my first wife than she was to me and we all lived together: me, Gaye and the three kids. It was a bit odd. Why that marriage was thought to be a good idea, I do not know. We lasted about a year and a half and then peacefully went our separate ways. Then in 1976 I met Kay. That's when my life really got better. We've been together for close to 40 years and those have been by far the best years of my life. I can

scarcely believe my good luck. Kay is a therapist, a marriage and family therapist. We have two children.

I have to emphasize that Kay worked incredibly hard to help keep the *Sun* afloat. I can make it sound as though the *Sun* was just all peaches and cream. But it wasn't. It wasn't. People would say to me, "Wow, you have your own newspaper, that's cool." Yeah, it is, but there is a big downside. The downside is keeping the damn thing afloat. Small businesses have a lot of stressful moments and newspapers especially so. We had some good times because we also owned a printing plant, Marin Sun Printing, and we printed a lot of newspapers in addition to the *Sun*. Made money there, that helped support the newspaper. Another big help for at least a while was personals ads. That was back in the days before match.com. We were among the first to do personals ads and we made money on that.

**Michelle Petersen:** And you said Kay would help in the office.

**Steve McNamara:** Oh god yes! Every time we'd get into a big problem, she would come in. Somebody important would quit within the organization and she'd come in and do the job while we looked for a replacement. She would grow weary of it, but you know, we had to keep going. So she was at the front desk for a while; she ran the classified department, which is also personals; she ran the display ad department which is a big challenge; she ran the production department; she ran the circulation department. She never did those for years and years, but it was one bucket of hot water after another. We would not have survived had she not only been willing to do that, but also been able to do it very well.

**Michelle Petersen:** What are your two kids' names with Kay?

**Steve McNamara:** Chris — his legal name is Christopher but he never uses that — and Morgan. Chris was born December 7, 1978 and Morgan on October 10, 1981. Chris went to Princeton and found out that New Jersey was quite flat and the school was full of easterners, which was not something that he had bargained on. It's a different mindset completely. He said he gave it his best shot. He found a professor there who was a good climber and who introduced him to some other climbers. He went with them to what passes for climbing on the East Coast, a rocky area called the Shawanagunks west of the Hudson River in New York State. After two weekends at the Gunks he called up and said, "Dad, that's not real climbing." By then, he had become a really, really good big wall rock climber. Big wall rock climbs are climbs that take more than a day, or take a normal person more than a day. By now he has climbed El Cap 70, 75 times, and he can do El Cap in seven or eight hours.

**Michelle Petersen:** He's obviously very good.

**Steve McNamara:** Very good, one of the best. He went from that to wing suit BASE jumping. Do you know what BASE jumping is?

**Michelle Petersen:** I do, yeah. He's an adventurer, it sounds like it.

**Steve McNamara:** He went from regular BASE jumping to wing suit BASE jumping, which is when you wear a suit that turns you into a flying squirrel. And then he went past wing suit BASE jumping to an even more rarified approach called terrain wing suit BASE jumping. In regular wing suit BASE jumping you exit from a Building, Antenna, Structure or Earth, and fly away. But as Chris says, the problem with that, if you call it a problem, is that although the wind is going past you at 100 miles an hour, you don't have anything to measure your speed against other than the wind. So in terrain wing suit jumping, you leap from a cliff, usually, and then turn and fly close beside it, so now you are going 100 miles an hour very close to a cliff. If something goes wrong, a bush comes up that you hadn't planned on or whatever, you are done. I said to him once, "How many people get injured in BASE jumping?" He said, "Oh, nobody ever gets injured. Either you make it or you don't." I said, "How many of your friends haven't made it? He said, well, they weren't all close friends, but they were all acquaintances, and about 40 are dead. At that time there were only about 500 wing suit BASE jumpers in the world, so a pretty high percent didn't make it. He doesn't do that anymore.

**Michelle Petersen:** Got to make you nervous as a dad.

**Steve McNamara:** Yes. People used to say to Kay and me, "How do you let Chris climb El Cap?" And we would say, "What do you mean, how do we *let* him? The alternative is to chain him to his bed? Not going to do that." So our belief, Kay's and my belief, has always been that you should follow your passion. Chris followed a passion that was very scary, but that is what he did. Maybe the scariest moment we witnessed was when Chris was 16 and his brother Morgan was 13 and they climbed El Cap. Their ages together combined to 29. That is by far the youngest team that has ever climbed El Cap. Kay and I got so freaked out watching that ascent from the El Cap Meadow that we had to go to the Ahwahnee Hotel bar and have several drinks.

In the early days we had our doubts. Once we were stopped on the road along El Cap Meadow and Chris said, "Wow! Look! There's Jim Bridwell!" Here was this famous climber in a beat up old red Toyota pickup that had a little camper shell on it. I remember thinking, "Oh my, this is Chris's future: living out of the back of an old Toyota pickup." Well, as it turned out, he found a way to do extraordinarily well. He's a wonderful entrepreneur and by far the most prosperous member of the family, his parents included. He has done it with owning vacation rental homes at Tahoe, part ownership of a string of California climbing gyms and two companies. One is called SuperTopo, which publishes the principal climbing guidebooks for the West, and the other is a company called *OutdoorGearLab*, which is like the *Consumer Reports* of outdoor gear. If you want to buy a tent or a parka, you go to *OutdoorGearLab*. Those companies are very, very successful. He is not, definitely not, living in the back of a beat up Toyota pickup truck. He and his wife Lita have a nice, solar-powered house in San Anselmo.

Our last son, Morgan, did go to Princeton. For some brilliant reason, Kay decided when he was in middle school that in addition to taking Spanish, he ought to try Japanese. He

took to it and studied it through high school and college. He has lived in Japan for 11 years and is totally fluent in Japanese. Level 1 fluency, which is very difficult for foreigners to attain. We went to his wedding a couple years ago in Japan and one of his Japanese friends told him, in Japanese, “Wow, Morgan, I didn’t know you could speak English so well!” In all the years he’d known Morgan, he’d never heard him speak a word of English. Morgan’s wife, Yoko, is Japanese, their daughter Nina is Japanese. He works for Apple corporate, managing demo software and helping plan strategy for retail stores in the Asia Pacific region, which is Japan, Hong Kong, China and Australia.

Also, there is a sixth member of our family, Marisa Rodriguez. She was in Chris’s class at University High School in San Francisco and on graduation day in 1997 her mother died. She had no siblings. Her mother and father had been divorced, and he died shortly after his ex-wife, so there was no connection there. Since 1997 we have absorbed Marisa into our family, so she is our sixth offspring. She is an assistant District Attorney in San Francisco and a favorite of the DA, George Gascon. She is considering a political future. Nothing she attains will surprise us. She is also involved with me in programs at San Quentin.

**Michelle Petersen:** I was going to bring that up. So now you are at San Quentin. What took you there?

**Steve McNamara:** I was going to write a story, actually a magazine article or book. What intrigued me was why some people do good things and some do bad things. I talked to a bunch of people who have done positive things in their lives. Then talking to Kay about it, we thought I could use a control group, people who have done crappy things. We happen to have four or five thousand of them living just up the road from here, in San Quentin. So through some friends I got in touch with the then warden, a wonderful guy named Bob Ayers. In the spring of ’08 he let me go in with a tape recorder, which is not normally allowed, and talk to a dozen or so inmates about what steered them the wrong direction. After I’d done that I realized this is a no-brainer. Your behavior is almost always tied to your family circumstances. All the good people I talked to, almost without exception, were raised with examples of good behavior. And all the people who had done bad things, almost without exception, they had had unbelievably crappy lives. You are not forced to kill somebody because your parents beat you up, but it certainly shoves you further down that road than if you have had a loving family life. So I thought “Hmmm, this is pretty easy to describe.” I’ve told you the whole story right here in the last two minutes. That’s not a book, although some of the stories are interesting. There is no real challenge in it.

The warden, Bob Ayers, was going to retire in December and he decided that as a part of his legacy he wanted to revive the *San Quentin News*. That was a newspaper that had been started by a progressive warden named Clinton Duffy in December of 1940. There had been a precursor newspaper called the *Wall City News* but it had ceased publication. Duffy wanted the *San Quentin News* to be a conduit for information of interest to the inmates. He said, “It’s all rumors around here and the rumors are generally wrong by the time they get passed along a few times. Information is a big deal in prison.”



The paper went up and down, up and down. There was a U.S. Supreme Court decision some years ago that said that prison administrators couldn't censor the views of inmates; they have rights to express themselves. So prison officials around the country said, "Really, is that right? Let's just close the damn paper down entirely. We can say it's a security problem, we can say it's a finance problem." So whenever the *San Quentin News* got itself into trouble, and the warden was less forward looking than Clinton Duffy, the paper wouldn't be censored, it would be shut down. Bob Ayers wanted to bring it back in 2008 so he contacted some former newspaper people. Now there are four of us: myself, who acts as the publisher, Joan Lisetor, who had been an *IJ* reporter, a guy named John Eagan, who had been at the Associated Press, and Linda Xiques, who was managing editor for me at the *Pacific Sun* for 24 years.

We advise the inmates and they put out the paper. It is the only inmate-produced paper in California, one of only three we know of in the country. One of the others, the *Prison Mirror*, is in Minnesota. It's been going for 125 years and its founding inmates included Cole Younger and his brother. They were part of the Jesse James gang. Probably the most famous of the prison publications is the *Angolite* in Angola, Louisiana. It is a quarterly magazine, or every other month, and it is famous because of its former editor, a man named Wilbert Rideau. He got himself off death row and became a great voice for inmates before he won a new trial and was released. He had a program on NPR for a while, has written a couple of books and is a wonderful person altogether.

That's the story of revival of the *San Quentin News*. There was an interesting bump in the road. Bob Ayers re-started the paper, then retired, and it was printed at that time as it had been all its life at the print shop within San Quentin prison. Then in the fall of 2010 the state decided to close down the print shop, so I started a non-profit called the Prison Media Project that raised some money. We got seed money, \$5000, from Tom Peters at the Marin Community Foundation, and then began to raise funds elsewhere. I made a deal with the printing company that Kay and I used to own, Marin Sun Printing, which printed the *Pacific Sun* and a bunch of other papers. We made a deal with Marin Sun to get the *S.Q. News* printed at very reasonable rates. The publication now has a press run of 11,500. It is 20 or 24 pages, and we manage to send 200 copies each to 17 other prisons. There are 34 prisons in California so there are 17 prisons that don't take it. Why? Because prisons are like kingdoms. The presiding king is the warden and if the warden thinks that giving prisoners a voice is a terrible idea, as some of them do, then they say, "Don't send us that crappy newspaper, we want no part of it."

**Michelle Petersen:** Do you distribute to family members of the prisoners, or anything like that?

**Steve McNamara:** The paper is online at [www.sanquentinnews.com](http://www.sanquentinnews.com). Also, we mail the paper to people who contribute to the Prison Media Project. If you go online, there is a way put a donation on your credit card. That will get you the paper for a year. The minimum donation is \$25.

**Michelle Petersen:** You have had a very successful career. Do you have any advice?

**Steve McNamara:** Follow your passion. And follow the advice my grandfather used to offer: “Be yourself. Do the right thing. Care for others.”

**Michelle Petersen:** Great. Thank you, Steve.

**Steve McNamara:** You are very welcome. I’ve enjoyed this.