The Worcester Writers Project

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents 2
Table of Figures 3
Abstract 4
Introduction 5
Content 8
Conclusions and Recommendations 11
Acknowledgements 12
Appendices 13
- Joe McGinniss 13
- Roscoe Blunt 20
- Paul Della Valle 26
Bibliography 42
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Current Worcester Area Writers website

Figure 2: The page of L. E. Sissman at the Worcester Area Writers website

Figure 3: Editing of the interview video using VirtualDub software

Figure 4: A picture of Roscoe Blunt from World War II (Courtesy of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette)

Figure 5: A picture of Roscoe Blunt taken during the interview of Telegram (Courtesy of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette)

Figure 6: A picture of Paul Della Valle taken during the interview
ABSTRACT

The goal of the Worcester Writers project is to create and maintain a website which includes information about the writers of Worcester area. The project has been studied at Worcester Polytechnic Institute by various students in recent years and there already exists a website where the visitors can gather information about several writers and poets who lived in the Worcester area. The main motivation of the project is to update the Worcester Writers website by finding more writers and poets, to develop a better-looking interface as well as to overcome copyright issues which have been encountered in previous projects. The first step of the project is to gather information about authors, to conduct interview sessions with them if possible and to analyze their works by writing critical essays. The collected information is revised, edited and then uploaded to the Worcester Writers website.
INTRODUCTION

There exist two goals of the Worcester Writers project. The first one is to analyze and study the works of the authors who lived in Worcester area and the second one is to upload the collected information to the existing Worcester Writers website by improving the quality of multimedia content about the authors; such as the interview videos, pictures. The Worcester Writers website is already up and running under the archives of Gordon Library of Worcester Polytechnic Institute \(^1\). The following figure displays a screenshot of the current Worcester Writers website as of April 29, 2010.

\[ \text{Figure 1 : Current Worcester Area Writers website} \]
The Worcester Area Writers website was created by Michael LeBarron and Andrea Hubbard in 2002 and then redesigned by Tara Ellsworth, Kathleen Joyce and Vickie Wu in 2003. As of April 29, 2010, there are information about six different Worcester Area Writers; S. N. Behrman, Robert Benchley, Robert Cormier, Esther Forbes, Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Milton Meltzer. The writers section was created by Michael LeBarron and Andrea Hubbard. As for the poets, the visitors of the website can reach the information about nine different poets; Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Olson, Stanley Kunitz, L. E. Sissman, Bill Tremblay, Mary Fell, Fran Quinn, Frank O’Hara and Olive Higgins Prouty. The students of this project in 2003, Tara Ellsworth, Kathleen Joyce and Vickie Wu created the poets part. The website also contains a useful links section; such as Worcester History, Book Trade Information, Other Resources and Gordon Library Home.

Each subpage about the writers contains the biography, works and photos of them as well as some of their famous quotes. References to the material about the authors are provided wherever it is necessary. The figure below displays the subpage of L. E. Sissman.

Figure 2: The page of L. E. Sissman at the Worcester Area Writers website
The Worcester Area Writers is a useful website where the visitors can find a brief summary about the authors listed above; but the design of the website is somewhat outdated. The last update to this website was done in 2003 and there has been a great deal of improvements in web development since that time. In addition, there are many other writers and poets who live in Worcester Area; therefore their pictures, biographies and interviews if possible can be added to this website to increase the quality of the content. The following sections are going to summarize the steps to accomplish these goals.
CONTENT

In order to create a better Worcester Writers website, it was necessary to add multimedia files of each author that I was working on. These multimedia files can be pictures, videos or sound recordings of the authors. Adding multimedia to the website is not only finding a photo or capturing a video of an author; it requires further steps. The media files need to be edited in order to increase their quality, besides there are the copyright issues.

There were three authors that I worked on during this project; Joe McGinniss, Roscoe Blunt and Paul Della Valle. Joe McGinniss had several pictures online that we can use in the Worcester Writers website; but at the end I was not able to contact neither Joe McGinniss nor the websites that owned his pictures to get permission about copyright issues. Therefore there is no multimedia file belonging to Joe McGinniss in this project.

The Worcester Telegram & Gazette conducted an interview with Roscoe Blunt in November, 2009. Roscoe Blunt was chosen to participate in the History Channel’s World War II series narrated by actor Gary Sinise[^9]. There were two good pictures of Roscoe Blunt available at this website; as a result I contacted Leah Lamson, who is the editor of Worcester Telegram & Gazette. She was very kind to give us permission to use Roscoe Blunt’s pictures in that interview for our project.

An interview session was arranged with the author Paul Della Valle which would take place at his home in Sterling, Massachusetts. The necessary equipment to record this interview was borrowed from the Academic Technology Center at WPI[^23]. The video camera from ATC had the high quality capturing option; therefore the video and sound quality of interview was excellent at the end. The video still needed some edition though, to cut out parts where the
camera was being tested. In order to achieve this goal; the software called VirtualDub was used. Below is a screenshot of this program during the editing of the interview video.

![Editing of the interview video using VirtualDub software](image)

**Figure 3: Editing of the interview video using VirtualDub software**

Once the unnecessary parts were cut from the interview, it was ready to be used in Worcester Writers website. Paul Della Valle gave permission to use the interview video in our website; therefore we do not have any copyright issues with the video. Once the multimedia files and biography essays for the authors were ready, the only thing left was to upload them to the Worcester Writers website in WPI Sharepoint Intranet \(^{[24]}\). Erin DeSilva from WPI Academic
Technology Center helped me to be included in Worcester Writers project group and below is a screenshot of the updated Worcester Writers website.

I spent a huge amount of time to collect material about Joe McGinniss, Roscoe Blunt and Paul Della Valle, therefore I could not work on the development of Worcester Writers website that much. It remains as a future work to improve the quality of the Worcester Writer website design by using modern web development tools such as Adobe Dreamweaver.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There were two goals of the Worcester Writers project. The first one was to collect material about authors who live in Worcester Area, and the second one was to upload the collected material to the existing website and improving the design of the website. Although there is certainly a good amount of material collected about Joe McGinniss, Roscoe Blunt and Paul Della Valle at the end of this project, there can be more information on Worcester Writers website about the authors in Worcester area. New interview videos as well as copyrighted pictures of authors should definitely be added into the website by the students who are going to work on this project. Also collecting material about an author takes a good amount of time; therefore I think it would be extremely helpful if a student works on this project as a dedicated webmaster. The Worcester Writers website was designed in 2003 and it definitely need some major revisions in order to give the visitors of the website a better experience. A dedicated webmaster can work on improving the design of the website; while the other students in Worcester Writers IQP group are working on collecting material about authors.
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Joe McGinniss

Milestones of his life

- Joe McGinniss was born in New York City on 9 December 1942.[2]
- In 1964 he graduated from the College of Holy Cross
- 1964, he started working at the Worcester Telegram
- 1965, he started working for the Philadelphia Bulletin
- 1966, he started writing in the Philadelphia Inquirer
- 1968, his first book, The Selling of the President,
- 1968, he quitted his job at the Philadelphia Inquirer
- He wrote the novels The Dream Team (1972), Heros (1976) and Going to Extremes (1980)
- 1979, he started writing for LA Herald Examiner
- In 1984, Jeffrey MacDonald sued him, claiming that McGinniss acted as if he believed MacDonald was innocent although he knew he was guilty just to work with him.
- In 1993, he wrote The Last Brother: The Rise and Fall of Teddy Kennedy
- 1995, his publisher offered him $ 1 million advance to write a book about O. J. Simpson trial.
- In 1999, he wrote *The Miracle of Castel di Sangro*, a book where he followed a complete season of a soccer team from a tiny town, Castel di Sangro, in Italian Second Division, Serie B, for a year.

- In 2004, he wrote another book called *The Big Horse*, a compelling nonfiction account of a colorful thoroughbred trainer's one big success.[5]

- In 2009, he published *Never Enough*, where he studied the murder of investment banker Robert Kissel by his wife Nancy in Hong Kong.

- In 2009, he began investigating the rise of Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

- His next book, *Sarah Palin’s Year of Living Dangerously*, will be released in 2011.

❖ List of works

- The Selling of the President (1969)

- The Dream Team (1972)

- Heroes (1976)

- Going to Extremes (1980)

- Fatal Vision (1983)

- Blind Faith (1989)

- Cruel Doubt (1991)

- The Last Brother: The Rise and Fall of Teddy Kennedy (1993)

- The Miracle of Castel di Sangro (1999)

- The Big Horse (2004)

- Never Enough (2007)
Biography

Joe McGinniss is an American author who was born in New York City on 9 December 1942[2]. He is an author of true crime and non-fiction novels. He is also a big soccer fan and his sympathy to soccer even took him to Italy to follow a second division club and spend a year there to write a book about their adventures in top leagues of Italian soccer. Currently he lives in Williamstown, MA with his wife, who is also a writer and editor, Nancy Doherty and his five children.

Joe McGinniss gained familiarity with journalism for the first time at the College of Holy Cross. During his education he wrote for the school newspaper and he worked for the Port Chester Daily Item in summer breaks [5]. He graduated from the College of Holy Cross in 1964 and started working for Worcester Telegram as a general assignment reporter. During his time at Worcester Telegram Joe McGinniss discovered that he had a talent for writing and decided to study in this field.

After spending a year at Worcester Telegram, McGinniss became a sportswriter at the Philadelphia Bulletin in 1965. Only a year after, he started working at the rival of the Philadelphia Bulletin, the Philadelphia Inquirer, as a columnist.

1968 was a remarkable year in Joe McGinniss’s life. He found the opportunity to write his first novel, The Selling of the President, in this year. While working on a profile of sports journalist, Howard William Cosell [10] for TV Guide, he learnt that a friend of Howard Cosell had the advertising account of Democratic Party president nominee, Hubert Humphrey [11]. Hubert Humphrey refused Joe McGinniss’s offer to work with him. Following this refusal, Joe McGinniss decided to follow the presidential campaign
of Republican nominee, Richard Nixon[^12], who later on won the elections to become the president of the United States. Richard Nixon’s campaign advisor, Roger Alies, who also worked for George Bush’s campaign, allowed Joe McGinniss to follow the selling of a president to the public. Following the presidential campaign, Joe McGinniss published his first book, The Selling of the President, which received a huge amount of positive feedback, such that it was in New York Times bestseller list overnight.

Following his huge success with The Selling of the President, Joe McGinniss decided to concentrate on writing books. Therefore he quitted his job at the Philadelphia Inquirer[^2]. He continued writing and his next book was The Dream Team which was published in 1972. In this book, Joe McGinniss narrated the story of a distracted young writer who was obsessed with horse racing, alcohol and women. His second book did not receive that much of positive feedbacks compared to his first book, The Selling of the President.

The next book of Joe McGinniss, Heroes, which was published in 1976 and where he mixed journalism with memoir[^5], still did not receive positive feedback that would remind his success with the Selling of the President; but he was regarded as an honest and diligent writer after on. In 1980, he published Going to Extremes which regained his popularity. McGinniss wrote about his adventures in Alaska in Going to Extremes and following the success of this book, he was on the cover page of New York Times Book Review[^5].

In 1979, Joe McGinniss became well-known nationwide after he met with Jeffrey MacDonald, who was a former doctor in US Army and who was accused of murdering
his wife and children in 1970. McGinniss and MacDonald had an agreement and McGinniss started working on MacDonald’s case. He has worked on MacDonald’s case for more than three years and published his stunning book Fatal Vision in 1983. This book sold over 3 million copies and Joe McGinniss gained reputation nationwide after publishing it. Next year Fatal Vision was converted to TV series to be shown at NBC. In Fatal Vision Joe McGinniss described Jeffrey MacDonald as a murderer who has psychological problems and this frustrated the imprisoned MacDonald too much that he decided to sue Joe McGinniss for breach of contract. MacDonald claimed that McGinniss acted as if he believed he was innocent just to collect information from him for his book; however he had already known MacDonald was guilty. MacDonald filed a civil suit against McGinniss that was settled out of court on 21 August 1987. McGinniss paid $325,000 to MacDonald, but he personally received only $48,000. The Kassabs, his wife’s family, sued MacDonald for the settlement and received $80,000. MacDonald's mother received $93,000 and his lawyers received $104,000. The disagreement between Joe McGinniss and Jeffrey MacDonald has been used as the main material of The Journalist and The Murderer, a book that was written by Janet Malcolm to explain the problems between journalist and their subjects.

Joe McGinniss continued writing true crime novels and his next book was Blind Faith, which was published in 1989 and converted to TV series in 1990 to be shown at NBC. Blind Faith is a true-crime book which is about the three boys’ crumbling faith in their smooth-talking, high-flying father; on that level, it is often moving and heart-wrenching. Following Blind Faith, Joe McGinniss published Cruel Doubt in 1991, which was
shown at NBC in 1992. Cruel Doubt is a true-crime book which describes a distorted mother-son relationship, where the son murders his mother and rich stepfather to inherit $2 million[^16].

Following his true-crime trilogy, Joe McGinniss wrote a book about Teddy Kennedy[^17], The Last Brother in 1993. In this book he portrayed the Kennedy family through the sixties, from Jack's ascension to the presidency, through the first assassinations, Chappaquiddick, their father's death, and finally to Teddy's solitary survival. This book received negative feedback from the critics who were sympatric to Kennedy family. He was also accused of plagiarism by Doris Goodwin[^18], but this was never proved[^4].

In 1995, McGinniss was offered $1 million by his publisher to follow the trial of O. J. Simpson, who was accused of murdering his ex-wife and a friend of hers. Although he followed the trial between January-October 1995, he turned down this offer despite being present throughout the entire event[^5]. He thought the trial had been a farce from beginning to end.

After spending years in writing true-crime books and investigating crime cases to collect material for his books, Joe McGinniss decided to write a book about a completely different topic, soccer. Joe McGinniss watched the 1994 World Cup which was held in US. Since he lived close to Gillette Stadium he had the chance to watch two games in that stadium. He has witnessed the passion and the excitement soccer offers and become a soccer fan rapidly. Then he heard about a soccer team in Italy, Castel di Sangro, which represents the 5000 populated town of Castel di Sangro in second division, Serie B. To follow the unbelievable achievement of this closer, McGinniss
decided to spend a year in Italy although he spoke no Italian and needed a translator. In his book, The Miracle of Castel di Sangro, Joe McGinniss shared his experiences he had with Castel di Sangro team. Joe McGinniss witnessed that Castel di Sangro players throwing their final game of the season against Bari, to ensure that Bari promotes to top division, Serie A and he wrote about this incident in his book [19]. Following this, the mafia in Castel di Sangro was after him; therefore he needed to return back to US immediately.

McGinniss’s passion in sports did not fade away and in 2004 came out his next book, The Big Horse. Joe McGinniss tried to recapture his lost love of horse racing by following P. G. Johnson and his horse Volponi throughout the 2003 racing season [20]. In 2007, McGinniss published Never Enough, in which he returned back to writing true-crime novels. In this book, he described the murder of a banker, Robert Kissel, by his wife Nancy in Hong Kong, an unhappy wife who murders her husband so that she can be with her blue-collar lover [5].

The rise of Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Sarah Plain, caught the attention of Joe McGinniss before 2008 Presidential Elections. His controversial article called Pipe Dreams was published in Portfolio [6] in April 2009. He continued to gather information about Sarah Palin and her campaign and he found a chance to have dinner with her through a bid on Ebay; but he lost the bid just by $ 3,500. Currently he is working on his new book, Sarah Palin’s Year of Living Dangerously, which is going to be released in 2011.
Roscoe Blunt

- **Milestones of his life**
  - He was born in the Swedish district of Worcester, MA, Quinsigamond Village on July 29, 1925[8]
  - 1938, he was accepted into Saxtrum Club, a jazz band in Clayton-Laurel neighborhood, as a drummer
  - 1943, he joined the army for the World War II and he played in army bands at US camps throughout Europe
  - During his time at army, he wrote down notes and collected material for *Inside the Battle of the Bulge: A Private Comes of Age* and *Foot Soldier: An Infantryman’s War in Europe*
  - 1946, he returned to Worcester and continued playing in Saxtrum Club
  - 1946, he left Saxtrum Club and joined Bob Chester Band
  - 1946, he was accepted to New England Conservatory of Music
  - 1947, while at conservatory a new jazz band called *Rockie Blunt All-Stars* was formed from the players at the Saxtrum Club
  - 1948, he married with his wife, Beatrice, and moved to Shrewsbury[9]
  - 1949, he graduated from New England Conservatory of Music with a major in percussion and honor in the History of the Jazz Studies
  - Mid 1950s, he disbanded the group since he thought he could not find a pianist compatible with *Rockie Blunt All-Stars*
  - For more than 30 years he served as a police and fire reporter for *the Evening Gazzette*
- He continued playing drums until just a few years ago, since he could not carry his drums anymore
- 2005, his wife passed away
- He currently lives in Shrewsbury, MA.

❖ List of works
- Inside the Battle of the Bulge: A Private Comes of Age (1994)
- Foot Soldier: An Infantryman’s War in Europe (2001)

❖ Biography
Roscoe Crosby Blunt, Jr, also known as Rockie Blunt was born in the Swedish District of Worcester, MA, Quinsigamond Village [8]. He has been interested in jazz music since childhood and spent his early music career in African-American area of Worcester, MA, the Laurel-Clayton area. He took drumming lessons as a kid at the Lincoln Square Boys Club and his father encouraged him to take these lessons. In one of his interviews [8], Roscoe Blunt reports that his father took him to all of the jazz concerts in Worcester. His mother, who was a pianist actually, was against his musical studies though.
He took drumming lessons, and at age 12, he was invited to join the local jazz band the Saxtrum Club [9]. His father asked the older musicians in the group if they can include Roscoe as a drummer in their group. He was physically so small that, he could not even reach the drum pedal [8]. According to Roscoe Blunt’s writings, they were performing their jazz music in almost all the night clubs in Worcester.
Roscoe had to put a breakpoint into his musical career due to the World War II. In 1943, when he was 18 years old and freshmen at Clark University, he was drafted to the army. His English professor noticed Roscoe’s writing skills and recommended him to improve these skills before he left for the army. In his interview with Telegram, Roscoe Blunt describes his professor’s thoughts about his writing skills; “He told me it would be a mistake not to make writing my profession.”

He was in the US army between September 1944 and March 1946. He fought in France, Holland, Belgium and Germany with the 84th Infantry Division. He participated in well-known Battle of the Bulge, capturing Hannover and moving into Germany. Towards the end of his duty, he earned the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and the Expert Infantry Badge. Later on he also earned the Combat Infantry Badge. While in the army, he played in army bands throughout the US camps across Europe. He wrote down almost every incident he had seen during war and he benefited from these notes to publish Inside the Battle of the Bulge: A Private Comes of Age in 1994 and Foot Soldier: An Infantryman’s War in Europe in 2001.

When he returned back to Worcester in 1946, he continued his musical career in the Saxtrum Club. Later on he left this club and joined the Bob Chester Band; but he did not spend a long time playing with this band; because he was accepted into New England Conservatory in 1946. In 1947, a new jazz band Rockie Blunt All Stars was formed with the members of the Saxtrum Club. In 1948, Roscoe Blunt married with his wife, Beatrice, and moved to Shrewsbury where he still lives. He majored in percussion and graduated with honor in the History of Jazz Studies in 1949.
In mid 1950s he disbanded the group Rockie Blunt All Stars, since he thought it was very
difficult to find a pianist compatible with the group. His interest in music continued until
a few years ago, but he quitted playing drums since he could not carry his drums
anymore. He has also served as a police and fire reporter for the Evening Gazzette for
over 30 years to improve his writing skills. As a result of his success in being a reporter,
he earned 35 awards and three keys to the city. Roscoe Blunt had difficulties with adapting to his old life once he was back from war. He
lost his hearing and ability to walk without help on the front line. In his interview with
Telegram, he says that people who had not been there would never understand how
difficult it was. He remembers the violent scenes from the war, such as a woman and
child murdered, people being gunned down and concentration camps.

In 1994, he published his first book, Inside the Battle of the Bulge: A Private Comes of
Age. In this book, Roscoe Blunt describes the adventures of the 84th Infantry Division
from its union at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey in 1944 until the days they fought in Belgium,
Holland, Germany and France. In 2001, he published his second book, Foot Soldier:
An Infantryman’s War in Europe. He wrote about the daily life of a lowly infantryman
during World War II. Roscoe Blunt currently lives in Shrewsbury, MA alone, since his wife passed away in
2005. Mr. Blunt is also one of a dozen American veterans to participate in the History
Channel’s 10-part series “WWII in HD” aired Nov. 15-19 2009, where he is narrated by
actor Gary Sinise.
Figure 4: A picture of Roscoe Blunt from World War II (Courtesy of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette)
Figure 5: A picture of Roscoe Blunt taken during the interview of Telegram (Courtesy of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette)
Paul Della Valle

- Interview with him on April 25, 2010

- I checked the online sources to find a biography of you; but unfortunately I couldn’t come up with any. So could you tell me of your birth date, birth place and where are you from?

- I am from; I was born in Quincy, MA. My father and mother are Italian and Irish immigrants. Actually they were born in here; but their father and mother were born in Ireland. My mother is Irish and my father is Italian. And I moved to Weymouth when I was seven years old and grew up there. Weymouth is also on the south shore. And I ended up in Clinton, I lived in Colorado for a while, I moved to Clinton to take a newspaper job, my first newspaper job in Massachusetts. And I ended up working at the Worcester Telegram with Jim Dempsey. I became a columnist at the Telegram in 1989. And later on I worked at Worcester Magazine and after I owned my own newspaper, the Lancaster Times &Clinton Courier for ten years and now I teach at school and I write still.

- Ok, so the first school you attended, your education life started in Quincy.

- Yeah, no, I don’t even remember. It was the Park Elementary School and I attended St. Francis Xavier Catholic School in Weymouth and then Boston College High School for two years and Weymouth High School for two years. And then I went to Metropolitan State College in Colorado.

- So when and why did you begin writing?

- I began writing; because I suppose I wanted to have some outlet of expression. I started writing. I loved the poetry of Edgar Allen Poe when I was in high school. I did not write that much then; but I went to Boston State College for a little while and I was on the newspaper staff briefly and I think I just became interested with writing at that point. At Metropolitan State College, I had a
professor named Greg Peterson, who changed my life. He was my journalism professor, he was the one who said to me you can really write well.

✓ **When did you first consider yourself as a writer?**

✓ As soon as I started writing. I started writing for Golden Galley Transcript when I was still in college in Colorado. Golden is a little town in Colorado where Coors beers made. When you start journalism, you get to the byline of the newspaper. The second I had my first byline I consider myself a writer I suppose. And I loved it, I immediately recognized I enjoyed doing it and I enjoyed having my name on it.

✓ **What inspired you to write your first book and what was your first book?**

✓ My first book was, I just happen to have one right here, I don’t have many left. It was a self-published book of columns. It is called My Favorite Column of Yours is The One Your Wife Wrote. It is a book of my favorite columns from the Worcester Telegram and Worcester Magazine. Back then I was as well known as Jim Dempsey was; because a lot of people read us in the Telegram and people often asked me “Where could I get a collection of your columns?” and I did not have one; so I self-published this. It actually did pretty well. I sold all two thousand published.

✓ **Do you have a specific writing style?**

✓ When I teach writing, I always tell to kids that the most important thing is seeable details. You have to use specific details in your writing; for example it is not enough to say he was a big man; because when I was a little kid, I mean when my kids were little, they thought I was a big man; because they were relatively small. It is important to say the man was six foot tall men, that specific detail. I think I always try to let people see what I am writing about instead of telling them. Show me don’t tell me, I guess, is the most important maxim I would say for any writer.
After my research, I found out that you have three books so far. Massachusetts Troublemakers, My Favorite Column of Yours is the One That Your Wife Wrote and the third one is Welcome to Your Midlife Crisis.

This was a joke book actually that I did with Lennie Peterson. Lennie was a cartoonist that worked for the Worcester Magazine and also for the Worcester Telegram after that. He was a great artist and we had a lot of fun doing this book. It is kind of dumb book. We did not make a lot of money on it. It was sold in Spencer Gibson, places like that. It is just jokes about turning forty.

For these books, I have specific questions. How did you come up with the titles of these books, how do you determine the title of a book?

When you propose a book to a publisher, you need to have a title. Usually you send out a couple of sample chapters and an outline of the rest of the work that you want to do. So, having a good title is important, the publisher is going to be more interested in the book if it has title they think they can sell. It usually has to be something kind of catchy. My Favorite Column is The One That Your Wife Wrote was always a joke that people would say to me, people would actually say sincerely because my wife wrote a funny column in response to something that I wrote. That just seems like a funny title to me. Welcome to your Midlife Crisis was, again it was a joke book, so it was something that people would buy for 40th birthday joke present. So that is where that title came from. Massachusetts Troublemakers, actually when I proposed that book to Globe Pequot, which is the people who ended up publishing it, I think I first said I wanted the title to be Massachusetts Contrarians. They said they like “Troublemakers” better; because it was catchier they thought. It would get more people interested. Anyhow, the thing is “contrarians” would be more accurate in some way; because the people were not necessarily bad
troublemakers, they were just people one against the grain; but “troublemakers” is more catchy so that is what they wanted me to change and I said that is fine.

✓ For these three books, you explained the message of this book so far, Welcome to Your Midlife Crisis. For the other two books, what was the message that you wanted your readers to grasp?

✓ Well, I guess with My Favorite Column of Yours was The One Your Wife Wrote, I was a writing a column three times a week for the Telegram and then once a week for Worcester Magazine altogether over ten years I suppose. So I got a lot of columns. Some of them were really good; I do not mind saying that. I would be falsely modest if I did not think that there were some really good ones. I wanted to collect the ones that I thought were the best and say to people this is my best work, this is the best I can do. Some were funny, some were sad, some were about me and my family, and some were about other people. Some were outrageous and some were, I guess, very somber. Some were about my childhood. I thought, as a columnist, that was kind of my autobiography in a way. That is how I would look at it. I want people to know me through those columns. That is what collection was about. As far as the Massachusetts Troublemakers book, that book came out of when I was a reporter for the Telegram in Leominster. There is a famous gravestone over there with a guy with the beard on it. On his gravestone it says “Persecuted for Wearing the Beard”. I was somewhat fascinated by that at the time I was reporter; but some people already have done stories about that. His name was Jo Palmer. So I kind of let that go whenever I wrote about it when I was at the Telegram. Later on my own newspaper I decided to do a story about him. And the more I researched him and I found a lot stuff in Leominster Public Library that have been written about him, the more I realized what an incredible character he was. And not just an odd guy, but he really had a lot of backbone; he was involved with the Fruitlands experiment and is a revolutionist. So, I thought there are other people like that in the
state. Maybe they caused some trouble in their time; but they made society better in some cases or maybe they just were troublemakers. So I proposed a book on that basis and I came up with over twenty different people that I researched briefly in. I thought they would be good candidates. By the time I got done, I changed most of them; because I found better ones that I liked. The message of that book I would say if there is a message is that, people can change the world sometimes just by having their own vision doing what they think is important.

✓ In your books, is there any character that you find yourself in?

✓ I would like to see myself in a lot of the people that I wrote about in Massachusetts Troublemakers. I definitely see myself in my book a columnist; because I am in my book a columnist and I did have a midlife crisis like most people do, not as severe as the jokes. In Massachusetts Troublemakers, I am not sure if there is one person in particular I see myself as. I see other people that I know in law in some of the people, like my daughter Jewel is a lot like Lucy Stone, she is a good person. Actually research in the Horace Mann chapters, why I became a public school teacher, so late in life. I am fifty-seven now and I did not become a public school teacher until two years ago. When I researched Horace Mann, all the things he said about public education ring through today; for instance when he was the First Secretary of Education in the Commonwealth, a lot of people did not want to pay property taxes to support the education of the Irish immigrant children. And he said which is true today, “The children of these people, meaning the Irish immigrants, are going to have the rights of citizens and that is why we better educate them.” I think the same is true today, sometimes people complain about their tax dollars going to educate people from other places, particularly the Caribbean Islands now. These kids are going to be citizens of United States; so we better make sure that they are well educated and that makes us a better country. So a lot of things he said moved me to become a teacher. Can I become like Horace Mann, probably not; but I would like to.
Are experiences in these books based on someone you know or events in your life?

Definitely, the first two are undoubtable. Welcome to Your Midlife Crisis is just taking things to a hilarious or bizarre level. The book of the columns is mostly based on my own life. With Massachusetts Troublemakers, not so much, other than things that moved me that these people did is the things that I chose to write about in many cases.

Other than your own books, what books have influenced you most in your life?

That is hard for me to answer; because I do not always remember the books that I read so long ago; but definitely there is a book called “The Greatest Game Ever Played” that is about the 1913 US Open when a young caddy from Brookline, MA, won the US Open playing against the greatest golfers of his day. That is just a phenomenal book and I love golf; so I love that book. The Lord of The Rings certainly, I read those when I was a freshman in high school. I would read it until three in the morning and my mother would yell “shut your light out”; but I just could not reading it. That just took me to a whole different place. Also I would say that, when I was a young boy I was a newspaper delivery boy. I would actually read the Boston Globe as I walked around and there was a columnist named George Frazier, who was just an incredible columnist. I still remember walking around, reading his columns. I used to love newspapers. And also music, I put out two CDs, which is another kind of writing. They all went together to me. I would say some of the songwriters; like Bush Springsteen, the Beatles and so many others had a great affect on me. The older I get, the less I read fiction. I read a lot of non-fiction. There is a park Indian chief name: Standing Bear, whose story, I read a couple different books of a man named Steven Dando. His story was so compelling that when I did my own Massachusetts Troublemakers book; I ended up doing a story about a woman from Amherst, who helped Standing Bear. Her name was Helen Hunt Jackson. I was so blown away by Standing Bear so that
I wanted to tell his story in my book; but he was not from Massachusetts and I figured out a way to get him in there, so that is what I did.

✓ I am also very interested in Lord of Rings and I had the same problem; reading that book until late and my parents getting angry with me. I think it happens to most readers of that book.

✓ I teach seventh grade; but some books, like we just read a book called “Kavik the Wolf Dog” and I have never heard of it before. But it is just a great and a short novel; it is just a great book. The kids loved it, I loved it. I used to read Robert Cormier, the great young adult fiction writer. I still remember reading his books, even when I was an adult; because I did not read him until I got to know him. They are just great books. They do not have to be, even something written aimed at the teenagers can be still a great book, I think. Lord of The Rings is obviously a fantasy; but great books and great movies, too.

✓ Is there any writer that you consider as a mentor?

✓ Well, Robert Cormier was a great influence on me. He is from Leominster, he died I think about six years ago, or maybe even a little more than that. He wrote mostly young adult fiction like I said; I still remember saying to him one time, at this time he was about sixty years old, “How can I guy who was sixty years old write for kids who are sixteen?” He said the one rule that I always follow is everybody wants to be Astaire dance, and when you are not it hurts. He says a broken hears is a broken heart, no matter how old you are. And that emotional honesty is, I think, one thing that I, if I hit that, I know that I something right. And I know that, it is going to connect with the reader. I could always tell if I wrote a good column. If I thought it was a good column, I gave it to my mother and she cried, or I gave it to my friend Walter Crouton and he laughed, I knew that was what I wanted.
Is there any other book that you are reading currently from any other author?

I am, I am reading actually there is a trilogy called “Horses”, and it is by an educator who just died named Theodore Sizer who was basically the man who started the charter school movement. Horace’s Compromise is the first one which is just a great book and it is saying what is really wrong with the high schools in America. He wrote back in the late 70s or early 80s, I think. And a lot of it is true today. Then, the next one is Horace’s Hope and Horace’s School. They are just very insightful books. Again I read mostly non-fiction for pleasure. With the school, I have to read all the books that kids are reading, too. We have just read a great book called “Chinese Cinderella”, that was really a great book about a girl growing up as an unwanted daughter in China in the 1950s. Even if books are aimed toward kids, if they are emotionally honest and they make me think, that is what I am looking for. I have actually read Steven Ambrose’s Undaunted Courage. It is a really long book and if I read books at night, I tend to read three pages and fall asleep. So it took me longer to read that book.

In Sun Chronicle website I have seen that you have a conference in Foxborough this Tuesday.

So basically what are your current projects? Are you thinking of writing a new book?

I am thinking of that. I am so busy with teaching; it is really hard to contemplate starting a new book. The conference is that I speak in engagement; I speak about Massachusetts Troublemakers at different places. I make a powerpoint up and talk about the book. And I am speaking to the Foxborough Historical Society. I am always thinking of what might be a good book. Doing a book is a huge commitment. The amount of research for Massachusetts Troublemakers was incredible and I enjoyed it; but I did not make very much money with the book, if I broke it down per hour I would not have made; I could not look at it as work like that. So it has to be something I enjoyed and the Massachusetts Troublemakers, I enjoyed researching immensely. I am thinking of couple different ones, just last night I was thinking what
a great book the story of General George Crocker, who was the nation’s top Indian fighter; but at the end of his life he realized that he really have been at the wrong side of it. He actually protested the way Geronimo, the scouts that helped him. I think he would be a fantastic book; but I have not taken any steps to start. A lot of times I think like “That would be a good book; maybe people like him would be a good book.” One thing I like about Massachusetts Troublemakers is that it was all varied. There were twenty different profiles; it was not just like researching one person. Any one of those people, any one of the twenty people profiled in Massachusetts Troublemakers could be their own book. In a matter of fact, almost all of them were their own books. They were their own books, every single one of them has had several books written about them. I tend to approach things like a journalist. In Massachusetts Troublemakers, instead of using a lot of footnotes, I almost always just quoted other books right in the text. I find that, when you asked me before my style of writing, I am a journalist, that is what I was for thirty years and I do not do academic type of books with a lot of footnotes. What I do is, I take the piece that I am quoting and I would say like I would quote it exactly like “According to so and so in the book” whatever the title of the book was. That is just how I work.

In your books, if you have a chance to change something what would it be?

I definitely take all of my mistakes out. Once in a while I found at least two mistakes in Massachusetts Troublemakers. Once I finish writing the book, they have editors that look at it, several editors and fact-checkers; but those are couple small details. One is I give an example; Isaiah Tomas who was from Worcester, the famous printer during the revolution, intercepted the Declaration of Independence going from Philadelphia to Boston and read it on, I think, Worcester City Hall steps or church steps, to Worcester. The Declaration of Independence was read for the first time in Massachusetts, in Worcester. So I quoted his own book about that, about what date that was on. I think, I put July 24th. Later on I saw a column that said the date
was July 14th. So I went back and I looked at my source which I have read his book, Isaiah Thomas’s book on Google books, online. I found the same page and I noticed that it was from the American Antiquarian Society I believe, and somebody had circled the date in the text and put in the margin the right date. His grandson, who did a later version of it, had got the date wrong and somebody corrected it; but I did not see the correction before my book came out. I also read somewhere that there was “Success is Counted Sweetest” by Emily Dickinson, was the only poem that she wrote, had published in her life time and I put that in the book in the chapter about Helen Hunt Jackson. That turned out to be not true and I do not know why. I do not know why somebody put that in, she published only couple poems, but there was more than that one. I wish I could take those back.

- While writing your books, what were the most challenging experiences you had?

- Well, the first one was already written; because I was a columnist. I would not say writing that book was so much of a challenge, just picking out the columns that I want to use in that. Welcome to Your Midlife Crisis was, it was like, as I said, a joke book. That was satisfying the publishers. There had to be these little short funny things and we thought things were funny, and they did not think were funny. They did not like some of the drawing and we liked some of the drawings more than they did. So the publisher was kind of hard to work with. With Massachusetts Troublemakers, the only hard part was, I would say was, taking the first step, beginning the project. I had sent out a sample chapter, but then I had the daunting task of writing nineteen more. Actually I had to rewrite the first chapter; because it was too short. I think for anyone writing is starting. Because it is a daunting task; I had to write; I think it was 60,000 words for that book. So you write one and 59,999 left would come to, that is challenging; but once I got rolling on, I felt more comfortable and I decided to do it in a chronological order. So I would research, write the chapter; research, write another chapter, and I just went up
through. I started with Thomas Morton in the 1600s, and just went on write up to the last chapter on Major Taylor from Worcester.

✔️ **Based on your writing experience, do you have any recommendations to other writers?**

✔️ The same advice, whether I am teaching in college or at the middle school level, my advice is always to use a lot of seeable detail. I know that, Jim Dempsey’s big thing is strong verbs and I hardly second that, too. Seeable details and strong verbs make for good writing. Sometimes it is easy to write in passive voice or it is easier to be wag; but the best writing is always going to be having seeable details and strong verbs. If people are going to write; they probably are not going to make a lot of money at it. Most writers do not make a lot of money. Especially with fiction or another type of non-fiction I do, I mean it is lucky to make a book like Massachusetts Troublemakers, I will probably make less than five thousand dollars. You have to find something that you want to write about; because I am really proud of the book and I am glad I have it, I can do speaking things, which I also get paid to do. You need to be passionate about it because you are probably not going make a lot of money. The same with writing music, with CDs I lost many on them basically.

✔️ **Do you have any recommendations for the readers of your books to understand the books better?**

✔️ I think, the best thing about my books for readers is that in the Massachusetts Troublemakers, they are short. Each chapter is only like 30,000 words. Not even 30,000 words. They are pretty short. I guess it is 3,000 words each chapter. And the same with my columns, they are like probably 1,000 words, the book of columns. So the readers can just jump around which is a nice thing. I think that my Massachusetts Troublemakers, the strongest chapters are toward the end; one is that I start to hit my stride and two is that there are just more sources available for the
research. The people are fleshed out from the research more than they had been from the 1600s. So you get more sense of the personality of people that I was writing about I hope.

✓ I have read an article which was written for Boston Globe in 2005. You mentioned about the illness of your father. Could you give me a brief summary of the events in that article?

✓ That article in the Globe got more response far then anything I have written. The Globe still has a wide reach. When I sold my newspaper, one of my goals was to take my parents on a trip. Because when I was a kid, they had taken me and my siblings on a trip to California, which was life changing for me, it really expanded my horizons. When I sold my newspaper, I wanted to take them on a trip. At the same, my father when they came back from Florida to up to here Massachusetts, we discovered that my father had lung cancer. We went through all these tests and stuff in Boston, in Brigham and Women’s Hospital. The doctor said “Listen we need to operate in order take tumors out, part of his lung out; but go on a vacation. Go have a great time; that will probably be the best thing for him.” So we went and we had a great time. It was just great to be with them and my wife and my wife’s kids, my step-kids came on a trip. We just had a great time. My father had the operation, he did great and he is fine now.

✓ You also have a career in newspaper publishing, in Lancaster Times. Could you give me details about your publishing career?

✓ When I was at Worcester Magazine, I decided with my ex-wife, to start a newspaper around the town of Lancaster; because it was really being poorly served by the one little newspaper that covered Lancaster from some other towns. So we just started. She sold out; I did most of the writing. At the very beginning I did almost all the writing except for a couple correspondences. Then it quickly grew. I was up all night every night just working on it. Starting a business is tough; but I loved doing it. It really took off and it gradually grew over the years and I got divorced. My ex-wife and I still owned it together and worked together even after we got
divorced for a while. My current wife, Karen, was the editor and she was an incredible writer and editor. I ended up leaving a lot of that part to her and tried to run the business, it did great. One time we had two different newspapers and a monthly magazine called Mothertown. We were doing quite well and I ended up selling it; for some reason I got sick of doing it. I was not quite sure why but I sold it in 2005 to Boston Herald and that is just what it was. Then I have tried to start another magazine; but I had all these different restrictions on me from the non-compete agreement that I had to sign when I sold the newspaper. The magazine was called Central Mass Magazine; I did it for about a year; but it never took off. So that was my publishing career.

✓ **You also have a teaching career. Right now, I think you work in Mary Wells High School.**

✓ Actually, now I work at Overlook Middle School in Ashburn and I worked at Mary E. Wells Middle School in Southbridge last year.

✓ **And you also worked at Northeastern and Clark University.**

✓ Yes, I taught in Northeastern and Clark as an adjunct professor for five years for each maybe.

✓ **Your daughter also goes School of Journalism in Northeastern University.**

✓ She did; but she just graduated. My daughter Jewel was a journalism major at Northeastern. She had a 3.9 GPA and she called me up some day a couple years ago and said “Dad, I have been volunteering at a school and I really want to switch majors, I want to become a teacher.” Noting the client of journalism, or not the client but the quality of the journalism, as much as the client of opportunity in journalism, I told her that was a great idea. At the same time, I was researching Horace Mann for Massachusetts Troublemakers. I realized that is something that I really would like do, too. So I took the Teacher’s test and that is how I became a public school teacher and I love doing it. I love teaching in public school. I think it is an important thing to do and I get a real kick out of kids and I hope I can help them become better writers.
Could you give me the name of some important awards that you have won in your career?

I won a bunch of awards. With the newspaper we won tons of awards. My favorite personal ones were, I won Best Columnist for New England Newspapers when I was at Worcester Magazine and with my own newspaper several times; but the most important ones to me were a couple times we scored well in, we got awards General Excellence, and we were runner up for the newspaper of the year for a couple times. Those ones were particularly important to me; because those were about the whole staff, about everybody. My wife was journalist of the year for all New England shortly after she started as a journalist. Karen was just a natural journalist and she is a great poet, too. That was gratifying to see her win that; because she worked so hard.

You also have some interest in bluegrass music.

Yes, all music really; but I have the opportunity to play music with, a big influence on my writing, Walter Crockett from Worcester, he wrote mostly about music; but he can write about anything, he is great. For the Telegram he was music writer. In Worcester Magazine he was the editor, we became co-editors there. And I started playing music with him and his wife and other people. They got into bluegrass, they got me into bluegrass. I discovered that, my best talent in music is writing the songs. I am not nearly as professional as the people I play with on their instruments. I write pretty good songs I think. To me writing is writing; it is all about emotional honesty and using details to word pictures.

And you are also a big Red Sox fan.

I even more like Bruins now. I love the Boston Bruins hockey. I just love Boston sports. I love to play sports, now I play golf. I love golf too; I wish I played it more when I was younger.

You are also a supporter of Celtics.
Somewhat. I would say right now it goes Bruins, Patriots when they are in season, Red Sox are all above and Celtics maybe a little notch below that. But I like it all.

Your dog’s name comes after a famous player of Red Sox.

My dog’s name is Yaz. It is funny; because Yaz knows that, the real Yaz. Carl Yastrzemski who was the greatest player, in 1967 he won the Triple Crown; I think he was the last in American league to win the Triple Crown. Two years ago during the World Series, my brother and his son were at Fenway Park. He knows they got to put the big flag down in front of the left wall, at the start of the game. He needed people stand on it, before the game started. So my brother and his son were on the field, standing on the edges of the flag and who comes out of the left field door there, below the scoreboard, was Carl Yastrzemski. He is standing right next to my brother before the National Anthem. So my brother says to Carl Yastrzemski, “We are all big fans of yours, we will never forget what you did in 1967”. He says “We are such big fans; my brother names his dog after you.” And Carl Yastrzemski said “Better than an ex-wife” which I still do not know what that means; it is a really funny thing to say.

This brings the interview to an end. Is there any final thing that you want to say about yourself and your books?

I am glad that I was able to write. I am glad that I was able to express myself. It means a lot to me, I still see people, they will say to me “The column that you wrote about having cancer, or your daughter’s cancer” or “The column that you wrote about thirty years ago, twenty years ago means so much to me.” That is really gratifying. Most of the things we do, the words the theories just go away; but when you write something it is just there. Sometimes you wish it was not; but it is there with your name on it and I always liked that. I loved being a newspaper guy, I loved working at the Telegram, writing something, doing some good reporting, then writing on deadline and going down and having a beer, and having a copy board bring down the first
edition, with our stories in it before we are even done with our first beer. That was always thrilling to me.

❖ Pictures

Figure 6: A picture of Paul Della Valle taken during the interview
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