ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH BILL MARIMOW

Interviewed by Ford Risley

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Bill Marimow Interview

Risley: It is May 30, 2019. I am here in Philadelphia with Bill Marimow doing an interview for the Pennsylvania Newspaper Journalists Oral History Program. How are you doing Bill?

Marimow: Excellent, Ford.

Risley: Good. So, we are going to start at the beginning. Tell me where you were born and a bit about your family.

Marimow: I was born here in Philadelphia, about six blocks from here, Pennsylvania Hospital. August 4, 1947. My mother and father were both Philadelphia natives. As was my grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side. My father's parents were born in Ekaterinoslav, Russia, in the 1880s. And Ekaterinoslav is now Dnipro, and during the days of the Soviet Union you could not go to Dnipro because it is where they built defense armaments. So, my paternal grandparents were born in Russia, came here in 1904, and I grew up primarily in a suburb of Philadelphia called Haverford Township. Went to public schools there until age eighteen, and then embarked for Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

Risley: What did your parents do?

Marimow: My dad owned the Oakmont Cycle Shop—bicycles, sporting goods, hobbies and toys. My mom was primarily a stay-at-home mom.

Risley: What did you study at Haverford?

Marimow: At Haverford High? The usual. Everything from English to history, to calculus to biology, and Spanish. At Trinity I was an English major. And, probably I would say I squandered the first three semesters. Once I knew I could do the work, I got easily distracted by non-academic interests. I think that, you know, given 20/20 hindsight, had it not been for the Vietnam War raging, I would have been smart to either start school a year late, or to go into the military for two years. I just didn't have the maturity to really cope with all that freedom. And, once I knew I could excel if I worked, then I stopped working.

Risley: But you managed to graduate and make something of yourself. So, tell me how you got interested in journalism?

Marimow: I've always loved reading and writing. And I've always loved people's stories. The questions you asked me are they questions that interest me – how people are connected. And then writing about it. So, after college I hitchhiked through Europe for four months with Diane, now my wife. I came back to Philadelphia jobless having gotten into law school but knowing that I wasn't going to go because my draft status was uncertain. So, for the first few weeks I would look in

the newspaper under 'employment' for college grads, and usually go to one interview a day, realizing pretty quickly that I was either unqualified or totally disinterested in the job. And then, after a couple weeks of that regimen, I decided it was time to focus, so I got out the Philadelphia yellow pages, looked under 'publishing' – and by the way, neither of my parents went to college. They weren't sophisticated, they didn't have contacts – so, under 'publishing' I started with the letter 'A' and started calling every single publisher. I'm guessing there are about 100 – of different types – probably some printers who were publishers. Each place I called, I said, "Can I speak to the head of personnel? I want to be a writer."

Risley: By the way, what year was this?

Marimow: Fall of 69'. I got to the letter 'C' and there was a company called Chilton, which published about thirty-five magazines for different industries – *Commercial Car Journal, Jewelers-Circular Keystone, Iron Age, Boot & Shoe Recorder* – and I was lucky, because it was lunch time, and the head of personnel actually answered the phone. His name was Art Megraw and he asked me some questions. And something I said must have piqued his interest, or he felt some sympathy for me. But he said "Listen, if you are ever in the vicinity of Bala Cynwyd, come on over, look me up, we have no jobs now, but maybe I can give you some guidance. So, within a half hour, I had been to Nick's Barbershop, got a haircut, threw on a coat and tie, and sped over to Chilton headquarters in Bala Cynwyd, and talked to Mr. Megraw. It is clear in retrospect that we had some rapport. He said, "Why don't you take our test that we give all our job applicants?" Which was basically I think a variety of SAT verbal and math. I took it. He said, "Listen, it's September 22 now, call me the week before Thanksgiving. I expect that we're going to have some jobs." Then I went home. My ritual in that period of time, was to have dinner, play basketball until dark at Bailey Park, and then to drink beer at Burke's Tavern. About 6 p.m., the phone rang, and it was Mr. Megraw. He said, "You know, we've reviewed your test. We'd like you to come back tomorrow and take our editing test." I said, "Great!" Off I went. I remember as if it was yesterday. The test was taking three stories about the devaluation of the dollar in Europe in the summer of 69'. One from, say, the *Wall Street Journal*, one from a technical economic review, and one feature, say, from *Business Week*, and take the three of them and write a 1,000-word story combining all the elements. I did that. I struggled to do it. And gave it to Mr. Megraw and he said, "Okay, in November give me a call." I go home, get ready for basketball, phone rings: "Bill we've reviewed your writing sample and we'd like you to come back tomorrow and talk to our hiring committee." No jobs, but they were very impressed. Off I go to the hiring committee. I can still remember sweating. And met them. One was Don McNeil, editor of *JCK, Jeweler's-Circular Keystone*. Bart Rawson, editor of *Commercial Car Journal*, *CCJ*, and the managing editor of *Boot & Shoe Recorder*. I tell you this for a reason. After the interview, Mr. Megraw says to me, "Bill, we have no jobs, but the hiring committee has decided to create one for you. You're going to be the assistant news editor of *JCK*." The third person on the hiring committee was Stu Bykofsky – now a columnist at the *Inquirer*. He doesn't

remember anything about it. He thinks that the hiring committee was created for a one-time purpose – hiring me. And Stu is embarrassed that someone knows he was the managing editor of *Boot & Shoe Recorder*. And that Ford, is how I got into journalism. The back door. Unwittingly, inadvertently.

Risley: And what did you do there?

Marimow: At *JCK,* I had to fill thirty pages a month with news stories. And, I was told really all I had to do was take press releases, condense them, compress them and make them grammatical. But I had pride in my work, and herein lies a tale. So, every press release that I got, that I thought was interesting, I would then actually do original reporting. So that year the actor Richard Burton had purchased a Cartier diamond for Liz Taylor, for a million dollars. Big story for *JCK*. I laugh even now. And, it had been sold at Sotheby's in Dallas, Texas at an auction. The auctioneer was named Landrigan. So, I got on the phone, called Sotheby's in I think, Dallas, and asked for Landrigan. He got on the phone. I said, "Tell me what it was like to have the bidding go up to a million dollars. Was Richard Burton there?" He said, "Mr. Burton's representative was here. And he was wearing a top hat. And, whenever he wanted to raise the bidding by 10,000 dollars, he lifted his hat." So, I had a lede. I continued to do that all month, and I thought, boy, this is really fun! I'm learning, I'm writing, I'm reporting. At the end of the month or so, the editor of *JCK* called me into his office and he handed me a sheet of papers. And, I thought he was going to give me a bonus. And he said, "Bill, what is the meaning of this?" It was a phone bill. I said "Oh! Get out your magazine. Here on page thirty-six, I called to Dallas for $6.76, that was Richard Landrigan. This call to New York was Gare Jewelers, they sold more lottery tickets than any place in the state. "Bill, here at *JCK*, we never make long-distance phone calls." So, at that point Ford, I decided my future was not going to be at *JCK*. And it's something, you know, that I tell every young journalist. Anyone who is aspiring to be a reporter. Say, like an Erin McCarthy. I say, "Make sure you work at a meritocracy." It is much better to start at the absolute bottom of the ladder. If there are 300 people, and you are number 300, and it's a meritocracy, go for it. If it's a bureaucracy, and you are number 300, you're going to be number 300 until the new 300 gets hired. That was a great insight —no one told that to me. Instinctively I thought, gosh, I've been working so hard, and they don't even want this work. I was only twenty-two, and it was instinctive—not intellectual—but I just knew something was wrong. That I didn't belong there. And I kept thinking, gosh, I could be here 20 years and never get to do anything enterprising.

Risley: So how did you go to work at the *Inquirer*?

Marimow: Well, first there was the [Philadelphia] *Bulletin.* And this was again, instinctive, lucky timing. When I was working at *JCK*, one of my colleagues was a guy named Jack Myers. After a few months he told me he was leaving to join the *Evening Bulletin* as the aide de camp to J.A. Livingston. Ever hear of him? So, he was the economist columnists at the *Bulletin*. He was syndicated to about fifty

papers. He had won either the first or second Pulitzer Prize of any Philadelphia newsman. I think 1965. He documented how the satellite countries of the Soviet Union were moving closer to the West in terms of economics. So, Jack became the aide de camp to Mr. Livingston. And I said to Jack, if you ever decide to leave that job, would you please call me up because I think that's something I'd like to do. And, the *Bulletin* was then the biggest paper in the city. Livingston had won a Pulitzer Prize. I didn't know what that meant at all, but it just seemed like a good job. So, after two or three months I get a call from Jack Myers. He said, "Bill, I'm not recommending you call Mr. Livingston. He is a tough taskmaster, but I'm leaving. I'm going to do something else and he is looking for help." I said, "Tell him to give me a call!" Within a day, I was down in Mr. Livingston's office. It's about twice the size of this room. And, during our interview, while he was sitting there, I was sitting here. The Pulitzer prize was behind him. It's like a telegram from Columbia and something else, like a certificate. Every time he looked down to take notes, I looked up to try to read it. Every time he looked up, I looked down. But I was really awestruck because when you're 22 you never expect to meet anyone who won a Pulitzer Prize. So, he hired me. One hundred and forty-five dollars a week as his boy "Friday." My job really was to read his columns, make sure the grammar and the transitions were fine. And to each column, he wrote two a week, to create a chart or a graph, that could be inserted into the column. So, for instance, it might be consumer sentiment going up, bond prices going down. Or, industrial production going up, pointing to recovery and then flattening out and asking the question: Does that portent a recession? Things like that. So, when I got to the graphic arts department the first week, the head of graphic arts, Bob Weir, said to me, not jokingly, "I hope you'll enjoy your short time with us. Mr. Livingston has had six assistants in the last year. So, I at that point pledged three things. Number one, I would always arrive at work before Mr. Livingston. I'd never leave until he was gone. And every time he gave me his column to edit, I would improve every paragraph. And in those days, if you recall, we had five-part books. White paper carbon, yellow paper carbon. Remember these?

Risley: No, that was before my time.

Marimow: So Mr. Livingston would get the white copies to edit, I would get the pale yellow to edit. The first time I got one, I spent about forty-five minutes and tried to improve every paragraph – almost every sentence. And it would be things like, something like, a transition, trying to make a transition more fluid, maybe add a piece of economic data, you know, he'd show me the books with all the data, maybe something as simple as putting in a comma, you know, this or that. So, I walked into his office, handed him the yellow sheets. He almost jumped out of his chair. "What is the meaning of this?" I said, "Well, Mr. Livingston, I have a reason for everything if you'd like to hear it." "Go ahead." I mean, he was gruff, and I liked him. So, I showed him everything – went through it. If I made twenty-five suggestions, he took twenty-two of them. That established some rapport. I think in the past, he'd have someone who was either super at economics and math, who couldn't write, or someone who was a good writer

who couldn't think. And I wasn't particularly good at economics, but I had a logical mind, and I could write. And, he taught me a lot – always by osmosis. You know, he never sat me down and said, "Here's the way you do it."

Risley: What did he teach you?

Marimow: He taught me about economics really, and how to conceive and write a column. By the end of my time with him I was writing first drafts of columns and giving them to him. And, if he took the idea I got a byline with him: "Livingston and Marimow." And he never ever once used the column I wrote, but he often used the idea, the format, and the organization—never once. He had real pride in authorship.

Risley: So, what was next after working for him?

Marimow: I'll tell you one other story. During that time, he won the Loeb Award for a story about how a major investor named Howard Butcher had handled selling Penn Central Stock when the railroad went bankrupt. Butcher was selling stock for himself, his brokerage firm, his family, his customers at the brokerage firm, the University of Pennsylvania – where he was the head of the investment committee – and he was a member of the board of directors at Penn Central. And, we were able to prove that Butcher had sold his own stock before the University of Pennsylvania, before the customers, and even though I wasn't a very good reporter – or sophisticated – I had lots of ideas. I was able to get from the Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington stock exchange their log of all transactions that occurred on any day. And it turned out that Butcher had sold 26,100 shares at a specific time and place, and that was proof that he was disposing of his own shares before his customers and before Penn. So, Mr. Livingston originally – he didn't give me a byline—and this was presumptuous of me, but I spent every hour that he spent on the story. I said, "Mr. Livingston, you know, it seems to me that you've given me bylines on columns. What's the story here?" He said, "Bill, I've been doing this for 45 years. You've been doing it for four or five months. I'm going to put in a box saying that this is based on work by the two of us." It was interesting because to me, I've always tried to err on the side of giving people credit, and that may be the result of that experience, because I knew I'd worked countless hours, and I knew I made contributions that he wouldn't have made. But it was great experience and he was an excellent mentor.

Risley: How long did you work for him?

Marimow: Starting in April 70' and in the summer of 72' he went to the *Inquirer*. And that is how I came as a "Player to be Named Later." But there is a story there too, which is really interesting. And, again it's instinctive. What happened is that he had gone to Temple University to teach while continuing to do his column. And he moved up to Temple and took me with him. So, I helped him teach. And I helped him work on his column. In June 1972, his contract at Temple was up. He had

been there for a year and a half, and he went back to the *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* had a hiring freeze and they wouldn't hire me. So, he ended up – Mr. Livingston – talking to the publisher whose name was Robert Taylor, and Taylor asked to interview me. So here I am 23 years old going to see the publisher of the *Bulletin*. And he talked and said, "We have a hiring freeze, Bill. No exceptions, but I promise you that come September you'll be the first person I hire. It's an iron-clad promise." I walked out of Mr. Taylor's office and thought about it. I said to myself, you know if the publisher at the biggest paper, and the most powerful paper in the city can't figure out a way to accommodate a person who's being paid $145, I don't want to work here. And I walked over to Mr. Livingston's house – which is about a mile away – and I just said, "I'm quitting. I'm not going to do this. I can't believe a guy with this power and this breadth can't figure something out." And that's when Mr. Livingston went to the *Inquirer*. Again, you know, I was stupid because I didn't have anyone really to give me any guidance. In 20/20 hindsight, knowing what I know now, I might have said, "Mr. Livingston, do you think there is a way I can stay at Temple for two months and do XY, and Z?" But I needed a job. I was just so frustrated.

Risley: So, you continued working for him at the *Inquirer*?

Marimow: When I joined the *Inquirer* in July 72' I was a business reporter four days a week and worked with Mr. Livingston one day a week. And by that time, I had – as his assistant – I had the work I had to do down to a science because I was no longer going to draft columns. All I had to do really was charts, and graphs, and edit the column. I could do that like the back of my hand.

Risley: What kind of stories did you cover as a business reporter?

Marimow: Well, it was short-lived because Gene Roberts came three months after I joined the *Inquirer*. But as a business reporter I can remember writing about the day the Dow Jones passed 1,000. I wrote about campaign financing; I wrote about the merger of two huge brokerage firms in Philadelphia. I remember writing about a new skyscraper being built for an insurance company. I went up to the top of the construction project and wrote a feature. It was the era of President Nixon's wage and price controls. I can remember a story—something like "Vanilla Yogurt Up, Alka-Seltzer Down." Wage and price controls.

Risley: So, you moved into a different position after Gene Roberts became editor?

Marimow: So, Gene arrived, and he created the trends desk with Steve Lovelady from the *Wall Street Journal* as the editor. I became a trends researcher and a trends reporter. That was a great experience. Steve Lovelady is probably someone whose value to the *Inquirer* is somewhat un*sung*. But he was a gifted writer. He had edited the leaders for the *Wall Street Journal*. So, at the trends desk I did things stories that I think withstand the test of time. I'd find an agrarian farmland that was being converted into a mall and use that as a metaphor for all these malls being created in the region and the nation. There is one out on Route

1 called Oxford Valley Mall that had been a little airport and asparagus farm. And I got the deeds. Found the people who bought it way back when. Turned out they'd been high-power developers who later built King of Prussia Mall. One built the Ardmore Shopping Center in 1928. And that was great.

Risley: What was the thinking behind the trends desk?

Marimow: To take young reporters who had never done sophisticated work, and give them the chance to work with someone who really knew how to put together a *Wall Street Journal* kind of story – both reportorially and writing-wise. So, one I did was, I had the thesis that if you looked at the top graduates of area high schools in 1973, those people would be doing … so looking at the high school class of 56' and 66', a certain number of years after graduation, my theory was that people's whose lives were disrupted by the Vietnam War would not be doing what the previous generation was. So, the previous generation of graduates had jobs like college professors, business tycoons, young rising executives. Some of the others were still figuring out their lives, even though they'd been terrific students. There was a guy in New York who was a cab driver named Richard Feldman and his picture was on the front page with a big bushy beard. He'd been one of the top five students at Central High, class of 1966. So, that was a really good experience.

Risley: It sounds like you learned a lot in that position. So, what other things did you do? Walk with me through your time as a reporter?

Marimow: After the trends desk, which was about six or seven months, Roberts who had been the labor reporter at the *Detroit Free Press*, approached me one day in his inimitable way. Have you met Gene?

Risley: Yes.

Marimow: [Speaking in a Southern accent] "Bill, I'd like you to think about covering labor. When I was in Detroit, I always thought Walter Reuther was a very visionary man. And if you're going to cover labor, you've got to cultivate the federal mediator. Let me tell you about the UAW negotiations." So, at the end of 1973 with prodding, nudging, and cajoling from Gene, I became the labor writer. And, this will get into mentoring, but most people say that Gene doesn't talk – that he sits there and there are long periods of silence. With me, I never had a chance to talk. He knew that I was a pretty good writer and accurate reporter but had no idea really how to combine the two. It took me ages to do a six-inch story. I could do a thirty-inch story faster than a six-inch story. So, this is Gene preparing me for the labor beat: "Now Bill, I want you to use the hard news stories as the catalyst—the spark to ignite everything else in your quiver. You got your features, you got your profiles. Your investigative, your spot news, your trends stories. And don't forget your Q heads." I was taking notes dutifully and I'm thinking to myself, this man is out of his mind. I am never going to be able to do

a profile let along this or that. So, I am writing and I look down. Do you know what a Q head is? Neither did I. But I was too inhibited to ask.

Risley: Sure, I would have been the same way.

Marimow: And this went on, no exaggeration, for at least an hour – maybe more. Walter Reuther stories, the mediator stories. How Gene and the mediator figured out what the UAW contract would be. About a year later, once I had taken over the labor beat and had some semblance of a working knowledge of it, I went to Gene's office one day. I said, "Gene, when we were talking about the labor beat the other day – it's now a year later – you mentioned a Q-head. I'm not sure I understand what a Q-head is?" He said, "Why Bill, that is what we back at the *Times* used to call news analysis." So, that is how I became the labor writer. And the funny thing about being the labor writer was – I would say I was probably a C-plus labor writer. Started out D-minus and got up to C-plus, maybe a B-minus. But, because I had an ability to develop sources, and the tenacity to stay in there with negotiators when everyone else was going "Ugh," I was able to get a lot of exclusive stories and I found that the AP, the *Bulletin*, the *Daily News*, they were copying my work. Now we call it plagiarism, but then it was just purloining.

Risley: What were the big labor stories?

Marimow: There was a strike by SEPTA, which is the public transit agency, the Newspaper Guild, which represented Inquirer journalists, and many others. What was really good, was early on, the Teamsters at the *Inquirer* went on strike and I was in the actual room where the voting was taking place. No one at the *Inquirer* knew what the vote would be. They knew it was going to be close. Someone from the police department who was there, told me what the vote was before it was announced to the members. So, I called the *Inquirer* newsroom from a phone, and said "It's 169-to-153. The Teamsters are going back to work." An hour later, I walked into the newsroom, I was hailed as the returning hero because Gene Roberts had been able to tell the publisher, as well as all the negotiators, "Here was the vote." So, things like that, which were really symbolic, not substantive, helped me with my reputation. At the time, I didn't realize it: "Why is everyone so excited,?" I wondered. So, from the labor beat, I went on to cover the city council and the mayor. I started doing that in late 75' and I continued covering city hall. I was the city hall bureau chief until early 1980. And then, it was during that time – in the first half of 1977 – that I actually did the stories with Jonathan Neumann that won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. By the end of 1979, I was really finding that stories were repetitive, and just like on the labor beat, I said to myself, do I really want to be the greatest city hall reporter ever, or do I want to do something else? It's exactly what happened with labor. Gene and the other editors would have liked me to be the labor beat for as long as they were there. So, I asked for a new assignment, and I got one. I became a general assignment reporter. No mandate to do investigative stories, but the latitude to do investigative stories.

Risley: Before we talk about that, let's talk a little bit about the city hall beat. What did you find interesting about that job? What did you think was some of your best work?

Marimow: I think my best stories out of city hall were examining the shenanigans of the Rizzo administration. I'll give you my favorite one. There's something in Philadelphia called the administrative board. It consists of the mayor, managing director, and the finance director. And they create "ad board rules," which govern all the top officials who are not in a union. It's probably at that time maybe ninety or 100 people. They included the assistant city solicitors in the Law Department, cabinet-level members, deputies. I got a tip from someone in a public employee's union that the Rizzo administration had secretly changed ad board rule three, for unused vacation time. And what they'd done was this: The Rizzo administration began in January 1972 and it ended in January 1980 – so eight years. So, they were awarding themselves retroactive sick leave – unused sick leave – back to 1972. So, eight years of retroactive unused sick leave, and I got wind of it. I calculated what it would cost. I knew that the vote had already been taken. It's all recorded under lock and key in the records department, but the public can request it. So I went and got it. I did the calculations and wrote an explosive page-one story about it. The managing director whose name was Hillel Levinson then held a press conference to say that they were rescinding the approval, but that the *Inquirer* had misinterpreted this because what it had done was intended to prevent the abuse of sick-leave, so that no one would claim that they had more than they actually had. And so, my favorite part about that was I had one source of the Rizzo administration cabinet and he told me the city solicitor, whose name was Sheldon Albert, came into a cabinet meeting and said, "Fuck! The *Inquirer* just took away the brand-new Buick I was going to buy!"

Risley: That's great. So, it was the right place for good journalism?

Marimow: Yeah, and by then I had more self-confidence, more experience, more sophistication. Another story that I did that I'm really proud of – and again, it was just a daily, but it was an enterprising daily. In 1976, the city had raised property taxes 29.3%, and wage tax 30%, to cover a huge gulf in the city budget. And the next year, I'm sitting in the city council meeting and I hear the clerk, Charlie Sawyer read the title of every bill. He said, "Bill number 1432 amending an ordinance passed in 1955, and city pensions, amending an ordinance as amended in 1972." And I wrote down 1432. At the end of the meeting I walked over to Charlie Sawyer and said, "Charlie, could I see that bill." "Sure." I read it. I said, "Charlie, does this mean they're doubling their pensions." He said, "You didn't hear it from me!" So, the bill had been sponsored by the council of seventeen people, fifteen democrats and obligatory two republicans. All fifteen democrats had signed the bill, and a person named Jim Tayoun – whose campaign motto was "Don't be a goon, vote for Jimmy Tayoun" – he'd been the original sponsor. I went to see him in his office, and he said, "It wasn't me. Must have been a misprint." So, that was rescinded pretty quickly. Those were the kinds of stories I did.

Risley: Tell me about the Pulitzer work. How did that happen?

Marimow: I had been on the court beat as a part of the City Hall bureau in 1976 – spring and summer. And during that time, I covered a case involving a man named Robert "Reds" Wilkinson. Wilkinson had been convicted in court of throwing a firebomb into a Hispanic family's house who were integrating a neighborhood – the man's name was Radames Santiago. Five people died in the fire, and Wilkinson was accused of throwing the firebomb. The police wrote a confession that he signed. He was mildly retarded. I had covered the trial and came to believe that there were serious questions about whether he did it. One primary reason for my doubt was that Wilkinson had passed a private polygraph administered by the former head of the homicide polygraph unit in the Philadelphia police department. Two, someone else had tried to confess to the crime, but the DA's office thought it was a strategic ploy and a lie and threw away the confession – discounted it. And, I forget the other reason, but when Jonathon Neumann took over the courts for me in May of 1976, I said one of the things I was going to do was go back to Wilkinson and look at the confession by David McGinnis and talk with the polygrapher and also analyze Wilkinson's alleged confession. How could someone who was mildly retarded have written something like this? And Jonathan began working on it. He teamed up with a federal court reporter named Jan Schaffer. And, together over a period of months, they determined that the police had beaten Wilkinson to smithereens, had threatened and coerced neighbors to implicate him, and built a case based on a foundation of lies. In fact, the person who had tried to confess, David McGinnis, had done it, conspiring with a guy named Ronald Hanley. It went to a federal grand jury in the fall of 1976, and it turned out that the person who had been posted as a lookout on the front porch of the Santiago family's home had fallen asleep. When he woke up, the house was in flames and the first person he saw was Robert Wilkinson, who was the one pulling the fire alarm box, because he'd come home from a late night. The kid, Nelson Garcia, lied because he felt guilty. Based on that lie, the police then built a case through coercion and beatings. The feds untangled it. That prompted Jonathan and me to say, you know, this happened once. I'm sure it's happened again. And we started looking at every single case – homicide case – where there had been a statement by the defendant. I had this source in the courts, Dennis Moran, and he gave me the disposition of every homicide case in which there had been a statement made to police by the defendant, whether the statement was thrown out of court, whether it was allowed to be used, or where it was partially allowed. One out of every five had been thrown out by judges. And in many of the cases, there were medical records showing that someone went directly from the interrogation room to the hospital. And, the data gave our series a jump start.

Short Break

Risley: Okay, go ahead.

Marimow: So, one of the things Ford, that I asked you to ask me about was advice for younger journalists. And one thing that I always did, that I would recommend to everybody, is living up to the letter and the spirit of every commitment you make, no matter how painful it is. So, for instance, let's say that you're working on a story, and that someone has given you the information on an off the record basis and four other competitors break the story. Most reporters would just go ahead and say, "It's out. I'm doing it." But my predisposition would be to go back to my sources and say, you know, it's out there, here in four different places, I'd like to go forward. Is it all right? And if they said no, I wouldn't do it. And if an editor tried to pressure me, I'd say, I'm going to work on it, but I'm not going to be able to do it yet. And to me, the long-term benefits of that practice far exceed the short-term benefits of breaking your word. You know, even if everyone would ask. And, also, it's the right thing to do ethically. So, my feeling is it's practically the good thing to do, an ethically good thing to do. Even though most people wouldn't do it if they'd been beaten on a story four different ways, by four different competitors, they would assume they could go ahead and do it. So, in this particular case, Jonathan Neumann and I were able to interview three homicide detectives that we knew on a not-for-attribution basis. And those interviews were remarkable because all three admitted what was going on in those interrogation rooms. One was a veteran detective; one was a recently retired detective; and one was the young detective who had taken part in the beatings. I was in in the basement, on a February morning in 1977 with the young detective, with Jonathan, and he gave us a beer. And then we started talking about the beatings. He was brandishing this bottle standing over me, shouting, "Would I ever beat someone because I thought they were a murderer? Who gives a damn?" And you know, I thought he was really going to slug me with the bottle. And he never said he did it, but he made it clear that the homicide detectives were the only ones in the system who cared about the victims: "Who gives a flying – who cares that judges don't care. They're out for glory!" – and on and on and on. And I really felt like he was, he was on the brink of hitting me. The other fact about that is that, one of my best sources on that was a district attorney with a conscience, an assistant DA who was very upset about one particular beating where someone ended up in intensive care for a week. And, he's someone – so this was 1977. It's 42 years later and this person is still a source for me. And whenever I introduce him to someone, if I were having a sandwich with you and I saw him, I'm not going to mention his name, but I would say, "Ford, I'd like you to meet so and so. I've known him for 42 years. We've had at least 500 or 600 conversations. I have never yet been right. Not once. This guy is a typical litigator and he blushes because he knows I'm not stupid. I hadn't been right once. So, people that I got to know reporting those stories are still people I talk with today, 42 years later. And that, that's one of the benefits of having come back to Philadelphia where I had a pretty broad and deep reservoir of sources.

Risley: So, after working at the city hall beat, what was next?

Marimow: Next I became a general assignment reporter and that led me to a whole range of stories, stories that were an outgrowth of everything I'd done before. And probably the most – well the two most notable were number one, the stories on the K-9 unit, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1985. And, because I'd done the homicide files, it gave me the ability to do the stories very efficiently.

Risley: How so?

Marimow: Because I knew what I needed. I knew that I needed medical records. I needed court records. I needed to interview the victims and independent eyewitnesses. I needed to do everything humanly possible to get the police side of the story. And even if I couldn't, to use sources to get the police reports of what they said happened. I knew that I was a better writer and I was more organized than I was in 1977 and 1978, when I still was in my developmental stages. When I looked back, when I started writing the K-9 stories, which I did pretty fast, I looked at the homicide files and I thought to myself, this is pretty primitive work. Even though they won the Pulitzer for public service, I felt that they weren't textured enough. I felt that we hadn't done enough to get the other side of the story, and they lacked nuance. And so, when I did the K-9 stories, I exerted an extraordinary effort to master the other side of the story. And as a result, the cases that were clear civil rights violations, were portrayed as civil rights violations. But, some of them were accidents where the dogs had been poorly trained, and they got out of control. And I was able to really distinguish between the two. And there's a classic example, written April, published April 22, 1984, about a veterinary student named Evan Blumer, who got lost in the park – Fairmount Park – on his way to his job at the zoo. He was asking directions from a police officer – a K-9 officer The dog jumped out of the van, attacked him, the officer couldn't get the dog to release on command. So he had to choke the dog, by which time Evan Blumer's arm had almost been ripped apart. And the police officer talked to me. It was a rare situation. There was no dispute at all about the facts, but it was clear that the dog hadn't been trained properly, and the officer had been negligent. And that was the kind of story that eight years before I might've had trouble doing, I might not have been insistent enough in getting the officer's side of the story.

Risley: Where did the idea for that series come from?

Marimow: What happened was, I got three leads all at once. The first tip came from Acel Moore, who was an *Inquirer* reporter – African American reporter – who had won a Pulitzer himself. And a family friend's son had come in town to go to celebrate the Sixers winning the NBA championship in 1983. As this young man came up from the subway, a dog mauled him. He'd done nothing. He ended up in the hospital for a week. So Acel told me about that. Then someone named John Fackelman, who must have read some of my stories, talked about two dogs that had attacked someone in the subway concourse who'd found an obscure corner to urinate in during the Mummer's Day Parade celebration. And he told me about what happened there. The guy should have probably been given a

summons for whatever, for disorderly conduct. And then an attorney, his name, let's see if I can remember his name. I'm not going to remember his name. An attorney called me up, and he said that he and his wife were walking home and they saw a guy on the street being attacked by two dogs while the officers held their leashes. And I put the three of them together and I said, "Wow." And that's how the story got started.

Risley: Why do you think that story had a real impact? What made it so important?

Marimow: I think that first of all, the symbolism. You know, dogs attacking people have great civil rights connotations – incredible symbolism from Alabama. Bull Connor – is that his name? I think the way that I documented made it irrefutable that the dogs were poorly trained. Anybody who knows the use of police dogs, knows that when you order a dog to attack, it's like an electric light. And these dogs wouldn't stop attacking because they'd been trained to attack and hold on, not to attack and release. And in each case, I chose cases to write about in which, number one, that the person who had been attacked, there was no underlying crime. In other words, you know, it'd be someone lost in the park. Someone who told an officer to "Get the hell outta here." Sarcasm and rudeness. You know, no crimes of violence. So, I tried to look for cases in which it was clear the injuries had far exceeded anything that was reasonable.

Risley: Was it difficult to get the information? To get the reports?

Marimow: It was difficult to get the police reports, but some of them had already been adjudicated in court, they'd just never been reported. If Evan Blumer gets attacked in the park and gets a $10,000 or $12,000 settlement, that's not news. But it is news if a group of officers, time and again, are ordering their dogs to attack people who did nothing wrong. And it's fascinating, when I did the story, instantly I got results, because the mayor of Philadelphia, Wilson Goode, was someone I knew well. First day he said, "There are no guidelines for when a dog can attack a human being. We are issuing guidelines." Three days later, I pick up the *Daily News* and it says the FBI has begun a civil rights investigation of the K-9 unit. I'm chagrined because I'm being beaten on my own story. And I walked into Steve Seplow, who is the metro editor at the time. I said, "Steve, I'm really sorry. I had no idea." He looks at me and goes, "Bill, it's great the *Daily News* did it. Gives us more credibility!"

Risley: What was it about the *Inquirer* at that time that made it a place where you could do that kind of work?

Marimow: I think, Gene Roberts was truly a reporter's editor. He had been a great reporter in Goldsboro, North Carolina, Norfolk, Raleigh, Detroit, the *New York Times*, in the South, and in Vietnam. So, he really had a breadth of experience that almost no one had at the *Inquirer*. And then he came and because of his accomplishments, he was really inspiring to a large group of people. To me, he was just kind of intimidating because I didn't have the experience to know how

impressive he was. I thought he was quirky. Quirky and enjoyable company, but the experienced people at the *Inquirer* knew they were really getting someone who was going to propel the paper forward. And I think Gene had a vision, that the *Inquirer* was going to be the best paper in the region. And, I've never talked to him about this, but my hunch is that he knew that if the *Inquirer* could ultimately outdo the *Evening Bulletin*, you could make a persuasive case to Knight-Ridder that foreign bureaus and national bureaus at key Knight-Ridder papers like the *Inquirer* could serve the whole group of papers. That's exactly what happened in 1982. And I always felt, you know, for myself, that when Gene came, the *Inquirer* started growing rapidly. And at the same time, I was growing far slower than the newspaper. And then there came a point where I started growing as fast as the paper, and even faster. But for a long time the newspaper's improvement was outpacing my improvement. I had the confidence in my reporting. I had the confidence in my writing, but I didn't have the confidence in combining the two *and* the confidence in my analysis.

Risley: When did that finally sort of click?

Marimow: I don't know, Ford. I'll tell you about one other series of stories that I did that I do think helped me immensely. And this was – this was after I was city hall bureau chief, and Rizzo was leaving office, and someone who was, a leader with the police department – an Irish American – told me that in Philadelphia, anyone who becomes a sergeant, lieutenant, captain, inspector, chief inspector has to take a civil service exam and finish in the top fraction. And so, if you want to be a sergeant, 5,000 people take the sergeant's test. A thousand take the lieutenant's test. So, an Irish American police leader told me that when Rizzo was leaving office, that they'd given the answers to a favorite few. And this was the lieutenant's test. He said, "Pal, we are calling it the godfathers list." Everyone was Italian American. I said, Well, how can I document that? He told me – number one -- look at the relationship between the people who become brilliant overnight and the chief inspectors who wrote the exam, you'll find that they're either the personal aides or the drivers for the test makers. Secondly, look at their past scores, which are public record, except the failures, and you'll see that they've never come close to being in the top echelon. So, I started researching this, and with the lieutenant's list, it was a self-contained group, and I realized that it'd be like me taking the college boards ten times and scoring 300 math, 280 verbal, and then on the eleventh time, 796 and 791. Probability of that – one in a trillion. So, I put together that story and as a result I started getting calls. "You didn't look in the sergeant's list! How could you miss that?" And by then I had some sources in the personnel department. I had the lists. I had a source in the police department because the commissioners changed and I was able to show that the top fifty of the sergeant's list, virtually every one of them had been either a driver for the test maker, an aide to the test maker, or someone with connections to the leaders of the fraternal order of police, and that there had been a past record of abysmal failures. And by then I was able to get the actual time spent taking the test. It was a five-hour test. The guy with a master's degree from Penn in the police department couldn't finish the test in five hours. The "Dirty

Thirty," as the sergeants were called, came in late, left early. So, there'd be guys who spent two hours and forty minutes and scored far better than they ever had before, and far better than Zeb Casey who graduated from Penn. So those stories gave me a lot of confidence, because you know, no one else but me was writing them. I couldn't say for sure they cheated, but I could take the statistics, the relationships, the times spent taking the test, and write about it. People would call me up anonymously and say, "Pal, how could you miss Donald Eife? Number thirty-four. He can't even spell his name!" And, then I 'd look up Donald Eife. I'd call my sources, and boom, I 'd realized that I missed Donald Eife, number thirty-four. And what would happen – and this was really rewarding – some of the people who called me, I never knew their names, and all I could use them for was leads to then verify what they told me. But I gave them nicknames like Mr. Girard, Mox, The Quaker. And I'd say, here's my home number, you know, call me any time or please call me back at one o'clock Friday, I'll be at my desk. My daughter who was then, let's see this, she would have been six. She would know them by their voices. "Dad, it's Mr. Girard."

Risley: That's funny. So, talk about making the transition from reporting into editing. How did that happen?

Marimow: Same, the same way as leaving the labor beat and leaving city hall. What happened was that it was really three factors. Number one, the stories were starting to get recurrent and I probably, if I hadn't become an editor, might have tried writing a book. We didn't talk about the bombing of the MOVE house. That was my really last big, big story. So, three things happened to influence me. The first was that a lot of my friends were becoming editors, and it's not pretty, it's not noble to say it, but I had the "what about me?" syndrome. How come no one is thinking of me? Second was that really dozens of people on the staff, including the best people on the staff, were giving me their stories to edit before they went to the editors. And most notably Don Barlett and Jim Steele, who are really, you know, exalted. And so, I would read them and I'd give them my suggestions. And you know, I never critiqued the stories in depth, but I always tried to give my best. Sometimes I would see my leads in the newspaper of Bartlett and Steele, or Mark Bowden. And so, I knew that I had a knack. And then the third factor was in 1985, there's a 46-day strike at the *Inquirer*. And, I went to work for *USA Today*, 20/20, *Time* magazine, and the *Tribune*. I was earning more during the strike than I had been at the *Inquirer*. And so those three factors—friends were doing it, I was giving extracurricular advices getting taken, and the strike had an effect on me.

Risley: What was your first editing job?

Marimow: I was the editor of *Main Line Neighbors*, a three time a week tabloid that covered about seventeen communities, including Haverford Township where I grew up, Lower Merion, Tredyffrin, Easttown, Charlestown, all the western suburbs. And that was very rewarding. I know now that I emulated Gene in many, many ways. He used to come around and talk with me, and I would listen, and he would

talk. But I knew that he'd listened to most people. So I promised myself – I think *Main Line Neighbors* had a staff fifteen when I got there – and I promised myself, every day I'm going to talk with all 15 people, even if it's just five or ten minutes, that's going to be part of my job. And first few months I did it. I didn't keep track, but I did it. I'd sit down at their desks because that's what Gene did. And over time I realized, and this became more apparent when I had a bigger staff, that I talked every day to the people I both liked and respected. I didn't talk to someone every day if I just respected them. And I didn't talk to someone every day if I just liked them. And I think that was true of Gene too. And if he were sitting here and I said that, he'd go, "Bullshit Bill, that's bullshit." But I think it's true. It may not have been true of him, but I think it was, but it was definitely true of me. And *Main Line Neighbors* was really fulfilling because I got to work with some young people. I hired some correspondents and the people – I think I really helped some people's careers. So, I'll give you some examples because that's one thing I feel good about. I hired – there's a guy by the name of Frank Langfitt.

Risley: Sure.

Marimow: You know that name?

Risley: Of course.

Marimow: So, Frank was a cab driver in Narberth. He gotten out of college in June of 1986. And in around October 1986, I got a letter from him saying that he wanted to be a journalist and he was driving a cab in Narberth, but he knew the suburbs, and would I talk with him. So, he came in. One of the great things about Knight Ridder at that point was the resources were enormous. And I said, "Frank, do you have something you've written?" He said, "Well, I've never written for a paper, but I have my thesis." It was on Coca-Cola and marketing. I read it, it's very good. I said, "Okay, you're going to cover Havertown cops and do obits, but the deal is you'll say yes to every assignment night and day, weekday and weekend for the next six months. You agree to that, we'll hire you as a correspondent." He did. So that would've been late October. On election day he had an assignment to work with Kit Seelye, Katherine Seelye, of the *New York Times* who was at *Main Line Neighbors*. She was my political writer. And I come in around eight in the morning and there's Frank asleep at his desk. He'd been up all night trying to write a ten-inch story. I then later became the Jersey editor and I brought him to Jersey. When I became the city editor, he was hired by John Carroll in Lexington, Kentucky. When John came to Baltimore, he hired Frank in Baltimore, and me. And then when I went NPR, I hired Frank at NPR and he's just written a book called *The Shanghai Free Taxi*. Another person who I think I really helped was a woman named Kate Shatzkin, who had gone to Haverford College. And I hired her at *Main Line Neighbors* for the summer. She went onto the *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, *Seattle Times* and then the *Baltimore Sun*. And probably biggest success outside of Frank was, I hired a woman who had been the editor of the *Haverford-Bryn Mawr News* in the fall of 1987 as a Jersey reporter. Her name

was Carol Leonnig. And Carol went onto the *Washington Post* after working in Charlotte, and she just won a Pulitzer Prize a few years ago.

Risley: You had some good folks working there.

Marimow: Can you imagine? These were stringers. So, that was my first job. The other thing I tried to do, which I really liked, was I tried to think of *Main Line Neighbors* as a small *Inquirer*. So, our education writer was someone named Suzanne Gordon. As soon as I got there, which was in September, I said, "Suzie, I'd like you to find three or four college high school seniors and do a continuing series. Start now and write about how they're deciding where to apply to college. At Christmas time be with them. Show how they're trying to write their college application essays. Part three, how are their parents grappling finances? Get them to show you the financial aid forms. Really go through that for when they get accepted, you know, pick good students. So we don't have too many heartbreaks. And then senior-itis sets in. And last but not least, pick one and go to freshman week with them." So, she did a six-part series and we did others like that. There was a reporter named Sue Warner and I had her do a story about the history of a property. Find a place that had been deeded by William Penn to someone in 1690 or 1700, and follow each person who lived there, whether it was a farmer or a homeowner. And she did that to four or five parts.

Risley: That's great stuff.

Marimow: Yeah, I liked that job.

Risley: And then you became Jersey editor?

Marimow: I became the Jersey editor. Well actually, there was an interim step. [Impersonating Gene Roberts] "Bill, I think you need to understand the relationship between the manufacturing of the newspaper and the content of the newspaper. So, we're going to make you a news editor." That was the most painful period I've ever had. It didn't last long, but I laid out the metropolitan section and I was incompetent. F-minus-minus. At about 10:30 or 10:40 I would implore a colleague named Pete Boal and I'd say, "Pete, can you give me hand?" And in ten minutes he would finish the five pages out of eight that I couldn't do. And then one night, I was probably doing that for six weeks, and I'd come in at six o'clock, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday and go home at two. There wasn't one day where I came home where my family was awake, and there wasn't one day when I woke up and my family was there. And six weeks into it, I go over to my desk and the head of the news desk says, "Bill, you've got to go out to dinner with Gene Roberts tonight." I said, "There's no way I can do that! I'll never finish." And that's when Gene told me I was going to be Jersey editor. So, then I became Jersey editor, and I went from Jersey editor to city editor. And I was city editor at the time Gene left the *Inquirer*. I had a staff of seventy people, including people like Steve Lopez, Mark Bowden, Rick Tulsky. It was a really a powerful staff. And when Gene left, I felt that I no longer had the

latitude that I'd had when he was there. And the metro editor was Steve Seplow, who I considered a friend, but I think he was insecure about his own job. So, he was fiddling with everything. So, I'd agonize over editing a story and an hour later it'd be completely reedited. And so, at some point I told Max King who succeeded Gene, that I was no longer going to be city editor and we'd figure something else out, including maybe reporting. And I then became the assistant to the publisher.

Risley: What was that job like?

Marimow: That job was educational. The publisher was a guy named Bob Hall, who comes back into my life unpleasantly with George Norcross. But every month Bob Hall would give me fifteen reports written by his vice presidents and asked me to read them, comprehend them, come in and ask them questions, dissect them, debate them. And, my main job was – the *Inquirer* was building a plant out in the suburbs and the person named Larry Marbert was really in charge of building the plant. My job was to oversee the transition, everything involved going from A to B, I was in charge of. That was educational. I really learned an awful lot about printing, about labor, management. Larry Marbert taught me a lot. Bob Hall did too. Toward the end of that period – so this would now be early 1993. I began in summer 1991 – Bob Hall told me that Tony Ridder was going to be calling me to offer me a job. I said, "Don't let him do it Bob." He said, "Well, he wants to make you a publisher someday." I said, "Don't let him do it. My intention is to go back to the newsroom. And besides, I don't like what I've seen of Tony Ridder, who used to come to the *Inquirer* every two or three weeks. I think that he doesn't treat people properly and I've got news interests, so don't let him call me." He called. He offered me a job to come to Miami and work with him. I took a night to think about it. I didn't want to turn him down instantly, but I turned him down. And that's when I got in touch with John Carroll and said that I'd love to come to Baltimore.

Risley: Before we talk about the *Baltimore Sun*, what do you think kind of marked the turning point from the Roberts-era at the *Inquirer*?

Marimow: I think what really happened was that Tony Ridder became the head of the Knight Ridder Newspaper Division. He puts the clamps on the *Inquirer*. I think from the fall of 1987 through the end of Gene's time, the *Inquirer* couldn't do any hiring – none. And I think that that chilled Gene's enthusiasm and ardor, and you know, up until then there had been a constant infusion of really excellent people. And after that, like when I was the city editor, the only people who came to the city desk were transfers, there was no hiring at all. So, I attribute that to Tony, and I don't know if I'm being fair or not. I think Gene could tell you. And Max King, I thought he was a very good editor trained by Gene, but he was restricted and inhibited by Tony Ridder's presence.

Risley: So, tell me about going to work at the *Sun*. How did that happen?

Marimow: Well, John had been the metro editor at the *Inquirer*.

Risley: John Carroll?

Marimow: Yes. We had a good rapport and when I originally wrote to him, I got back kind of a tepid response. It turned out, I learned later, the reason he wrote me a tepid response was his job was in jeopardy because he was in conflict with a publisher whose name was Mike Davies. He'd come from Hartford to Baltimore and he and John did not get along. I don't know all the details, but it ended up being a showdown in LA, and the chairman of the board, Bob Erburu and Dick Schlossberg, who was one of Erburu lieutenants, decided that John would stay and Davies would go. So, at that point, John was free to hire me. And I got there, and I'd say it was a divided camp. John was also at loggerheads with Kathy Christensen, who was the managing editor. And so I got a very chilly reception from everyone but John. And I came in April 1993. By August 1993, she was gone.

Risley: You were hired as city editor?

Marimow: I was hired as the metro editor, and I came in April 1993. By August 1993, she left, and shortly thereafter I was promoted by John to associate managing editor, and then managing editor. We were hiring, we were attracting talent. And I used to say to John, it's very hard for anyone but us to discern the progress. It feels like we've moved the mountain about an inch and you and I know it, but no one else knows it. And then maybe three or four years later, now people were saying, holy hell, how did the mountain get across the street? But what happened at the *Sun* was similar to what happened at the *Inquirer*. Good work created the momentum to attract good people who wanted to do good work. And John had a great reputation – an A-plus reputation. And I think during the time that I was an editor in *Main Line Neighbors,* in Jersey, and the city desk, I had cultivated relationships with a lot of young journalists who were attracted to the *Sun*. There were some native Marylanders who were attracted to the *Sun*, you know, they'd gone elsewhere. And I started to establish relationships with smaller papers around the country whose editors I knew well, like Mike Pride at the *Concord Monitor*. And they would send their best people our way. And we had great summer interns and I'd send the summer interns their way.

Risley: So, what do you look back on with pride about your time at the *Sun* and the work you all did?

Marimow: I'd say that thanks to John, myself, and the other leaders of the newsroom, and the people – well everyone really – I think we took a slumbering giant that had been resting on his laurels, maybe since the 1940s, and created energy, vibrance, and ambition. And there are people like David Simon who would tell you that's bullshit. Simon believed that we came to the *Sun* in pursuit of Pulitzer prizes. He argued that we didn't care about anything else. And I believe David Simon has

been trying to revise history for 15 years. I think there's no doubt in my mind that the *Sun* became a much better news organization with John at the helm.

Risley: What particular stories did you like?

Marimow: Well, several that I really liked – one was the shipbreaking saga, which won the Pulitzer for investigative reporting. So, John read a little story about this ship that was being dismantled in Baltimore harbor with all this asbestos-laden material being thrown overboard. And he asked Will Englund, who was one of our reporters covering the waterfront, to look into it. Will discovered this was happening in Norfolk. This was happening in the West Coast. This was happening in India. And John teamed up Gary Cohn and Will Englund together, and they went all over the world to do this story. It was really a coup. Another one that I really liked was, we sent two reporters to the Sudan to go and purchase slaves to prove that slavery existed in the world and then release – send the slaves back to their families. That was a really good one. There were stories about these boot camps for juveniles where, where juveniles were being assaulted, not reformed. And, Todd Richissin went out there and documented it very well. And if you remember, one of the things that John taught me was the art of headline writing. So, there was a very tight headline on one of the boot camp stories – like maybe six or eight characters. And John loved writing headlines. So, he wrote one, he said, "How's this sound Bill? From Yo to Sir." Genius! I was really happy with – and just the way I was in *Main Line Neighbors*, with the development and the evolution of our good staffers. One classic example of someone else, like Frank Langfitt, was David Folkenflik. John was friendly with the editor of the Durham paper who recommended Dave to us. Dave, as you know, is now the NPR media correspondent. Dave was covering Congress in Washington and I thought doing an adequate, not a great job. And I asked him to come up to Baltimore. I said, "Dave, there are two beats that I would like covered and you have a choice. The legal beat or the media beat." And he didn't like—as I recall, he didn't like either idea too much because he liked being in Washington. But he chose the media beat and he covered it *really* well for the *Sun*. And then we hired him at NPR where he's made a national reputation.

Risley: Yeah, he's terrific.

Marimow: Tom Bowman was our Pentagon reporter. We hired Tom at NPR and he's still doing distinguished work. I'm trying to think of who else we hired from the *Sun*, because there are others. Oh, David Greene would have been an example. So, Gene I think was the master of what I'll call legerdemain. He is creative and could always figure out a way to do something no matter what it took. So, we had David Greene as a summer intern. He was the managing editor at the *Harvard Crimson*, and he worked, I think, in Carroll County. He really wanted to work at the *Sun*. We had no money, no openings, and I think he'd been offered a job at the *St. Pete Times* – full-time job. I said, "David, how about this? We have an opening in the library of the Washington bureau. Twenty-four hours a week

and I'll guarantee you ten hours a week of freelance if you'll take it. And I promise you that in six months we'll find a way to hire you. So, would you be willing to do it?" He gave up a full-time job offer at St. Pete to become the Washington bureau librarian. Then we hired him for a suburban job. He did great. And Mike Leary, who I hired as the *Sun*'s national editor, persuaded us to make David the White House correspondent. He was the youngest White House correspondent there.

Risley: I didn't know that.

Marimow: Yeah. And then I hired him at NPR where he's been a star.

Risley: That's great. So, what did you learn from John Carroll?

Marimow: Many things. I learned to be patient, I learned to listen. One of the lessons that he taught me, actually by talking about it, he was more like Gene. He learned by watching. But he taught me that when you have an ethical problem in your newsroom, an ethical issue, to drop everything instantaneously and do whatever it takes to investigate it, adjudicate it, and move on. I thought that was great. I think John really had a great A-plus imagination for seeing stories in little grains of sand. I was always better at doing a story and using the story as a catalyst for another story. Like the police promotion exams. John, I think, would see a grain of sand and imagine a castle. The great thing about John, most editors and managing editors are not real friends. They have, in the best of worlds, a good business relationship. Sometimes they complement each other like Gene Foreman, who was an A-plus manager, an A-plus person, and Gene Roberts, who was more creative, more imaginative. John and I were really friends. We talked to each other seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, 365 days a year. And Lee Carroll, John's wife. My wife, Diane, John and I – the four of us were friends. Friday night we'd often get together for a pizza and a beer. More than one beer. And so that's what I really missed. Tony Barbieri and I were friends, but because he didn't have a wife, and he had a different life, we are very friendly, but we didn't socialize as much. John and I were really inseparable.

Risley: So, what made you decide to leave the *Sun* for NPR?

Marimow: I got fired. Denise Palmer, the publisher, called me up one day. Must have been January.

Risley: This was after John Carroll left?

Marimow: John left in 2000. I became the editor. Mike Waller was the publisher. In the fall of 2002, Mike Waller stepped down as publisher – retired. Denise Palmer, who was a Tribune accountant, came to the *Sun*. And, I thought we were getting along. I thought we were compatible, but much to my surprise, we weren't. And so, she called me in one day in January of 2004, and said, "You must know we're not getting along." I said, "I didn't realize that Denise." She said, "Well, I think you

might want to retire." And, I said, "Can we give this six more months and we could address these problems you have?" "No, I've already hired another editor, and you can't tell anyone." I said, "Well, I'm going to walk down now and tell Tony Barbieri." And then the next day, I came in and I thought to myself, well, it's over now, but I could maybe join the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Newsday*, because the editors there, you know, liked me and respected me. John was the editor in LA. And so, I said to Denise Palmer and Howard Weinstein, who is the head of HR, I said, "Listen, I have a proposal. If Jack Fuller, who's the president of Tribune [Company], will tell me that he will not step in my way to seek another job in Tribune, I will leave now. I don't want any money. I don't want anything. Just a promise from Jack Fuller." Silence. Well, it turned out that on the day that Denise Palmer was firing me, Jack Fuller had told the publisher of the *LA Times*, that under no circumstances could John Carroll hire me. So, I was fired from Tribune; I wasn't fired from the *Sun*.

Risley: What do you think was the root of the problem?

Marimow: I think because I didn't understand that in the Tribune Company dissent was viewed as disloyalty. I think that, you know, with Gene, I dissented it all the time. If I disagreed with something, I wasn't obnoxious. I basically said, I think, you know, this is my opinion. I think we should consider X, Y or Z. And that was welcomed. Sometimes Gene said, "I think you're making a big mistake." But you know, it was clear to me that I was welcome to speak out. I didn't realize that at the Tribune, dissent was anathema. And I think the reason I was fired was because I dissented it a lot.

Risley: What did you dissent about?

Marimow: I can remember a symposium, or a meeting, where maybe the fifteen executives were gathered. And the question was, whether in negotiations with the labor unions, we should be tough as nails or whether we should be firm, but reasonable. And whoever was leading this, you know, the consultant said, "Now everyone who thinks we should be tough as nails, step to this side of the table. Everyone who thinks we should be fair, firm and reasonable, step to this side of the table." So, if there are 15 people in the room, 13 walked over there, I walked over here, and then Tony Barbieri, who was wavering, walked over to my side. But it was clear that I was an outsider. And I was an outsider, not because of journalistic ability, not because of managerial ability, because I wasn't someone who automatically saluted. And I don't know what Denise Palmer would say. I think the only reason she gave was bad chemistry.

Risley: So how did the NPR job happen?

Marimow: Well, the firing was so public and so shocking, and it was in the news. And the people who'd worked with me I think, by and large, respected me—likely, trusted me. So, I started getting phone calls that day. And I'll always be indebted to Jim Naughton, who was the first person who called. He said, "I'd like you to

be on the national advisory board at the Poynter Institute. And I know that the publisher Paul Tash, of the *St. Petersburg Times* would like to talk with you as soon as possible." Same day or a day later, I get a call from someone whose name I didn't even know, Kevin Klose. "Hello, I'm the president of NPR. Can I come up to Baltimore and talk with you today?" I said, "Well, Kevin," I said, "I just got fired. Why don't I come see you?" He said, "No, no. I want to come up and see you." And it was clear that someone had told him about me, and that he was looking for—they'd just gotten a grant from the Kroc family, which founded McDonald's. They received $200 million from Joan Kroc, and Klose was looking for someone who would be a journalistic lightning rod. So, he came up to Baltimore. We hit it off. Then he sent me down to talk to his deputies. We got along, and that's how it happened.

Risley: What was the learning curve like in terms of going from newspapers to a new medium – radio?

Marimow: Yeah, I think technologically, I never mastered radio, but I came to appreciate the beauty of sound. And what I realized was that when you, when I read, it affects me only after I've read it and absorbed it and thought about it. It doesn't hit me emotionally; it hits me intellectually. With radio, you're listening, and for me, it affects me emotionally before I've intellectualized it. So, when I heard Walter Cronkite talking about D-Day, I really felt something different than if I read about D-Day. I was able to, I think, articulate my thoughts about radio in a way that resonated with everyone at NPR. So, I got there. They didn't have any tradition of doing investigative reporting and I immediately helped some people embark on some serious stories. Then with the hiring of David Greene, David Folkenflik, Frank Langfitt, Tom Bowman, and others, they fit in very well to the atmosphere there. They were anxious to learn. And it helped my credibility within the organization. I think that given 20/20 hindsight, I didn't spend enough time cultivating the upper management. I spent my time in the trenches, but I learned a lot and I liked it.

Risley: Do you feel like you improved the journalism at NPR?

Marimow: Definitely. I'm sure I did.

Risley: How so?

Marimow: We started getting awards from IRE – from other organizations for their investigative reporting. And Ellen Weiss, who eventually succeeded me, you know, she's now the head of the Scripps-Howard Washington bureau. And so, I think I gave everyone both the mandate and the tools to pursue some ambitious stories.

Risley: What do you look back on with regrets about the NPR time?

Marimow: I think that it was probably more of a bureaucracy than I could fit into. It was probably more like a college campus with tenured professors who felt immune to performance-based management. I was on the board of trustees at Trinity College and I, I realized, you know, in eight years there, I saw some of the same symptoms as I saw at NPR. Everything was decided by consensus rather than individuality. As a product of the Gene Roberts newsroom, I believed in benign autocracy. I know autocracy wasn't in vogue at NPR, nor at Trinity College. You know, it seemed to me that, you know, I was making good hires, but it was clear that politically – how come we have so many people from the *Sun*? And I was insensitive to that. But, you know, I think in general, because of working with Gene and the things I've described to you, I've always prioritized excellence over everything. And I believe that in a meritocracy, you're going to supersede the performance of an organization that is either political or bureaucratic. So, I have, you know, on the issue of diversity, which I think is incredibly important, I want to open the door as wide as possible. Once the door is open, I believe that every should be judged by the same standards. So, if someone's been there two or three years and they're failing, whether they're white, black, yellow, anything; the same standards have to be applied. So, I think my inability to perceive political implications probably led to my being fired at the *Sun*, my leaving NPR. I think that I flourish in an organization led by people like Gene, and I floundered in ones where politics and bureaucracy supersede merit.

Risley: So, what was it like getting back to Philadelphia?

Marimow: I came back in November of 2006. And I came back to a really, really demoralized newsroom now. I think that in the Tony Ridder era, the *Inquirer* shrunk and shrunk in terms of size, ambition, and collegiality. And, from the time that Bob Rosenthal got fired in 2001 or 2002, there was a succession of editors who were either inept, or like Amanda Bennett, really good journalists but didn't have the support of their publishers. And, I can remember seeing old friends when I came back in November 2006, who had been upbeat, enthusiastic, optimistic people, with deep frowns in their face at these meetings. I kept saying to myself, "What happened? What happened?" And, when Brian Tierney and his group took over – and Brian's the one that hired me – the profits were $60 million a year that first year. Second year $38 million, third year $15 million, fourth year $4 million. And even though they were still profitable, they couldn't pay the debt service to comply with the bank covenants, and that's why they went bankrupt. So that was really, really hard.

Risley: What did you think you were able to accomplish, even in those difficult times?

Marimow: I believe that I created hope and adherence to excellent journalism standards, a belief that the *Inquirer* could rise again. And you know, just before I left, we started a story called "Assault on Learning," which won the Pulitzer Prize for public service in 2012. And the people that worked on that – Jeff Gammage, I'd known since 1987. Kristen Graham, I'd salvaged her job in a way that I'll explain in a minute. John Sullivan, I'd put under my wing. He's now at the *Washington*

Post. And I think that people like that, with high ability and high ambition, felt again they had the latitude to really do great work. And Brian Tierney, I thought, was a really good publisher in terms of the journalism. He didn't have the greatest relationships with the unions, but when I came back, we had to lay off sixty people. Fortunately, they weren't people I had hired and many of them were people who applied to the *Sun*, and I chose not to hire. So, I felt badly about it personally because I'd never laid anyone off, but I also felt this was an economic necessity. It was part of the understanding when I was hired, and I could do it because I felt that we'd have a newsroom of 400 people when it was over, and that people who I would not have hired, would be gone. So, Kristen Graham was one of the people that could be laid off. All of her editors said, "You can't do it Bill. You got to keep her. She's indispensable." So, I talked to Brian Tierney. I said, "Brian, we need to figure out a way to do this." So, he transferred her to Philly.com, the website, and I promised her a year from then she would be back on the staff. And I told Brian – on the layoffs, we got to a certain point and the next person to be laid off was Tom Avril, who's a medical science writer. And during my month, or six weeks, before the layoffs, back at the *Inquirer*, I'd seen him. He was there in the morning before I was there, and I was there *really* early. He was there at night when I was there, slogging away, doing really great work. And I looked at the list, I said, "Brian, we can't go beyond Tom Avril. We got to stop." He said, "Great." And so, I was able to save a lot of jobs. And that to me, never would've happened with someone like Denise Palmer in Baltimore or Bob Hall in his later reincarnation. So, in October, 2010 the hedge funds took over. I was immediately fired again by Greg Osberg. But in this case I said to myself, you know, it'd be great return to reporting and really see what it's like now after a twenty-four year absence, I could learn a lot, I can contribute a lot, and it would be fulfilling as an interim step. So, I went back to reporting.

Risley: What was that like?

Marimow: It was great. And I learned an awful lot. You know, I found that based on the computer work that we are now doing, things that would take four hours in the past could be done in four minutes. So, for instance, to get a deed or mortgage in Delaware County in 1986, you'd have to drive from Philadelphia to Media—an hour. Go into the courthouse, get out to microfilm, photocopy the microfilm, pay for it at the clerk's desk, back in your car, three hours, three and a half hours. Now, boom, boom, boom. Print. So, I found that I was having a lot of time to develop an expertise in the areas I was covering. A lot of time to develop sources in a casual, thoughtful way – take them to lunch. And more time to do stories, just because everything was more efficient. I discovered that most of my young colleagues were not using the time to develop the expertise or the sources. They were going right back to the computer, you know, interviews were being done by email, not in person, not by phone. It was a revelation to me, and it reinforced my belief that the computer era is a two-edge sword. To me, great reporting consists of three components: One is the reporting you do through sources and documents. Two are your personal observations. And three, because you know, pulling it all together. And in this case, there was no personal observations, no

face-to-face interviews, just computers. So, stories were becoming one-dimensional instead of three-dimensional. Which helped me in my next step. So, Chris Callahan got in touch with me. You know who he is?

Risley: Oh yeah, of course.

Marimow: And he called me up and said he would love me to come out to Arizona State and run their summer program – known as News21. All through the year they work on one project and I would have been the executive editor. So, I went out for interviews. He asked me if I'd be willing to have the committee look through applicants.

Risley: It's academia!

Marimow: Knowing that I'd be chosen, I said, "Chris, if you really want me to come, I'm not going to go through that. I'm not going to go through a charade. So, if you want to hire me, I'm coming. If you want me to get through that, no thank you." That was stupid; I should have done him a favor. But it just seems so ludicrous, and such a waste of time and money. So, I went, and that would have been September or October of 2011. Around March 2012, Lewis Katz, who was thinking of buying the *Inquirer*, owned a home in Arizona. Lewis came out to Arizona one weekend. He called me up. I knew him because he was the boyfriend of Nancy Phillips, one of my Jersey reporters in 1987. And he asked me if I would talk with him about the interrelationship of the newspaper business, profits and losses, and the content. I said, "Sure." So, we spent a few hours. I did all the talking and he thanked me. He said, "You know, I may want to pick your brain again." Two weeks later he is there again. This time he did more of the talking. We parted company. I said, that was nice. Then maybe in April, I had to come to Philadelphia for a wedding and Lewis called me again. He said he wanted me to be the editor of the *Inquirer*, which was just a shock. And of course, you know, I felt like what I had begun at The Inquirer was incomplete, and I said, "I'm going to do it." But I'd only been at Arizona State like nine months. That was really unfortunate because any other job offer, I would have said no to him, but this was a chance to actually vindicate what I'd begun. So, I said goodbye to Arizona State. I think there were some hard feelings with Chris, which has since been mitigated. I think he understands intellectually and emotionally.

Risley: How was the place different?

Marimow: I think that for the first time in a long while there was hope economically because of Gerry Lenfest and Lewis Katz's wealth. But there was also a suspicion about George Norcross, who was a South Jersey politician and had a really bad reputation as a political manipulator and party boss, which he was. And for the first few months I got along very well with George Norcross. We talked almost every day. I tried to give him my best thinking on journalism. I remember talking to them about circulation and showing them how if you increase the size of the

death notices and increased the price, you would actually, you know, have hundreds of thousands of dollars in new revenue. I have him a lot of ideas. And I thought we got along pretty well, but then he started trying to boss me around and doing things like getting rid the editorial pages. And at some point, I remember saying to him something to the effect of, "George, you know, I appreciate your work ethic, I appreciate your attention to detail and your interest in newspapers," I said, "but when we just disagree, I'm going to tell you we disagree." Well, he never argued with me, but behind my back tried to persuade Gerry Lenfest and Lewis Katz that I was incompetent, unproductive, and insubordinate. He was right about the third. So, in October 2013, Bob Hall fired me, and Norcross took the position that only the publisher could fire the editor, not the two co-managers Lewis and Norcross. And immediately Lewis and Gerry sued the company. Norcross and Bob Hall, because their interpretation of the corporate charter was that only Lewis and Norcross together unanimously could hire or fire the editor. And, that went to court. Richard Sprague represented them, and he did a masterful job. The judge reinstated me in November. And I became the editor again under really uncomfortable circumstances.

Risley: What was that like?

Marimow: Incredibly uncomfortable because Bob Hall and I had no relationship whatsoever. And Norcross and Gerry and Lewis were at loggerheads. So, after I was reinstated, they battled it out in court – bankruptcy court. Ultimately there was an auction. And that happened in May, 2014, and Lewis and Gerry spent $88 million to buy the *Inquirer*. Norcross got cash for his share of the company. He left. And then that same week, Lewis was in a plane crash and died. So, that's the tangled history, Ford.

Risley: So, what's kept you going?

Marimow: I think what's kept me going really is a love of journalism, a love of Philadelphia. The lifetime interest in learning. The fulfillment of seeing young journalists that I've hired and tutored and mentored, succeed. And you know, like for instance, yesterday I had an op-ed piece in the *Inquirer*, and I'm learning, I won't be doing this forever. I may teach someday; I may write a book. But it's been stimulating. The relationship with the Lenfest Institute, which has been fairly successful—it's a new frontier.

Risley: What do you feel good about what the *Inquirer* is able to do now? You know, albeit it, with a smaller staff and fewer resources?

Marimow: I'd say the enterprise report and the public service journalism really stands out. Week in and week out there are stories that are changing people's lives and there are big ones, you know, like "Toxic City" and Craig McCoy's stories about unscrupulous real estate developers who steal homes from people who have been dead for years. But they're also daily stories, like Helen Ubiñas' columns.

She writes about people who are unheralded and unheard from, and really describes their plights. I think those are all good things. I think that the *Inquirer*'s commitment to diversity with the Lenfest fellows—it's a program a lot like the Times Mirror program – MetPro. To me these are all things that have been supported and helped with funds from the Lenfest Institute. So, this is good. And I think that the hybrid model where the *Inquirer* is a public benefits corporation is really a promising model. So, the way this works is the *Inquirer*'s mandate now is two-fold: Do great public service journalism and be a viable business. So, they don't have to maximize profits. The *Inquirer* just has to be profitable. And that's different.

Risley: What steps has the *Inquirer* taken to do that? To be in a position to do those things?

Marimow: What do you mean? I'm not sure.

Risley: I guess financially what has the *Inquirer* had to do?

Marimow: Well, I think number one, it had to get the staff to the right size, and that's still a subject of tumult because right now in order to get the website to be operationally excellent, the company needs more engineers and more product managers. To get the financing to do that, there have to be some staff reductions, which the staff is viewing as deeply troubling because they had the belief that the newsroom staff was going to stay the same size. I think that it's critical that the website be better operationally. The load time is slow. The navigation bulky. You have to reregister time and again. We need to fix it. When you look at the *Washington Post* where my daughter is a reporter, they have dozens and dozens of engineers in the newsroom. We have only a sliver for that kind of staffing.

Risley: So that's something the *Inquirer* has not done a good job with?

Marimow: Not at all. I think that people we have are highly competent, but there aren't nearly enough of them. You know, when I went into the *Post* newsroom, I was flabbergasted by the number of people who are working on technology, the number of people who were working on social media, and how close they are in proximity to the reporters and editors. You've been in there, I assume. It is remarkable. And I haven't been in the *New York Times*, but I assume it's the same way there.

Risley: So, this is a big question, but in what big ways has the newspaper business changed during your career?

Marimow: I would say that the biggest way of all is that reporters like me, no longer have all day long to report, analyze, and write a story. In the past, it never occurred to me that I had the luxury of time when I'd come in at seven in the morning and on Friday to write a Sunday story of 60 inches, be able to turn it in at 8 o'clock at night, and no one even blinked. My daughter on the other hand, who's been

covering the appellate federal courts down in Washington, and sometimes the Supreme Court, you know, she needs to blog. She needs to post on Facebook, she needs to tweet, she's on radio, she's on TV, she's on podcasts, she writes daily stories, Sunday stories, video – the whole gamut. And to me, while that's necessary competitively, I also think that it diminishes quality of work. I'll give you an example. You know, I wish I were a billionaire, because I know how I'd do it. So, let's say there was a criminal trial of Vince Fumo. You know who he is? When Vince was on trial, I would send three people to the court every day. One person, Bob Moran, to blog. I would ask Moran to come out of the court room every fifteen minutes and write whatever was happening, or not happening, no matter what. Emilie Lounsberry to cover the daily trial. To come out of the courtroom, you know, 5 o'clock, and write a 20-inch, 30-inch really good story. *Craig McCoy* to look for something for the Sunday paper, or the weekend website, that no one else would have an enterprise story. Now that was incredibly inefficient in terms of economics, but when the trial ended, all the TV stations in Philadelphia's said, "philly.com is reporting." They were showing the home page. And so, to me, if you want to make your news organization indispensable, you have to invest short-term, even if it's going to cause a loss, in order to reap the long-term benefits. And most companies don't have someone like Jeff Bezos at the helm, or the national/international audience of the *Times*, so it's impractical. But that's what I would like to do. I think it's a big mistake to have people always focused on how many posts they have each day, or each week. You know, to me the quota system is not the best measure of someone's importance to an organization. And underlying all that of course is the economics. I can remember in 2002 or 2003, I was invited up by the managing editor, Geoff Gevalt, to the *Burlington Free Press* in Vermont. We had dinner, and at the time the profit margins of the Burlington free press were 47% – 47 cents profit on every dollar of revenue. And of course, Gannett, if it dropped to 45%, there would have been trauma. So, you know, with those resources, and again, probably the *Inquirer's* best profit margin might have been the high teens, but with those kinds of profits, you could really invest in journalism and make the *Inquirer* and the website indispensable. Now it's much more thin margin.

Risley: Are you still confident about the future of journalism in some form, and its role?

Marimow: Absolutely. To me, every time the *Inquirer* does great stories, if you look on the website at the comments, you can see that people really appreciate it. Yesterday Craig McCoy had a story about unscrupulous flippers, who identify homes that had been long vacant. These flippers would forge wills, forge the bills of sale, and get the property, and then sell them to a developer and make hundreds of thousands of dollars. The comments on Craig's story, you know, dozens, this is real investigative reporting. This is the kind of stories we need done. And you know, the *Inquirer* now has probably more people committed to investigative reporting than it's ever had in any period of time. Gene never had an I-team. And when I came back, I inherited a small I-team, but my preference would have been for everybody to be doing in-depth reporting. So now there's an I-team under Jim Neff, who was hired from the *Seattle Times*. There's going to be a

Spotlight PA in Harrisburg. And the more of those stories we can do, the more it will benefit the public, the more public service we'll be doing. So that gives me a lot of hope.

Risley: Good. Is there anything you'd like to add that we didn't discuss?

Marimow: We got to do a lot of talk and this was fun.

Risley: Good. Well, thank you so much.

End of Interview