

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH CHIP MINEMYER

Interviewed by David S. Joachim

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Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications
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Chip Minemyer Interview

Joachim: So here we are, it's June 17, 2026, in the 10 a.m. hour. I'm in the offices of the *Tribune-Democrat* in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, with Chip Minemyer. Why don't we start at the very beginning: Just tell me a little bit about where you were born and grew up, and a bit about your parents and family.

Minemyer: Sure, I'm a native of Centre County. I was born in Bellefonte, in a hospital that's no longer a hospital. It's now county offices. I don't know what they're doing in the room I was born in. They may be giving out birth certificates for all I know, but it's no longer a hospital, hasn't been for quite a long time, Willowbank [formally called Bellefonte Hospital]. I was born in Bellefonte, grew up in a little town called Julian, which is just over the mountain from Penn State University, from State College proper, and it's in the Bald Eagle School District. I lived up and down the Bald Eagle Valley most of my early years — Julian, mostly in Port Matilda and Milesburg, and places like that. So that's my roots.

I went to Penn State after I left high school. I didn't start out in journalism; started out in another field and kind of wandered away and did some freelance writing. I had always been a pretty good English student and had a little bit of a knack for writing, or so I was told. I got decent grades. I did some freelance work and really loved it. And that led me to go back to school in communications. So that was a roundabout way of getting into this field. I was on my high school newspaper staff, which was kind of fun. I was a sports editor in high school, so I learned a little bit about interviewing and getting facts right and getting people's quotes right. Telling them what time you're going to meet, and then being there on time, all those things that journalists sometimes forget. That mattered then, and I had a lot of good people around me. That's how it all got started.

Joachim: Anything to say about your family in life? Your parents?

Minemyer: My parents both grew up in Centre County. My parents are both deceased. I'm 62 so that's natural. My wife, Amy, grew up in Huntingdon County, and we've been married 38 years. We've got two kids. My son Brandon, who's 32. My daughter Paige is 34, and she's a Penn State journalism grad. Despite my attempts to dissuade her, she followed me into the field and has gone off and done great things. Very digitally focused, found that path and has really made it into something special. It's a totally different way of thinking than I grew up with, and she's made the best of it. She's doing great.

Joachim: You mentioned that you started your working life in a field other than journalism. What was that job, and how did you pivot back?

Minemyer: I started out in a biology curriculum, and although I loved the natural sciences aspect of it, I guess I didn't study hard enough to do well in calculus and biology and chemistry and physics and some of those classes. I said, Well, let's just take some time off, figure it out, basically. I did a lot of writing, and that became something that felt really comfortable and natural. I got some freelance opportunities, covered Penn State wrestling for Blue White Illustrated at State College, did Penn State wrestling matches on the radio, did some other radio, worked for a couple of weekly papers in the Bellefonte area, hooked on at the *Centre Daily Times* as a part-timer. Then I decided I'd really need to go back to school and do this right, and that's what I did. It was interesting when I went back to school. I wasn't a straight journalism major. I was taking theory classes and expected to go to grad school and move in that direction. Right out of school I ended up right back in the workforce and doing OK there, so I didn't ever go back. But a lot of those courses stayed with me, whether it was media effects courses or media law and ethics, and diversity and those types of issues that I was studying at the theoretical level — looking at text, and how does it affect culture, and what do we know about each other, and how do we treat each other, how's that reflected in media. That's stayed with me, even though I ended up back in the professional ranks. I think that helped shape who I became. I loved those courses, and I found them very, very fascinating. They really changed my perspective on a lot of things, beyond just a straight lede or an inverted pyramid or building facts. That does all matter too, but this context I think really put me in a different direction professionally.

Joachim: Do you think that ultimately led you to take on leadership roles as you have?

Minemyer: Absolutely. Leadership roles, for sure, and how do you handle certain situations that arise in the workplace? How do you treat people above you, below you, beside you? How do you treat your community? What matters? And then, beyond that, what do you reflect in your pages that should matter? How do you reflect the various components of your community? And then, how do you write opinion pieces that show what you think is important, but also maybe take on causes you think the community needs to either be aware of or be represented in your pages? Those are the directions I ended up going, partly because of that education.

Joachim: That's really interesting. So on a full-time basis, it all started here at the *Tribune-Democrat*.

Minemyer: Well, I had a couple of full-time jobs at smaller places prior to that, but this was really the one that got me. I was locked into the field at that point.

Joachim: What led you here?

Minemyer: I knew somebody who was here. That's the way most things happen, right? Somebody I had run across a couple of times in my career who knew somebody else that I knew said, "Hey, they're going to be hiring somebody at the *Tribune* in Johnstown, you want to give it a look." So I applied and ended up here, and everything worked out really well from there. I came into an interesting town, historically, culturally. The whole business community, it's a very gritty industrial town that was trying to re-establish where it was going after that. You know, what are we going to be now that the steel industry is falling away? It was a veteran newsroom, with a lot of older journalists around. It was still guys that would have bottles of booze in their drawer and be smoking at their workstations and all the stuff you envision when you say "old newsrooms." It was happening here when I got here. It didn't last very long after that, frankly, because it was starting to shift culturally. But I did see some of that kind of thing, a lot of gray-haired people around me saying, "That's not how we do it here." You really need some of that coaching when you're just getting your feet under you.

Joachim: This is around the late 1980s?

Minemyer: Early '90s, yeah.

Joachim: Tell me a little bit about your career path here.

Minemyer: I came in as a copy editor in sports. That was the official opening that I applied for. Within maybe a year, year and a half, I was elevated as sports editor. Some people had moved on, and I had done enough of the planning side and the organizational side and getting to know the entire landscape, not just a beat, that I was pretty well positioned for that. I got to know some people and had earned the trust of the management here. So I went from the sports copy desk, and did writing too, to become the sports editor. Then I eventually became the news editor, overseeing the entire night operation — the pagination desk and the editing desk and front page and things like that. That was my first time in Johnstown. I've been here now a couple of times.

That was the first transition, and I got to know a lot of people, and I really embraced the history of the town and the history of the sports community. There's a lot of great names that came out of Johnstown, and these moments in the history of Johnstown I was introduced to. The hockey movie "Slap Shot" was filmed here, and if you come to

Johnstown and you talk sports, you'd better know something about "Slap Shot," or you'll be run out of town. Then shortly after that, "All the Right Moves" was filmed here. They used the old school hockey arena down the street, the [Cambria County] War Memorial, and they used Point Stadium [now Sargent's Stadium at the Point], which is the other way down the street.

Those two big movies were filmed here, and people really kind of attached themselves to those moments when this thing happened. You know, both of those movies represent sports happening in a community that's struggling financially. Both of them have that theme, and it was true. To a degree, it was true. It was never quite as bad as it felt like in the movies, but it was certainly realistic, and people took some pride in being a town that recovers from things like that.

Three major floods happened here. 1889 was the big one, the [Great] Johnstown Flood that everybody talks about. The flood museum is about a block from where we're sitting, and the flood memorial is just outside town. There was another big flood in '36 and a flood in '77 that was pretty devastating. So we got that "Flood City USA" moniker. It's an interesting wrestling match as a community to hang on to that legacy but not tie yourself totally to negative moments in your history. That's been a continuous process in Johnstown. So a lot of cultural history — steel boom after World War II, and then a decline from there to the flood in '77, which was one of the final nails in the coffin for the big steel industry here. Still have mills here now; they're just much, much smaller capacity. It used to be 20,000 people worked for Bethlehem Steel. It was a company town, literally, and I came in right after that and had to understand some of that journey that the city had been through.

Joachim: What were some of the big stories that broke on your watch during that first stretch at the *Tribune-Democrat*?

Minemyer: I'm trying to think about big ones in that first stretch, because 9/11 was later, and some of the other things came after that. Mostly, it was just getting a handle on the history of the town. There weren't any big giant moments in the '90s that I recall, but there was a lot of interactiveness, getting to know people, getting to know folks at Pitt [University of Pittsburgh] Johnstown, which had a nice history in town, a nice athletic program, and the high schools, getting to know the government people. I mean, the economics was the story. Where are we headed? There was a big baseball tournament held in town, still going strong then. How does that tie into the history or the culture of the town? In the '80s they rebuilt the [Johnstown Flood Museum]. A lot of that had just happened, so they were coming to grips with that history. But then, how do we turn this story into cultural tourism and economic opportunity for the community? That kind of

defined the '90s here: How do we do that? It was a very interesting period. I guess maybe I benefited from the fact it wasn't in one single moment that I had to deal with. It was a lot of them.

Joachim: Were sports important to you as a fan? What made you gravitate to sports journalism?

Minemyer: I always was a sports guy, played baseball and stuff growing up and always followed it, and followed sports writers in my community and nationally when I was younger. I got to know some of those people while I was getting started, so I ended up doing some sports writing myself. Then I really started to get comfortable with the history of it. Johnstown had a professional hockey team for decades, so that was part of what I had to understand when I moved to Johnstown. I didn't have that in my own background from living elsewhere. There were some big names there. But also the movie "Slap Shot" was based on an actual team that had played in Johnstown a couple of years before that and in a kind of Cinderella story won a championship. They didn't close the doors like they did in the movie; they continued to play for a few more years. But it was a similar storyline.

There's been some great names that have come out of Johnstown that I really came to follow when I got here. Jack Ham, who's color commentator for Penn State football right now but was an All-American at Penn State and played for the Steelers and won four Super Bowls. He's in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He grew up right here in Johnstown and went to Bishop McCort Catholic [High School]. Pete Vuckovich, who's become a friend of mine, pitched for Conemaugh Valley High School but then ended up pitching in the major leagues. Was a Cy Young Award winner and is kind of iconic in terms of baseball here in the Johnstown area. And there's been a lot of other people who have done similar things like that. It's a town with a lot of history. I [saw a stat recently](#): Johnstown has had 26 NFL draft picks, tied for third-most of all time among Pennsylvania high schools. It's really interesting. [Greater] Johnstown High School, they've had a bunch of guys do well playing Super Bowls, play at the professional level in the NBA. It was a town that was a feeder for some nice sports history.

Joachim: So after that first stretch at the *Tribune-Democrat*, you went back to State College, in Penn State's backyard. Tell me about that transition.

Minemyer: Ron Bracken, who was the sports editor up there at the time, I had known him for a long time. We had crossed paths over the years and sat together in press boxes and stuff like that. He said, "By the way, they're going to be hiring somebody up here." That's the same way I ended up in Johnstown the first time — somebody said, "Hey, by

the way." So I went up there and talked to them. It was a great move. I thought the *Centre Daily Times* was doing some fantastic work. Some great projects came out of those years. We did a huge annual business report. We did a big guide to Centre County. Massive projects that the whole staff was involved in. Then, as head of the copy desk, you see all of it. It all comes past you in one form or another. So you either get to read and correct and update stories, or you get to suggest things and help plan projects. That was my first move up there. From there it was just a series of steps at the *Centre Daily Times* on that first full-time go-around there. I was in the city editor role for a while. Then I moved into the role of associate editor, where I had almost no day-to-day touching of content. I was more training, recruiting. The editorial page was mine at that point. And then just handling the newsroom budget, paying for the freelance expenditures, paying for the syndicated material that we were publishing, keeping an eye on where the money was from a newsroom perspective. That was a great position, too, because I learned so much that I've used almost every day since then. I don't know at the time if I saw it that way, but it turned out to be a great step in terms of my development in a management role and my consistency at handling those types of decisions. That's the kind of stuff I've been doing ever since.

Joachim: You were executive editor of *CDT* during the 2012 child sex abuse trial of Jerry Sandusky, which took place right in *CDT*'s backyard. Tell me what comes to mind from that period. What was it like?

Minemyer: It was the most ridiculous news period I've ever been through. I was actually back in Johnstown as the editor here. I had moved back here in 2004, and I was the editor right up into 2012. It was late 2011 that that story landed. The *Patriot-News* had something in early 2011, and people saw it and didn't really understand the depth of what was happening. I think people thought, That's interesting. By November we knew — the indictments came down. So, while I was still in Johnstown, that Sandusky indictment and then [Joe] Paterno losing his job, and then in January, Paterno passing away.

It was right after that that I talked to them about the editor position. The publisher I was talking to, her big concern at the time was, "We're getting ready to have this huge story happen right in our backyard." We'll talk in a little bit, if you want, about how that great story didn't land in their pages originally, but by now they were saying, This is happening, we need to be on top of it, and we need somebody who's going to help us get the story back. I think the feeling was that they had let it get away from them. They had a reporter there in early '11 who said, I've got this story, and for whatever reason — I never asked everybody that question — but it didn't happen at the *Centre Daily Times*. I don't know if it was that they didn't think they had enough to go with it, or they didn't believe it, or they weren't able to stomach the possibility of it. I don't know what all was

going on, but the reporter left and went to [the *Patriot-News* in] Harrisburg. They hired her away. She did the story. They broke it. [They won a Pulitzer Prize](#). So it was really a case of this story became somebody else's story when it really happened right there in Centre County. I think that was the concern at the time. The reporting staff felt it too. They were like, Wait a second, we should be writing this story. They had been writing it in bits and pieces, but it wasn't their story. So that's the culture I tried to establish when I got there, and I think we were pretty successful with that. The big narrative was already out the door and gone.

What happened after that was, How do we cover a huge trial, knowing the world is going to be standing right beside us? How do we make it our story? How do we then deal with whatever fallout comes? By the time the summer was over, we already had the [Louis] Freeh Report that said all the things that it said about how Penn State handled these sex abuse allegations. NCAA sanctions had dropped by then. The biggest single news moment of the time I was up there was the Paterno statue coming down at [Beaver Stadium]. All those things happened by the middle-late summer. So I get there in April, and we're like, Here's the runway we're coming down toward. How do we prepare for that? So that's what we did. We just spent weeks and weeks getting ready for the trial, trying to understand how it was going to be logistically handled in Bellefonte, knowing ESPN and CNN and the *New York Times* were all going to be standing right there covering the story. How do we nudge them aside a little bit to get a spot? So I worked to establish some relationships. It was my job, I think, as editor, to get us a seat at the table, and we were able to do that, I think. Other people did certain pieces better than us, and we did stuff really well, I think. Broke a lot of news, had a huge digital presence throughout that whole process and really we were right on it.

Part of my approach was to literally be in Bellefonte during the trial. There was a picnic table right outside the courthouse, and it was right above the little door where vehicles would bring Sandusky up every day, and they'd walk them in. Right up above that, there was a picnic table, and that's where I sat every morning. Talked to all my people as they showed up and said, "Huddle, what are we doing? What's going on? What happened yesterday? What do we need to follow up on? Who's being called to the stand today?" It was like a coach's approach, a sports approach. How are we going to go after this today? What bigger stories are out there that we need to go after while we're in the courtroom listening to testimony? That was like a two-week or whatever period that was just relentless and exhausting, but it was fantastic from a leadership standpoint. We were saying, All right, guys. This is our story, let's go get it. Simultaneous with that, kind of an aside, was that my daughter was at the *Daily Collegian* at Penn State that summer, also covering the trial, so I would see her at the courthouse. That was a weird little dynamic. But she learned a lot, I know. All of us did. As a student journalist, what a crazy summer

to learn through. She was freelancing for the *Associated Press* and writing stuff for the *Collegian*, mostly online. So I know she learned a lot, and all of us really did. The team worked really, really hard.

Joachim: At some point in there you started teaching at Penn State.

Minemyer: In the '90s, I really started teaching.

Joachim: What was the experience like teaching, bringing your experience into the classroom? And how did that inform your day job?

Minemyer: It was a great opportunity. Somebody who was at the *Centre Daily Times* when I was there in the '90s as a copy desk chief said, "You know, they have an opening for an adjunct journalism instructor. You'd probably do pretty well." I had no idea if I would do well or not, but I said I'll go talk to him. I got the opportunity to teach entry-level news writing and found it fascinating — just the opportunity to have that narrative, that dialogue with these young people who were trying to get into the field and were really eager, and some of them were hungry and some of them didn't care. It was that kind of a thing. While I was there, within a year, we were developing a one-credit course in basic English, because we found ourselves teaching so much grammar and that kind of stuff in a news writing class. It was somebody else's idea, but I got to help a little bit with that — the prerequisite course that they had to take to be ready from a language standpoint to take a journalism course. So that was great. I mean, AP style, [teaching] just reinforced all of that for me. I was able to bring all those lessons back to the newsroom, ingest some of them into myself more strongly than I had prior. If you don't know it, you can't teach it, right? Reinforcing things like basic story writing and research, and spell check, fact check, editing yourself, all those kinds of things that you're able to impart to these youngsters and help them get better. That made me stronger as an editor and day-to-day copy reader, the things that now are just in my DNA. I was still somewhat developing at that point professionally, and that helped me speed that process up, because I had to be good at it. I learned a lot about the way the younger people were thinking. Then eventually I was able to massage some of that [curriculum], bring things from the field into the classroom. I used to take police reports in, and that was some of our writing drills in the classroom. "This just happened yesterday, it's not theoretical. Let's write it. Let's practice on that. There's six or seven key facts in there. What are they? Let's list them on the board. There's, What happened? When did it happen? Who's telling us it happened? Do we trust those people?" Those kinds of questions. It's all right there in a two-page police report. That was a great learning tool, and I used it the whole way through, anytime I taught. I taught six years at Penn State, won an award for adjunct teaching once, which was kind of cool. And then

when I came to Johnstown again, I ended up teaching at [Indiana University of Pennsylvania] and then at Pitt Johnstown. Honestly loved every minute of it, whether it was basic news writing or it was journalism history, which I taught, whether it was forays into journalism law, never at the 400 level, but kind of lower level stuff: What cases matter? Why do we do things this way, ethically? What's the risk we're trying to avoid here? And here's the case law that established that, because I think that's very important. Then feature writing, editorial writing was something that I dabbled in, in terms of teaching. Some of your colleagues at Penn State would get me to come back if they were doing a day on ethics, and I would bring real-life situations that I had encountered as an editor. "We did this story. After the fact, were we happy with what we did, or weren't we? Was it the right decision, or was it not?" You make the best decision you can when the clock's running, and you try to do it the best you can. Then afterwards you assess it to say, What could we have done better?

We had a story just this weekend. A year ago there was a mass shooting here in town. Four people were injured, nobody was killed, at a nightclub. A couple of days after that, there was a community forum where some of the folks who were there accused the police of using racial slurs and being insensitive, and treating minority patrons differently than white patrons at the establishment, things like that. We put in a request for the dash cam and body cam video from that event. It took us almost a year to get it, even though Pennsylvania law had changed in 2017 to say, for the most part, that this material was public information. Didn't used to be. It used to be: No, you're not going to see it. So we had to go through a long process, including in the courts here in Cambria County. Eventually the city just said, You know what, you're right, here it is. They redacted some of it, which was fine with me, because there were some things in there we didn't need to see and nobody needed to see. But at the same time we were able to go through 20 hours of video from multiple people arriving at the scene, and how chaotic it was, and all the stuff that was going on, and we put out what I think was a pretty strong investigative, factual report. We didn't set out to get the police, we didn't set out to get the city, we did not set out to expose problems at the lounge. It was just, What happened? And what does this video, what does the audio, show and tell?

Getting back to the whole classroom question, those are the kind of things when you're younger, sometimes it's hard to step back and say, All right, am I doing this for the right reason? Why am I doing this? And then, Am I doing it step by step in the right manner? I think, as much as subject-verb agreement and things like that that we try to teach young writers — use active voice not passive voice, and all this stuff that we emphasize — that's the real important stuff. Why are we doing a story? And then how are we going about it, step by step, to get to the end and say, All right, we have something that we can stand there and say, That's the best we could do. I think this past week we did, and you

can [read it for yourself](#). At the same time, there's always that post mortem where you say, All right, at this moment, what did we do? Because we were even making a few little changes right up to the end, things that I've done historically. "Let's put an editor's note at the beginning of that. Warn people of the kind of content they're about to encounter."

Joachim: That's something we never used to do.

Minemyer: Right, but you do it now. Look, in our digital world, that kind of stuff's out there everywhere. Nobody's seeing something or hearing a word they've never heard before, right? But you still need to say, we're a little bit above that, let's still warn people, and let's not run those F-bombs spelled out throughout the story. Let's tell people something was said here; they'll know what it was. Let them figure it out without just punching them in the face with stuff like that. So that's still an ethical wrestling match you have all the time, and you try to come out of it saying, Should we use that photo? Should we use that story? Should we use that quote? Does it help or not? You always have those moments. I'd always get these calls: Hey, can you come to my class? We've got this ethics session. I would bring two or three stories that we had done in the last year, where there was a legitimate moment where we said, Man, what do we want to do here? I mean, reporters would have an idea, and the other editors would have an idea, and if I was the executive editor, I hear it all, and this is what we do, because it's on me at the end of the day.

Joachim: You just earned yourself an invitation to my class.

Minemyer: Glad to do it, because there's always those moments. This story we just did, I can talk at length about that whole process, a 12-month process to get this story out there, and I still got a call from the mayor of Johnstown on Saturday night. I was out to dinner. She's like, "Yeah, I talked to one of these girls that was shot. She's really having trouble with it. She's still seeing counselors for PTSD, and this video is not helping." I said, "Yeah, I hear you." She's like, "Can you take it down?" I said, "Sorry, no, because we did a lot of work to make sure this girl and all of her friends were not identifiable, were not exploited." I said we didn't set out to get the police, we set out to understand the process. By the end of that conversation, the mayor was perfectly fine. She knew it was just an emotional reaction for her based on having a conversation with this girl who's still going through a lot. Fortunately, nobody died. That's the great side of the story. The lounge never opened. It was opening night when this happened, and it's never been open since then. And so, there's a lot of lessons in anything you do like that.

Joachim: Especially, minimize harm. That's something we really didn't learn explicitly coming up, and I think there's a lot more awareness now about our responsibility to minimize harm.

Minemyer: You minimize harm, and then you say, first, foremost, be accurate, and then what pieces of my community am I representing fairly in this piece. You know, a lot of different lessons were learned from the time I was a young journalist till now about, How do you portray different segments of your community? Whether it's minority, whether it's LGBTQ, whether it's women, whether it's children. How do you tell the right story without exploiting them or demeaning them in any way or taking advantage of any one person or a segment of the community? It's not easy, honestly. It's not, because sometimes that's not the agenda of the people in power. But at the same time, our agenda is to do the right thing. That includes during Sandusky, which was also very challenging.

Joachim: Say more about that.

Minemyer: There is one moment that sticks with me from the Sandusky trial. We did a lot of work leading up to it. Profiled all the key players, the judge, Judge [John] Cleland, who I got to know after that, sat beside him at a banquet at the end of the year, which was really kind of surreal. I was in his courtroom when we were deciding, how are we going to handle the verdict? It was me, it was AP, it was a national television guy. That was it, and the judge. Somebody broke the rules anyway. But how are we going to handle the moment the verdict comes down, because we knew everybody wants to report this right now. We were in a second-floor courtroom, marble steps to the ground. How do we make sure nobody falls and breaks their neck, but that everybody has the same opportunity to break a story? We came up with a set of rules, and that worked pretty well.

So that was one moment that I was involved in directly that affected how the trial itself was handled. We went into the trial saying we are not going to name any of these young men who are accusing Jerry Sandusky. We called them Victim One, Victim Two, Victim Three throughout. That's how they were labeled in the presentment, and we went out of our way to not name any of them. Then I'm sitting at lunch between sessions in the trial, and I'm hearing a CBS national radio report identifying the kid who was just on the stand — named him, said what town he was from. I'm thinking, OK, why do you work so hard? I said CBS; it could have been ABC, whoever it was, a national broadcast. That told me that there are different standards, even in our industry. But also it didn't change anything. We didn't suddenly start naming kids the next day. We stayed the course, and I think at the end of the day, we were very proud that we were able to do that.

Joachim: You said that during your first swing here at the *Tribune-Democrat*, there wasn't one big story, but when you came back, you had 9/11 on your watch, right?

Minemyer: On 9/11, I was still in State College. I was standing in the *Centre Daily Times* newsroom. I was the associate editor. I remember there was the developing early morning news of a plane hitting the tower in New York City. We had TVs on all over. There were probably 10 or 15 people in the building, not too many. I walk out of my office, probably holding a cup of coffee, saying, What's going on? CNN or another national broadcast was on. You're watching that second plane hit the second tower. Then you know you've got a big story. Then, how do you handle it? So I was literally at the *Centre Daily Times* then. We were pulling together the news and trying to figure things out. We put out a bulldog edition by like noon on the street, 5,000 copies, just giving them away, basically: "Here's what we know as of right now." Put together a pretty extensive report for the next day. Did a 16-page special section for that following Sunday edition. It just became an all-consuming thing. Found out, I think, late the first day that a young man from Bellefonte had been killed in the Pentagon, so that brought it local, even though it wasn't local at that moment. We were also trying to understand what was happening in Somerset County [where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed], what was happening in New York City and Washington. We were hearing about Penn State kids being in DC or in New York City, on internships or work study or something. We're there, with the university trying to hunt them all down, make sure they're safe. All that stuff was going on those first hours. So I was in State College the first period after 9/11.

Then I moved up here in 2004 and inherited that story. I said, all right, let's go back through everything you've done, because it was enormous here, right? We're 30 minutes away [from the Flight 93 crash site in Shanksville]. It's literally a local story here, and they did a great job with it. They had people on the ground. They had a photograph that was on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day from Shanksville. The photographer had to be one of the first people there. All the local media did a great job of that, because it doesn't get much bigger. For months and months that was the story. So, when I came here, we started looking at, Where's the narrative going? Because they were starting to acquire property for a permanent memorial. They were doing a memorial design contest, and all that kind of stuff was developing when I got here.

Joachim: If I remember correctly, that was a pretty contentious process.

Minemyer: Well, for a couple reasons. One, the design they had picked had some controversy because it had what was perceived as Muslim elements in it or Islamic elements that they thought, Why would you use that? The designer had to articulate what was behind it. Then also the acquisition of the land — [the plane] landed in private

property. It was an old strip mine, and the family still owned it. "We want to put a national memorial here." "Well, I own the ground." So that whole thing was playing out too. How do you negotiate terms and exchange territory? How big does it need to be? Is there going to have to be a legal process? That was where I walked in the door with Shanksville.

Then we started to curate our coverage. We eventually did a book and then updated that book, on Shanksville, on what happened, what the community's reaction was. There were only 40 passengers and crew, so you were able to do bios on all of them. It wasn't 200 people on a plane, and then unfortunately you become a name in a hometown, and that's all you are. Here you could do a lot more than that. You can get to know family members. You can interview people who were there. I've read so many books since then, just trying to make sure I understand. People did a great job of getting out into the community, talking to first responders, talking to state police, talking to FBI. They were all just trying to figure it out for several hours. Was it a big plane or not? Was it full of passengers? Why am I not seeing a plane when I get to the site? It was in the ground, literally. It embedded at 500 miles an hour straight into an old strip mine. Getting my head around that whole narrative, and then saying, All right, we've got a responsibility to own the story going forward, and to tell it like it's never been told.

There's a second version of the book right there — ["Heroes Were Made"](#) — was based on that. We did a version for 2011, updated for 2021 after the whole memorial was built out, added a bunch of content to it.

I started to realize early on that newspaper content is really good material for books, eventually, because we are the chronicle people of history as it happens. It's still valuable 5, 10, 50 years later. How do we encapsulate that whole event and bring it together? Well, newspaper archives are a great place to start. It's all there, usually, and done by people who care about facts and dates and names and all that kind of stuff. We did one on the 30th anniversary of the '77 flood. That was the first big book project here. Then we did [lighter material](#). We did hockey history, 50 years of professional hockey in Johnstown. Then we updated that because Johnstown eventually was named [Kraft Hockeyville USA](#) in a 2015 fan vote. So we said, "Oh, we have all this other stuff." Went into that, and we updated that book. We did a book on the churches, a lot of beautiful European churches around here. When the diocese was considering merging congregations: What's going to happen to that beautiful church there? So we started taking pictures and gathering the histories of those churches. We did a book on that.

I think that's one of the lessons I started to learn as an editor, that you need to embrace your community's history and its culture. Then, if you have the opportunity to pull it all

together and preserve it in one place, you should do that. These are a lot of the bigger projects that I've been blessed to be part of, where we've looked at something that's really meaningful, especially here in Johnstown, but elsewhere too. How do we pull together everything we've done, bring the story forward and then put it out there in one big narrative?

Joachim: I think we skipped a step, which is what brought you back to Johnstown.

Minemyer: Well, I came back as editor in 2004.

Joachim: So you were recruited back from *CDT* to here as the top editor.

Minemyer: As the editor in chief, right. Each move I've made has been very positive, and thinking through this journey for this particular moment, for talking to you, I could see how I benefited at each of those steps, how things changed, how I became different. Not just because my responsibility level elevated, but there were also other things happening around me that I was able to grow. So I came back in '04, and then we got into the book stuff right after that. We did a whole series of them before I went back to State College, '12, '13, '14, during the craziest time you could be there, Sandusky trial and all the things that happened after that. Then I got called back here to be a regional editor here.

Joachim: You've said that as a late-era baby boomer, you were influenced heavily by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and Watergate, as many boomers were. Can you explain how exactly those events shaped your worldview, and perhaps even more important than that, how they shaped the way you looked at and thought about *local* news?

Minemyer: Look, my dad was a World War II vet, brought shrapnel back from the Battle of the Bulge. So I was very aware of service, military service, how important that was, especially in that war but also in the ensuing wars. I had uncles that were in Korea and knew people who were in Vietnam, and things like that. That was part of my exposure when I was younger, to that side of putting your life out there for your country, those kinds of things. But simultaneous with that, if you're growing up in the late '60s and early '70s, a lot of things are happening that can influence how you see the world. It was late civil rights era, but things were happening. A lot of those assassinations were when I was a youngster, MLK, people like that. Watergate was pretty significant journalistically, of course, but also culturally. And then Vietnam was happening, as a backdrop to a lot of that too. Give my parents credit — they did not shield me from any of those types of moments or any of those types of issues and ideals. I was allowed to explore it. We got daily newspapers that landed on our doorstep every day, so I was perceptive of that kind

of thing, and I was open to trying to understand and justify multiple truths all at the same time. How this thing could be happening. And I think that's what, No. 1, opened up my mind to being curious and to exploring different experiences, and how that establishes your role in this field.

Joachim: And maybe also questioning authority?

Minemyer: Questioning authority, questioning myself from time to time, questioning decisions that we make. You can question authority, and that's absolutely something I've done relentlessly throughout my career. I also have to look at a mirror every day, and that's the other half of it. Am I who I ought to be? But also, are these people representing us the way they should? Do they have our best interest in mind? Plenty of fodder for writing editorials and columns, right down through the whole sequence of me growing up, including this week. That's something I've embraced, and I think part of it was growing up in that open era where you're exposed to so much and you had to try to understand it, even if you were maybe a little young. I told you about taking some of those theory courses and trying to grow up that way too, being exposed to thoughts and research and ideals that maybe, growing up where I grew up, you didn't necessarily experience a lot of that. Diversity existed; it was not right beside me all the time. That's another thing I love about Johnstown — very diverse community. You're talking to me right in the middle of Juneteenth week. It's a weeklong festival in Johnstown. So that's another thing I love about this city. Taking on that role of being a voice, I think that matters. There's a lot of people I've known who have gone up through the ranks as really good editors who never took that step to say, I want to write about what matters and offer a perspective on it, and offer potential solutions. Talk about solutions journalism. A lot of people try to do it but don't ever get there. But I think it's an important piece.

Joachim: Now that you mentioned that, about your voice. At some point you started writing opinion columns. Tell me a little bit about that transition to opinion writing, and also maybe, how do you square your two public personas, as an opinion writer and the publisher?

Minemyer: I've only been a publisher for like two and a half years. I've been an editor for a long time. I think here's the big balancing act: No matter what you're doing on the opinion side, facts first. You have to be right. You can't say, "My opinion is this" and have no basis for that. You have to build it on verifiable information and things that you can see and fully understand. Then you have to have some authoritative approach to it. You have to sound like you know what you're talking about. I studied a lot of people who've done that, grew up around some people who were doing that at a pretty high level, probably better than I've ever done it. That was some of the lessons they imparted and

that I could just glean from being around them, even a sports columnist. It's not just, go off half-cocked and take on something. You really have to have something to say, whether that's, "This quarterback's a bum, and they should cut him." You still have to be able to support that, right? So that's kind of where it started, with sports, but it really evolved into politics and culture, and honest reflection of history. I've done a lot of that.

America 250, I think, is a fantastic opportunity that we're in some ways blowing right and left, screwing it up. Because we should be saying, All right, let's go back and talk about what was going on in 1776. Who were the players? Who were they, really? They're writing, "Freedom for all," but that really wasn't their own lifestyle. Let's be honest about that. Let's talk about the Civil War. Let's talk about the leadup to that. I just [wrote about that](#). What was really going on culturally, and how did that play out? I think in some places I've seen that done pretty well but not enormously well.

Joachim: Well, I think it's partly because not everybody agrees on one history.

Minemyer: Right. Yeah, I just had this argument with some friends of mine in the business. There are things that, in my mind and in my heart, I guess, there's no either-or. Bigotry is bad in my brain. I'll never write the opposite of that. I'll never say, "Well, there were good people on both sides." I will never be able to say that. Certainly there are nuances, and there are some subjective ways you can view things. Everything is interpreted, and the crazy thing about history is, you study it all the way back, whoever's in charge writes history, right? But you still have to go back behind them and look at it honestly and say, what was really going on at that moment, and I think that's something we need to do a better job of.

Joachim: Do you want to talk at all about your volunteer nonprofit work for the PNA Foundation and the Pennsylvania News Leaders Association? What makes you do that work, and why is that work important?

Minemyer: I think it comes with becoming a publisher, but also when I was an editor I was on the statewide editor's board [the Pennsylvania News Leaders Association, formerly the Pennsylvania Society of News Editors]. I was eventually president of that. I think it's just giving back to the industry that gave me so much. That's really part of it. I benefited from this. I don't have a palace, and I don't play golf seven days a week or anything like that, but I have benefited enormously. My life is very rich, so how can I help other people experience that? Or how can I make sure that kids in the classrooms right now have that opportunity 10 and 20 years from now? So that's part of it. Also, selfishly, to pull back and help our industry right now, which is in a challenging moment. How do we become stronger? One of the ways we become stronger is to bring good

people into our ranks and to learn from people outside our doors about how they're doing things and how that might be able to be reflected in our business models or in our approaches. So it's all of those things. There's a selfishness to it, but also, ultimately, it's, can I help, can I give back, whether it's through awards programs that recognize current journalists or through training and opportunities, internships that may help future journalists. Feel as if you're making a difference. I think that's ultimately what it is.

Joachim: What do you remember about covering your communities during the COVID outbreak?

Minemyer: Yeah, I almost forgot that when I started thinking about this conversation. What a crazy time that was.

Joachim: It's now become a historical moment.

Minemyer: Yes, six years ago. I was fortunate. I was in Johnstown, and it started to happen. We were looking for, How do we cover this? How do we help our readers understand what this is, not just the high-level conversation among political figures, but how do we get down into the communities, into the streets, and say, Look, here's what you need to do to be safe. Here's how you can understand that whole process. So I got lucky. I connected with somebody I already knew at Pitt Johnstown who was a health sciences professor who had done a lot of research prior to that on ticks and Lyme disease and things like that. That was her background, but then she evolved and started looking at mRNA and different vaccines. She had become an expert on the vaccine and the medication side and was really good at public relations. And I brought in somebody from one of the local hospitals who was very willing to give some of his time. Neither of these people had time to give, but they did it. Then we talked to folks in the legal community, in the business community, just started doing a whole series of Q&As. People could send us questions. We opened that up, and we would try to answer them. Or we were coming up with questions we thought people needed to know. It was a relentless thing in the summer of 2020, where day after day after day, we would have either a piece of it or it was online. That was a huge digital thing, where we were putting out there, "COVID 19, your questions." These professionals would answer them. Like, "What is my risk if I go to the mall today?" Something that basic. Then talk to me about the science behind this vaccine. It could be those two far-apart ideas, but people were asking about those things.

I was fortunate that I was able to get a coalition of folks who could answer the questions, who were willing to, who weren't saying, "You know what, I'm not putting my neck out there to answer that question." They were willing to do it. They saw the value in

community education. Then from that, or alongside that, we developed this group called In This Together Cambria, which is the county Johnstown is in. The Pitt Johnstown scientists, the folks in the community and others formed this coalition of, How do we reach out into the community and help them understand this? We did a bunch of actual live online forums where I would be the host and we would have people in the science community, people in education, people in business. How are you handling this situation? How are you doing? How are you getting your work done with nobody in your building, or how do you connect with your employees, or how is your school dealing with this? We did a whole series of those, and I'd never seen an online audience like we had for those questions and answers. People from Asia and Eastern Europe and Africa, because it's electronic. You can just email a question. It was ridiculous where we were getting questions from, but to those people's credit, they did a fantastic job.

Then they also parlayed that into this whole community push that also involved county government, cities, regional governments and just a lot of different people trying to help the community, first of all, increase its vaccination rates. We were looking at that statistically. Where are we? We started out, we were pretty low in Pennsylvania, and we got it up to a pretty decent level. Then also, what are our hospitals saying? Are they still overrun? Are they able to cope? Are we getting people treated in a way that they really ought to be? Are they just showing up en masse at the emergency room? Geez, now that I think about it, it seems like a million years ago. But I think that was a different kind of journalism.

Joachim: It strikes me that this period was highly improvisational.

Minemyer: Yes. We didn't know what we were dealing with. I was, I guess, fortunate being in a town where there were people who did have a pretty good understanding of the science of COVID, the treatment of COVID, the prevention of COVID, and could articulate that through us. I think we became that conduit to get these really bright people's responses to people's concerns and questions, and connect those.

Joachim: And to draw on the community's expertise.

Minemyer: Exactly, and you have those people. I was lucky enough that I knew some already, and we connected with others, and I was part of a larger organization that set about the task of making sure this region was as safe as possible, given all of what was going on, whatever that turned out to be. Part of that was drive-up vaccination events. A lot of communities were doing that kind of stuff. Then clinics after that, and then informational pamphlets, and just trying to keep folks aware of their own risk and what

they could do and what they probably ought to do and those kinds of things. We were all figuring it out.

Joachim: What a huge public service.

Minemyer: Yeah. It came and went in a couple years, like one of those crazy stretches, but you know when I look back it's right there with some of the biggest things I've had to deal with as an editor. The opportunities that came with it — from obviously 9/11 and the Sandusky situation and COVID, all of which had a significant level of stress and heartache attached to them, but also a great opportunity to do community journalism and to help people understand what was going on, or at least respond and try to get their heads around it. Then also in terms of COVID, there are literal steps you can take. We tried to make sure we were telling readers, to the best of our knowledge, what those were. I don't know if I had any litigious society kind of risk, but it never came to that.

Joachim: What's it like overseeing three newsrooms now? How hard is it to keep track of three big communities and their different wants and needs?

Minemyer: It's nuts. I love it, and it's also quite stressful, because I live in State College, and I get up every morning and drive any of three directions, about 90 minutes. It's either Sunbury to the east along the Susquehanna River, or it's Johnstown, where we're sitting right here to the west toward Pittsburgh, or it's south to Cumberland across the Maryland line. You're right, they've got similarities, but there are peculiarities that separate them too. And I'm over the entire operations — I'm over the advertising, over the production side, distribution. I have to worry about all those things in three different markets. Fortunately, and this is what people ought to say, I have great people under me, or I'd be in deep, deep trouble. This editor that you just met here [Renée Carthew, news editor of the *Tribune-Democrat*], very good. In all three places, I've got really good editors, I've got good advertising people, and good distribution leaders and production people. Part of my job is to put out fires, whatever little thing pops up in any of those three markets, and to get to know the communities.

You know, the more you get spread out, the harder it is to get immersed in any one of them. I'm fully immersed in Johnstown, somewhat immersed in Cumberland, still trying to get my feet under me in Sunbury. That's just truth. That's just me being honest. I was at a Chamber of Commerce board meeting in Sunbury yesterday. That's one of my entry points. But you just do the best you can. Our industry is thin, thinned out. What'd she say she had, 18 people in the [*Tribune-Democrat*] newsroom, or something like that? When I first came here in the early '90s, it was more like 40, probably 45. We were putting up signs all around the building that our goal was to get back to 50,000 [print circulation]

on Sunday and 45,000 on daily, and we never sniffed those numbers again. They were maybe 5,000 or 8,000 below that when I got here, and now we're just over 10,000 daily in Johnstown. Still pretty good by industry standards.

Joachim: 50,000 was big.

Minemyer: 50,000 was big. Every paper went through that same sequence, where you're like, We were the big game in town. Then it became a lot more fragmented, and then you throw digital in the mix, and it's just all over the place. The real key now is, No. 1, you mentioned paywall: What's the smart decision versus what do we wish we could do? Then what's the realistic approach we should take to this? What can we really do here, to continue to serve the community to the best of our ability? And it's changing, it's evolving. We used to do a book a year; now we do one every three or four years, because we don't have the staff. We just finished one, as a matter of fact, but it's harder.

Joachim: Has book publishing become a significant revenue source?

Minemyer: Special sections have, like this is one [["See PA: 50 Places to Celebrate America 250"](#)] that's actually coming out in four [CNHI] papers in Pennsylvania this Saturday. I was involved in this project, and you see at the bottom in front, all four newspapers are going to have this. That was just, What's the approach we can take to America 250 that's a little lighter but that we can also sell it across a wider region? That book is "50 places to see across Pennsylvania to experience American history," basically. We could have picked 150 very easily, but we picked 50 that we thought we ought to do out of the gate. Then we had four different advertising teams, a couple of different newsrooms, a lead editor, lead designer. We had the resources of four different properties at work here, so that helped. First it was like herding cats, but then once we got on a path, it was smooth sailing the rest of the way. Everybody said, Yup, this is going to work.

We do a lot of regionalization. We work really well across the Pennsylvania group, and then across into neighboring states, just issue-oriented deep-dive stories, enterprise. When I came back here after being in State College the second time, that was kind of the big push. How do we utilize our resources in a wider sense? I became a regional editor. Not only was I coaching and helping develop newsrooms in multiple states — it was at that time Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, West Virginia, North Carolina. We have papers in all those places. We had just moved into North Carolina. So we have newsroom standards, hiring practices. That was the main thrust. But then beyond that, how do we cooperate better? How do we say, "That story that's happening in Sunbury, Pa., might just be interesting in Bluefield, West Virginia"? The same issues are happening there. Or maybe we have two reporters from those two towns work together on a single issue.

Maybe it's a coal legacy issue; both of those areas have that. Or maybe it's something else. We got better and better at that. I think that's something that the company has done a good job of growing, and a lot of different people have been involved in that. Even projects like this, where you can even sell it across different markets, it's interesting, because then all of a sudden you've got more mass than any of you individually have. So my sales rep in Sunbury, several of them, can sell to their tourism attractions that they're going to be in Johnstown and New Castle and Sharon and other places where we stack these. They might be drawn to your place, and vice versa. We kind of stumbled into that one, but it worked out really nicely.

Joachim: What do you think the future of local news will look like in Pennsylvania? Are you optimistic, pessimistic or neither?

Minemyer: That's the million-dollar question, right? I think I'm generally optimistic. I think there are still really good people in the news business who care, who understand the role. Some of the things we've talked about, it's not just unique to me, it's everybody. We have responsibilities to report and cover our communities first and foremost, and beyond that, to represent our communities, to speak up on their behalf. I think there are still — I know in my company, certainly, and in others — there's still really good people doing that today. There's not as many of them. We have more news deserts here and there in Pennsylvania and elsewhere than I am comfortable with. People that I used to fight with as competitors, now I'm just hoping they survive. That whole dynamic has shifted, and we're much more collaborative, even with people that 20 years ago we said, We don't want anything to do with that group, because they're trying to take my readership away. Now we're just trying to help each other keep doing this. So that's part of it.

I think we're also committed, at least I can speak for CNHI, my company, to maintaining newsrooms that are doing that kind of work to the best of our ability. The economic realities are there. The advertising is not what it once was. Certainly, some of the national advertising and the big stores we used to lean on, we don't have many of them anymore. We do a lot more digital, we do more special projects like the one I just handed you. We do a lot more obviously online, but also moments, like saying, How do we capture this moment and put some revenue to it?

We do a lot more events than we ever used to do. We have a bridal show, which is sponsored by dress shops and cake makers and flower shops. We allow them to get the exposure and the access to our readers, and then we benefit on the backside of it. We do a lot more of that kind of thing than we ever used to do. And then it's just, try to continue to make a difference.

I think I'm still optimistic, but I'm much more realistic than either pessimistic or optimistic. I mean, I know what our map looks like, and I have no interest in being the guy that turns the lights off on the last day. I do not want to be that guy, and I'm doing everything I can to try to not have that happen on my watch. Part of that is, fight for every job we have, and part of that is to fight for every dollar that we can get our hands on, and to help the communities understand what we're dealing with. Do they want us around or not? That's part of the question, right? And to try to explain to them, here's why we have a paywall, because we gave it away for a long time, and we paid a price for that. And here's why we've raised our subscription rates, because we either have somebody driving them out to you, and gas is whatever it is a gallon now, or we send them out through the U.S. Postal Service, and that's three times as expensive as it used to be. We try to help people understand that.

We're way more transparent, I think, than we ever wanted to be early in the days, because otherwise people just think, You're jacking my rates up, I've had enough. So, let me explain that to you. This is not a money grab; this is us trying to keep what we've got. We made some really hard decisions over the years, really hard. Sat down across from a lot of people whose jobs were going away. That sucks. I mean, honestly, it never is easy, because you know it's just one more moment of erosion. Sometimes those people came back, and sometimes they weren't ever given a chance to come back. But we still push forward, and I think that's what really matters, that we still have that resolve to do big things, to do meaningful content like this story I just referenced from over the weekend, like a book we just sent to the printer last week. Still push yourself to do those kinds of things that you know communities care about.

Joachim: Is there anything we didn't talk about that you'd like to mention? Anything important that we missed?

Minemyer: I don't think so. I think we covered a lot of ground.

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