

WYFF4 Family:

I worked for a General Manager once who, while we were enjoying the last drink of many would always start another story and say, "One more, it's the Final Final." And we'd have one more. I know this is long and I don't blame anyone who looks at this wall of text and just hits delete. Or, you can read just one more.

In January 1978, I was living in Aberdeen, SD, half-assedly attending Northern State College. One night while driving home from Not-The-Library, my car slid on an icy road. I couldn't get it unstuck alone so I went to the closest apartment building and listened at doors until I heard noise, knocked, and asked to use the phone. There was a party going on and the guy who had answered the door looked vaguely familiar. While calling for the tow, I realized he was Gene Reich, the sports anchor at the local TV station KABY. Pretty cute too. When the tow truck arrived, I hated to tear myself away. Gene was already taken but another guest asked for my number. Turns out he was also a KABY employee and told me about an opening. I was hired two weeks later.

What I know about journalism was learned from patient news directors in markets big and small. Thankfully, many (but not all) of my mistakes were made in small places or caught by mentors. I was a photographer during the manual white balance TK-76 days, a reporter when I was much thinner and cuter, on assignment desks in Reno, Miami and Boston, an EP of special projects in Chicago and news director in Tulsa, Memphis, Syracuse, Baltimore, and Kansas City.

For more than 40 years, I've had a front row seat to some of the nation's biggest news events (and tragedies).

My early career was at KTVN in Reno. In 1980, men dressed as delivery guys planted a bomb at Harvey's Resort on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe. The mastermind had lost \$750,000 at the casino and intended to extort money from the owners. Ballistics experts could not figure out how to disarm the bomb. It exploded, blowing out part of the building but miraculously, nobody was hurt. A few months later, Priscilla Ford drove her Lincoln down Virginia Street on Thanksgiving Day, trying to kill as many pedestrians as she could. Six died. Dozens more were hurt. I covered avalanches, mud slides and forest fires from both sides of the camera. I moved from studio crew to news photographer to reporter to assignment editor in the 80s. That's when I worked with Janice Limon!

I was on the desk in Miami for the Noriega trial and Hurricane Andrew in the early 90s. My first news director's job was in Tulsa. In 1995, an American driven by hate blew up the Murrah Building 90 miles away in Oklahoma City. We sent 35 members of the 55-person news/production departments to cover it. I found myself navigating on-the-spot leadership amidst a crisis that deeply affected many of the young journalists working with me. I made terrible mistakes in the early days of that

catastrophe, but I learned. What I didn't learn was how to protect my relationship with the General Manager and he lost confidence. Two years in, I took a bullet. I got lucky though and landed in Boston, working on a TV show called REALlife and then in special projects at WHDH.

I was the news director in Memphis for 9/11 -- our crews convoyed with FEDEX trucks carrying relief supplies to first responders in NYC. In 2009, my Baltimore news team covered the train trip of the country's first Black president and his family from Philadelphia to DC for his inauguration. We were the only station to do so, and the ratings were like the Super Bowl.

I remember 2011 in Kansas City for apocalyptic weather coverage -- a killer blizzard buried the city in almost a foot of snow followed by flooding from the Missouri River and three months later, south of KC, the Joplin tornado killed 158 people. Weather coverage followed me back to South Florida. Only then it was hurricanes -- one after another after another. I will never forget the jubilation on Calle Ocho when Fidel Castro (finally) died or the terrified panic of parents calling WPLG to see if we knew about their children after the Parkland school massacre. Some things stick with you. School shootings will always be a dreadful trigger for me.

In the fall of 2019. I told my bosses in Miami that I planned to downshift and move to Greenville. Then came COVID. In June 2021 we made the move after I found the assignment desk job on the Hearst careers website. I meant to stay exactly two years. It's been so much fun; I've moved my departure date a couple of times. We've been together for the emergence from the fog of COVID, severe weather like tornados and that crazy snowstorm, sadly, another school shooting and the combination of joy and agony when South Carolina beat Clemson in football. In Death Valley.

As I said earlier, I am addicted to you...or people like you. You're smart and funny, data and deadline driven, curious and persistent. It will be hard to quit you but it's time to stop and smell the baby diapers and I will always be proud to have WYFF4 on my vitae. I will send you the NYTimes quiz on Fridays for as long as I have a subscription. Let me know when you ace it. (I rarely do)

My home email pPhillip57@gmail.com. DO NOT under any circumstances, share that information with John Champion from Whitmire. 😊 Keep fighting for the defenseless and voiceless. Produce excellent stories and newscasts. Be proficient, persistent, and professional. And kind. The world needs journalists now more than ever.

Have I told you lately how much I've enjoyed working with you? Love You Mean It. Change if you must but know that I think you are perfect, just as you are.

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