ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH JIM MCCLURE

Interviewed by Ford Risley

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Department of Journalism
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Risley: Okay, it's July 30, 2020. I'm here in York, Pennsylvania, interviewing Jim McClure for our oral history program. Thanks so much, Jim. We'll just start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

McClure: I was born in Niagara Falls, New York, and spent some time there as a youngster. But I really grew up in Brandenburg, Kentucky, which is on the Ohio River and down river from Louisville. And I think about growing up in the Mid-South like that. My father and mother were born in Pennsylvania. They were Northerners, and here I was in the South. And that was an interesting thing to be an outsider growing up in the mid-South. And my father's employment took him there. And also something that I've been proud there's been various family generations with a wife from a blue collar background and a white collar husband or vice versa. So my family, in my case, my mother happened to be from a blue-collar background; her father was a linoleum layer in Johnstown. And my father was a college professor in Johnstown, a chemistry professor in Johnstown. So my family had this blue-collar, white-collar quality which I think is really good. I've always loved that you can have that diversity in your background. And so I think both of those helped me as a journalist, you know, to feel compassion and be able to navigate in different worlds.

Risley: Great. Where did you get your education?

McClure: I went to school, graduated from high school in Kentucky.

Risley: And where in Kentucky did you live?

McClure: Brandenburg. It's a town that some people might remember because it was partially wiped out by a tornado in the mid-70s. My father worked for a chemical company. Then I went to college at where my grandfather had taught and where my father and had gone, Pitt-Johnstown. I was a journalism major there. And then I in mid-career I got a master's in American Studies at Penn State Harrisburg, where I'm proud to say I was mentored by Simon Bronner.

Risley: Oh, really?

McClure: Yeah, he was a very influential person on my life. About five of us who do a lot of history work in York county are all graduates of the American Studies program of Penn State.

Risley: Great. I'd like to talk more about that. So, what was your first job in journalism, and what did you do?

McClure: Well like a lot of us, I've worked on a weekly newspaper for a while in high school and tested that out. I like to write, I liked sports. So, like a lot of people got in through sports. I was a chemistry major with the idea that my grandfather was a chemist, my father was a chemist, maybe I'll do that, or pre-med. Then I ran into organic chemistry my sophomore year. But more of the point, I was finding I was spending more time in the newsroom than I was in the chemistry lab. I really enjoyed that more, and my story is probably similar to a lot of people in that way. You grow to love a newsroom, and it's kind of your second home. I would say just that, this COVID moment is, I think difficult for journalists who love newsrooms. You have to do everything remote. So, you know, I think that that is something that they're grappling with as much as many other things during this COVID moment. So I then changed my major to journalism and graduated with a journalism degree. I got out in the mid-70s during the energy crisis. There were no journalism jobs, so I spent a year at an ad agency, which was difficult at the time because that wasn't my personality. But I learned a lot and learned a lot about just making contact with people and the audio-visual aspect of advertising. Then after about a year of that then I was able to get on at the *Somerset Daily American*. I was there for five months, and I kind of broke a rule that I regretted. Because in the hiring process later in my career, I urged people to stick with a job for a couple years. if not longer. I use the Malcolm Gladwell's idea that you really need 10,000 hours before you can master something. But I spent five months in my first job. The paper was limiting and I was making a minimum wage. So I got a minimum wage job, plus some, by going to the *Lewistown Sentinel*. There I spent nine years, the first couple years as reporter, and then one year as the news editor, and the rest—six years—as editor. Your first newsroom is always something you look back on and you always have that kinship with those that were there. And two people were there that you would know. Cate Barron was working for the radio station and beating us on stories. I hired her away for our staff. She was with us for a number of year and then she went to the *Patriot-News* where she's been ever since. The other person in that newsroom was Kim Strong, who I know, you know is Kim Strong. She's now with the York *Daily Record*, but she went on to become an advisor at the *Daily Collegian* at Penn State for a number of years.

Risley: I didn't know you worked with Kim.

McClure: Yeah, I've worked with Kim up until when I retired. She's at the *Daily Record*, I was at the *Daily Record* when I retired. There were other quality people in that newsroom. Bill Mahon for a long time was the news editor there.

Risley: What did you learn about journalism during your stint in Lewistown?

McClure: One of the things that when you're at a small daily, you know, where do you get your inspiration? Where do you learn? And you learn from each other, of course, but you also learn by going to conferences. You have to be curious and learn on your own. A lot of it is still self-taught. The publishers I worked for were quality people and one of them was Jim Dible, who later went on to Pottsville and Erie as publisher there, was my publisher in Lewistown. He had a journalism background. He was very good at giving you new challenges, so I was able to always remain fresh and learning. They must have thought that I had learned enough because I had an opportunity to move with the company—a little six newspaper company, Buckner News Alliance —when I was about 30, to California for three years. I worked at two Buckner papers in California as publisher. I was out there for three years, and I got that publisher background. The time I was there was difficult. The late 80s, was when the pre-prints started to move to direct mail. And that was really the beginning of this revenue slide for newspapers. When I was there in late 80s, you know, you had these historic margins, sometimes 50%. And pre-prints were a big part of that, but direct mail was coming and that undercut our distribution. We lost all these major pre-print accounts, so it was hard to hold that margin. And, you know, of course, newspaper owners wanted to keep that margin. And, we didn't have other ways to supplement, our main business. We had job printing, but it was difficult at that time to find new business to replace that business that was sliding. I was finding that I just didn't enjoy looking at rate cards and things like that. I realized that the promise of being a publisher at the age of 30, or whatever, outstripped the reality of it. And I often will tell people later in life, when they were thinking about changing a job, or going to a different job, I would look at them and say, "Okay, you get the job, you can go to going- away parties, you get the welcome party, you're sitting on your desk, are you going enjoy what you're doing? Think about that. Try to visualize. Do you like the subject matter you're covering? Do you like the beat? Or, are you just going to be there just climbing the walls wondering why you ever did this? So think about that before you make the move." And I think we were able to—in York—with that type of introspection, we were able to retain people longer, which was a main part of our success.

Risley: What were the two newspapers in California?

McClure: One was the *Fontana Herald News*; the other one was *Oroville Mercury Register*. One was in Southern California, and one was in northern California.

Risley: So you got to experience the entire state.

McClure: Yeah. I mean, these were small newspapers being swallowed up by the *Orange County Register*, and so forth. It was difficult. So after three years of that the managing editor position came open in York, which is a part of the same group. What I didn't know at the time and this is something that I've thought about a lot is that I was seen as problem-solver—someone that could run order through chaos, as Henry Adams said, someone who could take a situation that was just impossible and make it possible.

Risley: What was the newspaper like when you joined?

McClure: I didn't know at the time that Dean Singleton had purchased the *York Dispatch*. He had two newspapers in York—the *York Daily Record*, owned by Buckner, this little company. Dean Singleton, who owned a major company, Media News Group, bought the *Dispatch*. And, he bought the Sunday paper. So you know, the *Daily Record* was really mopping up, doing well in the 1980s going against this six-day *Dispatch*. The *Daily Record* was seven days. So about, in the late-80s, which is a little bit before I got here, Dean Singleton bought the *York Sunday News*. So in one small town, we had two seven-day newspapers, head-to-head for the first time. And to level the playing field, the *Dispatch* brought in Peter Bhatia and other really quality people. They transformed the *Dispatch* and put pressure on the *Daily Record*. They also hired many of the *Daily Record's* best people. About the week after I got here, both groups pursued a JOA (Joint Operating Agreement). With a JOA, one of the newspapers had to declare themselves as failing and the *Daily Record* was the failing newspaper. You can imagine the pressure that put on the staff. Who was left? How do you hire? How do you retain? They were talking about setting up an office in Camp Hill to liquidate the *Daily Record* because that process took a whole year. There's a whole approval process. It doesn't happen overnight. Congress has to approve the JOA. And so after a year, they finally did, and now we had a JOA. And to get the JOA, the *Daily Record* had to give up its Sunday paper, but retain the morning. The *Dispatch* was six days and evenings. Dennis Hetzel came in as editor because the previous editor had left. He was editor for about fourteen years, and I was managing

editor. That was during the 1990s. We were in that status as the minority partner in the JOA for the next fifteen years.

Risley: Was a lot of your work, essentially, rebuilding the paper and rebuilding the staff?

McClure: Rebuilding and rebuilding and rebuilding. We were able to add staff, because there were more resources, at least initially. As a minority partner, we were always second fiddle as it were. Most the resources went to *Dispatch,* and they had the Sunday paper, so we learned. But in some ways, it was a blessing, because here we were, this little company and we could just do stuff. There was a spirit of innovation. We felt they were slow at getting the news. They had more resources, and we built this underdog image. We had a meeting with a businessman in town here because we had heard about the Internet. This is about 1993 or 1994. So, we met this businessman and that businessmen said, "This is really going to change the world." At that point, it was hypertext markup language. And it was obvious you could put text, and you could put content, and you could put ads on there. So we were looking at the future. That businessman, by the way was Tom Wolf, now the governor of Pennsylvania.

Risley: How about that?

McClure: Two years later we started development work on a website—York Digital Record. Then the blizzard of 1996 hit and we couldn't deliver the paper. But we had this on the shelf, so we made it live in 1996. And in the middle of a blizzard we went to radio and said, "If you want to see the news, just type this into your computer."

Risley: How about that.

McClure: So we couldn't deliver paper but we launched on the web in the middle of the blizzard. That shows how nimble we were and how entrepreneurial we were. As you know, if you get into the digital space, if you get in early, it's everything. Even to this day, the *Daily Record*, at least when I left the *Daily Record,* compared to the *Dispatch* in digital metrics just were enormously large compared to the *Dispatch*. The *Dispatch* didn't really get going on digital until 2005, so we had that eight-year, nine-year head start on them and much of the rest of the industry.

Risley: Can you talk about some stories that you all did in those early years that you're especially proud of?

McClure: We did a lot of enterprise stories. We did local enterprise stories like absentee landlords. We prided ourselves in investigative reporting and good writing. Part of our team building in those days, and we can talk about this later more, but was to send twenty people to the Wilmington Writers Workshop, which was a Poynter thing. We would go there and we'd stay overnight. Put people up, and have a dinner together, and lunch together, and have a common experience. Probably the biggest story that came out of that era was about a guy in Arizona from York, who was on death row. His stepfather and mother brought in a scrapbook of what happened in Arizona, to their son. He was accused of a crime that they claimed he didn't commit. There wasn't any DNA at that point in time. And we eventually sent people to Arizona from York to go after that story. He was the hundredth person exonerated or taken off death row at that time. It was a big moment for justice, because it was the hundredth case. We won the Casey Medal for that work. This couple from Dover, whose son was in Arizona, was in trouble. No one else would listen to him but we did.

Risley: Was it difficult not publishing a Sunday paper?

McClure: It was. In retrospect, we should have staffed Saturday more strongly and relied on our web presence more. But this was in late-90s and people weren't yet on the web to the degree they are now. For many years, we were head-to-head against the *Dispatch*. Every little thing that happened in city hall, we advanced it, they advanced. We were fighting over incremental stories, and stories that didn't really mean as much in retrospect. They were stories that wouldn't be read today because we have the metrics to know that. So, we spent too much time fighting the *Dispatch* head-to-head. As another editor, John Kirkpatrick, told me one time from the *Patriot-News*, "One of the things you all really should look at is whether you're fighting too much on the courthouse or the city hall steps." I thought about it at the time, and he was right. What we should have done is said, "Okay, we're going to concede certain stories." I think we could have been smarter about stories that we didn't go after and invest that time on the web. Even though we were ahead of the game, maybe ahead of a lot of the industry, we didn't use that time smartly. And with hindsight, I regret that. Now, of course, the metrics inform, they don't determine, but they inform what we do in a smarter way.

Risley: That's the way a lot of competing places worked.

McClure: Yeah, but I don't know if that, in the long-term, is a smart strategy. You asked about big stories. This happened in the early 2000s and this was the defining story for us versus in the *Dispatch*. In 1969, fifty years ago, a white cop, and a black woman visitor were killed in race riots. We were one among 500 racial unrests in those days. We know now that was one, of the maybe, the twenty-sixth most violent. A York college professor has determined that on a per capita basis, it might have been the most violent of all 500 race riots, and certainly in the top twenty-five. For years, the idea was, as Charlie Robertson, the mayor said years later, he said, "One white, one black. We are even." So there was a kind of a detente in the community. Neither the assailants were arrested. And every five years the newspapers did a retrospective story, every five years. In 1994, we did it and the *Dispatch* did it. In 1999, we did it, *Dispatch* did it. The thing that was different in 1999, was that there was this young, aggressive prosecutor who read those stories and said, "There's no justice here. I'm going after justice." And t was hand-to-hand combat relative to the coverage of the case. Both of us went after it. It was, it was a story that we covered aggressively, and I think well. We won many awards for that coverage. At one point, the city fathers said, "You know, enough." These two newspapers are doing so much, you know, we're looking so bad nationally, we're going to write each of the editors, and we're going to write Governor Tom Ridge and say, "This is pure self-aggrandizement, they need to back off." t was signed by ninety-four leaders in the community, saying, "Back off." And, of course, we didn't. We continued on with that story. And it's interesting today, in our community, there are some people – this is before Black Lives Matter. This was last year, the 50th anniversary. Much of the community said, "Don't pick at the scab anymore." And the Black community was saying, "Yeah, there's a lot more of these stories to tell." So we told those stories again last year. We didn't tell the same stories. We tried to be smart and tell new stories and not rehash. We were intentionally trying not to rehash, but we had three meetings, no four meetings, where we brought the community together, the *Daily Record,* and the historical society here. We brought people together. We had forums and talked about the issues then that led up to it. So anyway, what that shows—and now we have Black Lives Matter—and rightfully so, that are saying, "These issues are not resolved." And I like to think that we knew that then in the early 2000s. We knew it at the 50th anniversary, and we know it now, that they aren't resolved. I think that we were insightful enough to know that and reported accordingly. We didn't back off.

Risley: Talk about 2004 and what happened then.

McClure: Phil Buckner was nearing retirement or past retirement. And he wanted to divest of the *Daily Record* at the time. And Dean Singleton was just this big force. He wanted Phil to get out. So they started in the talks to try to do another merger. The merger would call for the Sunday paper to go to the *Daily Record*, which was already morning, and the *Dispatch* to go to five days. But Singleton would get control of the JOA. And as it turns out, they swapped ownership. Dave Martin, who was Phil Buckner's lieutenant, for all those years, now owns the *Dispatch*. And at that point, I became editor. There was going to have to be a merger of the staffs. This *Dispatch* had a large staff because of the Sunday paper. I knew nine months in advance that this was going to happen, so we had some time to plan the transition. We knew we're going to have two days to put out a Sunday paper, which we hadn't done in fifteen years at the *Daily Record*. We also would bring nineteen people over. So on a Thursday, nineteen people who would have been competing against fiercely, came into the *Daily Record* newsroom. And then we had two days to put out that paper. We actually put out a kind of a pseudo paper to show that we could do it, two weeks in advance. So we practiced and we went through all the drills. But we weren't ready. I mean, we did as best we could, but to bring nineteen people was difficult. We had, I don't know, maybe we had fifty at the *Daily Record*, and we brought nineteen over from the *Dispatch*. We had something like eighty people. We had to bring over and assimilate the *Dispatch* folks, make them *Daily Record* folks, or make them into a new thing, which is a *Daily Record/Sunday News*. And meanwhile, through attrition, fortunately, through attrition, we were able to bring the staff size down. Fortunately, the owners didn't pressure us to lay anyone off. We were able to do through attrition. So we had this very difficult situation of people that had competed, you know, duplicate beats, all that stuff we had to sort through, and create this new thing that wasn't the *Daily Record*, wasn't the *Dispatch*, was something new. So that was a major process.

Risley: Was this like a Sunday staff?

McClure: Yeah, that's the way it was pitched. But the new entity that we created wasn't going to have a separate staff. So I think there was some misunderstanding. They'd been on the Sunday staff, and they came over thinking they are still going to be on a Sunday staff. And that's in the way a modern newsroom operates. You've got to do everything and you got to integrate. And we knew that, and they didn't. They didn't like that. They were good people. That was the thing. They were good people, and so there wasn't personal animus, we just had been competing so fiercely for so long.

Risley: And so how did that work itself out?

McClure: Well, it took some years. And there are still some former *Dispatch* people on the *Daily Record* staff, but you wouldn't know it. After a couple years, you just wouldn't know. You didn't care. We were a new thing. At that point, we really started accelerating digital. And, you know, because we had new resources, digital was strengthening. We started introducing products. Anytime we introduced a new product, like an entertainment magazine, it had to have a digital component. We just insisted on it. And so we're running parallel print and digital. At some point, we start taking resources away from the print, which continues to this day. And that is the painful thing in the community. People are used to well-resourced newspaper. And we were taking resources away from it with earlier deadlines and things like that. But I will say that the *Daily Record* newsroom, we bought into digital. It wasn't a sale at all, to, you know, to convert to digital first. And I think other newsrooms struggled with that. Elsewhere in Pennsylvania, I think some still do. But we were all in, maybe almost to a fault because we got away from doing special sections, which was great revenue. But you know, but the advertising people were supportive of eventually getting rid of those special sections because those ad salesmen were being tied up on those. And so, we kind of put those behind us much earlier than a lot of newspapers did, and that probably hurt our revenue earlier. We felt that revenue impact earlier than other newsrooms did. But we are ahead of it. Because, you know, we had long since converted to digital. The ad salesmen were selling digital, so other companies were still, you know, enjoying some of this print revenue, which wasn't going to last. We were moving toward the future.

Risley: Getting back to stories, are there stories that you all worked on during that time that you're especially proud of?

McClure: Some of the stories that we did were, we were experimenting with storytelling on different platforms. And when you're converting to digital you're trying these new platforms, you're trying apps, you're writing for Kindle. And I think that some of that took some of our enterprise edge off for a couple years, as we were trying out these new platforms. We continued to win major awards. But I will say that it was a struggle for the staff, you know, to populate digital platforms, and still do the long-form things that are associated with print.

Risley: What are the stories that the newspapers here cover most often and regularly? What are some of the things you all have to do on a regular basis in a place like York?

McClure: It's interesting that race has been a big thing since, really since the early 2000s. It continues that way today. So that has been something that has always continued to be on our plate, and that takes—to do those types of stories, you have to have credibility in the Black community. Otherwise, there's this idea that you're exploiting the situation. The white community, sometimes they grow tired of the stories. So the stories have to be compelling to do. I think a part of that goes back to having rootedness in the community. Because our management team had been with the community, for the most part have been intact through the 90s, and even up to this day. My successor is now the editor. I think that we had rootedness in the community. And part of the way that we did it was because I'd done a lot of history work, which we can talk about, but I was very familiar with the 1969 riots, and our history of race in York County. So we didn't fall into those pitfalls that maybe can happen. The stories had a thoughtful tone to them, I think. I think we understood race in the context of history. We continue to do those.

There are two stories that stand out in the last ten years, besides a lot of the coverage of race. One is that when we became part of other organizations, you know, after Media News Group, we would send teams out. I had regional editor roles. And my responsibility was for stories on the East Coast. And so, one of the stories for example, was the Newtown, Connecticut, Sandy Hook Elementary killing of kindergarteners. I went up there, and I was the senior editor on-site up in Newtown. And because I was East Coast editor for Digital First Media, and so I was up there, and we brought a lot of Pennsylvania people up there. I think ten to twelve, and maybe more from Pennsylvania, went up there and helped cover that story. And so that was a big story, even though it was a Newtown, Connecticut story. A lot of the *Daily Record*, and other Pennsylvania staff worked on that story for many weeks. We also did the same thing for the Boston Marathon bombing. We sent teams up there to do that. And so those are stories. Those are different types of big stories.

Risley: When did you become the regional editor?

McClure: We went through three other ownership changes. We went through Media News Group, which was Dean Singleton's. We went to DFM, which was John Payton's. And then we went to Gannett. So we went through three different

ownership changes in about five years. And I would say that with every ownership change, we got better. You know, the Media News Group made us better, even than we were under Buckner. There were more resources. We had the *Denver Post* that we could call their photographers and say, "What do you do?" And things like that. Then, you know, Digital First Media. But basically, it was owned by John Payton, and his editor was Jim Brady from the *Washington Post*. And he and Steve Buttry were the two point-people, and they had this entity called Thunderdome in New York. And for two or three years we honed our digital work. But during every ownership change, including the one in 2004, we kind of modeled what was coming. Gannett had a strategy called Picasso, so we would get a copy of Picasso, and we would go through it, and we had classes on it. This is even before it was announced that Gannett bought us. And the same thing happened to Digital First Media was we read the playbook. We watched how they did things because they had a lot of eastern Pennsylvania papers. We modeled ourselves. We restructured our newsrooms in advance, so we got ahead of it. We learned their vocabulary. There are some bad new owners, there's bad owners out there. But those bad owners weren't Gannett, those bad owners weren't DFM, those bad owners weren't Dean Singleton. And so those transitions were good. Our team remained intact; people got promotions. I became regional editor under DFM. became regional editor under Gannett. We enjoyed the resources; we enjoyed the new technology.

Risley: What was your responsibility as regional editor? Were you still here in York?

McClure: Yeah. That's pretty common. Under DFM, I was East Coast editor over twenty-four newsrooms. That's where Newtown came into play. So I was the East Coast editor, and Greg Moore from the *Denver Post* was the Midwestern editor. And Dave Butler from San Jose was the West Coast editor. And so we would oversee things. You were on the road a lot, but you had to trust your people back in York. Our team had been together since the 1990s, and you could trust them. So, it was a growth experience for all of us. You would go and translate or talk about company policy with the editors. You'd go visit, help the editors, be a sounding board. And the same thing with really was true under Gannett. I had six newspapers in the Mid-Atlantic region: Wilmington, four in Pennsylvania, and one in Salisbury, Maryland. I worked with those editors when we were under Gannett. The other big story that took place in that latter period was the priest abuse story. We got ahead of that story. We did some good work. Tentative reports were out two years before the grand jury came out, you know. We started reporting on and piecing things together. We pieced together central Pennsylvania priests who

had been abusive, and in some cases, we could publish their names. So we had a list before there was lists. And then when the grand jury came about the terrible priest abuse in Pennsylvania, we were on it. I think we did the best work in Pennsylvania on that story.

Risley: What year was that?

McClure: This was only two years ago, whenever the grand jury report came out.

Risley: What changed when Gannett bought the newspaper?

McClure: Gannett taught us you really need to be thinking bigger, just not on your own community, but Pennsylvania is your community, and I think that's the biggest takeaway from Gannett.

Risley: What do you look back on with pride and regret about your years at the *Daily Record*?

McClure: There are a lot of things that make us different at the *Daily Record*, or at least we think we are. We are probably not as different than maybe many newsrooms. One was that we used awards to motivate our staff. We learned that from John Bull, who was with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the days of Eugene Roberts, when they won all the Pulitzers. And they would use that as a motivator. And, we did too. And we did at the end of the day win every major award except for the Pulitzer, which is I guess that's a regret if you want to call it that. There's a Newspaper of the Year award in Pennsylvania. We won five awards, the only paper to win more was the *Patriot-News*. And this was since 2002. We won ten G. Richard Dew awards, the last one being the priest abuse work. That was over the course of twenty years. And then there's a Readership Initiative Award, which is offered, I think, thirteen times, and we won eleven of those. This involves bringing new ideas to market that would produce revenue or produce new readers. And so we won eleven out of thirteen of those. And we just won one this past year. And then in terms of our category, we won sweepstakes in our class, the second-largest class of medium-sized papers; we won eighteen of those since 1990. So, you know, we would use those and leverage those in a positive way. Here's the thing that we never gave up on, and that is providing intensely local community news. We never lost sight of that. We established Facebook groups. One of them is called Pixie York, and it has 20,000. members. And that's a place where hyperlocal news comes forward. We also have about three or four other groups that are hyperlocal. And you know, and then

people step forward, But the most important thing, just talking about fixing York is, it's at least 25 percent diverse and people of color. And people below 44 is 66 percent; two-thirds are below 44 years of age. These are audiences that we can't get as a newspaper. But on Facebook, we're able to do that, so we're able to communicate our content to them. We're able to get ideas from them, we're able to engage with them. And, you know, in a way we give a voice to people of color. The couple of other things that I think made us different is, we really sweated in hiring. If we did one thing well over the years, it was hiring. We also always looked for people who were kind of on an upward arc. It didn't mean they had to be young but were on an upper arc. They had a track record of success. This borrows from one of my mentors, and that's Billy Beane of the Oakland A's: you look for people who no one else might want for some strange reason. We would try to find blue-chip people that a medium-size paper couldn't get normally because somebody bigger would get them. My favorite example of that is we had a guy from Columbia Journalism School, who had a stutter; he had a speech impediment. We hired him; he was great. We learned from Bill Belichick to create a system. Ss we brought these people in, they came into a system. It wasn't just a hodgepodge of ideas and philosophies. We had a system in place that they could be successful in.

Risley: How would you describe that system?

McClure: Well, it was a system where we did have "stars," but we valued everybody on the staff. You know, in some newsrooms there's a star system. And everybody [on our staff] was a star. We lifted everybody up; we treated everybody as valuable. We told everybody we were going to invest in them. And we did. And we told them when we hired them, we would say, "If we stop investing in you, I can see why you'd want to leave. But I tell you what, we consider ourselves a destination paper. And we're going to keep you. We value you. We want to keep you as long as we can. And in order to do that, we know we have to keep you growing." And so we were able to keep people. Over the course of time, some people just weren't good enough. They realized they weren't comfortable and they left. In other cases, we held on to people longer. We have three people at the *New York Times* right now. So we lost people to really good places. What was most difficult is when you lose a good person to a bad paper. But we, we just said, "Why?" We asked them that, but then we, of course, moved on. It was a system that was important. We talked a lot about culture and the way people fit in the culture. We valued our middle managers and you don't hear that a lot. We valued our assignment editors. We know that the reporters are going to move on, but we

value those people in the middle. There's fewer of them now. And because the industry doesn't value them. The middle managers, the assignment editors, do a lot of reporting. That's something that I could never get people above me to understand, how much content creation they do and how much content creation they can influence. But, you know, but they're still a backbone of quality assignment editors at the *Daily Record* that are kind of leftover from that. Bill Belichick would see the tight-end that threw the block that freed the runner that no one else saw. We tried to recognize those small contributions that lead to really big things. We already talked about getting digital early. And I think maybe it's often overlooked –that medium-sized papers, like the *Daily Record*, and really like the *Patriot-News* is kind of medium-size. That's where a lot of innovation can take place because you don't have the big bureaucracies of the metros. And, you know, you have more resources than the small daily. So as a medium-size paper, we were just right to be able to do things and to innovate.

Another thing I would just say is, is never give up in a career. Some of my own things I point back to with the greatest, I guess, pride, came late in the career. Like the work I did in Newtown. I was interim editor in Wilmington, the *Wilmington News Journal* for about five months after the editor left and before Mike Feeley came in. And our numbers improved, and they're still improving under Mike. So, even late in the career, you never, never give up. I would say in terms of biggest regret, I think that one of them is that during this difficult moment, I'm not there. You know, I can't be there. I'm not there. They have a very capable editor, Randy Parker, at the *Daily Record*, and other newsrooms that he oversees. But during this difficult Covid moment, this is a time that I missed being able to be there, and buck people up and support them, and so on. But that is a regret, that this is a difficult moment for newsrooms, I'm not there to help solve problems.

I would say that another area is what it takes to be able to do all this and then have a successful family. I exemplified workaholism, [although] my family tells me that I didn't. But I will say that in my years of experience, the most successful editors were those that were all in. You couldn't work nine-to-five. You can't do that and be successful and have a successful operation. There's a point of burnout probably, which I don't think I ever hit. But I'll just tell you one successful editor is Cate Barron. I don't know her hours and all that, but I do know that she's all in. She's kind of that editor that has been successful, and part of it is, that the staff knows that she's totally committed. If you sense that your editor is not committed, you're not going to be committed. So how do you balance that and do the family? I probably didn't do the family as well

as I should have. They tell me I did okay or did fine, but I wonder about that. I thank my wife and three (now-grown) children for their forbearance. How do you do this type of this type of stuff with all these ownership changes and all these all these big stories? How do you do that if you're working eight-to-five, or something like that?

Risley: This is a big question, but how did the newspaper business change during your career?

McClure: I mean, we clearly went digital and that would probably be the biggest thing. You know, the staffs got smaller, but with digital, you don't need the largest staffs. But the long and short of that—without saying the obvious—is that we did what we needed to follow where readers were, which is on digital platforms.

Risley: Do you think newspapers, in general, grasped the effect of the Internet?

McClure: I think that some still haven't and I think some are really good at that. And don't know if Pennsylvania, because we have a lot of newspapers in small towns whether we felt the compulsion to change. We had to rely on print longer, maybe because we still had a community. But now those papers are feeling the impact.

Risley: How did you get interested in local history and begin writing about it?

McClure: I always had an interest in history. I started when I got here from California. I started taking classes at Penn State, Harrisburg in American Studies. I did it really for job security because I figured that if I had a master's degree, I might be able to teach. What I found out was, it probably didn't help me much in terms of what I could teach, but it elevated the paper. People see you and they say well, "He's a historian. He's just not a journalist." The whole time I was working on that under Dr. Bronner, I was studying journalism history in our county, and I was coming across all these stories. So I knew that the 250th anniversary of York County was big so I started compiling year-by-year history of York County. I had basically enough for a book. The paper got behind it. The book that was called, *Never to be Forgotten,* went out in 80,000 homes, and then the paperback went to three printings. I did a book on American Revolution history, which is big in York. So I was doing this history that had meaning. Of course. the paper was tied in and they could use my stuff. But an interesting point was in 2002, we had been through all this riot stuff, the riot trials. We knew we were having the 25th anniversary of the

Pennsylvania Conference on Black History and they were going to be here. I pulled stuff out from my two books and added stuff, and I came up with a black history book for this conference. Then I did a Civil War history that hadn't been done before and then I did a World War II history. All of those were parts of community things. The black history study was interesting because it involved people in the black community. And so that helped us cover race for the next twenty years and up to this day. So I can more comfortably write about -- as a white person -- more comfortably write about race, because I understand the history here about race in the community. I've talked to a lot of people of color and I'm still doing that, even in retirement. It's a wonderful blending of history. History informs journalism and helps credibility in the community. And so that's the major thing I do in retirement, I'm writing another book. There's a York Facebook group, which has now about 9,100 members. That's a whole community in itself. So I moderate that and am still connected with the paper.

Risley: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add that we didn't discuss?

McClure: I want to thank you so much for coming down. Politically, I'm somewhere, right of center and York County is right of center. I don't mean far right. I mean, probably what you would call moderate conservative. And I think that helped me to see Donald Trump coming. I'm probably more in accord with the York County community politically than someone maybe it's over here [to the left] and looks down on them condescendingly. I'm also a Christian and and I think that helps you understand people and understand the community. You don't have to be a Christian to be a great editor, but I think being a Christian does give you insights. So I that's been a big thing that's informed me over the years.

Risley: How do you think that has informed you?

McClure: Christians can be left of center, so I'm not tying those two together. But the newspaper historically going back was thought to be left of center. It was for fifty-five years in the twentieth century owned by a progressive guy by the name of J.W. Gitt who was Henry Wallace's campaign manager in 1948, and endorsed Henry Wallace in 1948. We have a heritage of being far left of center. And as editor, how do you deal with that? So I tried to respect and not impose my views. I was to the right of some of the positions that we took, but with an editorial board, you went with the majority. The majority was often left of me, but I made peace with that. In terms of being a Christian, I just think it helps you see value in people. If we had a guy coming in who is a

little odd and has a stuttering problem, that's an asset. That's an asset, not just for journalism. An asset because I want to help that guy. And, again, a non-Christian could do that. But from where I sat, I wanted to help him. We know that Jesus dealt with not just his disciples, but with people far different than him. And so that was a model. You know, as an editor you're dealing with people that are just a lot different than you are often. People of color who have different backgrounds. And so how do connect with them? How do you value them? Jesus was a model for that.

Risley: You talked about the longevity of your staff and how many folks stick around for a long time. What do you attribute that to?

McClure: Well, I think that, that they felt that -- especially the middle managers -- felt like they were a part of something. They felt they were valued. They felt I had their back, that I didn't treat them as a disposable assignment editor who wasn't doing anything. I think that they felt valued. And which I think is a shortcoming of Belichick. I don't think people feel valued under him. But, I think the *Daily Record* staff felt valued. And when you feel valued, you're going to stick around longer. I mean, Patrick LaForge's now is at the *New York Times*. We had him for eight years, or something like that. It has to do with the way you look at them, and the way they see you looking at them. That they can see that you're going to look for opportunities for them to get better. And let me just be clear that people at the *Daily Record* who weren't good, they felt so uncomfortable because we were always moving and always saying, "Okay, that's good. Now, what's next?" The pace was too great for some of them. So they just left or we had to part company with them. I learned from Dave Martin from Buckner News Alliance, was this idea of pairing. A tree is stronger if you're able to pair off the weak limbs. So you constantly are pairing as a manager. Someone who's weak, you try to bring them up. You don't try to get rid of them, you try to bring them up. up. If you can't, then they have to go. So everybody knew that.

Risley: Right. What would you say were your strengths and weaknesses as an editor?

McClure: I think probably that I was all in, and the people knew that. And they knew that I respected and valued them. The weakness was probably that some people -- I guess you have to ask them -- but some people probably felt like I was too all in, that I probably micromanaged. They probably wouldn't say micromanage; they probably would say I was too attentive. That I would check things on weekends and call them and say, we're behind on the story.

That type of stuff. That's probably what they would say. I was probably too intense. I would just say, though, Face it. You know, the best editors I know are like that. You want an editor who is looking in on the website on weekends. You don't want someone that's going to not care about what's up there. You can go overboard, I understand that. I had to always work on that. But that's probably what they would say.

Risley: All right, Jim. Hey, thanks a lot. This has been good.

McClure: Okay. Good. Well, thanks. I'm glad. You were good at letting me ramble.