

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH ERNEST SCHREIBER

Interviewed by Ford Risley

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Ernest Schreiber Interview

Risley: Okay, we'll get started. It's July 27, 2021, and I'm here in Lancaster and doing an oral history interview with Ernie Schreiber. So, let's just start at the beginning. Tell me when and where you were born, and a little bit about your family.

Schreiber: Sure. I was born here in Lancaster in March 1948. My family has roots that go back to the mid-1700s on my mother's side. They were Mennonite farmers and farming sort of persisted throughout the generations. My grandfather lost the farm during the Depression and became a cigar maker in Ephrata. That Depression experience really shaped how our family thinks about finances and money. So, I was a child of Depression parents. On my father's side, they were farmers too, German immigrants [who] came in the 1880s. And all of them got off the farm, including my dad, who went to work for New Holland Machine Company, a farm equipment manufacturer. So I grew up in the suburbs. I was lucky to go to one of the better school systems – Manheim Township in Lancaster County.

From there I went to Millersville University as an English major, then to the University of Pennsylvania for a master's degree in English literature. I wanted to be an English lit professor. I really liked 18th-century literature, but there were no jobs. It was the 70s, and thousand of young men had gone into education to avoid the draft. I hadn't. I was in liberal arts. So there were no teaching jobs for me. After graduation, I was living in Philly on 40th Street, right next to Penn, desperate for money. I was scouring the newspapers for jobs, and I saw a two-line classified ad for a news reporter. I thought, I can probably do that. I had no journalism classes ever – just English. But I figured, okay, how hard can it be? I can write a newspaper story. I called and got Joe Halberstein, managing editor at the *Bucks County Courier*. He started asking me a couple questions, "Where do you go to school?" I said, "Penn." And he said, "You're hired, just come on up" [laughter]. So, I drove up to Bucks County, and he introduced me to Sandy Oppenheimer, the editor. We talked for a few minutes. He knew I was totally green, and he was happy with that because I didn't have anything to unlearn. I started writing obits. I can still remember Oppenheimer standing beside me saying, "Here are today's obits. You see, they're almost the same. Its name, age, address, occupation, family. Just copy this style." So, I did obits for a while. Then they put me on cops, just making a round of calls to all the departments.

Risley: The police beat?

Schreiber: Right. The police beat. And after that, I got a township to cover – Bensalem Township.

Risley: Okay, let's back up for just a minute. What year did you join the *Bucks County Courier*?

Schreiber: That would have been 1972. I graduated from Penn in '71 and started in '72.

Risley: And so, you said you got a township beat.

Schreiber: Yeah, I got Bensalem Township, which was right over the county line from northeast Philly. I was so lucky. It was the most corrupt township you could ever cover. It was a wonderful training ground. And, better than that, there were a couple citizens who really knew the ropes about how municipal government worked. They knew the players and were an immense help to this young, green reporter in figuring out what was going on. At that time, Bensalem was a hotbed for wannabe gangsters – guys who couldn't make it into the Philly mob, but they wanted to act like that. There was one guy, Joe Vacca, who had connections in traffic court in Philly. He would drive through the towns of lower Bucks, collecting parking tickets that locals had gotten in the city and turned over to their township officials. He'd take the tickets down to City Hall and get them fixed. That won points for all of these politicians who were helping out their constituents, and it put them in Vacca's debt for future favors.

That kind of petty stuff was rampant. Their bigger schemes involved land development. Many of these township supervisors were openly taking money or gifts from builders. And because they had never had any kind of serious news coverage, they weren't cautious at all. So I was able to write a story on a builder who gave a supervisor a Cadillac in exchange for rezoning farmland for a housing development. He didn't bother to change the license plate or registration, which tracked back to the builder. Another time, there was an ad in the newspaper for the sale of a farm for building lots. It was a 200-acre farm and the ad said you could build housing units on it. But it wasn't zoned for that. So, I put a tape recorder in a briefcase and went with some of these older guys who were citizen activists to talk to the Realtor about showing the property. He shows it to us, and we said "You're saying that it can be developed. How do you know that? This Realtor said, "You don't gotta worry. We have all these guys on the payroll. Dominic Belardino, he's on the payroll. Henry George, he's on the payroll." It made a great story and eventually the IRS investigated. This was post-Watergate when every reporter wanted to be an investigative reporter. Once I had a taste of that

kind of excitement, I wanted to be a full-time investigative reporter. But at a midsize newspaper like the *Courier*, that wasn't possible. The editor said, "No, no, you still got to keep covering beats." So, in a huff, I quit and started working for *Today Magazine* as a freelancer. Howard Coffin was the editor, and the two of us got along well.

Risley: What was *Today Magazine*?

Schreiber: It was the Sunday magazine of the *Inquirer*. So, for me, it was a great venue because it was a much larger audience. Sunday magazines were well read back then. I would do one piece a month. Howard wanted good investigative journalism, and I couldn't produce them any faster than that. I did one on Gypsies in Philadelphia and another on New Hope and the tourist impact there. I did a story on the cost of corruption, from fixing tickets to murder for hire. The stories were exhilarating. But the pay, \$500 a story, barely covered my rent. And the crime down there, the constant living with fear, got to me. I was still basically an off-the-farm suburban guy, not used to that. At the same time, some of the people involved in the IRS investigation in Bucks County ended up being killed. There was a builder at the heart of the land deals who was supposed to testify. His son was killed. Somebody turned on the car in his garage, and his whole family was asphyxiated. The builder's daughter was found in a Volkswagen pushed off the edge of one of the docks in Philly. That stopped the testimony. I thought, I just don't want to be involved with this.

So, I came up here to Lancaster; it was home. My finances weren't good, but my family was here, so I settled in. I applied for a job with Lancaster Newspapers, sent a letter and resume to the personnel department. I heard nothing for like six months. So, really desperate, I called and got through to Dan Cherry, the editor. He said he was looking for a reporter. I had an interview and got hired. That taught me a valuable lesson that I always passed on to college students and interns. When you want a job in journalism, talk to the editor, never go to human relations or personnel.

Risley: That was here in Lancaster?

Schreiber: That was here. Dan Cherry was then the editor of the *Lancaster New Era*. He had never gotten a resume from personnel. So anyway, I started there as a beat reporter.

Risley: What year was that?

Schreiber: That was 1974, and the rest of my career was with the *New Era*.

Risley: And what did you do initially as a reporter? What did you cover?

Schreiber: Actually, it was the township I grew up in, Manheim Township. I was given that as my first beat. This was very common in most news organizations: start small with a municipality and then work your way up. So I covered that township, then city government and then county government. I did beat journalism steadily until 1980. Then Cherry wanted to make me assistant news editor, so I tried that. God, I hated it. It was copy editing. I just hated sitting at a desk all day, correcting grammar and spelling. In retrospect, it made me a better reporter and writer. But I got out of it within a year and a half. I went back to reporting. A good while later, in 1996, I was named staff editor. I did general assignment and county government [reporting], and I was also coaching reporters, building newsroom data bases, vetting editorial software purchases.

I also put together a lead-writing guide at that time. The *New Era* was an afternoon paper and since we had a morning paper in town, a competitor, our writers needed to produce fresh stories quickly. They could not repeat what was in the morning paper. Every story had to be new, a story or new development that the morning paper didn't have. And it had to be produced in under six hours, from 5 a.m., when we came to the office until our deadline at 11:30. We had this motto: Our stories must be new, or they must be better. But there was only that short window of time to develop stories, so the lead writing guide was developed to help writers get over the hump of trying to figure out how to organize and tell their stories, how to dive into it and get it done fast. We had wonderful, incredibly fast, incredibly productive writers. Cindy Stauffer could do three stories in a morning. She was amazing. These were not superficial stories either. These stories were well-documented, with multiple voices and opposing sides in them. Most of our reporters could do two or three stories a day. The guide was a tool for those reporters who didn't know intuitively how to get started reporting a story.

Risley: So, you were a reporter for more than ten years?

Schreiber: Yes, from 1974 to 2000, with the exception of that brief time as a copy editor.

Risley: What did you enjoy about reporting and writing?

Schreiber: It's a license to be curious and nosy. I love research. And I love talking to people. I love exploring their lives. You know, journalists often say, "I would pay to be able to do this job." And it's true. I mean, you just walk into

situations where you could never have been otherwise – tragedies, celebrations, major public decisions – and you get the opportunity to ask questions and find out what’s really going on.

Risley: Were there memorable stories, not necessarily big stories, but just stories that you still recall?

Schreiber: Several, but one has always stood out. There was a Mennonite couple in the eastern part of the county. Their son was going to public school. One morning he walks out to get in the front of the bus when a car goes around the bus. The car hits him and kills him. The driver was a New York City policeman on vacation who didn’t know about the law requiring mandatory stops at a school bus. That law had just been introduced. The family was obviously devastated. But they were Mennonite and, for them, forgiveness was a big part of their religion. They invited the officer’s family to their home. They met and they had dinners together. Later that year, the parents went into the court and told the judge, “We don’t want him –.” [silent pause] You can see I still get emotional over it. They went into court and asked that the officer not be punished. He wasn’t.

Risley: Wow.

Schreiber: That’s one of the things I like about Lancaster County. It has this deep culture of compassion.

Risley: That must have been a great story.

Schreiber: Yes. I did two other series that I really liked and which resulted in some change. One was on sexual assaults. Cases were being dropped right and left. Sentencing was oftentimes reduced for outlandish reasons. I did a two-part series on this. I interviewed the victims and their families. In one case, there was a young woman working as a maid in a home daycare center. The husband of the woman who ran the daycare center tried to attack this young woman. The case went to court, and it was obviously an attempted sexual assault. But the charges were plea-bargained down to misdemeanor assault. When I interviewed the judge and asked, “Why did you accept that plea?” he said he wanted the woman to be able to continue her business. If it was a felony committed at her business, she would have had to close the daycare center. The story showed that the judge was allowing this woman to bring young children into this place where her husband, a predator, lived. Not right at all. There were many similar cases, a young mentally retarded boy raped by a neighbor bully; a date rape. All inadequately prosecuted. Anyway, that

series resulted in a lot of changes. Punishments became far more severe. The district attorney developed what was then fairly new, a counseling service to work with victims and prepare them for testimony in court. In those stories, the victims spoke on the record with their names being used. It was not difficult to convince them that the stories had much more credibility when there was not an anonymous person talking, when their story was something that could be verified.

One of the things I dislike immensely about modern journalism is this excessive protection of victims. As you read stories, you don't really know who or what occurred because there are no names. There's no ages. There's no clear relationship between perpetrator and victim. Stories without verifiable facts lack credibility and hiding the names of victims perpetuates an aura of shame on victims that they don't deserve. I did a similar series about failure to prosecute drunk driving homicides. Back then, in the '90s, county judges were handing sentences of two years or so in prison for killing somebody with a car while driving drunk. One case involved an elderly Black woman who had come up from Baltimore to shop at the Route 30 outlets. She was walking across the street when a drunk driver hit and killed her. The driver was let off. There was no penalty at all. But the woman's son was a cop, and he spoke out. That and many similar cases resulted in embarrassing the courts and from then on, the sentences got stiffer.

Risley: What was the relationship of *New Era* and the *Intelligencer* at that time?

Schreiber: Fiercely, fiercely competitive. We sat in the same newsroom, used the same computers, the same telephones. We had to tell our sources *do not* call back after 3 p.m., which is when the change of shift occurred, because if they did, the *Intell* reporter would answer and say, "Oh, thanks for getting back to me." And they would end up with the story. And, sure, we would do the same thing to them.

Risley: And you shared desks?

Schreiber: Yes, we sat at the same desks. There would be a set of drawers for the *Intell* reporter on one side and a set of drawers on the other for the *New Era* reporters. We used the same computers. God forbid that you didn't log out because all your files would be available to your competitor. There were times when a reporter was sure the other side had stolen a story. Then, a few weeks later, we'd leave the notes of a fake story laying around just to make them spin their wheels tracking down a story that didn't exist. [laughter]. It was fiercely competitive. If we knew of a story that was upcoming, we would beg the source not to tell anybody else, not to tell WGAL or the *Intell*. We'd

tell them, "You know we'll do the story the best. We'll give it great play. We're really interested in it." Anything to get that story first.

Risley: So, when did you move into editing positions?

Schreiber: Let's see. Well, when Bob Kozak retired, in October 2000, I became editor of the *New Era*.

Risley: Okay. Did you have other editing positions before that?

Schreiber: Well, I was staff editor from '96 to 2000. That was 80 percent reporting, 20 percent coaching and technology assistance.

Risley: What was it like moving into the top job?

Schreiber: It was really different for me, giving up writing, but it was an opportunity to reshape the newsroom culture. There were a group of writers, me included, who thought there were different ways of doing things that would improve the paper. We wanted to build a writers' paper. And do you know Pete Mekeel?

Risley: I know about him

Schreiber: Yeah. So, Pete was my right-hand guy, a consummate editor and wordsmith. There were four of us: Pete, Randy Montgomery, Jim Loose. We built a cohesive newsroom oriented around encouraging good writers. We built a newsroom where the editors assumed that reporters know best what is happening and have a pretty good idea how to tell those stories. The four of us had low tolerance for writers who were lazy or prima donnas. So, there were a number of people who left in the next year or two. I developed two rigorous tests to screen new reporters. I would give an applicant raw notes for a story and say, "Here, write a story," to see what they could actually do on their own. I had another test, a story with close to 100 grammatical or spelling errors. The tests weeded out those reporters who had good clips only because they had good editors at their last job. So, we started hiring smart and getting good reporters.

After that, I saw my job as clearing out all the obstacles for the staff, so all they had to do was report and write. Computer technology was changing every couple years, and there could be large amounts of wasted time and frustration with technology that didn't work well. I focused on finding computer systems that were friendly for a reporter. I insisted that that our writing software mesh with the digital archive in a way that reporters would

find easy to search so that they could grab those old stories quickly and build background. On deadline, basic things like that spell the difference between a well-written story and an incomplete one.

Risley: What did you enjoy about the job?

Schreiber: Well, I mean, there was satisfaction in keeping an evening paper alive, and competitive, and just being good. Doing good stories that changed the community. There were two big stories that the *New Era* pursued starting in the '70s and continued through to the 2000s. One was farmland preservation. The other one was redevelopment and growth of Lancaster City. We championed farm preservation and did frequent series on the loss of farmland and the risk it posed to our community's economy, culture and traditions. We pushed for changes in zoning law and planning that resulted in a system where Lancaster County now has more preserved farmland than any other county in the United States. Something over 100,000 acres is permanently preserved.

Risley: I didn't know that.

Schreiber: The city redevelopment effort was just as important. There had been a time in the '80s, and into the early '90s, where downtown Lancaster was a dangerous place. One of the stories I recall doing was about the "Wolf Pack." Six guys running down through the main street – King Street – in Lancaster, breaking windows as they go, beating up people, just smashing them in the face, and running on. There was a year when there were 22 homicides in Lancaster City. There was a shootout from the courthouse to a bank across the street where a couple felons who were being brought to trial overpowered deputies, grabbed their guns and started shooting. Lancaster was much like York is now, or Harrisburg, a place of daily violence, and this trend was building as I watched. It seemed to me that the community was spending way, way too much money on police and crime and courts, and that money could be better spent in trying to make Lancaster a place that was civil, where there were jobs and where there was opportunity.

I read about other cities where they built convention centers and turned a deteriorating downtown around. So we championed – editorially – the construction of a Lancaster convention center. The model was Saratoga Springs, New York, which had done the same thing, built a convention center and then saw restaurants and shops open up nearby to serve the convention-goers. A convention center never makes a profit itself, but it infuses money into lots and lots of small businesses throughout the downtown. And that's

what happened here. Once you had all those businesses established, the condos started going up, people start moving back into town. One New York newspaper called Lancaster “the new Brooklyn.” It’s a very nice place. People are buying \$500,000 condos downtown. There’s something like 40 or 50 restaurants within walking distance of Penn Square.

Risley: So, downtown has really turned around?

Schreiber: Yes, it has. It’s totally up. I look at Reading, Harrisburg, York, and they’re still a mess. Frequent shootings, struggling businesses. You know? We’ve had one shooting this year. I mean, the turnaround hasn’t eliminated the drug trade, but it has really subdued it because there are other opportunities. There are rising minority subcultures in our city that are very entrepreneurial, doing well. The city is alive and vibrant. It’s neat.

Risley: How did Lancaster’s unique publishing arrangement affect your job?

Schreiber: You mean, so far as the three papers?

Risley: Yeah.

Schreiber: Well, it made journalism very competitive. You could not cut corners. You could not just give one person’s side of a story, because the other paper was certain to do the other side and probably make a dig, writing “Contrary to what has been reported...” And so, it kept the bar high. There was always somebody on your tail after the same story you wanted. In retrospect, the amount of resources that the Steinmans devoted to running three separate news organizations – two dailies and a Sunday paper – and strictly keeping them separate, it was really commendable. One of the things that I liked about family ownership was that they did not have stockholders demanding growth, demanding that they wanted a higher return year after year. I always thought that Knight Ridder started going downhill when it became a public company and every year had to produce another 5 percent in annual returns. The Steinmans were satisfied to have a steady income. They didn’t expect more every year, and that was a tremendous benefit.

Risley: Did you did you feel like the resources were distributed equally across the three newsrooms?

Schreiber: Certainly, so far as editorial went. Both dailies had the same size news desk, sports staff, feature section. Where I think the system fell short was, there was not nearly as much promotion of circulation for the evening paper as there

was for the morning paper. I guess it was just too costly. There would be boxes out for the *Intell* in the morning, but they wouldn't bother to put *New Eras* in them in the afternoon. So, while we would do well with subscriber sales, our street sales were always a little bit lower.

Risley: Why do you think the Steinmans kept an afternoon paper around for so long?

Schreiber: I think for competition and because politically the *New Era* editorial pages were conservative/Republican. The *Intell* was Democratic. This is an overwhelmingly conservative/Republican area, and so, not to have a voice for the Republican Party, for conservative principles, would have been shooting themselves in the foot. There's a reason that Ford produces various models of cars. You try to satisfy multiple audiences. That's what they were doing. It was a smart move.

Risley: You talked about this a little bit, but what did it mean for the Lancaster newspapers to be locally owned?

Schreiber: The Steinmans themselves, the individual family members, were involved in the community. They wanted it to succeed. They supported many things – the arts, museums, libraries, concert halls, nonprofit organizations. Jack Buckwalter was the publisher, and we would have lunches monthly. He would talk about local issues, like the crime rate going up and the importance of figuring out why and what to do about it. When he spoke, I knew I had his support and the family's support to go after those issues. The family put their money into those issues. The Steinmans would bring in speakers, like George Kelling, the fellow who did "Broken Windows." They gave generously to support farm preservation. They underwrote several art galleries and our local history museums. Their philanthropy was interwoven throughout the community. Jack Buckwalter would often say, "There's no limit to what you can do if you don't want credit." They did much quietly behind the scenes. One other thing I ought to mention about them. They had a rigorous rule about noninvolvement in the newsroom. I mean literally the Steinmans themselves in the newsroom. One day, after a board meeting, Peggy Steinman said to me, "Would you mind showing me the newsroom?" I said, "Sure." I took her down and pointed out where the editors, copy editors, and everyone sat. She said, "This is the first time I've been here since I was 7." She said, "My parents told me, you should never interfere with the newsroom, but I'd like to see it." And that was it. I never ever had a phone call from them, a letter. Nothing. Things have changed. But back then, that's the way it was.

Risley: How would you describe your style of management?

Schreiber: Yeah, I thought about that one. I'm going to change the question to, "What were the components of your job [laughter]?"

Risley: Okay.

Schreiber: I tried to look at the big picture and find stories that in the daily grind, the reporters weren't necessarily looking at, stories that never popped up on anyone's beat. One example was the schoolhouse shootings, the Amish shootings. We had gone through that grind of the day-to-day reporting on that story and everybody was sick of it. There had been this overwhelming national media presence here. Everybody was thinking "Enough of this. We really need to quit exploiting the Amish. But when it died down, I called the newsroom together, and I said, "We have to do the story right, now. There are pieces of this that have never been reported well. It's just been all this daily stuff." I got a bit of pushback, but I said, "No, we have to do this." So, Janet Kelley, who was our police reporter, I assigned her to do a minute-by-minute [look at] everything that those police officers did and what has happened to them since then. I put Ad Crable and Cindy Stauffer on the families; Tom Murse on the shooter; Jack Brubaker on the Amish bishops and religion. It took months. I mean, those reporters dropped everything else, pretty much. And for four or five months, that's what all our best reporters were working on. But when the stories came out, they all loved it, and so did readers, especially the Amish. The series won the Taylor Award for Fairness and the Wilbur Award for reporting on religion. We reprinted the series and sent 11,000 copies around the country, mostly to Amish communities.

Risley: Why do you think doing that story was important?

Schreiber: Because of what it says about the culture of Lancaster County. The culmination of the series was about the forgiveness that the Amish families extended to the shooter and the kindness they showed his widow. She became close friends of the Amish parents. The police officers formed lasting relationships with the girls' parents that continue to today. The series documented the religious underpinnings of this county and the bonding that this terrible tragedy had fostered in this county among the police, the families and the doctors and nurses who cared for the girls. I mean, these were important stories about people at their best.

Beyond that, getting back to your earlier question of what I did in my job. One of the most important things, one of the few times when I would insert myself into the daily news process was, making sure that stories were fair.

I'm still a firm believer that there are two sides or three sides or four sides of a story. I would insist that, not at the bottom of the story or in the last two paragraphs, but up high, the opposing side or the dissenting voices were there. It was not that hard to do, but it was important to our credibility as a fair newspaper.

Risley: We talked about this a little bit, but what would you say is the newspaper's role in Lancaster?

Schreiber: One role was demanding accountability from politicians. One of the real strengths of having a Republican and a Democratic newspaper is that there were always editorial writers willing to point out the deficiencies in the public officials on the other side. And so, the *New Era* was never hesitant to hold a Democratic mayor – like Janice Stork – accountable. The *Intelligencer Journal* was never hesitant to hold the Republican county commissioners accountable and point out their mistakes. I think the biggest service that the papers provided was that there was always a watchdog no matter what party was in power where. And the second thing, I think, was pursuit of community betterment issues. The owners gave the newsrooms the confidence – and the resources – to go after that kind of stories. When I was doing general assignment reporting, we were doing series after series on community issues – affordable housing, prison overcrowding, or liability insurance reform – stuff that was pretty wonky, but that was really oriented toward decision-makers and public leadership. We were saying, "Here's what you need to know about this issue." We tried to lay out the issues clearly, so that changes could be made.

Risley: How did the newspaper business change during your career?

Schreiber: Well, I mean, obviously, there were all the technological changes, going from lead type to digital. But, more importantly, I think news has gotten softer, less disciplined. Routinely stories appear with anonymous sources. The ages and addresses of subjects in a story are missing. The names of injured people in accidents or victims of crime are not reported. The goal of fair, balanced reporting is often gone. Some times it's derided. Many journalists today do not allow readers to decide where they stand on an issue, based on a full, fair presentation of facts. The journalists now decide and present the facts that support their opinion.

Risley: What do you look back on with pride about your career?

Schreiber: Well, we already mentioned the sustained focus on farmland preservation. That resulted in actual changes in local zoning laws, so our county now has borders drawn around every urban center, every city, and all the towns. Building is encouraged within those lines and discouraged outside those lines. And zoning codes reflect that. So, that was a real achievement. That went a long way to sustain the unique culture of Lancaster County. And the convention center was the other achievement locally. Statewide, Teri Henning and I were major authors of the open records law.

Risley: Yeah, let's talk about that.

Schreiber: And that's both a point of pride and a point of regret.

Risley: Talk about why it's a point of pride first.

Schreiber: Well, in theory, the new law opened up state government much wider than it had been – and local government, too. There was a presumption that records would be available. Our thinking was, citizens are paying for these governments, these records should belong to them. They should be available. And we thought that law would achieve that. Our opinion was based on what we thought were good-faith representations by the Township Supervisors Association, the Borough Association, and so forth that they would encourage their organizations to observe the spirit and intent of the law. The regret is that these groups did not follow the spirit of the law, just the opposite. The law allows multiple 30-day appeal periods, and many state agencies and local governments make those appeals standard operating procedure. Now by the time a reporter ever gets a FOIA request fulfilled, the story is gone. It's two months old. I used to tell reporters, if you have to use a Freedom of Information request, you've lost. You need to do it the old way. You need to develop sources that trust you and will just give you the information. And that remains true through today.

I'll give you an example. Recently I was interested in a city water project. When it was proposed, I walked into the water bureau and asked to see the plans. The office manager was not there, and a secretary said, "Oh, sure! Here it is." Just the way the law is supposed to work. I had my phone with me. I just photographed every page. Weeks later, one of the citizen's groups that's concerned about this project requested the plans formally from City Hall. After three months, they got this heavily, heavily redacted copy, and it cost them a couple hundred dollars in copying fees. The law is an absolute failure. You know, it used to be, you'd just walk into a bureau up in Harrisburg, and say, "I want to look at a corporation filing

papers, blah, blah, blah." And they'd said, "Well, there's the files!" And you'd just flip through them. Now everything is off-limits. The state needs a new law.

Risley: So, what do you look back on with regret?

Schreiber: The other one I regret is that I didn't build a sustainable culture after I left. I had retired in 2011, but I was asked to come the next year to lead the merger of three newsroom into one. We did that, building a really cohesive newsroom that did good journalism. Pete Mekeel and I, and a handful of others laid plans for this to continue. But, after my one-year contract ended, the new leadership took the paper in a totally different direction. And so, I really regret that the news operation we built did not last.

Risley: What was it like merging the three newsrooms? That must have been a big job.

Schreiber: Big and painful. On one hand, it allowed us to choose the best talent out of each organization. But there were some limits with seniority and all that sort of thing. It took a while to build camaraderie because there had been a deep-seeded rivalry among the staffs. So, initially, here was the *New Era* editor running the newsroom with *Intell* and *Sunday News* reporters in it. They were deeply suspicious that they would be treated fairly. Lots of people were given different jobs. So, I mean, initially there was turmoil, but then everything settled down. And the staff of the other papers came to realize that there was a lot of trust being placed in them. They were given assignments of substance and jobs of substance. And it worked, it worked.

Risley: Well, is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't discussed?

Schreiber: One is an observation on the effort at newsroom diversity. I think there are complicating factors in that effort that don't get mentioned. The Freedom Forum had a program for training minority interns and bringing them into journalism. And during the time that I was *New Era* editor, I would bring an intern into the newsroom every summer. We would pay their salaries and lodging and so forth, for them to work in community. They were great and they learned. They were green, but it worked out. They were mostly African American; one was Native American. But I could never keep them. Their feelings were "Lancaster's too small. There's not enough going on. I want to go to my hometown." Some of them did stay in journalism or writing related careers. But I could not keep them in Lancaster. Diversification has a lot to do with the cultures of communities, not just hiring decisions. I think that's often not discussed.

Another effort I should mention is polling. In the early 1990s, I teamed up with Terry Madonna and Berwood Yost to create what we called the “Lancaster County Poll.” Terry was teaching at Millersville University, and he hired students to survey registered voters. Yost handled the sample selection and statistics. All of us helped design the questions. The poll covered county elections and statewide elections. The first year it forecast a huge upset, Harris Wofford beating Dick Thornburgh for a senate seat, and that drew national attention to the work Terry and Berwood were doing. Now they are the go-to pollsters for Pennsylvania.

One other thing. We were the first newspaper to sign up for “Journalism Online,” which was an early paywall system developed by Steven Brill and Gordon Crovitz, the *The Wall Street Journal* publisher. They came down to Lancaster, and because I was involved in the technology end of things, I volunteered the *New Era* to be their test case. So, we set up a paywall but only for obituaries. The ownership was cautious because they believed we were going to drive away subscribers if we asked them to pay. The notion of a firm absolute paywall just seemed like it was totally crazy. I could not convince them to do that. And so, we had this sort of limited paywall that didn’t earn much. In retrospect, we should just have done what *The Wall Street Journal* did and have a hard paywall – one price for print and digital. We should have made sure we did not giving away our news to Google or Facebook.

Risley: A lot of newspapers wrestled with those decision.

Schreiber: Yeah, right. Soon after I retired the second time, at the end of 2013, I started looking at the transfer of jobs and money and revenue between Google, Facebook, and traditional newsrooms. You could see all that ad revenue flowing and jobs flowing away from print newsrooms to Google. It was something like 25,000 people over a five-year period that Google hired and newspapers lost. I still think it’s outrageous that Google and Facebook can profit off of what’s been written and researched in traditional print newsrooms. They make all the money; they get all the ad revenue. But, when you look at the sad quality of much of today’s journalism, these tech giants would be smart to invest some of their billions of dollars in pumping up newsrooms. If they disappear, so does most of the reliable content on the Internet.

Risley: Well, I think we’ve discussed all my questions. Thanks so much.

Schreiber: Sure.