

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH PAT WALKER

Interviewed by Ford Risley

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Pennsylvania Newspaper Journalists Oral History Program  
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## Pat Walker Interview

Risley: Okay, let's see, it's May 7, 2021. I'm here in Mays Landing, New Jersey, interviewing Pat Walker for the Pennsylvania Newspaper Journalists Oral History Program. So, we'll start at the beginning. Tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about your family.

Walker: So, born in New Jersey in Newark, I'm the youngest of five children, and my family moved to southern New Jersey -- Mays Landing is in southern New Jersey, near Atlantic City -- when I was six. So, I grew up down here in a very much a resort community. And then, when I decided to go to college, I just wanted to get someplace else that had more people and more things. So, I ended up at Ohio State and I started there in the fall of '[19]69. I thought I was going to do music and didn't. That was shortly after Kent State and down here was very sheltered. So, when I got to the Midwest, in the height of the Vietnam War protests, it just opened a whole new world to me. I had worked on my high school newspaper, and it had always been fun. I thought, well, let me see, maybe I'll work on the paper here. I'm a kid, I'm ignorant of sort of how college works. At the time, the *Lantern* at Ohio State was actually a class, so, I thought, well, alright, I'll take a journalism class or two.

I guess in life when you're meant to do something. All of a sudden it's easy, and you like it. So, I then started covering protests. And after Kent State, Ohio State shut down because it became the center of the Midwest protest. I remember at the time, Jerry Rubin was coming and Abbie Hoffman was coming. The Midwest culture was panicking over this influx, so the university shut down for two weeks. They told us on at, like, one o'clock on a Friday, "You have to be off campus by five o'clock. We're closing everything down." I lived in New Jersey, and at the time, there were probably two flights a day to the east from Columbus. So, I had no idea what to do. I ended up going home to northwestern Ohio with my roommate. My dad and mom were thinking this was only going to last a couple days; it lasted two weeks. When we came back, the university was occupied by the National Guard, and obviously, the protests continued. That really is what sparked my love for journalism, I think. To just be able to tell people what was going on and become immersed in that whole thing.

My first front-page story was when Roe v. Wade was overturned, and I once again had no idea what I was walking into. I was sent to cover a Planned Parenthood press conference. And in between the time that I got to the headquarters, Roe v. Wade was overturned, so whatever they were planning was totally upset. And I just remember standing there and thinking, oh, my gosh, this is like, bigger than big. And when I came back, everybody was like, "Did they talk?" I said, "Yeah, that's the story." I just thought, wow, this is just an amazing thing to do.

But at the time there were also things that stood in my way as a woman. I wanted to cover football. Now, you can cover women's sports, but you can't cover football. I'm still only 19, 20, 21. You know, you're not stomping your feet at that point. But I covered women's sports. I met my husband at Ohio State. He went to graduate school at Purdue and that's really my first newspaper job when I graduated from college in [19]73. I started working for Gannett at a small newspaper in West Lafayette, Indiana, where Purdue is.

Risley: What's the name of the newspaper?

Walker: The *Journal and Courier*. So, my first job was on the copy desk, which was kind of a weird transition, but it was all that was open. I didn't really know very much about copy editing. The guys I worked for taught me everything because college didn't really teach me about copy editing. We had a copyediting class, but it didn't really teach you anything. So, I learned everything I learned from them. And then they moved me to be an education reporter, which was great fun. I really enjoyed that.

In the late [19]70s, Gannett was one of the first companies to try to start to push women and minorities into management and into non-traditional roles. So, they moved me to sports. I said, "Sure, I'll go to sports." I worked for a very traditional sports editor, who once again said, "Nah, you can't cover football. You can cover women's sports." So, by that point, I pushed back, and I said to the editor, "Hey, listen, I don't mind covering women's sports. But on Saturday afternoon, when the rest of the sports department -- there were maybe five of us, five reporters -- are at the ballgame, I want to go to the ballgame. Or I don't want to do this." So, I think they were like, alright, move her back to general reporting, because they probably didn't want to deal with the editor at the time, and they didn't want to deal with me being mouthy. After my husband finished graduate school, he got a job back east. So that's how I get to Pennsylvania in 1979. Gannett was going to transfer me to the Camden Cherry Hill newspaper, but when I got here, I just had a child, and there was a job open at a small community newspaper about five minutes from home, and it was the city editor of that paper.

Risley: What's the name of that paper?

Walker: That was *Today's Spirit*.

Risley: And where is?

Walker: In Hatboro, Pennsylvania, a small town in suburban Philadelphia. I took that instead because it was five minutes from home, and I had an infant. It was probably the most fun job I ever had. There were maybe seven or eight reporters, and we covered the small towns. Our competition was the company I ended up with, Calkins. They had bigger daily newspapers, and, at the time, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* was still being published. I think why I loved it so much was that we hired people right out of school. They were so

eager but so interested in what they were doing and, everybody just really pulled together. It was great fun, and I was there about, I guess, five or six years.

Risley: Okay, let's go back. What year did you join *Today's Spirit*?

Walker: 1980.

Risley: Okay. And you were there for five or six years?

Walker: Six years. Yeah, because I went to the *Courier* in [19]86, so six years. *Today's Spirit* folded into a weekly, and so they let me go and some other people go. I ended up being picked up at the *Bucks County Courier Times* on the copy desk. The night editor job kept turning over year after year after year because it was insane. It was just too much work. So, I'm there about a year, and the job turns over. I ended up applying for the job and I got it. At the time, you not only had to be in charge of putting the paper out at night, you had to be a night city editor too. And they probably had fifteen freelancers filing meeting stories. It was crazy, just crazy.

So, shortly after, I got the job, the editor of the paper was let go. The publisher -- Art Mayhew was the publisher at the time -- said he wanted to meet with all the department heads. One of the problems was that there was a day [shift] and a night [shift] but they didn't have a middle. I never had met the publisher. So, I go into meet him and he says, "You know, I'd like you to tell me, you know, how things operate, and what's your perspective on how you see them?" And I said to him, "Do you want the truth?" And he said, "Yeah." And three hours later, I had told him that people leave at four o'clock and say, "Here [is my story]. And then come back the next day and say, "What the hell did you do that for?" And you're like, "I made the best decision I could because you all left." And I said to him, "There's no transition between day and night side. You think you're doing what they want, but you have really no idea of what they want you to do." So, he said, "Thank you." All of a sudden, things changed.

Risley: Was it a morning or afternoon paper?

Walker: It was a morning paper. But about three years before, they had switched from afternoon to morning, so the managers there were still in afternoon mode. And I said, "You have to have a night city editor. This is impossible. You know, you're just shoveling. You're not paying attention to what's going on." And I said, "You can't, you can't do both. You need a night city editor. Somebody that works 3 to 11, who's here to handle all these stories coming in." So, he made the changes and things got better.

Risley: And what was your job?

Walker: My job was night editor. It was like a night managing editor. You were in charge, you were it. But you did have a sports editor there at night and you had a night city editor who technically didn't report to me. But if somebody had to make a decision, I was supposed to make the decision. So, things got a whole lot better. And then the editor at the top changed. This guy comes in, and his name is Bill Steinhauer. He promoted me to managing editor, but I still worked at night because there really was a need for somebody to oversee the process of getting the paper out. So, for, I guess, four years or so, I was the managing editor, but still responsible for putting the paper out. Then when he left in 1997, that's when I became editor of the paper. So, then my life switched big time.

Risley: And you spent the rest of your career there?

Walker: I spent the rest of my career as the editor and then the editor of another one. All three of them eventually.

Risley: We'll talk about that. So, what was the newspaper like at the time you became the editor?

Walker: The *Courier Times* was 100 percent involved in their community, which was a really nice thing. We were an absolute partner with our community, and that was something, I think, instilled by the Calkins family. They were very much into the community. At the time, the three sisters owned it. Their brother, I guess previously had owned it, but he preceded me. So, when I came there, it was owned by three sisters, and they encouraged you to be involved in the community.

Risley: And when you say involved in the community, what do you mean?

Walker: Well, we did certainly partnered in projects. We did a lot of town meetings on issues of concern. We did something called "Give a Christmas" every year that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for kids. If there was something was needed in that community, the community turned to the *Courier Times*. Bucks County is a pretty affluent community, but it has a serious homeless problem in pockets. They have a homeless shelter, but it was only open from -- again, this is in 1998 or 1999 maybe -- from September to May. So, the kids who lived there never finished the school year. The newspaper had a very strong bond with family services, which ran the homeless shelter. We wrote a story about how these kids can't finish, and the money was raised to keep the shelter open, at least till the end of June.

One story that comes to mind is a guy was raising a grandson who was quadriplegic and the only way he could transport him to his doctor's appointments was for him to lie flat in the back of an old-fashioned Chevy station wagon. The car died and he couldn't afford another car. We wrote a story about it and the local car dealership outfitted a van for this kid and the guy now had the car. I could recount that [kind of story] numerous times.

When we wrote a story about something, the community paid attention and took action. And I think that's how the bond stayed so strong because the flipside would be if there was a problem, somebody would call us.

Risley: And what kind of stories like that? What kind of those problem stories did you all cover?

Walker: One of the high schools, Neshaminy High School, was trying to raise money to go to China to sing. So, this has got to be, maybe the early [19]90s, and they were robbed, scammed by whatever fundraising company that they were using to sell something. We wrote about it and a philanthropist in the community came up with the \$5,000, or whatever it was at the time, that they needed and the kids were able to go on the trip. If you write about somebody who was sick -- a family that was desperate in need for something -- they would get the help. The flipside is, you know, you'd get scammed sometimes. I remember one time we wrote about a guy who was living in his car in a parking lot and had two dogs. He was asking for food, for money for food for the dog, and we later found out he was doing it up and down the East Coast. The answer to that was you tell people this is what happened. We tried to help, but we got scammed, too.

Risley: So, it was a real community newspaper?

Walker: Absolutely, very much so. I learned over my years as an editor just how important it was. I remember the leader of United Way actually saying, "Everybody knows that if you want your effort to be successful, you have to get the *Courier Times* in your corner."

Risley: What other kind of big stories did you all cover?

Walker: There were so many stories about youth organizations where money went missing. You realized how much lack of oversight there was, and probably still is, and the gobs of money that passed through the hands of the soccer club president or the guy raising money for lights at a stadium. And to me, those are the kinds of things that will go unnoticed or unprotected without somebody watching.

When 9/11 happened, I don't think any of us realized how many people from our community actually worked in New York City. That was just overwhelming. The pilot of the plane that flew into the towers was from Bucks County. There were people in Shanksville from Bucks County and people in the Pentagon from Bucks County. I remember having poster boards up on the walls in the newsroom with the missing and dead, names and names and names.

Risley: How did you all try to cover 9/11?

Walker: We did it from a local angle, the best we could. Our philosophy was always to get a local angle for something, not to duplicate, but to accentuate. It's never hard to find a local angle, you know, you just need to look. You just need to know your community, and that's part of it, I think. But 9/11 was really tough on the newsroom. We ended up bringing counselors in. People were just so impacted by the sadness of it all. I don't think reporters at that level, at the community newspaper [level], were prepared to handle what happened. Maybe nobody was, but I certainly know my staff wasn't, and I wasn't personally.

Risley: How big was the newspaper editorial staff?

Walker: There were 102 people in the newsroom at the time. That was just the *Courier*. There were about 100 at the *Intelligencer* and maybe about fifty at the Burlington paper.

Risley: And those are the two sister newspapers?

Walker: The *Intelligencer* is in Doylestown, also in Bucks County, and the *Burlington County Times*, which is just across the river from Bucks County, South of Trenton, north of Canton, in between.

Risley: What was your relationship with those newspapers?

Walker: We should have worked better. There was always a sense of competition. The *Courier* was the biggest. A lot of times they would say, "Oh, the *Courier* gets this. The *Courier* gets that because they were the bigger paper." Not by much, but they were bigger. At the time, the *Courier* was about an 80,000- circulation paper, and the *Intel* maybe forty [thousand] and *Burlington* about thirty-five [thousand]. The truth was the *Intelligencer's* publisher was the husband of one of the sisters, and the *Burlington County Times'* publisher was the son of one of the sisters. They had an easier path to getting things than we did. We had no family member. I tried very hard to build an alliance because it used to make me crazy that -- especially in Bucks County -- that something would happen, and both papers would send a reporter. So, it made me nuts that we were wasting staff. I tried my best to work with the other two gentlemen and say, "This is nuts!" So, it didn't work as well as it should have, in my opinion. That was one of the beauties of the consolidation because then I could make it work.

Risley: I want to come back to that. What in general was the newspaper scene like in the Philadelphia metro area?

Walker: Very competitive. Very, very competitive. At the time, you had the *Philadelphia Daily News* and the *Inquirer* owned by the same company but competitive with each other. You had a couple of very aggressive weekly newspapers in suburban Philadelphia. And you had a ring of suburban papers from the south, like by the airport, all the way around to where we

were at the top. We were very competitive with the Trenton papers -- the *Trentonian* and the *Trenton Times*. They crossed over into Bucks County. And then you had the television stations, which, you know, you could swear you'd hear the pages of the newspaper turning when they were doing their broadcast. In the [19]90s, of course, there's no Internet then, so, it's all deadline driven. We had the luxury of having, having a later deadline than the *Inquirer* did. But the *Inquirer* still was in our face, and they were trying to make a push into suburbia for circulations when they had their neighbor sections. The competition was fierce.

Risley: So, what did you enjoy about the job as editor?

Walker: The people and the fact that every day was different. I enjoyed putting out the newspaper; that was probably my favorite part of my career. Just the camaraderie that gets a job done, right down through to the press guys. You form such bonds with those people. When a meeting was late, or, the Eagles were playing late, and it was very important for us to get the score of the game in because the *Inquirer* couldn't get the game in. So, if somebody was going to go out and pick up a paper, to read about the game, we needed to do that. And those guys [in the press room] said, "Whatever you need, we'll do. We can hold [the press]." It was just such a team effort. And then you'd go down there the next day when they bailed you out with pretzels or doughnuts or something. You would think you'd brought them the world. That was just such pure enjoyment. I didn't feel like I was working. You're deadline-driven; it's so stressful. But you're done and you come back the next day, and it's completely different. You start from scratch. I guess that would drive some people crazy, but that was just what I loved the most about it.

Risley: What didn't you like about the job?

Walker: Personnel. I loved the people, but at the same time I never quite could wrap my arms around the complaints that people would have when I became a manager. That and I think the lack of appreciation sometimes from some readers about what it takes to get something to you or to get something covered, and that mistakes will happen. And their lack of, sort of, any kind of sensitivity to that. There wasn't much I didn't like about it. But I did get frustrated by people who didn't understand the business and didn't understand what it takes to as a reporter to do something, to pull a story together, especially on a deadline.

Risley: Did you do any writing yourself?

Walker: I did when I was a reporter.

Risley: I'm thinking about when you were editor?

Walker: I tried. They wanted me to write a column, but honestly, I was so busy. I always was a hands-on, kind of roll-up my sleeves person. So, if it got to the



end of the day, and city editors were up to their elbows in copy to read, I would help. So, I didn't do as much writing then. I did more help probably editing, which was okay with me. I was a good reporter, but not the greatest writer. I'm still marveled by people who can turn a better phrase than I could, but I was really good at making your story better.

Risley: A newspaper needs both.

Walker: Yeah, yeah.

Risley: What was Calkins like as a newspaper company?

Walker: It was very good to work for. I had come from Gannett which was very structured. And while their pockets were deeper, there were still times when, it was a corporate situation. Calkins was a smaller family-owned paper, but the pockets weren't as deep, but boy, did they care about the people who work for them. I guess that's the best way to say it is, if you could show them why you needed something, they were willing to put their money to get it for you. They also very much seemed to care about the people who work for them. They would go the extra mile to make sure somebody got all the breaks they needed. I learned this one more than one time when I was an editor with a personnel situation. They were more inclined to send a troubled employee two or three times to rehab. That was very generous on their part.

Risley: There were three [Calkins] sisters?

Walker: Three sisters.

Risley: And what were their names?

Walker: Shirley Ellis, Sandra Hardy, and Carolyn Smith. Calkins is their maiden name. And it's funny because Carolyn had the *Intelligencer*; Sandra, the *Courier*; and Shirley *Burlington*. It was kind of their thing. I think it was the day of the O.J. [Simpson] verdict. The TVs were on in the newsroom, and I turned around and Sandra was standing at the back corner of the newsroom. We never had much interaction with the owners, but I knew her. I walked over and said, "Hey, come on over. Everybody else is standing around the TV." And she was like, "Oh, I don't know, I don't know." I said, "You own this place! Do you want to come stand with everybody?" She said, "I just feel like a newsroom is where I want to be when the verdict comes back." And I said, "You could come on over here and stand with everybody else." But they were very shy, which is interesting for women who were millionaires. You would not know it. They were just very -- plain is not the right word -- they were just very reserved.

I know why I stayed. You were rewarded for hard work. They cared about hard work, they appreciated hard work. As I became more senior in the [company] structure, I had to do board meetings with them. I sort of did a

yearly report. Never once did they ever not thank me for what I did. So, I always felt as if I was appreciated there.

Risley: That was my next question. Why did you spend the rest of your career there?

Walker: There were plenty of opportunities. I was recruited by others and there were times I thought about it. But the family-owned thing was really appealing, and I also am a community newspaper person. I liked the fact that we touched lives. I liked the fact that we could write a story, and it could make something happen. I always felt like it was, you know, my own Woodward and Bernstein kind of moment, you know. I wasn't going to maybe change the world. But I was going to be able to change a piece that really mattered to somebody. And that was good for me.

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

Walker: It certainly changed from, "You can't cover men's sports," to where I ended up. All through my career, there were always times when I was told I couldn't do something because I was female. "You better not go to that murder," when I'm 20 something. But I always would push back. I would say, "Well, let me go with you to cover the murder" or "Let me go with you to do this." I was the first woman editor of the *Courier Times*. It probably should have happened sooner at a company owned by three women, but okay.

We made an effort to try to diversify, and it was really tough to diversify a community newspaper, especially in the Philadelphia area, because any journalists of color were sucked up by the *Inquirer* and the *Daily News*. So, we struggled, but I created a program, which we called a graduate internship. In our salary scale, we had no entry-level positions. We could hire somebody with one or two years of experience. So, I created this graduate intern level, and we were able to get journalists of color to come for a lot less money, but they were right out of school. So, it was pretty successful and a lot of times, they were green. But we were able to bring diversity to the newsroom. Our commitment was, "We're going to make you ready. You're going to come out of this with two years of experience whether we hire you or somebody else hires you." It worked and a lot of times, we hired them. We never could quite break the management level, though. Just couldn't do it, couldn't get people to come. They were just sucked up by bigger newspapers around the country. Then probably by 2004 or 2005, things started to really tighten up. And by 2008, we were struggling like everybody else.

So, in 2008, we go into work one day and were pulled into a room, and told, "Okay, we're consolidating our management team. There's going to be one publisher for three newspapers, one editor for three newspapers, and you're it." So, you know, my colleagues, the other two editors are now [thinking] "Are they working? Are they not working?"

Risley: And you did not have any hints that that was coming?

Walker: Nobody did, nobody at my level did. So, you can imagine that first year was brutal, because everybody looked at me when I walked into these other newsrooms, like the invader. And the first thing I had to do was consolidate. I had to end duplication and consolidate personnel. So, we created one copy desk for the three newspapers. That meant people who were working in Doylestown now had to go work in Levittown. So, I was not liked, I'm sure. And it ended up, that both the other editors stayed on for a little bit, but they didn't want to stay. I don't know how I would have been had the shoe been on the other foot.

Risley: Why do you think they hired you as the editor and not the other two?

Walker: I think because the family thought that I was capable. They never really told me, but they said, at one point, "We were just confident that you could handle it." But it was brutal.

Risley: And how long did that consolidation process take?

Walker: About a year. I had one photo editor. I had to take three and make one. I had to keep city editors in each place. So, they could run [the newspapers], like a managing editor here, a managing editor at each newspaper who directly reported to me. We had to have offices at all three places. So, I had to travel between three newspapers. It was taking about forty minutes to get between each one. I learned early on, there was no going between. I would be here one or two days a week, here one or two days a week, here one or two days a week. And you had to have a managing editor in each place to run it day to day because it was impossible. I was obviously deep into the world of budgeting and cost-cutting, and that kind of stuff was not my favorite part of the business.

I had to pick a sports editor. I tried to evaluate personnel as best I could, and it's not like I didn't know all these people because I had worked with them. So, I ended up picking the sports editor from one newspaper over the one that I had at the *Courier*, and that guy was mad at me. But I just had to make hard choices. I was never privy to anybody's salaries before this, and I was now privy to salaries. I found out that the editors at the other two papers were making significantly more money than I was. So, you know, once again, you get smacked back into reality as a woman in this business. And there were inequities in pay across the board. The managing editor at one paper was making \$25,000 more a year than the managing editor at the other paper. They were generous enough not to cut pay. The inequities were crazy, crazy.

Risley: How did the newspaper coverage of the three areas change?

Walker: I think it changed because we were forced into cooperation, and it became easier. Prior to consolidation, the *Intelligencer* had a reporter for courts and county government, and the *Courier* had a reporter for courts and county government. Now, courts probably needed one of each because there's just too much [news]. But county government didn't. We all used the same story. So, we were able to get more coverage because we could stop the duplication.

Risley: So, you don't think that coverage suffered?

Walker: No, I think the coverage got better.

Risley: Really?

Walker: I do because we could expand staff because we weren't duplicating situations. So, I think it got better. It certainly expanded. It wasn't as easy with *Burlington* because you're in a different state. The Doylestown, Levittown *Courier-Intelligencer* thing was a natural. I think if anybody from the outside had ever bought these two papers years ago, they would have made one paper with two editions, and that would have been it. *Burlington* was a little tougher. But there were still issues, especially with the river, issues along the river, that were common. So, there were ways even to consolidate there.

If you did issue pieces, you could throw in some quotes from *Burlington*, and they could take advantage of a Sunday story. So, if you're the reporter in Doylestown, and you're doing a piece on educational testing, you had to get a colleague from *Burlington* to make two calls to a couple superintendents over there, put that in the story, and everybody could use the story on Sunday. And that makes it so that some other reporter can go do something else. So, once everybody got on that train, it became better. I took three people and made them columnists. And I told them, you know, you're writing two or three days a week, and one of those days, you have to go to *Burlington*, and write something about *Burlington* so they can use your column. too.

Risley: And all three papers carried those columns?

Walker: Yes, they carried those columns. They were human-interest columns, so it wasn't anything that couldn't have been interesting. But I think once everybody got that --and it took a couple of years for everybody to get it -- it worked. It worked better. But I'll tell you, those first couple years, I would go into *Burlington's* newsroom, or the *Intel's* newsroom, and it was like I was a foreigner coming in. It's funny because my office in Levittown was all decorated in Ohio State stuff. And I was venting to my friend at the *Inquirer* one day. I said, "I cannot get these people at the *Intel* to talk to me. I go from desk to desk. I say, 'Good morning.' They just ignore me. I don't understand." And she's said to me, "Why don't you try creating your office the same there as you have in Levittown?" So, I was like, okay. And it became a conversation piece. I decorated a Buckeye office there, and all of a sudden,

people would go by and go, "Oh, my God!" because most of them were Penn Staters [laughter]. It worked and it became a conversation piece.

Risley: What was the impact of the Internet and online news?

Walker: Initially we had a bulletin board, like back in 2000 to 2003. One guy was totally into it, and so we sort of got a little early introduction into that. I think for traditional journalists, it was tough to handle at first. We had a change at the top, a new CEO came in, I guess, probably 2010, maybe 2011. And he really [emphasized] the Internet, and then a push into video. I'm not sure it was worth the investment made, but it really was a push to try to see if we were going to survive that way.

But the Internet certainly ended competition in terms of trying to get something by deadline. And you know, it just made it, so much harder for reporters, because now reporters, had to quickly file something. That was an educational process and that was a steep hill: Quickly file something that we could put up online, and then come back and write your story, and then update the online story. I think people were frightened by the technology. And in a place where pockets weren't as deep, we probably didn't have the technology that we needed right off the bat. That was one thing that the new CEO brought. I said, "If you want us to do it, we'll do it. But you got to give us the tools we need to do it." But it was a steep, steep climb for people. Newspaper journalists are used to gathering our facts, double-checking our facts, making sure it's right. Making sure again that it's right. And that speed to quickly post something was, I think, unnatural for us. It was really difficult and so many mistakes were made. But eventually, I think most journalists saw the power of it, and what you could do, and how much more relevant you might become because of it. But I think it was very, it was a very hard sell to people. Naturally, they just want to be careful. You're taught to be careful.

Risley: How did the print newspaper change?

Walker: It became harder for reporters and harder for editors because you didn't just put stories on pages. You had to remember to put a bug in for a website that somebody could find if they wanted more information about X or Y. And through every stage, I think everybody needed to monitor that. And what didn't come naturally to monitor that when you're sitting on a copy desk to think, oh, shoot, they should have put a link to this or that in there. It's become more so complicated. Now, I think with social media, it's become even more complicated than it was then. Early on with the Internet, I think most newspaper people thought it was a nuisance, and I'm sure they probably think social media is a nuisance now, too.

Risley: I always thought the *Courier Times* was an attractive newspaper from a layout and design standpoint. Is that something you all worked on?

Walker: Yeah, we redesigned a couple of times. In the early [19]90s, an editor came from Gannett, and he did some things that I think were really good, with sort of a *USA Today* impact. Instead of writing stories about police incidents, we wrote a log that just said who, what, when happened. And you didn't need to make it into a story anymore. You could just make it into a list of things. We did a lot more lists. People balked at that at first, but it really made the paper easier to read. And he was always very good about telling people to break out the time something is and put it in a little inset that says, "If you want to go to this game . . ." We had some really good design people. I didn't pretend like I knew more than the graphic artists did. I said, "So have at it! Make this look better. Just tell me what words need to go there." That was sort of my management style. I didn't pretend like I knew it all. I was a delegator. And I think that helped with the way we looked, and the way it read. We weren't afraid to publish a giant picture when the picture was worth it.

Risley: What would you say were your strengths as an editor or a manager?

Walker: I think, probably first and foremost, is that I recognize my own weaknesses and didn't pretend like I didn't have them and knew when to yield, in a sense, to somebody else. I was always an open-door kind of person and very inclusive. There were times when somebody had to make the decision. I always made sure I had listened to everybody else before I made a decision. I'm a good listener. And I think that was a strength. I like people too, so that helps. I think the people who work for me would probably say that I'm firm but fair. I would never go home if you still had work to do and you needed help. I would always, before I left every day, I'd say to the city editors, like, "Are we good?" Or I could look in the queue and see that we had twenty-five stories then, you know, I just sat down and helped.

Risley: What would you say were your weaknesses?

Walker: Maybe that I expected people to have the same commitment that I did a lot of times, and they didn't. That was disappointing to me, and I guess sometimes I showed it. I don't think I ever realized myself as an editor that, oh my god, she's the boss. You know, that when she walks through the room, she's the boss. I just never saw myself that way. So, if I said something, and people would recoil, ten minutes later, I'd be like, "Hey, Ford! You ready to go have a beer?" And you'd still be recoiling. And I didn't I didn't understand that. I was somebody who would just kind of let that go. I still have to teach myself or remind myself that it takes some people longer to get past something than it ever did me.

Risley: You talked about this a little bit, but what were things like for women in the business, and especially in terms of in terms of management.

Walker: Tough. I would go to Pennsylvania Newspaper Association, meeting and there'd be two of us, me and Cate [Barron] usually, maybe one other. There were plenty of women at managing editor, city editor level, but when you got

up to editor level and/or publisher, it was worse. You're just in a room full of men. And you just learned to navigate that, but it's like, "Yikes, when is there going to be a woman publisher?"

In 2005 or 2006, they were hiring a publisher at the *Courier* and, and I applied. I didn't think I would get it, but I figured, well, I've got to put my money where my mouth is, I'm going to at least apply. But it is just tough being told you can't do something. And I'm not somebody who takes that well, especially as a reporter being told you couldn't do something. I tried never to do that.

One of the first things I did when I became managing editor at the *Courier* was, I said we've to get a woman in sports. I always made sure that women were in non-traditional newspaper roles. I can't even imagine like a person of color. I wouldn't even begin to put myself in that place because it's got to be ten times worse than what I ever dealt with. But you do see those barriers. You get told you can't do something. Or, you may not be verbally told, but you know it. You know, you're not getting that [position].

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

Walker: So back to this homeless shelter thing. This is my proudest moment, I think. This organization was really struggling to keep this shelter open. It was aging, and it needed a lot of work done. So, the woman who was in charge of it was always trying to get us to write a story. So I was like, "Okay, Audrey." And we were walking around, and she was showing me what they needed. And she said, "Oh, my God. You know, this kitchen here is falling apart." I said, "Well, can't you get grants?" She said, "Well, with the red tape, it'll probably take two years for this to happen, maybe four years for me to get through the red tape." I said, "Well, what does something like this cost?"

We're literally standing in a parking lot having this conversation and she says about \$200,000. So, I'm thinking in the world of federal grants, \$200,000 doesn't seem like a whole lot of money, but it's going to take her years to get it. So, I said to her, "How many people live in Bucks County?" And she said, "About 500,000, I think. And I said, "Well, you know if everybody in Bucks County gave a \$1, we could have \$200K. You could have your new kitchen." And she just kind of looked at me, and I said, "Do you want to try that?" And she said, "Yeah." I said, "Okay." So, we pulled some people together. I said, "You know, here's my idea. I called it 'Buck Up, Bucks County.' All you need to do is get those four quarters that are in the bottom of your couch, and then tell your neighbor to get his or her four quarters. And if everybody does that, we can do this." So, we started writing stories.

I had to keep reining in the organization because traditionally, they would go after the big donors. And I kept saying, "Let's not do this the hard way. Let's not. If somebody wants to give us \$10,000, that's great, but let's try to do this, just

asking everybody to give \$1. Every man, woman, and child." So, we kicked this thing off on February 1.

Risley: You kicked it off with a story?

Walker: We kicked it off with the whole front page, big splash: Pictures of the kitchen with holes in them. We pulled every heartstring you could pull. The next day, I got a phone call from a general contractor, who says, "My wife read your story. We'll do the contract work." I said, "You need to call Audrey Tucker, but okay." A couple hours later, I get a call from an architect who says, "My buddy Bill, the general contractor, called me. We'll design it." I'm like, okay. In twenty-eight days, we had \$200,000, and 90 percent of it came from four quarters.

We got canisters and I literally pasted labels on these things. I went and met with our advertising representatives. I said, "If we're going to do this, I need your help. Every time you go into one of your clients, I need you to ask them to put one of these canisters on their counter." We were putting canisters all over Bucks County. And it just it worked. It was crazy. We ended up with more than \$200,000.

I remember, one day literally brought me to tears. Somebody called me from a small laundromat. I walked in, and it was a mother and daughter who ran this place. It was in a kind of a depressed neighborhood. They look like they needed every penny they had, and they said, "Our canisters are full. We put our tips in there." I went to my car, and I just broke down. I couldn't believe these people who needed the money probably as much as anybody else. And it was the strength of the paper. Because I said, everything has to be transparent. Every cent that put in is going to the cost of this. Nobody's taking anything out of it. We'll show you every day that every cent there was no administrative costs.

And people got it. And when it was done, people could come see it. It ended up that so much stuff was donated. It was just an amazing community effort, and it would not have happened without that newspaper because we were the driving force to let people know what was going on.

It's sad today because the papers there, but that connection to the community is not there. They don't have time. So, what happens to these communities when issues arise, and the need exists? And the means to meet that need is there, but who's telling you? Who's helping you? And who do you trust to get to make sure it happens? In my wildest dreams, never would have thought that it would happen that quickly and mostly from very small donations.

Risley: When did you retire?



Walker: In 2016, well, 2017, technically. Because I was technically on the payroll until the end of 2017.

Risley: And what was your decision about that?

Walker: We started to do a lot with video, which was very fun. It was like my introduction late in my career into what it's like in the TV world. But boy, you know, it was tough for journalists again, because now they're asked to shoot video. And now they're asked to edit their own video, and you got to have an audio clip. Some of them took to it and we carved some people out to be only video reporters, and we had our own TV broadcast thing. We did a local high school [sports] shows sort of like, *Game Day*. That was very fun. But everything was overwhelming. And I just kept thinking I don't know that I have the heart to be in this business when I don't feel like I have all the tools to do the job well when staffing was being cut, and you couldn't cover the community the way you used to. That probably for me was the decision, you know. I can't do my job well. I was fortunate enough that I was at the right point in my life where I could say I don't have to. If I can't do it the way I want to, then I don't have to.

Risley: This has been great. Is there anything you'd like to add that we didn't discuss?

Walker: I don't think so. I feel like the passion for journalism has got to still be there. I talk to people now especially, you know, 20- and 30-somethings, and it's discouraging that they think Facebook is true and that's how you get your information. It used to be that we were always trying to get younger readers, and you couldn't get them until they bought a home and they had kids in college or kids in school. Then you got them, but now you don't get them. I don't think you're ever going to get that same interest level in what goes on around you. And they don't seem to care. You care about news nationally, yeah, okay. But there's so much more to care about, in terms of how your money's being handled, and who's taking your taxes, and how they're spending it, and why is it that one company always gets the paving deals, you know, and at a local level.

Millions are going unchecked. That is disheartening to me. There used to be conversations between five reporters about my municipality and your municipality, and you know, isn't it interesting that this particular company got all the paving contracts in this borough or this town? And oh yeah, they got them in mine too. And then boom, there's, you know, there's a story. And that conversation would percolate, you know, something's going on. Why is it that this keeps happening? And that's just going to run unchecked. That and millions and millions of dollars in local tax money that just is going unchecked.

But overall, I wouldn't have done anything different. I used to drive my family crazy because they're like, "Do you ever stop asking questions? And

do you ever not see something you got to go check out?" And I still do it now.  
I am still wondering why something works the way it does.

Risley: Hey, thanks so much.

Walker: Thank you.