

Oral History Interview with Keven Ann Willey

Date of interview: Nov. 7, 2017

Location: Dallas Morning News

Interviewers: Hannah Wise, Claire Higgins

Transcribed by: Andrea Arterbery, Sheri-Lee Norris

Hannah Wise: Thank you so much for joining us. We are very excited to speak with you. I was hoping you could tell us a little bit about your origin story, where you were from and what you remember from the early years.

Keven Ann Willey: Well, I was born, do I look at you or do I look at camera?

Wise: You can look at me.

Willey: Ok, I was born in Washington, D.C. My mother was a newspaper junkie; she subscribed to two or three different newspapers back in those days. She likes to tell the story, I obviously don't remember this, but I was in my bassinet and my mother would take me to the Senate gallery to watch the debate of the day. My mother loved current events and still does. She will be 90 and lives across the street from me. So, I got my interest in politics and journalism, I guess, very early in the bassinet.

Those were the days when Everett Dirksen and Estes Kefauver were debating the political issues of the day. They were very consequential times, in the 1950s.

Wise: What did your mother do? What did your father do?

Willey: My mother was a stay at home mom although later she did go into teaching. She was a teacher's aide after we moved to Arizona. My father at the time worked for the National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C. We moved to Arizona, which is where I did most of my growing up, in 1962. I was almost five. My dad worked as a training officer for the Peace Corps in Tucson, traveling to Mexico and Venezuela, and then joined the University of Arizona faculty, first at the medical school and later at the Flandrau Planetarium.

Wise: What do you remember from your time in Arizona as a child?

Willey: I grew up in the desert, played cowboys and Indians, ran across the desert barefoot, had lots of forts and those kinds of things as a kid. I was a Girl Scout and enjoyed camping, played varsity volleyball, varsity tennis. I tried to make the varsity gymnastics team and failed at that. So, it was a very active childhood.

Wise: You spoke about the Girl Scouts, with the Boy Scouts being in the news. What does that make you think of? Some of the things I've read that women who were in the Girl Scouts at that time didn't feel like they were getting the same badges that Boy Scouts did. They're excited to have it opened up. What do you think about that?

Willey: Well, I'm certainly open to the reasons for allowing girls in Boy Scouts. I'm a big advocate of greater rights for women and if this is one way to achieve that, that might be a good idea. I do have some concerns or questions that I would want to ask. I loved Girl Scouts. I had a sash full of badges that I worked very hard for and I certainly don't remember feeling as though my badges weren't worthy. Now that was a long time ago. So maybe times have changed, which is why I'd sort of like to learn a little bit about more and hear more stories. We've published op-ed columns on both sides of this issue from men and from women who've been in both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and

I've read them very carefully and been very attentive. I just don't come to it with a strong: "We've gotta change it." But I'm open to being persuaded.

Wise: Do you remember feeling any sense of like shock or wonderment? D.C. is very different from Arizona. Can you talk about that transition?

Willey: Well, I was small enough to where my transition happened in a very, you know, small world. We moved to Tucson when I was just shy of five. We lived in a tent in a campground for the first six or eight weeks as my dad looked for a job. I remember bits of that. I remember my mother making eggs on the camp stove and bacon and how good that smells and things like that, but I don't remember cultural or social shifts.

We then did buy a house outside of Tucson. Again, I grew up in a kind of rural area. We boarded horses for a while. I used to say that I shoveled my share of manure, different terminology, but that was brief. It wasn't like for years on end. So, I enjoyed growing up where I grew up.

The big deal to me was when I got my driver's license. When you are 15 years and 7 months you can get a learner's permit. 15 years, 7 months and one day I was given my learner's permit. Every now and then my dad would let me drive the 1958 Volkswagen Bug, his car, without air conditioning, in Tucson to school and if you were a senior you could go off campus for lunch, so we would load the Volkswagen Bug up with as many people as we could put into it and the big debate was whether we'd go to Hardees, that's was when Hardee's still existed, or McDonald's. Those were our two big ...

Wise: Which did you prefer?

Willey: I think I was just as happy to have a chocolate milkshake at either place, so I don't remember having a strong opinion.

Wise: That makes sense.

Willey: My job was to get the car. I had a strong opinion about that. (laughs)

Wise: So, when you were growing up in Arizona, that was in the '60s, yea? So that's a very tumultuous political time. Do you remember having any feelings of opinions about what was happening in the news or do you feel like growing up at that time has shaped who you've become today?

Willey: Oh, I'm sure it has contributed in some ways, probably indirectly. I graduated from high school in 1976 so the '60s and '70s was sort of my era. My best friend, at the time, her older sister was really into the Woodstock thing and was quite angry that her parents would not let her go to Woodstock. So, I remember those kinds of debates. The Vietnam War was a big ugly deal and I remember the debates around that.

The thing I remember, oddly enough, the most is Walter Cronkite. We had to sit down and have dinner together every night. I thought that was archaic and unreasonable. My friends didn't always have to have dinner with their family but we, every night, had to have dinner together and the TV had to be off. The only exception – not the Wide World of Disney, which was my favorite, or Lassie or Bonanza, or any of those TV shows, the only exception was Walter Cronkite. We could have CBS News on for dinner, but that was it. So, I remember that, and 60 Minutes was a big up and coming thing at that point.

In fact, I have over on my wall pictures of Walter Cronkite. When I was in college, I may have been a junior, I went to a national conference, it was a Society of Professional Journalists -- it was called Sigma Delta Chi back then -- conference and they had a silent auction of items. This is signed by Walter Cronkite if you look in the lower right-hand corner very discreetly is his signature. And I bid, and the bidding went up and I paid \$60 for that and it broke

my bank. I mean I regretted afterwards having gotten carried away and spent so much money on it. \$60 was a big deal. But I'm glad I did. I've had it ever since and it sits on my wall and he was the only person on TV that was allowed to join us for dinner in the evenings.

Wise: That's great. Do you feel like watching those kind of reports led you to want to become a journalist? Do you have a distinct memory of deciding that this is what I wanna do?

Willey: Several things played a role, yes. In part watching my parents take seriously the events of the day and my father would read letters to the editor and comment on which ones were smart and which ones weren't and I remember those discussions and how an argument holds together or how it's illogical. So that is maybe an early memory.

I also knew that I wanted to write, I wanted to write you know the great American novel, what writer doesn't? So that played a role in my interest in going into newspapers or magazines. I kind of thought originally I would go into magazines.

And then I remember attending college orientation, when you are pre-freshman in college and you go and you have a session with other entering freshmen and various professors in a group setting and Dr. Bert Bostrom was the journalism professor who was speaking at my particular initiation meeting and he made journalism sound like so much fun. And I thought to myself, "Gee I could actually go out every day and learn something new and then write about it for other people? What could be more fun than that? To get paid to learn things and tell other people." That kind of sealed it for me.

Wise: And which university was this at?

Willey: Northern Arizona University. I started at the U of A, the University of Arizona in Tucson and then I graduated from Northern Arizona University. In between I did a brief study tour abroad and in Mexico, two separate study tours, and then I finished at Northern Arizona University. And then I started a graduate program at Arizona State in Tempe, just to be equal opportunity with the Arizona schools, and I just never finished that graduate program. I was going to get a Master's in Spanish literature. And I got a little way in and the newspaper started taking up more of my time.

Wise: You said you went to Mexico. Where else did you study abroad?

Willey: I did a brief study tour in five different countries. It was during the summer: England, Greece, Italy, France, Switzerland.

Wise: While you were abroad, what were the people there, what were their opinions of Americans and did you feel any different?

Willey: The first time I was abroad was in 1976, I think, and this was when Europeans, particularly the French, were very critical of Americans and you know I felt some of that. And we were instructed to be very careful and to make sure that you follow all the rules. Back in those days Europeans went to church and Americans didn't, now of course, it's kind of reversed but that was so important that we were instructed to you know cover your head when you go into churches and that sort of thing.

I went back to Europe several years later and I noticed a big change, it was a much warmer reception.

Wise: What was it like, did you have any discussions with your parents like when I went abroad even to Germany my parents were very nervous for me to leave home and go somewhere that far away. What was your family reaction like?

Willey: They were very supportive, very excited. I'm trying to remember how the trip came about. I don't even remember that, I just remember wanting to go and making a pitch for it. It was for a summer, it wasn't for like a whole year or anything. It was only part of a summer.

And I think they were just, neither of my parents had been to Europe and so I think, you know my dad had been in the Air Force, so he had seen parts of the world, but my mother had not at that point, and so I think they were just very happy for me to be able to provide their daughter with widened eyes.

Wise: Sure. So, then going to Mexico did you study Spanish beforehand?

Willey: Yes, I took Spanish in elementary school, sorry, junior high school. I started in junior high school, and in high school, and I minored in it in college. And so, I went for a summer and lived with a family in, actually outside, Guadalajara, and there were four American girls who boarded with this family who had three daughters and it was a blast. We just had a great time ... and the cultural differences. The daughters didn't speak much English and of course our Spanish, we spoke more Spanish than they did English, but our Spanish was still in the learning phases and it's funny how well teenage girls can communicate with or without language. We got along just fine.

Wise: Obviously living in Texas, there's a lot of discussion around the U.S.-Mexico relationship. Do you feel like it has changed since that time that you were there?

Willey: Yes, very much so. Particularly, along the border. When I was growing up, the border was the safer part, the northern part of the county was regarded as more prosperous and safer and it was the southern part, Chiapas and the southern states that were more dangerous. I think the inverse is true now. The southern part of the country, the state of Chiapas, for example, is probably the safest state there is in Mexico and the border area has become very tense and you know the drug trade and other things have contributed to escalating crimes and such there. And that has contributed also to the economic tensions along the border between landowners, private landowners. So, yes, the situation is very different now than it was when I was growing up.

Wise: Growing up in Arizona, what was kind of the demographics of where you were living ... as a rural area?

Willey: I went to public high school, public schools, very diverse by those standards. It's on the southwest side of Tucson, so we had a large black and Latino population, and we also had one area, the school district was a very wealthy, largely white and then you had us, on the, the outliers – those of us that were bussed in from the rural areas. That was quite a mixture. So, we had ranchers, we had urban, we had just a, when I look back on the '70s it was a diverse, it was diverse before diversity was cool.

Wise: Tell us more about when you started at the university and you decided to pursue journalism. Kind of what were those early years studying like?

Willey: Well, I started out with the sort of a general introduction to mass communications, but I really didn't enjoy it very much. Then I remember going to talk to my advisor, Dr. Bostrom, and I said you know I really think I wanna change my major. And his deal was, I think I was a second semester freshman or maybe I was a sophomore, I don't remember, and his deal was, "Well why don't you take one more semester and let's load you up on practical journalism classes, not the theory of this or the theory of that. If after that semester you still want to change majors I will help you do that. But give it one more semester and let's play with your class structure a little bit." And so, I agreed. So, we did, and I took introduction to reporting and interpretive reporting and public affairs reporting. Loved it.

You know as a student I would go to the Flagstaff City Council meetings, the Flagstaff City Hall meeting and have to then turn a story back, and this is in the days when we did this on typewriters, sorry, and then we had to slide it under the professor's door by 8:00 a.m. to simulate deadlines. I can remember having attended the meeting and

understanding only a portion of what was going on and then going back to my dorm room and trying to write it up and then realizing I hadn't asked all the questions that I needed to get the answers for and how do you deal with that and turning the paper in. And for some reason I just really really enjoyed that. Again, it was learning new things about the community I lived in and then being paid, although not as a student – that would come later – to tell people about it. And so, I enjoyed that.

Wise: Did you work on the student publication?

Willey: I did. I worked on the Lumberjack newspaper. I was the editorial page editor. Actually, the most difficult story I did had to do with the safety of railroad track crossings. Flagstaff is a big railroad town and there are lots of railroad track crossings and there had been several deaths at one particular crossing that was near campus when the arm would come down or wouldn't come down. So, I was doing a story about whether there was a violation of federal laws having to do with railroad track crossings and as part of that I had to for some reason I remember going to truck stops to interview truckers about those crossings. I remember being a little nervous about going to truck stops and interviewing ... you know I'd go to Little America, which was a truck stop in Flagstaff, and interview truckers, but I got great quotes for the story as a result.

Wise: So then how did you, what made you go toward the editorial board? You mentioned being the editorial page editor of the Lumberjack, and so what kind of led you down that path?

Willey: In college I think it was just interesting, I was editor of the paper and you were also editor of the editorial page. So, I enjoyed not just absorbing the news but interpreting it and trying to chart a way forward as a result.

From college I went to The Associated Press as a reporter and at that point I was still just interested in being a reporter. I think I eventually did want to be an editor of a section of a magazine because I liked longer form writing and I thought it would be fun to write for a magazine.

Then I went to The Arizona Republic. I started there in 1980 in November and I did the school boards and the like, in fact I remember covering the Agua Fria School District my first assignment of the school district remember walking in and asking the front desk, "Where does the school board meet?" And she said, "Well, if you're here to enroll for high school, you need to go over here." And I was so insulted because I was a college graduate and I was there to cover the meeting that was, that brought me down a notch.

From that I covered the weekend duty, cops, a mishmash of things and I covered the legislature which really was interesting to me. I enjoyed, I had done an internship earlier at the legislature as a research assistant. That was really interesting to me how bills became law and how bills got introduced and what research went into and behind them. I was one of the people who was, you know, researching whether something should be in a bill and I really enjoyed it. And then the people and how they argued and interacted with one another, what succeeded? What failed? Why it failed? All of that I thought was so interesting and I remember at that point editorials would run occasionally which had errors in them or which, I thought, were not logical. And that's when I started to think I'd like to do that. I think I could do that better. I wanna do that. And so, it took a while, but that's how that idea was born, I think.

Wise: So, you discussed your various roles. What was the makeup of the newsrooms that you were working in? Were there other young women there? Were there mostly men? Were there African Americans or Latinos?

Willey: It was mostly men. But I was hired in at a time when there was an effort to hire more women and so I wanna say there were like three or four of us women, four or five of us, hired at about the same time. And I've kept in touch with two or three of those women all these years later because we became fast friends. There were a couple of older women. And by older women at that point, I mean like 30, you know not particularly old, but older than we were in the newsroom and they were tough, crusty, you know, great role models, but they were few and far between. We did have, I mean Arizona does not have a large African American population. I do remember the education

reporter Art Gissendaner on the staff, in fact interestingly, I just last month got a call from Art Gissendaner, who's now doing something completely different, but he had seen my name somewhere about retirement and he reached out and we reconnected. So that was very fun. But he was, candidly, the exception to the rule. We had some Latino reporters but they were the exception to the rule in those days.

Wise: Do you feel like you were ever given assignments based on your gender or not given assignments because you are a woman?

Willey: Probably, but I don't know about it, but I do remember being the subject of speculation that I resented. I did a stint on the investigative team, which was a great learning experience. Worked with three men, all of them more experienced than I, very smart award-winning journalists. To this day I look up to all three of them. One of them is Bruce Tomaso, who was at The Dallas Morning News for many years after he left The Arizona Republic.

But I remember going on an assignment out of town with the head of the investigative team and the number two and I, the three of us, went to Lake Havasu City to do a series, we were doing one on gambling and whether gambling interests were buying up land and trying to come into Arizona and establish casinos, et cetera. We would check in every day by phone, and another young male reporter I overheard on the phone joking with them about hotel rooms and who was sleeping with who and that sort of thing and I was angered by that. I was kind of hurt by that because it said to me that I was there as an object, not as a journalist. And what really rubbed salt into my wound was he was a young reporter. He was my age; he was maybe even a year younger than I. Now when I look back on it, he was just trying to be one of the boys with the older guys, he probably wanted a spot on the investigative team and this was probably a way to ingratiate himself. So, you know, I'm much more forgiving now than I was then although it has left a lasting memory and that's just one example. I'm sure there are others. Everybody has those stories.

Wise: Are there any moments during those years that you think you might have wanted to handle differently? Looking back, like, vision is 20/20. But, like...

Willey: Oh yes, where do I start? Um, there was one assignment I remember when I was on the investigative team. I went to, I'm trying to remember what city it was now. It was a city in the Northeast. I have to think about which one it was and I was to try to get an interview a person that we were investigating for possibly having connections to an organization alleged to be training terrorists in the deserts of the Southwest. And I just walked up to the door and I knocked on the door and the person answered and I had my tape recorder running and I just started asking questions and they asked who I was and, uh, eventually it was a short interview. The door got slammed in and I left. Later, like years later, that interview as short as it was, came up on on a Federal wiretap. Those people were being tapped. We didn't know that at the time. Although they were clearly being investigated and we were investigating them, too. In hindsight, I don't think I should have done that. I think I was so willing - I mean, my boss said, "You wanna go? Just go up and knock on the door," and I said "Sure." You know, I don't know. I was probably 23 years old. I mean, I don't think that was a smart call on my part or on his part, in hindsight. Fortunately, nothing happened, so. I mean, you have lots of thoughts like that. But, um, a life unexamined isn't a life worth living, so.

Wise: Yeah. So, what's a story that you're really proud of?

Willey: Oh, there's just, there's so many in different ways. Whenever you feel like you make a difference or make the world a better place. That's always such an uplifting feeling. I remember once, this isn't particularly global ... but there was a state senator who was from, he was in Arizona, but he was from Tennessee, and he had been very controversial for a number of reasons and was accused of unethical conduct in office, et cetera. And so I thought, well, and he said, on the record, that he had never filed for bankruptcy and had never had any criminal problems. And I kinda thought, a categorical statement like that begs to be confirmed. So, I pitched my editor and I needed to go to Chattanooga, Tennessee and check those courthouse records. I really had no, I wasn't pulling a thread, I didn't have a thread. I just had an instinct that he was so eager to make that categorical statement, and he had such a shady

background, or lots of unknowns about his background. I thought it was worth checking. So, the Editor bit, sent me to Chattanooga and I spent about three days and after about two days of going through courthouses I was like, ok, this is a really stupid idea. My eyes are glazed over. I've now figured out the Tennessee court system and it's really boring. But, I stuck through it and at the end of the second day, he had indeed filed for multiple bankruptcies. Didn't have a criminal record, as I recall. But, that was enough to get a page one story, and that was a pretty good page one story, so.

Wise: Yeah!

Willey: It also earned me my first death threat as a journalist. Not from him, but from one of his supporters.

Wise: How many death threats have you received?

Willey: Well, it depends on how seriously you take it. You know, email makes it even easier to make kind of veiled threats. Probably a half dozen. That was the most serious one because it was in a telephone voicemail. You could hear the person's voice. That was a little scary. But, I think, you know, like most death threats, they're more about how they make the threatener feel than posing any real danger. The person doing the threat, makes them feel powerful.

Wise: So, tell us a little bit about how you arrived in Dallas.

Willey: I have one other quick story that just occurred to me. So, I was, I can't remember if this before I covered the legislature, but anyway, I wanted the City Hall beat and I didn't have the City Hall beat. And the guy who covered City Hall was really good! I still keep up with him on Facebook. But, he didn't want to cover night meetings. The planning and zoning meetings in Phoenix were night meetings. Well, think about that: Phoenix, southwestern city, Sunbelt, lots of planning, lots of zoning. So, I said, I'll cover the night meetings. I'll do the planning and zoning. And he was happy, because he could just cover the main stuff and I could cover planning and zoning. It was a big beat. It got me on page one as a young reporter and I don't remember if I was 23 or what, but, several times I got those page one stories because I was covering planning and zoning and that was a great segway into other issues.

Wise: Yeah!

Willey: So, how did I come here? Um, I remember I was editorial page editor in Phoenix at The Arizona Republic and we were rocking and rolling trying to do different things. Um, and there was a series of forest fires that was devastating across Arizona. And we were in the midst of doing something very unusual - of putting out two special sections for the weekend. One was a news section by our reporters covering the fires and their cause and their containment and the property damage and loss of life and all of that. And we were doing a separate section of commentary and we'd gotten everybody from, I think Bruce Babbitt was Interior Secretary at the time and people writing pro/con commentary about this should be done differently/here's how we can plan for the future, here's policy changes that should be considered. It was the first time, that I'm aware of, that we had done two sections designed to integrate nicely, but one was news, one was opinion. And a call came in from a guy named Bob Mong, and so I called him back. And he said he had this opening and would I be interested in hearing more? And I said, "Well, um, probably, but I'm on deadline right now and I really kinda need to finish this up. Can we talk later?" And he said, "Sure!" So, I waited a day or two before I even thought to tell my husband that this guy from The Dallas Morning News had called and I really actually never finished the conversation because I was so busy. And he said to me, my husband said, "You know, Keven, maybe you should let him finish his sentences before you tell him you're not interested." That was great career advice because sure enough, Bob and I did connect again and talked even more. He talked about what he was looking for here in an editor and the more it just sounded kinda intriguing.

Wise: What were some of those things?

Willey: He wanted a smart, thoughtful, provocative editorial page. I would say responsibly provocative, energized, with fresh thinking and new ideas, muscular. And so, we were trying to do some of that in Phoenix and I had been editor for about four years, five years at that point. And, so he offered to fly me here to interview and I was intrigued. I was flirting, essentially, with the idea. My husband came with me and so I spent, it was a weekend and it was kind of on the QT, and I spent, I think it was like five hours with Bob Mong. Just chatting, he took me to lunch, showed me the newsroom, kind of just chatted about ideas. My husband kind of scoped out Dallas, what it was like, what living would be like here. And we met for dinner that evening at The Grape on Lower Greenville and had a wonderful waitress who lived downtown near the Farmer's Market. And it was at that dinner that I was telling George about my day and he was telling me about his day, that a light bulb kinda went off and we sorta thought, you know, maybe we should really think about this. Because we were flirting up until that time. It was kind of a lark, nice to be flown in, see a new city, ok moving on. Something bit though. It was at The Grape and we ordered champagne. We had nothing, didn't have a job offer, I mean nothing. It was very preliminary. But, I remember that waitress and we ordered champagne, that was the beginning of the decision process.

Wise: What were some of the factors that you liked about Dallas?

Willey: I liked that it was big and people were bold. One of the people I knew who had moved here from Phoenix I consulted with and she told me that she loved Dallas and that Dallas is a big place where big people do big things, which I thought was kind of a nice motto. I also was in my forties and I kinda thought if I'm going to make a change and leave my home state, probably now is the time to do it. Like, I'm not gonna want to do this 10 years from now. I was kind of a big fish in a smaller pond and if I was ever going to try and swim in a bigger pond, now was the time to do it. And the more I learned about the paper and Bob Mong's philosophy on what he wanted in an editor, it just sounded like a great opportunity. My husband was wonderful. He was self-employed and he could do his thing wherever and, you know, he had traveled as a young man from Belgium to the United States without speaking the language and managed to make a business success. I thought, you know, moving from Arizona to Texas? Probably not that big of a deal.

Wise: How did you and your husband meet?

Willey: That's a fun story. So, he is a former restaurateur chef, owner of restaurants. He had sold them by the time I'd met him. He started in Belgium, came to L.A. and ultimately had a restaurant in Tucson and was very well-known and widely acclaimed. But, he had sold his restaurants by the time I'd met him and he'd gone into the travel business. His thing was bringing French speaking Europeans to the United States and giving them a flavor of the Southwest. Then, he would also take Americans into Mexico because he speaks multiple languages. It was 1999 and I had given my father a week's vacation on me with me. You pick the vacation, whatever you want. A lot of my friends' parents that age were starting to die off, so I thought now is the time to do something like this. So, I thought we'd go to like, Bali, or you know, something very exotic and my dad picked the Copper Canyon in Mexico. I lived in Phoenix, my dad lived in Tucson, so I drove down, spent the night with him, we showed up early the next morning at the University of Arizona where the tour started. One of the tour guides had this very cool accent, I thought it was very intriguing. So, I spent the whole week being the dutiful daughter, spending time with my father and flirting with the tour guide. At the end of the tour, seven or eight days later - George handed me my suitcase and said, "Would it be ok if I called you?" and I said, "Oh yes. That would be fine." And he said, "Would tomorrow be too soon?" And I said, "Oh, no." So, he called the next day, we had a wonderful, long phone conversation and then he was off on another tour. So, it was a month before we got together. But, a month later, he drove up from Tucson and we spent the day together in Phoenix and things clicked. So, we met in Mexico and we got married in Greece on the island of Kos.

Wise: I'm sure those are beautiful photos.

Willey: Yes, great time.

Wise: That's great. So, you accepted the job at The Morning News, clearly. What did you see as your mission then when you were running the page? I mean, everybody kind of gets to shape it the way they want. I'd love to hear more about when you started and what you see as the page's future.

Willey: Well, first of all, I wanted the editorial voice of the paper to be very smart and logical. So, that had to undergird everything, which means that you need to have well-researched points of view and you need to have considered the alternative point of view before, you know, digging in on your point of view. So, that was goal number one: making sure that we were well-researched and open minded. I truly mean, I want to hear the best argument against our position before we publish so that we can counter it. And to do that, you need to have a board that has a diverse set of views. So, I made it a point to hire a board that spans the ideological spectrum. We have conservatives, we have liberals because I want the debate. Now, that can be tedious and not efficient because we do have to have a debate often. You can't just, you know, march in like step. But, I think that's the better way in the end. I like to think that the opinion that's expressed in public is better formed as a result of having that debate up front. I also wanted the page to have energy and be fun and unpredictable on occasion. Not unpredictable gratuitously, but, you know, I didn't want us to be staid or dull. I mean, if we're dull, no one is going to read us, so what's the point? So, you stir all the things up and that's kind of what I set out to try and help the page become.

Wise: And reflecting back upon your time, do you feel like you've been successful?

Willey: In large part, yes. I feel like the pages have been very robust and well thought out, well considered, open to different points of view. We're the only editorial page in the country I know of that keeps monthly tallies of our op-ed columns. So, I can tell you at the end of every month how many conservative columnists, how many liberal columnists we published on the op-ed pages. And we always try to keep them roughly even. I've been here now 15 years and for the first 14, at the end of the year, we've never been more than one percentage point apart liberal-conservatives on the op-ed page. We'll see what the end of the 15th year holds, but I don't think it will be any different. So, we mean it when we say we want to be open to different points of view.

At the same time, I want our editorial voice to not be wishy-washy. I don't want a "on the one hand this, on the other hand that" kind of editorial. I think that the best editorials are the ones that state a point of view, explain how you got to that point of view, acknowledge the most prevalent arguments on the other side and explain why those arguments are unpersuasive and then conclude.

It's best to know your audience. Who are you trying to persuade and what arguments will work with them? One example I often give is if you're advocating for, pick an issue, you're advocating for some kind of an environmental reform, small or large. If you go before the chamber of commerce to advocate for said reform, you're going to use one set of arguments, right? You'll probably use it saves money or it will increase sales or reduce regulation or whatever. You know your audience, you know what moves them. If you're advocating for exactly the same reform in front of a different audience, you're going to use a different set of arguments, right? There's nothing disingenuous about that, it's just knowing your audience. So, you might talk about the public health benefits or the, you know, endangered species improvements or whatever. So you just need to know your audience and speak persuasively. It doesn't do you any good to stand on a mountain and pound your chest about something, even if you're right, if your audience isn't listening.

So, we talk a lot about strategic persuasiveness. That's sort of our catch phrase in this department. It's how can we be strategically persuasive? And I think that's an art form to some degree. So, we work very hard at trying to achieve that goal.

The other thing we talk about, we have the Donna Rule, which is kind of funny. I went to high school with a woman who later went on to sell Tupperware and I bought a lot of it. The Donna Rule is "Why should Donna care?" You're

writing this editorial about some high-falutin' policy or some economic issue or yadda-yadda, why should Donna care? We have to be able to say that somewhere in the editorial in the hopes that people will actually read it.

Wise: Yeah, so how has digital technology kind of changed how the editorial board operates or how you're trying to be strategically persuasive with so many opinions floating in the ether?

Willey: The pendulum has really swung. When I first got into editorial writing, one of my goals was to accelerate the process. It used to be something would happen on Monday and if you editorialized on it in Sunday's edition, that was considered adequate. And so my goal was, if something happened on Monday, by golly, we should get it in Wednesday's or Thursday's edition. Why wait till Sunday? We really need to speed this up and be on the news, be a little less lackadaisical about it. Well, fast forward now, and I mean something happens at 11 and if we don't have an editorial up at 11:30, we feel like we failed.

So, the pendulum has really swung and I kind of feel myself pulling it back a little bit because what you have to say at 11:30 is based probably on very limited knowledge. And if you draw conclusions from very limited knowledge, those conclusions can be wrong and then you have to peel them back later. So I find myself sometimes thinking, ok let's slow down just a little bit, which is really not my nature. This is so foreign. But, let's slow down long enough to make sure we have enough facts so that we can have something to say. And then let's think carefully about what it is that we're going to say because we're going to have to say something now that we're going to have to live with tomorrow and the next day. Not that you can't change your mind, but you have to then explain why you're changing your mind. So, the warp speed with which we reflect is a challenge.

And that's another thing to keep in mind: editorials, op-ed columns, any kind of opinion writing, what they're supposed to bring to the table is the benefit of reflection. Here are the facts, here's the breaking news, here's what happened. What are we to think about that? And you can't reflect thoughtfully, in 90 seconds. Sometimes you can move more quickly than other times. But, there are some issues that require a little additional reflection. So, we do live in interesting times. And in a world where everybody has an opinion and everybody has a blog and everybody can tweet, how do you make your voice distinct? And I think there are lots of different ways to do that.

Representing a newspaper, or a news organization, I think it's important that our voice have special credibility, that it be a thoughtful, measured, I don't mean dull and lethargic, but we will always want to advance the debate. We don't want to just throw bombs for bombs' sake or beat up on whatever. We ask ourselves: How does this editorial point of view or this column advance the conversation? We wanna move the ball forward. And, if I feel like we know enough to where we can move the ball forward, then we'll pull the trigger on a column or editorial. If I feel like we're kind of repeating what everyone else is already saying, we're not adding a lot, then maybe we need to do a little bit more research before we have something to say.

Wise: What are some issues or editorials that - as a group, as the DMN - that you are proud of? That we took this stand on this issue? That you really feel like you moved the ball forward?

Willey: Several come to mind. This department has been involved for 10 years in the Bridging Dallas' North/South Gap editorial initiative. And this has been an effort to recognize first of all the fact that this city has been a city divided and that if you live south of the Trinity River, or south of I-30, you've likely grown up in an area that is underprivileged and has largely suffered economic disadvantages and some racism and other environmental problems, etc. And we wanted to help the larger community recognize that and acknowledge and talk about that. And then we wanted to help the city come together to rectify that and to change that, and to some degree, overinvest in Southern Dallas to make up for generations of underinvesting. One of our earliest editorials as part of this acknowledged that the DMN had contributed to this divide. In fact, most businesses in Dallas had, inadvertently or otherwise. And so, that was an important editorial to do. And then to talk about how to move the ball forward. One

of, lots of editorials, as part of that initiative are near and dear to my heart. The closing of crack houses and helping various neighborhoods get rid of vacant properties, et cetera, to the bigger policy issues.

One of the most rewarding moments was the first time that Mike Rawlings ran for Mayor, when there were like 13 candidates in the race in the beginning and it got down to 11 and then there was a run-off between David Kunkle and Mike Rawlings. All through that mayoral race, a central theme all the candidates were talking about and pounding their chests about was Southern Dallas. I would be the Mayor to do the most for Southern Dallas. This needs to happen in Southern Dallas. This shouldn't happen in Southern Dallas, blah, blah, blah. The whole conversation of that mayoral race, a significant component, was about Southern Dallas. Now, there are lots of factors to that. I don't want to sit here and pound my chest and say it was all the DMN, but we contributed. We contributed in a significant way. And that was very rewarding to see that conversation shift. Then, some people said that, "Oh, this is just a flavor of the month. Dallas Morning News will be strong on that for a month of two and then they'll move on" or "They'll win an award and then they'll move on." Well, we did win an award, we did in 2010. We won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing for our efforts on southern Dallas. Actually three reporters, three editorial writers, won that award. We launched the project in 2007, we won the Pulitzer Prize in 2010, it is now 2017 and we are still banging the drum for bridging Dallas' North/South gap.

This is a divide that took generations to create. It's not going to go away in a year and a half. So, we planned on pounding the drum for some time. The long term goal of the project is to narrow the economic disparity between North and South. Roughly 80 percent of property taxes are born by North Dallas. 20 percent, Southern Dallas. So, if you're not motivated by the it's the right thing to do kind of thing, perhaps people are motivated by pocketbook issues and one way to even the tax burden would be to invest more in Southern Dallas so hopefully property values would go up.

That's a long term goal. I probably won't be alive by the time it gets there. So, we have lower hanging fruit, shorter term goals, to push as well. We led the charge against payday lending. We've led the charge for charter schools, why should kids be locked in schools that aren't working? We've led the charge on a number of other sorts of policy issues like that that are important. So, I guess what I'm most proud of in the gap project is its longevity. It's a sustained issue that we care about in our hearts or we wouldn't have been at it for so long.

Switching gears, in 2006 I think it was, we came out against the death penalty, reversing a century old position at the paper in favor of the death penalty. We came out against it, we explained very carefully why. This is a good example of trying to be strategically persuasive. This is Texas. What arguments do you make against the death penalty? The arguments you make here, I would contend, are different than the arguments that would be persuasive somewhere else. New York City. Vermont, these are supposed to be some of the most liberal cities in the country. I don't know, the arguments you might make in Vermont might be different than the arguments you make in Texas. So, we steered clear of things like, you know, we mentioned these arguments, but we didn't hit them hard about how third world countries are the ones that have the death penalty. Those were not going to be that persuasive here. We hit hard on the economics. People were surprised to learn that it costs more to put someone to death than it does to just give them life in prison. We advocated for, Texas had no life in prison. For many years the choices juries and judges were faced with were the death penalty, which is pretty permanent, versus send the guy to prison and he might be out on parole at some point down the road. Well, there's a lot of room in-between there. So, we advocated the legislature pass a life without parole law. And they did. So, once that law passed, then it became easier to make the argument that you don't really need the death penalty because you've got, we just took to calling it, death by prison. So, that was a major push on our part.

I remember the day the special section came out where we laid out all of our arguments and we included a full page of countervailing points of view, including one member of our editorial board who disagreed with this position and he wrote a column explaining his disagreement and why. And I remember wearing my suit of armor to work the next day thinking, "Ok, I'm going to get blown out the water. It's just going to hit the fan" And we did get some push

back, but we didn't get the push back that I really kind of expected. I'd like to think that, I can never prove this, but maybe we didn't get as visceral a pushback because we included the other point of view. I mean, we didn't pretend it didn't exist. We didn't call people who disagreed with us idiots. There is a very legitimate set of arguments to be made for the death penalty. We just think these arguments are better and here's why.

So, I mean I did a lot of radio talk shows that week, but lived to talk about it.

Wise: Talking about your suit of armor, so, days like that when you think you're going to get a lot of push back. I'm sure the editorial board recommended Hillary Clinton for president was one of those days. What is that sort of mental - or physical - armor that you're putting on to prepare for that?

Willey: The blowback on that was much more significant than the one on the death penalty, which kind of surprised me. On the other hand, it was a different era, too. That was 2006, and there's a big difference between 2006 and 2016. We expected blowback and had, in fact, calibrated our editorials very carefully with that in mind. I felt very strongly, it was important to do an editorial first explaining why Donald Trump is not conservative. And I felt like we had to lay that predicate first. The newspaper had not recommended a Democrat for president since before World War II, so clearly being a conservative, being Republican is political outlook is a principle this newspaper places value in.

And if you look at Donald Trump's record on issues, he simply is a not a conservative. He's conservative on one issue, he's liberal on another. I mean, he's just, he's more impulsive than anything else. So, we felt like we needed to lay that out. And then, and only then, could we come back and say, well, the only other real option is to recommend Hillary Clinton. Yes, there's a Libertarian on the ballot, yes we could keep our mouth shut, but leadership is about leading. And ducking the tough ones isn't leadership. So, we did an editorial recommending Hillary Clinton.

It was a delicate one to write because as a board representing this newspaper, we weren't wild about Hillary Clinton. She has lots of flaws and we'd been critical of her over the years. We summarized her flaws in the editorial. On the other hand, you can't write a recommendation editorial for somebody and only write about their flaws. I mean, that doesn't make any sense. So we did acknowledge, we tried very hard to explain why she was better than Trump. She's not our first choice, but you've got two, you've got A or B. Pick one of the other. Bottom line: A is way better than B is sort of where we were coming from.

I was surprised by the vitriol that followed. We knew that there would be some. But, the number of people who said that we should have just kept your mouth shut, or you should have just recommended the Libertarian, and then cancelled their subscriptions, surprised me. I respect those points of view. Those are valid points of view and in each of those instances, I spent a lot of time responding to emails and phone calls. I mean, it ate up a lot of time. When I explained why we didn't exercise either of those options, in nine out of 10 cases, people said, "I understand. Thank you for the explanation. I may not agree with you, but I value that you thought it through carefully and I understand that you did that. Thank you for that." That's all I really ask is if people can just hear why we did what we did. We didn't go for the Libertarian because that vote, in essence, was a vote for Trump, we felt. And if you truly believe that one alternative is bad, really bad, you should do everything you can to prevent that one alternative. So, you know, voting for the Libertarian might make you feel good temporarily, but it doesn't really achieve anything.

Anyway, we talked about all of those issues. Talked them through. Argued about them, debated them. Came to a place where we had two separate editorials, one on one day, one on the next day. I thought we made the best case we could given the difficult situation and I still think it was the right thing to do for the right reason.

Wise: What is it like working working with, you worked with Mong for a number of years, what is it like working with Mike Wilson?

Willey: They've both been wonderful to work for in different ways. I'm trying to think of how to describe the different ways. The first thing that comes to mind is one way that they're similar which is that they each want to set a general parameter for the editorial voice of the paper. And then they kind of expect you to figure it out within a general parameter.

Like if here's the general parameter, we don't want to be over here, we don't want to be over here. Generally these values should rule. You figure it out. Within the parameters, there's a lot of issues. There's a lot of different ways to go. Lots of judgment calls. And they've both been wonderful in that they have delegated a lot of that to us, and to the board, and trusted us to make the right decisions. And that's what makes it a rewarding place to work. It's been wonderful.

Wise: What would you try and tell a younger you or even just a younger reporter today if they were trying to take a similar path or really stay in journalism? Because I think that's something that's becoming increasingly difficult. What advice do you have?

Willey: Well, I think there will always be a market for informed news and commentary. People always want to know what's going on. People always want to know what to think about it or what others think about it so that they can then make up their own mind. What is unknown is what platform, or what shape that will take. So, my best advice is to make sure you can write. I harken back to what I said earlier about my father always wanting the logic of an argument. Know your facts, make sure you've got all your ducks lined up in a row. If you can write and think smartly, there will always be a place for you. We just don't know where.

Is it this website? Is it that website? What will come after digital? What does that look like? What's Twitter 9.0? I don't know what that looks like. But I guarantee you, people that think smart and write smart are going to be needed. So, do what you can to school yourself and make sure that you are knowledgeable and fast. Fast helps.

Wise: As you move into retirement, what are you hoping for in the next editorial board editor? If you were going to do what presidents do and leave a note in that top drawer, what are some of the things you'd tell them?

Willey: Well, I guess to be relevant. And by that I mean pick issues and platforms that are relevant to readers or viewers. I wouldn't advocate continuing to do things just because we've always done them that way, because Keven did them that way or whatever. That would not be good. I've been sort of the change agent in my career, so I would certainly urge the next person to do some of the same.

By the same token, decide what you think is important and live by that and don't be persuaded otherwise. And if you think certain things are important, even if the current is going against you for the moment, stick to your guns. Because otherwise, at the end of it, what have you done? What was your life for? You have to have a set of principles and live by them.

And then how you live by them. The platform and what it looks like, that's all elastic. But principles aren't.

Wise: Tell us more about what you're doing next.

Willey: This is what is exciting. So, my last day in the office will be sometime in January and then we will have a few weeks to prepare for our year-long camping trip along the perimeter of the United States. My husband and I have a little 17-foot Casita trailer. Casita brand is made in Texas, in Rice, Texas, about 40 miles south of Dallas. It's a family-owned business. And we've had this little Casita for about 10 years and we're weekend warriors. We like to go to different state parks and bicycle rides and around the state and actually around other states as well. But, we've always been kind of weekend warriors or staycation warriors. So, we've never spent more than 14 consecutive nights in this little Casita. We will embark on a 365 night trip on March 1.

We will start in South Texas. We will start there for several reasons. It's warmer in March. I have a cousin who lives there with her family, so we'll visit her. We will for the first leg be taking my mother, who will be 90 years old this December, with us and we'll go down and start at Kickapoo Cavern State Park. The reason I picked that place is because when we finish, we're going to go counter-clockwise around the United States and when we finish, we'll come up through Big Bend and we don't want to have to go all the way down to South Texas before we go to Dallas. Kickapoo is sort of on the way back up to Dallas, so it's a nice starting point.

We'll spend some time with my cousin and then we'll leave my mom with my cousin or she'll fly home from there and we will then work our way up the Texas coast for the month of March, which is great for birding. We'll be in Florida sometime around April. We'd like to be in Maine by Fourth of July. Do the Great Lakes around August. Be over in the Seattle-Vancouver area around Labor Day. Come down the Pacific Coast. And we'll probably spend Thanksgiving and Christmas next year in Tucson. We still have friends and family who live in Arizona so we'll spend the holidays with them. And then sometime after the first of the year, we'll come back up through Big Bend and back to Dallas.

And my mother will come at several different times to join us. My hope is that she might come to Florida. I have a cousin in Connecticut I know she'd like to see. I have several cousins in Ohio, so we'll have to do the Great Lakes there by Cleveland, by Port Clinton. I'd like to incorporate my mother's trip there. And then I don't know if she wants to do some clam digging with us over in Seattle or not, but we'll check that out.

Wise: Sounds great. What does your mom think about your life and career? Like, watching you grow up? Have you talked about that with her at all?

Willey: Oh, not in any sort of setting. Not in an established way. But, you know, I think that she's very proud of me.

Wise: It's so cool that you guys are so close still. Like, that's wonderful. Now I have, like, mom goals.

Willey: That's right. That's good. We used to fight when I was a teenager. Who doesn't, right? With their mother? But, no, she's been good. Her role model was Amelia Earhart, so that tells you a lot about my mom.

Wise: Is there anything that maybe we neglected to ask you about that you think should be included?

Willey: Yes, I think that one of the best things about this job is creating an environment where other people can succeed. And it's been such a privilege to be the leader of a team, first in Phoenix and then in Dallas, of different people. Of people from different backgrounds, different interests, and to help create an environment where you hope they can succeed even beyond their own expectations.

And so, when somebody tells me, "thank you for all you've done, I didn't think I could do that," oh that's the most wonderful set of words that anybody can ever say and more important than anything you could have ever done. So, that's been a real privilege to work with, I've worked with really great people. They used to all be older than me, now they're all younger than I am so times have changed. But it's been a privilege. That part has been really fun.

Wise: I think one of the things I think of a lot with the paper is how we are transparent and how we explain our processes. So kind of like going through and emailing all of the people, what skills do you think you learned to do that? Or how would you advise the younger generation of people at the paper to carry that on?

Willey: Yeah, I think transparency is very important and can sometimes be undervalued.

One thing that I've learned is to just be patient because you find yourself saying the same things over and over again. And I thought of you, Hannah, because you're on Facebook and I've thought of you often because I'm sure that you are answering the same question the same way multiple times. And that's how I sometimes feel when I get a

little tired of that and impatient, “didn’t you see my last 100 emails on this?” Which of course they didn’t because they’re living their normal lives.

So my counsel to myself always is take a deep breath, you know, chill. Because nine out of 10 times when you take the time to explain why you did something and if you can explain it in a non-defensive way, you’re not defending it because it may or may not have been right. I often will say, I’m explaining this. I’m not trying to defend it right now. I’m just offering you an explanation. Nine out of 10 times, people will listen and understand. So, my counsel to other people is you really need to remember that and be transparent.

What we do in newspapers and in news organizations in general is a mystery to most people. It used to be that way because there were only limited outlets. There were just three or four TV stations and your morning and evening newspaper and radio station and that was it. And so, by nature, a lot of the goings-on behind the scenes was sort of not transparent. It was very quiet, secretive almost. Well, now the world is so different and everything is so much more visible. I think it’s important for news organizations to keep up with that, to be very transparent. We aren’t a bunch of people who sit around in cigar-filled rooms and plot strategies on how to hurt this candidate or enable that policy. We’re people just like everybody else trying to understand the issues of the day and what the best way forward might be. That’s not a terrible thing.

We just need to remind people that’s what we’re doing. And we often succeed, we sometimes fail - and we should acknowledge that.

Wise: Cool. Is there anything else?

Claire Higgins: Do you have any other thoughts on working as a woman in the workplace, especially in a place that’s usually so male-dominated? Anything stand out to you there?

Willey: You know, I feel like when I started, that was a big deal. I remember working in the capitol pressroom in Phoenix and I asked, ultimately, to have that, they put the new person by the door in the press room, and I asked not to be put by the door after about the fourth person walked in and asked me to get coffee for them.

Now, I don’t know how much that was a gender thing. They thought I was an intern, you know, and God forbid I should wear my red suit because all of the interns had red blazers. So, whatever. I never wore that red suit. So, I think some of it was gender, some of it was age, and so I just didn’t want to sit, I got tired of saying I’m not going to fetch your coffee. I mean, how do you say that politely? I mean, the first couple of time, I actually did go and fetch the coffee cause it just was easier. But then I got kind of tired of it.

So, I felt those kinds of things at the time and I told the story about having an investigative team and boys on the bus, that kind of thing, I felt a lot in my younger days. I think it still occurs, clearly, but it occurs, I suspect, less frequently and at greater risk. It still occurs, but it’s more likely now that someone will blow the whistle on it. Whereas years ago, no one was going to blow the whistle on the guy who I’m thinking of right now. So, it still exists, it just exists differently. And I’m in more and more meetings where I’m not the only woman. There are meetings, I’ll have editorial board meetings and I’ll be like, “oh my God, I’m the only woman,” but that’s the exception now, rather than the rule, I think.

Wise: I don’t know, I feel like here especially, it stands out when I’m the only woman in the room. And the men in the room also notice, which makes me happy that it’s not just normal for there to only be one female voice. I don’t think that’s the same at every paper. I feel really grateful to work here especially because we have such strong female role models like yourself, Robin and Sharon, Nicole,

Willey: We may be the only editorial board with majority of women. I have to hand count here for a minute because it’s changed.

Wise: Do you count Jack Floyd?

Willey: So that would be six, and we are 13, so let me see if I can come up with the seven men and make sure I didn't leave anybody off...[naming off names]. We're about 50 percent. We're either one more or one shy of 50 percent. I don't know if that's the case elsewhere.

[break in recording]

Wise: So tell us about your work in national politics.

Willey: So, I covered the 1988 presidential campaign, that was the year Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt ran for president and I was excited to be able to do that but I did ask my editor if we could make the commitment to stay in the race, even if Babbitt fell out of the race because I didn't want to be perceived as sort of a homer for the Arizona governor, you know, although I thought he was a good governor but to the editors credit he made good on it.

So, in 1987 I essentially moved to Iowa and New Hampshire and did a lot of the Iowa and New Hampshire stuff pre-caucus and covering Bruce Babbitt and the other candidates, but largely Babbitt. And then in February, he didn't do as well as expected in Iowa. He went to New Hampshire later that month and announced that he was withdrawing from the race. And we did stay in and I covered the rest of the race. It was me and our Washington Bureau reporter Anne Hoy and the two of us covered the '88 presidential campaign. Neither of us had done that before. It was quite an experience for us. I traveled with everybody from Gephardt to Biden to Jesse Jackson, you name it, Jack Kemp. It was quite an experience, not a pleasant one at the time. It was a whole new world for me. I didn't know all the issues as well as I felt like everybody else did so I always felt like I was behind the eight ball and I didn't like that feeling. It was very tense.

But I learned a lot. And as they say it was a character building experience. I remember going into interview Al Gore, who was 39, the youngest presidential candidate at the time, thinking that I would really like him because he was a former journalist and we would have a lot to talk about but the interview with him was a bunch of answers, "yes – no – yes – no."

I found myself going, "Could you go with that a little bit more?" Thinking to myself, "I need a quote – could you complete a sentence." He was very, I think, self-conscious about being very serious and he over-compensated.

Conversely, I interviewed Jack Kemp thinking, "You know, he's a former football player, what does he know about politics, I'm not really going to like this." He was fabulous. In fact, I got a very lengthy interview and he let me join him on his plane. It was flying from Des Moines, Iowa to St. Louis in 1987. But it was me, him and three of his aides on the plane for an hour and a half and I had him to myself. He took his shoes off, put his feet up. They had a fruit tray, cheese tray. I had my notebook and I ran out of notebook and I mean, I just had everything. He was great, and at the end he was interested in Arizona politics. He asked me what I thought about Governor Mecham at the time. He was quite a controversial character at the time in Arizona. He displayed an interest in the world around him that I really was impressed with.

And Al Gore, I remember we went to a convenience store for breakfast when I was in the car with him and I was in the back seat and he was in the front seat and I was trying to get my 20-minute interview in as quickly as possible. He went and had his aide go in and buy him powdered sugar donuts and tomato juice, and I just remember thinking, that never made my story, but I just remember thinking who would drink tomato juice with powdered sugar donuts? Anyway, it was just weird. Just a weird experience.

And then I covered '92 and '96 and the conventions, so it's not something I would really like to do again. It was a lot of pack journalism, which I really don't like doing at all. But it was a learning experience and I am still in touch today with people that I met through that process.

Wise: Was Joe Biden as much as a celebrity figure as he is now?

Willey: Yes, he was pretty much. He was very fun to interview, his speeches were interesting, he was full of energy and vigor. That was the year though where he was accused of plagiarizing portions of his speech and that pretty much torpedoed the rest of his campaign then. In hindsight, that issue has sort of dulled and he has clearly recovered from that.

Wise: He does a great with eating ice cream with sunglasses-look.

Willey: Yeah, he was an interesting and always full of vim and vigor and for the most part very good natured, not a grumpy. I covered Dukakis and Dick Gephardt, so I remember, you know you're a little fish when you're from Arizona and, so I had to negotiate for my interview time and they were rotating through Wall Street Journal, New York Times and Washington Post and they kept postponing my interview and postponing my interview for days and days and days and my plane back to Phoenix was coming up. So, they said, "ok, well follow us on this car trip and be a part of the caravan and we'll slide you in for 20 minutes with him between this leg and this leg of the trip. Somebody else will drive your rental car and then when we are done you'll get our rental car back and you can go to your place." I said, "ok fine," so we did that.

So, it's a four-way intersection with stop signs and corn fields on all four sides, we were in rural Iowa. I give my car keys to some young person who was going to drive it. I get in the back seat and it's me, and Dick Gephardt is sitting next to me in this interview. And I'm interviewing, and I've got like, I'm on my third question because he's given long-winded answers and I can't politely figure out how to cut him off because I need to get through all my questions. And they pull over and the mayor of the next city is scheduled to be with him to brief him on the next city for his remarks and I didn't quite realize what was happening, but they opened my car door, Dick Gephardt scooted over to my seat and I was sort of squished and I was like essentially on the ground and the mayor gets in with Dick Gephardt on the other side. So they just sort of rotated me out of the car. I didn't quite fall on my butt but pretty close to it. They closed the door, handed me my car keys and said, "that's it."

I had like three questions and the most unceremonious exit of the interview. I was so peeved I wrote a letter to the campaign afterwards saying how disrespected I felt I'd been. Anyway, not my favorite candidate.

Wise: And he didn't win. He wasn't the country's favorite candidate either.

Willey: No, but was interesting because I took such great pains to write the profile even-handedly because even though I had a horrible experience with the press aide, I blamed the press aide, either rightly or wrongly, which is why I wrote the campaign chairman a note. I never got any answer.

But I was really careful to be even handed because my job was to write the profile, we were supposed to profile of these candidates. So, I'd sent the note with my profile which was my way of saying, "See I treated your candidate really fairly which is more than I can say for the way your press aide treated me." (laughs)

So, it made me feel good. I don't know that it accomplished a damn thing, but anyway, such is the life on the campaign.