

From a smart, logical career to retirement on the road: An oral history of Keven Ann Willey
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Keven Ann Willey has a suit of armor. She doesn't have to wear it often, but as the editorial page editor at *The Dallas Morning News*, it has to come out. It's taken her from reporter to columnist to editorial page editor over the course of her 38-year career, 15 of those years at *The Dallas Morning News*. She is known widely as a change agent in the industry, but especially in neighborhoods across Dallas.

Willey joined *The Dallas Morning News* as editorial page editor in 2002. She has led the editorial board to bring "strategic persuasiveness" to the city, tackling issues like the death penalty, a recommendation of Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump for president, and most important to her a 10-year-long crusade in bridging Dallas' North/South gap through editorial coverage. She directed this team to a Pulitzer Prize in editorial writing in 2010.

While Willey's career began in traditional news reporting, her transition to editorial writing was seamless, natural even. Willey was born in Washington, D.C., where her father worked as for the National Institutes of Health, then a training officer for the Peace Corps before joining the faculty at the University of Arizona in Tucson, first at the medical school later as director of the Flandrau planetarium. Even when she was an infant, Willey said, her mother would take her to the Senate gallery in her bassinet to hear lawmakers debate the issues facing the nation.

After several years in the District, the family relocated to Arizona but the lessons in civics from her parents did not end in the land of the saguaro cactus. Walter Cronkite was a familiar guest on the television during dinner. The newsman's thoughtful way of delivering the news made a lasting impression on Willey that she didn't realize until later in life.

Willey's father picked up where her mother left off in the Senate chamber. Over those Walter Cronkite punctuated dinners, Willey's parents taught her to see both sides of an issue, craft a logical argument and present it fairly. During her university years at Northern Arizona University it all came together -- it wasn't just absorbing the news that interested her, but interpreting it and charting a way forward.

Willey quickly began racking up impressive front page stories with her reporting on local issues like school and zoning boards, the 1988 presidential campaign and eight national political conventions. She had her first professional byline at the Associated Press before moving to *The Arizona Republic* in 1980. Eighteen years later she was named editorial page editor.

In 2002 when Willey took a curious call from former editor at *The Dallas Morning News* Bob Mong, who was looking for a new editorial page editor. She was happy in Arizona, but thought one trip to Dallas

couldn't hurt. After a day filled with interviews, Willey met her husband, Georges Badoux, at The Grape to compare notes. It was not long before they were sharing a champagne toast to seal the deal.

The philosophy and direction for the paper appealed to her. It was an opportunity to grow her own experience, and *The Dallas Morning News*. She set out to create a smart, logical, energized page – and that she did.

With her suit of armor on, Willey braced formal and informal death threats, countless emails with repeated information, phone calls and radio shows explaining a position already explained in the print edition, but also as a woman in journalism.

Sexism isn't something Willey said she regularly experienced in her work as a reporter or editor. She was aware of the culture she was working within and the work women had put in before her. Her gender was not holding her back, nor was it what was driving her success. That was led by her talent, her dedication to making a difference – and a balanced editorial page.

After 15 years in Dallas, Willey and her husband are hitting the road. She plans to travel in a Texas-made, 17-foot Casita trailer and see the edges of America. Ever interested in learning more about the world around her through thoughtful writing, Willey asked friends and readers to suggest place-specific books she should read along the way.

And after that sojourn around the country's perimeter, 2018 will be different for Willey. But her impact on *The Dallas Morning News* and the city as a whole will be everlasting. Her advice to the next editor? Be a change agent. Continue to be strategically persuasive, but most importantly: Decide what you think is important and live by that. Stick to your guns, which is just plain good advice.