INTEGRITY OF BROADCAST JOURNALISM
A STUDY OF NEWS JUDGMENT IN COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING

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Honors Thesis
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PASS WITH DISTINCTION
TO THE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE:

As thesis advisor for Jeremy Stevens,

I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1927, the United States Congress passed a law stating that the airwaves belonged to the citizens and, therefore, must be used in the interest, convenience and necessity of the public. During the 20th century, television became the primary source from which Americans learned information about their communities, the nation and the world. The media had four principle roles in society. First, it was a signaler telling people about the important issues and events that directly affected them. It also acted as a conduit or messenger transferring information between people and the government. As well, the media was an educator to inform people about situations, policies, programs and other news that would help them become better involved within their communities. Finally, the media acted as a watchdog. Independent of government control, news organizations kept policy makers and businesses in check for the benefit of the general public (Patterson 191).

As the main medium of information, television news has great potential for influencing our daily decisions about society. It also cultivates our perceptions of the real world by deciding what issues or events are important (Gant 628). In today's world, the priorities of the media, especially commercial television stations, have changed. This investigation will look into the current process of newsgathering and analyze the concepts and strategies necessary for a commercial broadcasting facility to survive.

Before presenting the investigation, it is important to consider the current relationship between the American public and the media. Up until the mid-1980's, the three major networks had a virtual oligopoly on audiences across America. This was the
time before cable television when there was no other programming on at 6 or 10pm besides the news. Each of the networks had about one third of the audience so there was little competition in comparison to current times (Butte 5).

Television today is said to be in a fragmented era where the struggle for viewers is much more difficult than years ago. Cable television is now in a majority of homes across America, and there are numerous channels and programs carrying news. The three networks have to compete with 24-hour cable news channels, as well as up-and-coming broadcast networks such as FOX, UPN and The WB. On a local level, commercial stations are more concerned than ever about gaining viewers and keeping them tuned into their programming. For this reason, many of the news stations have moved from a traditional journalistic news format to a more sensational and entertaining one (Butte 1).

Americans have also come, as a result of the variety of programming, to expect more from news coverage. In this context, the word “more” does not necessarily mean better quality; rather it means that viewers will watch news that is most settling and fulfilling to them (West 83). Current studies show that Americans have developed certain characteristics for watching news over the past twenty years. First, there is a low tolerance for boredom and monotony. There is also a high expectation for performance and perfection in relaying the news. If there are no solutions to a situation, viewers tend to not want to know about them (West 83).

Viewers prefer to watch stories with quick, effective, and neat resolutions. They basically want the news of the day to be resolved by the end of the newscast. With this mentality, there is also a tendency for viewers to have misperceptions about serious
events. They feel that if the news is no longer covering some topic or situation, then it must be fixed and therefore is forgotten (West 84).

Finally, viewers tend to rely on the plethora of news so much to the point that they have limited experience or contact with their environment. This is called the natural sensory envelope where viewers develop a worldview through the news (Funkhouser 57). In local news especially, many viewers develop a notion that their community is corrupt and violent because that is what the pictures on TV illustrate.

The nature of television has greatly changed over the past fifty years. Local television stations are constantly changing to keep up with the explosion of media venues. Newsgathering practices within the station also change in regards to reporting and decision-making. Choosing the “right” stories to air is more important than ever because viewers have an array of other outlets for information.

This study considers the current condition of the media industry in an investigation of local television coverage. It will discuss the notion of gatekeeping that is an important aspect of modern newsgathering practices. Then it will describe the various roles of gatekeeping into positions at a local television station. With those positions explained, the study will decipher what material makes the news, and who makes that decision. It will then examine the story material and the effect that it has on the viewer. Finally, the study will look into possibilities for the future of broadcast news and it's integrity.
CHAPTER 2

Internship at KHQ-TV, Spokane

After speaking at a televised student forum last fall, the news director at KHQ (Q6) offered me an internship in the news department of her station. The opportunity was vital for two reasons. First, it would give me insight into how people find and deliver news. If I wanted to become a reporter, it would be helpful to know what it takes to do the job. Even more importantly, there was a theory taught in a communications course that I found very interesting. The gatekeeping process, which will be discussed in more detail later, was an interesting theory I wanted to observe firsthand.

For the internship itself I read a number of journal articles and books about newsgathering and the role of the media. Each day I wrote observations of the morning news meeting; the comments, suggestions, and reactions for all in attendance were noted and taken into account.

I also worked with a different reporter, producer or manager each day. I asked them about their decisions and reasoning for angles or stories. Some of the questions were: What report did you do? What would you have done differently? What did you cover and why did you do it in this manner? What do you like about your job? What don’t you like? What are some constant pressures you are faced with as a reporter or producer? What is your job description?

The reading posed a number of questions for the news personnel that will be discussed further on. A majority of the material dealt with newsgathering tendencies and decisions made during the editorial meetings. Other sources looked at the effects of local news on the viewers.
I also used some material collected from a media and policy class in this study. It mainly focused on the notion of civic or public journalism in local television news. Those ideas were applied to the workings of the commercial station in Spokane.

General background information on the area and station itself is also important to the study. Spokane stands at market size 78 out of 210 television markets in the United States. Though it is the second largest city in Washington, it is considered a medium size market. In comparison, Seattle is considered a major market ranking twelfth in the nation (Nielsen 1).

Spokane has all four major commercial networks represented in its market. Q6 is the NBC affiliate, but is privately owned by Cowles Publications. Since Q6 is not owned by NBC, it must work hard to maintain a certain rating to keep it’s identity as an affiliate.

The Nielsen ratings system randomly surveys a large group of television viewers in each U.S. market. Each station within the market then receives a rating based on the number of people who watch their programs over a given period of time. Q6 has the highest overall rating among the broadcast stations in the Spokane market. That includes news, television shows, promotions, and other programming. Specifically, Q6’s newscasts are ranked #2 in comparison to the other newscasts at the same time. KREM-TV, the CBS affiliate, ranks first in all evening news (Nielsen 1).

The ratings information is important when considering the most popular style of format and delivery for the local news market. Those rankings influence strategy for newsgathering that will be discussed further in the study. Overall, the investigation focuses on some uncommon findings that one may not consider when passively watching the local nightly news.
CHAPTER 3
The Process of Gatekeeping

The gatekeeping theory is one of the oldest in the research of mass communication. In general, mass communication means all print and electronic media through which information is delivered to viewers. Kurt Lewin who was studying American social change during the 1940s introduced the idea of gatekeeping in 1947. His model suggested that as news items flowed to and from various channels, they were accepted or rejected by members of the news organization (Bissell 9).

The concept of gatekeeping has advanced through the years to basically mean the process of “winnowing” down hundreds or thousands of potential story ideas to the few that are transmitted by the news media (Bissell 10). It is now further interpreted as a series of decision points where news items stop at “gates.” A few of those items pass through while others do not. As the stories move through the gates, positive and negative forces determine if they will or will not be used. In news, some of those forces are: profit, news value, news cycle and audience taste. They also can be factors such as: Can we promote this story throughout the day? Could this become a series of reports? Is this story an exclusive that no other stations have? Overall, the main question and driving force is: How can we catch and hold viewers?

Here is an example of the gatekeeping process in local news. At Q6 there are different formats for each newscast. The most crucial newscasts are at 5 and 6 pm. Just before the 5 is the 4:30 “news show.” The News Director say she calls it a news show instead of a newscast because it is intended for homemakers who just finished watching the lighthearted Rosie O’Donnell Show. The show contains some news, but mainly
focuses on helpful information and consumer advocacy. The news show is similar to morning network programs like *Today*, *The Early Show*, or *Good Morning America*.

In Q6’s 4:30 news show, the anchors talk about helpful topics and give information for local services such as health care providers, school district updates, and the better business bureau. The news is softer in content and appropriate for children. Gatekeeping comes into the picture when there is a breaking story that is urgent and potentially newsworthy. The news director has a policy to not allow that information on the air until the 5pm newscast when it will become the top story. Symbolically, that story is stopped at a “gate” because it is deemed inappropriate for the lighthearted format of the news show. It is not allowed to air though many would argue it is more important than most of the content in the news show.

This policy changed halfway through the internship. The competing ABC affiliate in Spokane, KXLY, launched a 4:30pm newscast because research showed people were coming home from work earlier. That format was just an earlier version of its primetime hard newscast. In order for Q6 to keep viewers from changing the channel to the earliest major evening newscast in the market, they had to change their 4:30 to a newscast instead of a news show.

The change meant that producers could no longer import “fluff” stories or medical reports that made up most of the news show. Reporters were now assigned to cover major local news stories for all three evening newscasts. Before, they only needed to focus on the 5 and 6pm newscasts. This development prompted a great change in strategy and news format for the gatekeepers, but it was necessary to hold audiences for all three newscasts.
Gatekeeping is in a sense a business. Certain people decide what stories to put on the air based on the content and how it could potentially attract or detract viewers. Though traditional journalists would put stories on the air based on importance, most commercial broadcasters today air interesting or sensational stories first (Butte 22). According to highly paid consultants, viewers are more attracted to the exclusive or rare stories. Gatekeeping filters through the typical stories even if they are of great importance to the public (Butte 23).

Consultants also encourage producers to include “consumer” or “medical” news, especially during the late afternoon shows when homemakers are watching. Gatekeepers tend to select stories that would entice homemakers, because they are the main household consumers (Butte 23). Thus, when there are a lot of consumers watching, news companies can charge advertisers more to air their commercials. That is the business of gatekeeping.

In addition to the financial motivations, news values influence the gatekeeping process. There are a number of criteria that must be considered for an effective news story. It is no longer acceptable to put the most “important” story on the air. Most commercial broadcasters look for the most exclusive or unique story and turn that in to what viewers think is most important.
Mass media researcher David Manning defined a “gate keeper” as: a person who sorts through and chooses among a number of competing messages and then determines which ones the receiver will hear (Gant 628). In the broadcast newsroom, a number of different gatekeepers determine what the receiver or audience will hear. Those decisions are usually made in the morning news meeting.

Q6’s meeting is held daily at 9am, but decisions are being made even before then. The Assignment Editor is probably the most influential gatekeeper and arrives early each morning. Her job is to create the day sheet that is a rundown of all the possible stories (Figure A). She compiles this list from overnight e-mails, police scanners, phone calls to law enforcement, and sometimes the newspaper. There are also a number of press releases that come in from companies or organizations looking for coverage of some event or product. The Assignment Editor sifts through all of the material and presents the most interesting or visual possibilities at the meeting.

During the meeting, the Assignment Editor explains her story ideas to the reporters, producers, and the News Director. The group then discusses the idea to see if it will work. Those stories that do make the final cut are assigned to a reporter. The producers then go over stories that will not be covered by a reporter and see if they can fit them into the specific newscast (Refer to Figure A). When everything is settled, the day begins.
After the meeting, the Assignment Editor makes follow-up calls on the stories selected to see if there is any new information. She then schedules necessary arrangements for interviews or appointments during the day. Gathering the news is perhaps the hardest part of the business because there are limited sources of information.
That is why the Assignment Editor must keep close and friendly ties with official, corporate and community sources.

The next most influential gatekeeper is the Producer. Q6 has three main producers for each of the prime time newscasts. During the meeting they decide which stories will lead their newscast, and then select other stories that will transition well throughout the program. One producer states that a story may be very important or urgent, but if it does not flow well with the rest of the newscast, it cannot be aired.

It appeared that the producers determined most of what went on the air and, therefore, what would most affect the viewers. However, they hardly ever left the building and had very little idea of the true nature of the stories or their focus. This posed a problem because they were acting more as show strategists than as deliverers of pertinent information. Still, they had the most impact on news judgment for the station.

With regards to news judgment, recent reports showed that news coverage was basically the same in all American markets. That is partly because producers moved around so often that there needed to be a standard for news flow. There were also only about eleven national consultants last year that worked with all producers in the nation. Their styles of news formats were basically the same, and that is why most producers favored certain stories that were synonymous nationwide (Butte 7).

Unlike producers, the reporters are the primary link between the public and the final broadcast. They are never in the building during the day, because that's not where the news forms. Their role as gatekeepers, however, begins even before leaving the station. During the morning meeting at Q6, each reporter is required to list off a few personal story ideas. The executive producer believes this keeps them actively involved
in their market. Sometimes a reporter does not have an idea and makes one up for the
morning meetings. That is where some news judgment dilemmas can influence the
integrity of broadcasting.

Before one of the morning meetings, a Q6 reporter showed up to his desk and
realized that he didn’t have any story ideas. He opened his phone book, and it landed in
the yellow pages under restaurants. Looked for any ideas, he seemed to find one just
before everyone met. When it came to his turn, he said there was only one idea because
it was going to be such a big story.

The idea was to do an investigation of area restaurants that no longer accepted
checks. He named numerous angles that other reporters could use to make the topic a
special “news team” report. The News Director agreed and thought it would make a
great series. That evening his idea became the top story, and the other reporters did
follow-up consumer reports based on his main topic. The reporter later said he
exaggerated the last-minute idea and pitched it to the News Director so he would not get
in trouble. Looking at other possibilities on the day sheet, that last-minute idea took the
place of a parasite outbreak at an area hospital, as well as a water shortage in the Spokane
valley.

Most of the reporters say they like their story ideas and hope to use them for their
daily assignment. Many at Q6 admit there is a slight bias toward their story than others
they are assigned. One reporter even says that about 80% of the stories they have to do
are not of interest to them. This raises some more issues on gatekeeping. When a
reporter covers a story of interest, it is usually because he or she knows about or has some
sort of background in the subject (Ryan 177). It seems that a story of personal interest
would have more in-depth and thorough coverage. This is because the reporter knows more about the situation at hand and can angle the story in the most logical and understandable way. He or she can also turn to the appropriate sources to further explain the story. A reporter who has little knowledge of a story would usually have a hard time figuring out who to speak with and where to “take” the angle (Ryan 178).

Every reporter at Q6 is a general assignment reporter. That means that they cover any story on any subject assigned. This poses a problem because the reporters basically have to become experts in some situation or field every day. Few reporters today are hired with an academic background other than broadcast journalism (Butte 5). Also, most of them move from city to city every couple of years in search of better pay. So there is limited connection, especially in small to medium size markets, between the reporter and the public (Butte 5).

Many times the reporters have to “close the gates” on important community stories. Reasons for this are because there isn’t enough time to get all the facts, reporters don’t have enough knowledge about the situation, and they have no unofficial community sources to help out (Butte 3). The end result is usually a generalized account of an event or situation. The pictures usually end up telling the story as will be discussed further in the study.

The final product that goes on the air is not checked first by an authority figure. But the News Director watches each newscast closely and makes comments for the reporters and anchors. The News Director is the overall gatekeeper in charge of the gathering and presentation of the news. This position is symbolically high on the gatekeeping scale, but there is little day-to-day influence from this position. This person
ties the business aspect into the newsroom by constantly comparing the content with other stations (Butte 8). If they are covering an important event, the News Director will make sure some reporter and photographer is right there as well. It is important for ratings that the News Director not let any major or breaking stories slip form the station’s coverage. Otherwise, his or her job could be in jeopardy (Butte 8).

The General Manager is who the News Director reports to, and he is also an indirect gatekeeper. This position can affect the quality of news depending on the person’s background. Most often, the General Manager comes from the Sales Manager position because advertising revenue is the heart of a television station (Butte 9). Those with sales backgrounds tend to require only enough journalistic integrity and excellence to score high ratings (Butte 9). The higher the station’s ratings, the more it can charge advertisers for airtime. General Managers who come from the news side of the station tend to back their news teams with more staff and higher standards. In this case, the content of the news will usually be more content-based than colorful (Butte 9).

Since reporters are the primary link to the public, they tend to take the “brunt” of criticism by viewers. It is important to realize that there are a number of other factors and gatekeepers influencing the nature of the newscast content.
CHAPTER 5
What it takes to make the 5p.m. News

With the establishment of gatekeepers in the news industry, it is important to see what material will and will not make it through the “gates” to become a final story. There are two fundamental activities that go into the filtering process: sensing and valuation (Gant 628). In the sensing phase, gatekeepers evaluate a large list of story ideas and topics taken from various sources. They are set against a list of news story “criteria” that is made up of elements for potential news stories. During valuation, gatekeepers take the filtered stories and put them against another set of criteria that determines stories that will actually go on the air (Gant 629).

During sensing, the assignment editor sifts through all the press releases and pitches made by local businesses and organizations. The only ones that could survive are from major local companies that are making an announcement affecting many viewers in the market. Material that gatekeepers favor the most comes from business, civic/service, government, and interest group information subsidies (Kurpius 344).

The main reason decision makers take stories from organizations is because there is little investigation or background information needed. Usually there is a spokesperson for the organization that is willing to talk about the news event. Also, the reporters can easily piece the story together when there are simple facts laid out. Decision makers will usually only take stories from other sources if they are presented in concisely written news releases tailored to the needs of the station (Gant 630). This raises concern about the coverage of events rather than issues that will be addressed later.
There is also a list of specific criteria that gatekeepers tend to consider when choosing potential stories (Gant 630). Studies show that the basic elements for a news story are:

1) **Affiliation**- getting the name and image of the station into the community.
   
   Q6 co-sponsored the Interstate fair this summer because it is one of the major events of the year and is a tradition for many in the northwest. The station had extended and, many times, exclusive coverage of the festivities at the annual event.

2) **Conflict**- possible verbal and physical disputes on camera are great for grabbing viewers’ attention. Researchers say that balanced reporting is not just for journalistic objectivity; more importantly it is to cause controversy and unrest (Butte 9). In conflict situations, Q6 reporters are encouraged by the News Director to include interviews filled with anger.

3) **Information source**- to create a greater sense of credibility a “watchdog” image among the viewers. Q6 has a policy to include one “Consumer Reports” and one “Medical Alert” in each of its newscasts. It is highly suggested by national consultants to have viewer advocacy in news (Butte 7).

4) **News Format**- The story must flow with other stories in the newscast, especially the top story. Producers at Q6 strategize their newscast by placing stories that relate to one another together.

5) **Normality**- The story must deal with something familiar to the viewers. Large companies, major roads, and familiar people are all favored. Q6 will always
cover the opening of new businesses especially in times of economic hardships.

6) **Uniqueness**- There needs to be an odd or novel aspect to the story, otherwise it is just everyday life. News stations look for “exclusives” or “firsts” in their reports (Butte 10). Q6 producers tell the reporters to have a creative angle on standard stories so there will be more viewer interest.

7) **Proximity**- The event needs to be within the station’s coverage area, or have a local tie. Audience members will not tune in to something that doesn’t relate to their community or radius of interest. Q6 covered a memorial for fire fighters that took place outside its coverage area in Winthrop, WA. A number of local fire fighters, however, were remembered in the ceremony and that brought locality to the coverage.

8) **Resources**- the station needs to have the ability to cover a news event, otherwise it will not turn into a story. Many stations, especially smaller markets with limited coverage capabilities, import news from their networks. If a producer at Q6 hears about a sensational story that happened on the East Coast, he will import the footage via satellite from a network feed. This can sometimes defeat the purpose of local news coverage and turn into more of a tabloid program (Carroll 124).

9) **Significance**- the story must be newsworthy to the point that viewers will stop what they are doing and tune into the broadcast. This is sometimes done by “scaring” the viewer through using phrases such as, “…and it can happen to you” or “…and it’s taking place in your neighborhood.” The News Director
encourages reporters to find a sense of urgency in their reports to attract viewers.

10) **Timeliness** - the story must be very current in order to have the latest news of something. Q6 never allows reporters to begin a story with “last night” or “yesterday.” The story must have developing situations that are happening right at the moment of the newscast.

11) **Visual Potential** - this is a crucial point that flows through all the minds of the gatekeepers. The pictures are what tell the story, not the reporter’s words. If there are no decent camera shots or “colorful” sources available, then the story will not make the newscast. This final point in sensing is the primary aspect to determine if a story will make the air.

During the internship, there was an example of the importance of visual images. At one of the morning meetings, a reporter said he heard about a parasite outbreak at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane. He saw that the story was not on the day sheet and wondered how such a critical situation could be overlooked. The Assignment Editor said she knew of the outbreak but claimed the story had no decent visuals. She tried to get an interview with the hospital, but no one wanted to talk at the time about the situation. There also was no access inside the building to get reaction from patients or staff. Therefore she felt it would be a good story at a different time when there was more access to visuals.

In the second phase of story selection, “valuation”, most of the filtered stories make it to the air. Reporters either like a story that is suggestion, or the story they have is approved for the news. The main news stories end up usually involving government,
disaster, and crime (Gant 633). If a suggestion can fit into that category, it will probably make the newscast.

It is important to understand that many of the decisions on news stories are made with other influences in mind. The News Director is especially conscientious of the stories being selected because she has to explain how they will help the business of the station. The age of information must also work with modern business. In broadcasting, this is called infotainment and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6
Infotainment in its Prime

The news industry recently moved into the Fragmented era. This began with the spread of cable television in the late 80’s and early 90’s. The networks now had to compete with 24-hour cable news channels that were specialized in business, sports, international affairs, and more. Local news also had to compete with these programs as well as new networks rising in markets across the country. There was suddenly a need to hold onto viewers that was never a problem in the past (Ryan 177).

News Directors worked with consultants to figure out ways of keeping the audiences from switching to an enormous selection of other programming. The end result was a new way of delivering the news called infotainment. It was necessary to deliver legitimate information, but now with a twist of entertainment or uniqueness (Ryan 177). This was seen as a desperate attempt for stations to keep the viewers tuned in by promising news that could not be found anywhere else.

Today, Promotional Directors create flashy commercials for exclusive or unusual stories airing on the evening news. The meteorologists at Q6 and other stations are also encouraged to make “teases” that encourage potential viewers to tune-in for the forecast. Studies show that most viewers watch local news for the weather report. Knowing this, producers have the weather talent give a glimpse of their forecast early in the newscast, but then make the viewers wait until later in the show to find out the entire report (Butte 10).

As well, the News Director at Q6 has story-length policies in order to keep viewers from becoming bored and changing the channel. This way if there is a story a
viewer isn’t interested in, she knows that it will be over shortly (Butte 10). At Q6, full stories, or packages, must be shorter that 1 minute and 15 seconds. Stories with video footage and a sound bite\(^1\) are less than 45 seconds, and the bite\(^2\) is more than six seconds. When just the anchors read stories the length must be no longer than 25 seconds.

Though there are many stories included in a newscast, the content of each story is little more than pictures.

Once the stories are assigned to the reporter, there is limited time to create an average of two produced pieces by the 4 p.m. deadline. Even if a reporter knows or likes her story, she still must spend most of the day gathering pictures, not information. When a story is broken down, there is usually little verbal content involved in the story (Butte 12).

The following is an excerpt from the script of a Q6 news story:

\(^1\) Sound bite- a portion of the commentary from a videotaped interview.
\(^2\) Bite- same as sound bite
Note that the final product is fast paced with few words. Reporters are encouraged to produce stories like this one because it adds flow to the newscast and entertains viewers. As well, the reporters are told to include sound bites from interviews only if they are catchy or emotional. Studies show that viewers would much rather see an enraged mother or silly child than a “talking head” (Carroll 123). That is because there is more of a compelling aspect that attracts the viewers to the story. Reporters at Q6 say the sound bites should be emotional and not informational. Their job is to give the basic information and the source’s job is to draw in the viewers.
CHAPTER 7

Final Remarks

More than anything, my observations from this internship showed me the relationship broadcast news has created with its local audience. Before the study, it was hard to understand why broadcasting professors and professionals constantly told students to write news stories at a fifth grade level. The answer became clear—local television news had turned into a passive medium. More and more, people wanted to hear the main information without having to pay attention to details.

Studies show that many people who watch local news are doing other things at the same time. They are preparing dinner, talking to their family, or doing homework. Most of the time they want to see the events of the day, but don’t have time or interest for detailed explanations (Gant 638).

In looking at the future of local television news, I conclude that it will not return to the original principles of broadcast journalism. There have been a few attempts to turn local television news back into the public affairs medium that it once was. These attempts called “public” or “civil” journalism were met with mixed reaction, but didn’t take on the popularity that reformers wanted.

The integrity of commercial broadcasting is not necessarily worse off than the days of Edward R. Murrow’s newscasts. Times and technology are quite different now, and local news has a more specified role as a result of media fragmentation and profit capabilities. It too is a business, and its consumers are more numerous yet passive than ever. Local news will continue, however, to be a local provider of information as long as viewers stay tuned.
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My first day at the station went by very fast. I learned that there was an editorial meeting every morning at 9:15. This meeting was to brainstorm story ideas and then elect finalists for the main newscasts at 4:30, 5 and 6pm.

After the meeting I followed a producer for the day. I searched through the wires and Internet to find other stories that would fit in the newscast. The assignment editor then gave us a few press releases that came in later that day. It was my job to write a 20 second story based on the information in the release. There was a special program called NEWSTAR that formatted each story for the anchors, reporters, and production crew. I had to follow the guidelines when writing the story so that the anchors knew when to talk and when to wait for a sound bite.

In the afternoon, we finalized the stories we wrote and then added the scripts from the reporter’s stories. The executive producer then went over our work and approved each story when it was to her liking. After printing the scripts, we went into the production room to co-produce the 4:30 newscast.

I kept track of the time that the show was running. That time was compared to the estimated time that the producer figured earlier in the day. No stories needed to be cut that day and the show went very smoothly.
JULY 2, 2002

After the morning meeting I went with reporter Craig Zlimen to cover two news stories in downtown Spokane. First we went to a YWCA rally at Riverfront Park where the mayor announced a budget proposal to stop child abuse. I spoke with parents and community members about their reaction after the rally. Those people with emotional reactions to the situation were elements that Craig wanted for his story. We then shot footage of a dog swimming in the river for the weather producers to use in the newscast.

On the next story we spoke with local storeowners about the growing tendency to not accept checks from customers. Craig looked for testimony as well as evidence for the story. He said that stories were very boring if there were not a lot of visuals to enhance the narrative. The owner brought out all his bills for bounced checks and Craig used those to help tell his story.

When we returned to the station, Craig watched all the footage the photographer shot and found the sound bites that he felt were most useful. He then wrote a script incorporating the bites into the story so that it would flow smooth. After he wrote the story, I found footage that would visually match what he was saying.

About 20 minutes before the newscast, we drove to a location for the live shot that each reporter was supposed to do for their story. Craig had two stories that ran in different newscasts, so we had to change locations for the second story.
**JULY 3, 2002**

On the day before the fireworks, many of the reporters were sent out to do fire safety stories. I was assigned to go with Jeff Moreau on a couple stories in Stevens County. Our first story was about zones in which fireworks could and could be lit off. We spoke with Department of Natural Resources officials to tell us why they were banning certain areas. To make the story more dramatic, we shot footage of nearby trees that had caught on fire the previous year by fireworks. I shot a stand-up for my resume tape at the site.

The next story was further north and it dealt with two rare birds being killed as a result of a firework that caught their nest on fire. We spoke with a local resident to get her emotional reaction to the situation. Then we went to the site and shot footage of the charred nest and the area around it. Jeff tried to get in contact witnesses but there were none available. Since the story was not visually interesting, we had to find file tape of the birds back at the station.

While Jeff wrote his script, I edited my short piece for the resume tape. Next we went by the Spokane River for the live shot to make it look like we were in a wooded area. During the newscast, Jeff's communicator with the producer went out so he had no way of knowing when to speak. Channel 6, however, transmits it telecast on the radio, so he listened to the actual newscast for his cue.

**JULY 4, 2002**

I wrote a few stories for the 4:30 newscast and then went home early.
JULY 5, 2002

I stayed back at the station with one of the news producers. Since it was the day after the 4th and a Friday, she thought it was best to have lighter news because there weren’t going to be as many viewers. She led with a story about the sheriff’s patrol on area lakes and how they responded to incidents from the night before. After deciding the lead, she chose stories that related to Independence Day festivities.

I wrote a few stories about clean-up activities in River Front Park and other gathering spots for fireworks. Since there were no major incidents, I was told to look up incidents in the archives from years past to make the story more interesting. Then I wrote how this year was not bad compared to a few years ago when a couple children were seriously injured from fireworks. It seemed to be old news that had nothing to do with the night before, but I was told that it added color to the story.

Next I wrote about a few construction projects around the city. Also, I looked up alternate routes and incorporated them into the story to make it a little more useful. The producer gave me a headset when it came time to the newscast so that I could instruct the anchors and reporters and when they were on air.

JULY 8, 2002

During the morning meeting there was a lot of discussion about a thunderstorm the night before. The news director put a couple reporters on the topic to cover different aspects. I went out with Toby Hatley to a fire department in north Spokane to talk to officials about lightning damage. The fire official did not have a lot of information about
fires from the storm, so Toby used some lightning tracking graphics to make the story more interesting. We then went to the Department of Natural Resources headquarters to ask about fire incidents. There were not many fires caused by the lightning, so we went with a crew to do some follow up work on a fire from that morning.

After shooting the footage, I looked up file tape from the “sky cam” to find lightning shots for the story. I worked with Toby to find an appropriate angle for the story. After editing the story, I went with Toby back to the scene of the smoldering fire where he did his live report. He used the location to help describe what fire crews look for at the scene of a blaze.

**JULY 9, 2002**

At the morning meeting, the news director held a special meeting to tell us that she planned to change the format of the 4:30 newscast. She gave us reasoning and the new layout of the show so that our news reports would fit.

I was assigned to go with Craig Zlimen to cover a couple stories in Coeur d’Alene. KHQ had a bureau in northern Idaho at the Spokesman Review building. The news stories from that location were then sent via transmitter and into the control room at the Spokane station. This made the travel and reporting much more efficient.

Our first story was about a water shortage caused by a broken pump. We drove around looking for sprinklers or people washing their car, because it would soon be forbidden. Craig wanted to put a lot of natural sound breaks (a.k.a.- the sound of a hose, a splash in a pool, etc.) in the story to make it more interesting, so we searched around for a lot of different elements.
Craig was especially interested in talking to children and elderly people, because he thought they made the story more animated. We were then taking to the pump house to interview the local water commissioner. Since KHQ didn’t like to have many “authority” figures in the newscast, the commissioner’s interview was brief and general.

For the next story we went to the Kootenai County Court House where a man was on trial for poisoning neighborhood cats. Our cameras were not allowed in the Court Room, so we had to go to the man’s house for video footage. None of the cat owners or neighbors would speak to us, so the story turned into a simple video package.

I used the water ban story for one of my resume stories. That afternoon I wrote the story in the manner I would like to tell it, and then we shot a stand-up of me presenting some information. I edited the story together that afternoon from the Idaho bureau.

For the live shot we stood at the water well and then the court house for the other story. Both locations brought the viewer in “living color” to the scene of the story.

**JULY 11, 2002**

After the morning meeting, I was assigned to go with Jeff Dubois to do a lottery story about the record high jackpot. The news director told us to take a different angle than just who wins, or what they would do with their money. We were told that some of the money went to public education and thought that would be a good angle to take.

I called the state lotto commission and Jeff did some research on the Internet about the dividends of the lottery. I found out that about 25 percent of the lottery
revenues went to schools to pay for teacher salaries. Jeff found a pie chart that would visually help break down the allotments for the viewers.

Next we went to a convenience store where they sold lotto tickets and talked to the owner. He knew all the rules and information about the lottery and made a very good source for the story. Then we talked to some customers who were buying tickets. They were not used for sources of information; rather Jeff wanted emotions of excitement and happiness for the story.

We were leaving the store and going to the next interview when there was a report from the station that a pipe bomb was found inside a U-haul truck. Since Jeff was closest to the location, we covered the story. The police had evacuated the area around the store and were sending a robot into the truck to investigate the situation. Our cameraman was not allowed past the yellow caution tape, but he could zoom all the way into the truck with the lens and shoot the robot at work. After the robot removed the bomb from the truck, it took it to a special containment vehicle.

The other TV stations were at the scene, but the follow-up police officer would only speak with Jeff because they knew one another. He explained the situation to us, and then spoke about the procedure disarming the bomb. That was the top story of the night.

After we sent in the bomb story, we continued on the lotto story. We next interviewed the Spokane School District accountant, and he told us more in detail about the donations from the lottery.
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We returned to the station and I found some file footage of teachers in the classroom, since the money from the lottery went to support teachers. Jeff wrote a script and dubbed his tape. I also wrote a script and used the lotto story for my resume tape.

For the newscasts, we went back to the convenience story and Jeff sold a lady a lotto ticket during his live piece. We then went to the U-haul store for the second story.

JULY 12, 2002

This was the beginning of the summer heat wave when temperatures were about 105 degrees. The news director decided that she wanted the reporters to do a lot of stories about the heat since everyone was talking about it. I was assigned to work with Teresa Reardon on a story about jobs that make money from the hot weather. We made some initial phone calls to air conditioning companies and ice factories.

We then met up with an air conditioning crew that was installing a unit into a home. We interviewed both the owner of the company and the homeowner. After shooting footage of the installation process, we went to an ice factory. The foreman gave us a tour of the facility and explained how the machines worked. There was plenty of noise and footage for the visual aspect. He then talked about the amount of ice that they sold during the summer and how his job was great during these times.

Finally we went to a mall where we talked to managers about the amount of sales before the heat wave versus during the heat wave. We also talked to people waiting in a very long line at the movie theatre.

I helped edit the package with the cameraman and also found good sound bites for the story. For our live shot we went to Riverfront Park because no one was there. In her
live shot Teresa talked about how people usually filled the park in the afternoon, but not when the weather was unbearably hot.

JULY 13, 2002

This was my first taste of the demanding news industry. It was Saturday and I was supposed to go to the lake with some friends to beat the heat. At 5:30 am, however, Craig Zlimen called me and said he was covering a wildfire that broke out around midnight. He needed some help and was wondering if I would be willing to go. Though it ruined all my plans for rest and relaxation, and accepted his offer and we headed up to the fire. There were firefighters and engines everywhere around the blaze. We found the location for the media that was actually quite close to the fire. Surprisingly we were the only station there. One of the chiefs came over soon after and told us about their efforts thus far. He told us about the size of the fire and how long it was expected to burn. When the interview was finished we asked some follow up question, and then he went back to work. The other news station arrived later that morning, but the chief refused to talk to them because they didn’t show up until about nine hours after the initial blaze.

We had a portable editor and Craig showed me how to put a story together from the field. We then transmitted the finished product to the station where they aired it as the day’s top story. Craig did updates from the scene for the rest of the day, and I made a few stand-ups for my resume tape.
Today was another unique taste of the news industry. I worked on the morning show that was broadcasting for two hours live from a remote location. It was the reopening of the historic Davenport Hotel that is the centerpiece of downtown Spokane. The news director and many of the reporters and production crew worked months for this show.

I arrived at the hotel at 2:30 am and helped run cable from the satellite truck to the show stage in the lobby. We then set up lights and cameras in a number of ballrooms and lounges around the hotel. Each segment of the show would feature a different room. I ran a camera from a few different locations and we worked on camera shots and angles for about an hour.

When the morning show anchors arrived, I worked with them going over scripts and show schedules. During the show I acted as a producer for the talent. When the show finally went on the air, it was my job to tell the anchors and reporters where they needed to be and what they were covering in that segment. I also worked with the lighting to make the shots as presentable as possible. The director, who was outside in the control truck, would tell me what I needed to do to make the shots more appealing for broadcast.

During each commercial break, the anchors and I would run to different locations and set up the lighting just in time for air. It was really stressful at times because some of the breaks were only a couple minutes long and we had to go up two flights of stairs and down corridors. This was the most fun I had during the internship because it was exciting and improvised.
When the morning show finished, I stayed and produced the news updates during the Today show. We used a few camera shots in some of the different rooms, and it was my job to decide the order and camera angles. After the show ended, I helped close down the set and prepare the equipment for the evening newscast that aired from the hotel as well.

**JULY 16, 2002**

There was a lot of smoke coming into the region from the fires in northern Oregon and the producers wanted to do a story on them. One reporter suggested that peoples' allergies were probably acting up as a result of all the smoke. I was assigned to work with Craig Zlimen on this story.

The first thing we did was contact some allergy sufferers that we knew. We asked them if their allergies were worse than normal over the past couple days. Many of them said that they were, so we set up interviews. We then called an allergist to get a professional comment on the effects of the smoke on allergies.

Craig felt that natural sound and visuals were almost more important than the word in the story, because they told it better. When we interviewed the first person, we waited for a long time until she sneezed and had to blow her nose. Craig said this would add a lot of understanding and interest to the story. Following that interview, we went to a clinic where patients were receiving allergy shots. We collected footage of a doctor administering a shot and then got reaction from the patient. These elements enhanced the story by the interesting footage and by the relieved emotions of the patient.
Later in the day, we spoke with an allergist about the smoke and its effects on people. He then gave us tips to beat the smoke and stay healthy. Those tips in turn became graphics that Craig used in his story.

After we returned to the station, I looked up file footage of people sneezing or blowing their nose. Craig wanted to get the message across so allergy sufferers would tune into his story.

The live shot was in the middle of a meadow where he said that the weeds were not the only thing bothering peoples' allergies.

**JULY 17, 2002**

There was a call into the station during the morning meeting from a lady claiming to be sick because of mold in her house. Jeff Dubois and I were assigned to look further into the matter and develop a possible story.

The lady told us that she bought a house in the Spokane Valley about a year ago and was recently feeling very ill. She discovered mold growing in her home and wanted us to do a consumer alert special. The news director liked the idea of the investigative report but said it would be too risky, because there would be a lot of legal matters to consider.

Jeff and I decided to cover the story in a very objective and factual way. We set up an interview with the woman and also one with a local toxicologist. The lady showed us the mold around her home and told us about her symptoms. There was a lot of good footage of the damage, and her testimony was very emotional.
Next we spoke with the toxicologist and he gave us the fact from a medical perspective. He showed us charts of the different molds and told us how they affect people. With that information, we pieced together the story based on known and common facts. I made a graphic of what to look for in your home if there are unusual illnesses.

Our live shot was inside the woman’s home where Jeff showed some of the damage from the toxic mold.

**JULY 18, 2002**

As an intern, I was required to edit and produce my own resume tape. Throughout the internship, I wrote different packages and did a number of stand-ups. I still needed to anchor for my tape. I spent the day working with Q6’s main prime time anchor, Stephanie Vigil. She talked to me about the requirements for the job. I learned that there was a lot more work involved with her position, because she had to make a number of appearances and do a lot of work outside the studio. Just in that week she had hosted two fundraisers, spoke at a middle school, and attended a news conference on behalf of the station.

She talked to me about contracts and what elements to look for, and to avoid. There were a lot of sections such as public appearance and wardrobe that I did not realize existed. We then looked over the scripts for that evening’s newscast. She showed me how to mark areas of emphasis and urgency.

The other anchor, Dan Klechner, arrived shortly and he showed me how to apply basic make-up. This was an important aspect of the job, because the intense stage
lighting would completely wash out any facial definition without make-up. When I was ready for the air, the producer showed me where to sit and where to look.

I worked for a few minutes with the teleprompter operator so that my reading would be paced and smooth. We then started a newscast and I read and introduced reporters just as the anchors did.

After the newscast, the anchors critiqued me based on delivery and performance. After I had a few pointers, I did another newscast that flowed much smoother. Then I viewed both casts and found segments that would work for the resume tape.

**JULY 19, 2002**

This was the last day at the station and it was time to edit the resume tape. I finalized all of the scripts I wrote for some of the stories. Then I collected all of the tapes of story footage, stand-ups, and anchoring. The editors were similar to those at the Murrow School of Communication, so it was easy to learn the keys. I edited all of the news packages first. Then I selected certain parts of my newscast that were well delivered. I put all the elements together for the final tape, and then copied them on to a master reel. I would eventually combine the best material from Cable 8 News with this material and make the final product to send as a resume.