



funny/memorable/moving

Funny stories, indelible moments & fond memories

Funny

Producing a publication every month for three decades sounds daunting, but there have been some funny moments and I've culled a few stories over the years... here are a few....

■ Michael Saunders

In the very early days of WCW I mustered up the nerve to call one of the most powerful women in Sarasota: Michael Saunders. Would she take my call (actually it would be her assistant)?



Michael Saunders

Would she say yes to some unknown writer? Gracious person that she is, we met at her Main Street office and later at Land's End, her former home on the northernmost tip of Longboat Key where she grew up.

She couldn't have been nicer even as we had her pose outside in warm weather and she was all dressed up (beautifully as ever). I went back to the office and settled in at my desk when a delivery person came to the door and dropped off a huge floral arrangement. It said something about "a pleasure meeting you" but what I remember after all these years was "Don't let this influence your article." It was signed simply, "Michael."

And I also remember thinking, "Wow, and she has a \$150-million dollar company." In 2017, MS&C did \$2.75 billion in residential sales.

■ Cindy Gettinger

Another early interview was with Cindy Gettinger, who had received a full scholarship to New College where she earned a degree in cognitive neuropsychology in 1989. She was also nominated for a Rhodes scholarship.

In 1988, Cindy participated in the Para Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, winning four gold medals in swimming and set four world records. In 1990 the



Cindy Gettinger

Jaycees named her as one of the Outstanding Young Americans in the USA and that same year she was among the Top Ten Young People of the World. In 1992 she took over as volunteer director for Manatee County Special Olympics, a position she held for over 20 years.

Not one to make a fuss about her injury, she did relay how she became partially paralyzed in 1981. She was working her shift as a paramedic and a mentally ill patient threw her against a wall injuring her neck and spine, which left her with low-level quadriplegia. So I asked during our interview, "What do people say when they find out you're a champion Para Olympian swimmer?" She told me, with a straight face, that one person asked her how she got her wheelchair into the swimming pool.

I'd read about Cindy on occasion and sadly read that she passed away in 2012, at the age of 52.

■ Never Thought about that Dept.

After working day and night on the first issue of WCW it went to press in Clearwater and was due to arrive in Sarasota at our designated storage unit. But things were delayed and delayed and delayed and the paper was due to arrive well past 6 p.m. Hmm, I remember thinking, that storage place closes at 6.



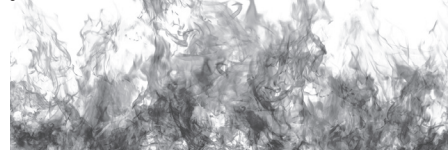
So, what to do with 20,000 newspapers in a truck heading to Sarasota? I remember thinking; we'll store them

in the building's lobby. Then we'll get in here early, like 6 a.m. before anyone else arrives, and move them out. Yes, it took forever. Falls under the "ya gotta do what ya got do" category.

■ Never Should Have said that Dept.

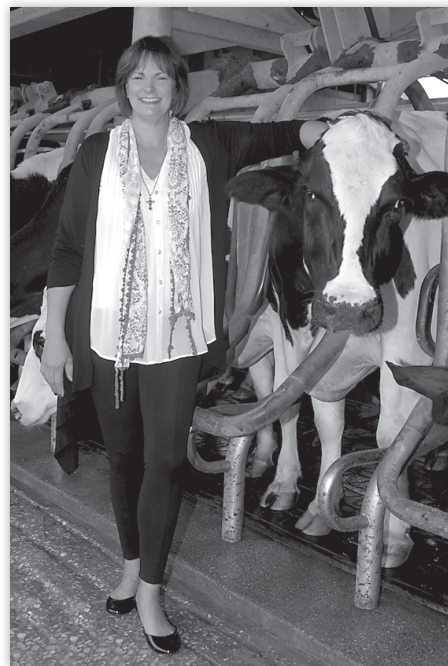
Having to deliver files very two weeks (WCW came out twice a month years ago) you had to make sure all the boards were in place. Check. Count all the seps. Check. All photos included. Check. All pages clearly marked. Check. All instructions completed on the job order. Check. Yet, I would still worry.

I got sick of myself worrying and tried reasoning with myself instead. What would be the worst thing that could happen? The printer burn down? Yes, the printer DID burn down (but not right after I said that). The entire printing plant was damaged except for the part of the building where our files sat. Be careful for what you say to calm yourself down.



■ Thank Goodness no Scratch and Sniff

One of the most unusual photo shoots we went on was to Dakin Dairy. Evelyn England and I headed out east where the roads change to two lanes and the buildings disappear. There's just pasture or farmland on either side. We saw a small sign and turned. We got closer and were picking up a pungent smell that got stronger every block. Yep, even stronger. We rolled up the windows...too late the smell was all over us.



Karen Dakin

The smell of bovine waste material seemed to circle us as we pulled into the parking lot and there we saw a pyramid of, you guessed it, cow poop. Owner Karen Dakin was a delight (I guess she's used to the smell) and the cows were very accommodating and pleasant. But the stuff was everywhere including all over their huge bodies – even on their faces. We drove home with the windows open and Ev spent many an hour photoshopping out the muck from the images. I can still remember that smell.

Memorable

The consistent characteristic of the WCW we've profiled would have to be courage. Or maybe resolve. Hmmm, determination? You get the idea...pretty exceptional. Here are a few of the over 450 we've profiled.

■ Tornado warning

WCW Melody Trimble has worked in various places in her career. I interviewed her soon after she was made CEO at Venice Regional in 2005. She would go on to leave the area in 2009, but not before making many great changes at the hospital.



Melody Trimble

When I interviewed her it was still unusual for a woman to run a hospital (locally, Gwen Mackenzie would come to Sarasota Memorial a few years later). Melody recalled how when she was running a hospital in Oklahoma she was, of course, first to know about any weather alerts or other emergency. She was alerted that a tornado was coming. Turns out it was coming right to where her house was.

She called her husband to get to safety along with their children—which they did. The house, however, was completely destroyed. She told me they did find her daughter's prom dress – still in the box.

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Melody was credited with leading Venice Regional's financial turnaround. And if you Google her name you'll see she has had a long career at progressively larger hospital systems—all as CEO.

■ Louise Ray and the Ray family

The New York Times headline said it all, "Family in AIDS Case Quits Florida Town After House Burns." Published: August 30, 1987. "As a result of a 'suspicious' fire that destroyed their home Friday night, the parents of three young brothers infected with the AIDS virus said today that the family would leave this town in southern Florida," the article said.



Louise Ray

That town was Arcadia and this was the '80s and AIDS was still misunderstood—dangerously so. And prejudice against this family was particularly virulent even with all the misconceptions about the disease.

The parents, Clifford and Louise Ray, moved their family to Sarasota which, to its credit, was supportive of the family. The Ray brothers, who have a younger sister, Candy, are Richard, Robert and Randy. All were hemophiliacs and were thought to have become infected with the AIDS virus through the contamination of blood-clotting drugs that they were treated with.

Since the time I interviewed the family, Ricky and Robert have died; Randy, now in his 30s, manages his HIV and lives in Orlando. The family left Sarasota to move to Orlando some time back and I believe they are still living in Central Florida.

■ Concussion

Deborah Semrinec. I remember her name and her story so well because it was so enlightening. And it eerily previewed present today with all the talk about children playing sports and the risk of concussion and at the same



Deborah Semrinec

time, football players following "concussion protocols" and yet suffering from severe brain damage later in life.

Deborah had a business in Sarasota and her story was how she was hit by a reckless driver. Deborah had taken up the cause I think because the driver who hit her was impaired. But it was the first time I heard of brain injury or, as she called it "a brain bruise." It was the first time I ever heard that a brain could be bruised. Later it would be called concussion. And its lasting effects could be deadly.

■ Queen of the Canopies

Well, I didn't give her that name, but if you Google "Nalini Nadkarni", that's what you'll often see. I interviewed Dr. Nadkarni when she was working at Selby Gardens.



Nalini Nadkarni

She's an ecologist who pioneered the study of Costa Rican rain forest canopies. Using mountain climbing equipment to make her ascent, Nadkarni first took an inventory of the canopy in 1981, followed by two more inventories in 1984, according to Wikipedia.

Her studies within the canopy revealed that the epiphytes, which are non-parasitic plants such as orchids and ferns that live on the branches and trunks of other plants, were

trapping organic material beneath their root system.

I remember finding that she created a form of slingshot to reach the canopy where she would often camp while doing her research. Dr. Nadkarni's work in the Costa Rican rain forest was featured in the 1988 PBS series, "The Second Voyage of the Mimi," starring a young Ben Affleck.

Now she's an Emeritus Professor at The Evergreen State College, and is currently a professor in the Department of Biology and the director of the Center for Science and Mathematics Education at the University of Utah.

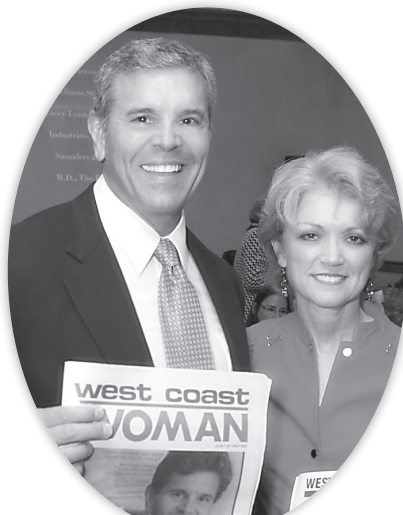
But there's more. Nadkarni is married to myrmecologist (study of ants) Jack Longino, who is also a professor at the University of Utah. I met his mother/her mother-in-law and she said with her interest in plants and his interest in insects, "I'm so glad they found each other."

■ Friendship and Loyalty

One of the first advertisers to come on board at WCW was an OB/GYN named Dan Watts, MD. We ran a black and white photo of a woman holding her newborn. Well that ad is long gone and that baby is now entering his or her thirties and may just have a baby of his or her own.

Dan has been with WCW for our entire 30 years. As we've evolved so has his practice. He dropped the OB after a few years and started to offer new treatments that more and more women sought like bio-identical hormones and safe weight loss. Eventually his practice became focused on total wellness for women—and men.

Through Dan I, of course, met his wife, Sherry, who manages his practice. And if you know Sherry then you will know about Girls Inc. which she was involved with then and still is today.



Dan and Sherry Watts

And I had the pleasure of profiling Sherry and finding how she wants young girls to grow into successful, self-empowered women.

The picture here shows Dan and Sherry at one of our expos. Dan is holding a cover of WCW and yes, that's him with his children Ashlee and Danny. Sherry is holding the issue in which we profiled her. You can't get better than having people you like and admire be your friends AND support your business.

Moving

There are so many touching stories I've been privileged to hear and share over the years. It was tough, but these just jumped out at me.

■ Mary Clark

Mary Clark's name would come up in a "six degrees of separation" kind of way. She knew many of the same people I knew, we had similar interests, she lived in my neighborhood and we were the same age.



Mary Clark

But what brought her to our pages was after she got sick with cancer in 1988. Mary was a "lawyer who successfully campaigned for a change in Florida law so that people with major illnesses would not lose a large part of their medical insurance coverage," wrote the New York Times.

"For four years she traveled across the state, arguing before newspaper editorial boards and at legislative meetings that insurance companies should not be able to reduce the medical benefits of people forced to retire because of illness. She also sued her insurance company and won the right to medical benefits up to \$1 million [the policy had been reduced to \$250,000 after she became ill]. But that

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decision was overturned on appeal.”

In 1992, however, she persuaded the Legislature to increase minimum lifetime medical insurance benefits for individuals to \$500,000. By then Mary’s health was getting worse. I interviewed her at her home which she shared with her husband, Keith Westerberg. It was in the Sapphire Shores neighborhood along my favorite bike-riding route.

She was open and friendly—not bitter at all. In fact, she was at peace with her mortality. She joked about the wig she wore and made only a passing mention of the chemo port at her waist. We agreed to watch political debates on TV together and she said she had a craving for ice cream and could eat all she wanted since her weight had dropped so much. She somehow made that seem like a good thing—yes, she was that upbeat.

She died in 1993, age 37. I went to her memorial service at New College (where she graduated and where she had her wedding ceremony with Keith). I had to leave early because I broke down in uncontrollable tears. Whenever I ride my bike by her house I still see her face and remember her smile.

■ Melissa Wandall

I’m sure you’ve probably heard the name Melissa Wandall. Through her hard work we have red light cameras. I know, you don’t like them. No one



Melissa Wandall

does. But what if you lost a loved one to someone carelessly running a red light? Well, that’s what happened to Melissa.

Her husband Mark and her brother were out on SR70 one October evening in 2003. A car that ran a red light t-boned the car and Mark was killed and her brother injured. Melissa was nine months pregnant at the time and gave birth to her daughter Madisyn who never got to meet her father. It was in 2006

I went to Melissa’s home and interviewed her while her daughter played.

It was a hard story to retell, but Melisa has courage to spare. And integrity. She just wants people to be careful and considerate on the road. We shared tears that day —hers in telling the story and mine in listening to it especially since Madisyn looks so much like Mark. Melissa even agreed to be photographed on the same road that took Mark’s life with a red light glowing in the background. Again, I call that courage.

It took four years of dogged determination to get the Mark Wandall Traffic Safety Act passed —due to Melissa’s hard work. The act established uniform standards for use of Red Light Safety Cameras. I was there when then Governor Crist signed it into law surrounded by a roomful of police officers, sheriffs and state police. Every year it seems someone wants to do away with red light cameras and they probably always will fight over this lifesaving necessity. But I know Melissa will never give up and we’re all safer in Florida as a result.

■ The Sherman family

The late 80s were a crazy time with so many changes and so many new issues. But AIDS was something that caught everyone by surprise and caused anxiety and a lot of thoughtless behavior towards those afflicted.

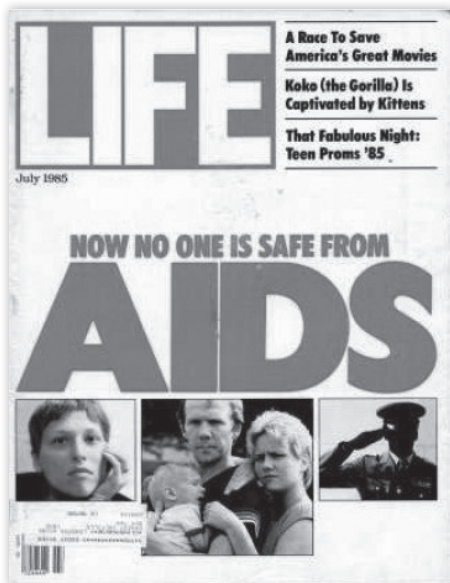
I wanted to cover the issue from a woman’s perspective and found her — via her mother, Ina Sherman. Her daughter, Sonny, contracted HIV and came down with AIDS and died. So the profile would be on Ina, but also about Sonny and the life she didn’t get to live. I visited Ina and Murray Sherman in their Sarasota home and was welcomed like one of the family. There was no trace of judgment or moralizing or bitterness. They showed me pictures of



Ina Sherman

Sonny as well as the rest of the family and Ina and I moved out to the lanai to talk. I saw the Life magazine cover with Sonny’s picture on it alongside others who also had AIDS.

Ina told me how Sonny got HIV by dating a man who was bisexual. She started to have strange symptoms, fatigue and fevers—all unusual for a 34-year-old active woman. What she had was AIDS and few women back then had it. I found this from the Washington Post: “Sherman, the first woman in the Washington area to contract acquired immune deficiency syndrome, represents both a medical rarity and the latest development in the course of a frightening new virus that has been targeted as the nation’s number one public health problem.



“Since its discovery three years ago, AIDS, which kills nearly all its victims within two years of diagnosis, has been largely identified with homosexual men, who represent the overwhelming majority of its 6,251 victims.” Sonny went on to the NIH to be a part of a research project studying AIDS and women—one of five women chosen. And that’s why her devoted mother kept referring to “Tony” who I found out was Anthony Fauci, MD, the Director at the National Institute of Health (he’s still there).

Ina brought to the table a pink urn. While we talked she’d wrap her hands around it. It was the urn that Sonny had chosen for herself and in it rested her mortal remains.

■ Graci McGillicuddy

I was there when the Child Protection Center moved into its much larger new space in 2010. Of course Graci McGillicuddy was there. She and her husband Dennis were, and are, generous supporters of the Center.



Graci McGillicuddy

They give to lots of causes, but this one I found out years later was something we had in common.

Back in the 80s there was a horrific story in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune about a couple who was charged with their child’s death. They contended it was an accident. But investigators found that the little girl had been beaten and starved. They had burned her with hot water and even put their cigarettes out on her skin.

The story haunted me and I was looking for volunteer work to do. I ended up volunteering at SPARCC, but Graci made child abuse her cause. We found out that day in 2010 that we had both read the same story.

So we then moved on to dedicating the new building and Graci came to the podium to speak. And as she spoke a butterfly started to fly near her and landed briefly on her face. After the ceremony I said to her that maybe that was the little girl we had both read about who came back to say hello. 🦋

