

## OPINION

## Just Jonathan

### A local reporter's guide to conversations with strangers

When I started with the newspaper in March, approaching strangers seemed like a very daunting task. Before diving into local journalism, you probably wouldn't see me striking up a conversation with someone I wasn't familiar with. I wouldn't describe myself as someone with social anxiety nor am I diagnosed with such disorder. I'm not a doctor, psychologist, or therapist, I barely received a high school diploma a year ago. With that in mind, here's five ways I've gotten better at talking to strangers.



Jonathan Meyer

#### 1: Carry a man-purse

You heard that right! I wouldn't necessarily call my camera bag a man purse, but my sister and all of her friends definitely do, so it's become a staple at this point. Knowing straight off the bat that you don't fit into typical social conventions has lightened the load that is interviewing many unfamiliar people. When I have my purse at my side, I know I can fall back on my journalistic skills in any situation.

#### 2: Confidence is key

The only way to rock a sweet Nikon branded purse is to carry it with pride. Make it seem like you're really really important. Walk into every situation with positivity and a stupid amount of confidence. All traits and characteristics stem from how much confidence you display.

#### 3: Prepare

As my hero Ron Burgundy once whispered into my ear, "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail." After Ron dropped this small but powerful piece of knowledge into my brain, I've never been the same. Before any social encounter I can be seen frantically writing in my notebook, page after page of possible questions and preparing for every situation imaginable.

#### 4: Look the part

While in high school, I could be seen in what I would call my standard outfit, a 5k t-shirt and black gym shorts. In March when I was brought on board with the paper, I knew this simply wouldn't cut it. I purged my closet of these wretched clothes and replaced them with suitably fashionable attire, Polo shirts and cargo shorts. These items turned out to be far more comfortable than the typical t-shirts and gym shorts and makes me look immensely more qualified and as my mother would say, handsome.

#### 5: Send emails whenever possible

The best way to get around tough social interactions is to quite literally avoid them. Send emails and when you get overwhelmed, simply stop responding or forward the email to someone higher up in the pecking order. While interviewing French President Emmanuel Macron, I was lacking on my French and simply checked out. I turned around, pulled out my laptop and in a panic wrote him an email with the remainder of the questions before promptly exiting the interview.

While the details of this list may not hold up in a court of law, the points still stand. I'm not a licensed professional by any stretch of the imagination but preparing, having confidence, and dressing for success, has led me to many conversations I would never have had before. Being unapologetically yourself in any situation is always the best way to go.

## World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

June 15, 2023, is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging is proud to join communities in the USA and all over the world to help raise awareness of this systemic social challenge.

As Americans, we believe in justice for all. Yet we fail to live up to this promise when we allow older members of our society to be abused or neglected. Older people are vital contributing members of American society, and their maltreatment diminishes all of us. Just as we have confronted and addressed the social issues of child abuse and domestic violence, so too can we find solutions to address issues like elder abuse, which also threatens the well-being of our community.

Our policies and practices make it hard for older people to stay involved with and connected to our communities as they age. As a result, older people are more likely to experience social isolation, which increases the likelihood of abuse and neglect. We can design stronger societal supports to keep our older people connected and protect them from abuse, whether financial, emotional, physical, or sexual. When we address a root cause, like social isolation, we also make it less likely that people will become neglected. Older adults who are socially connected and protected from harm are less likely to be hospitalized, less likely to go into nursing homes, and less likely to die.

We can and must create healthier and safer living environments for older adults, including their homes, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities.

Get more information about how to make a difference by visiting the National Center on Elder Abuse <https://ncea.acl.gov> or by calling LifeLong Links at 866-468-7887.



Stacie Speirs

Stacie Speirs is elder abuse prevention and awareness regional coordinator at the Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging.

## Magic Mike 6xl:

### The wanderlust deficiency

MICHAEL D. DAVIS  
CORRESPONDENT

I have never in my life thought about leaving Toledo. I was raised here, and I'll die here, just hopefully not today.

I have friends that have traveled from coast to coast, one friend that just went to Florence, I know a woman who just visited Italy, and I know people that annually travel to Canada. Meanwhile, I've been here, and I'm not complaining. Wanderlust seems to be something that fills nearly every soul but mine.

As much as I'd like to see Michelangelo's David or The World's Largest Toilet, I find neither to be a reason to get in a car, on an airplane, or in a train. I would rather fight naked a rabies-infected Tasmanian devil than spend a week with my family in a car traveling across the United States. And I'm sure the feelings are mutual.

So far in my life, I have only been out of the state twice, and both times for funerals. The first trip I can't remember too much of as I was young,

but we went to Minnesota to be with the bereaved. The second trip was about 10 years ago, and the funeral was on the southern border of Iowa. The funeral itself is a story that I won't get into at this moment, but it involves a shorts wearing preacher, a glass shattering vocalist, and an ill timed bathroom visit.

During the trip to the funeral on the southern border, we came to a point where we needed gas in the car. Since I'd never been, we took a 10 minute trip south and filled the tank in Missouri. At the gas station, I got out of the car, walked around a bit, blew my nose, and all in all, spent about six and a half minutes in the state.

My parents this past weekend celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary, and 40 years ago they traveled on their honeymoon. In a 1970s blue VW Bug, they drove all the way to Arkansas — which is, as you know, one of the hottest honeymoon destination spots, Paris, Niagara Falls... Arkansas. The traveling was made better by the fact that the VW Bug

was missing a shock and had an incessant squeak before it just broke down completely. It is stories like that that make me think my opinion on traveling isn't so crazy.

Also, in this day and age, who needs to travel? I have friends that live in New York, New Jersey, Canada, and Wales, all of whom I keep in contact with via this amazing 21st century invention called the Internet. And, of course, good ol' snail mail, as I am a throwback fan of writing letters that get sent with a stamp instead of the click of a button.

I guess I'm just different this way, which is fine with me. For two years after high school, I barely left the house, and that suited me just fine. If Murph's ever starts delivering, I think I'll have no reason to go outside.

So, as you all travel this summer, going to the Bermuda Triangle or going to see the world's biggest ball of twine, I'll sit right here, watching the neighborhood. Well, unless, God forbid, another out-of-state family member croaks, then I'm screwed.

## A good-news story about Iowa newspapers

Gordon Wolf was everywhere in Denison.

Until he wasn't.

A trusted newspaper editor, a 24-year veteran of the Denison Bulletin-Review, a bespectacled journalist fond of button-down short-sleeve shirts that date to an earlier time of ink-stained work when most newspapers had their own presses, a reporter with the ever-present camera around his neck, Wolf built a considerable brand as the chronicler of City Council and other meetings, and parades and new business openings, and all that makes life, well, life in this western Iowa city.

Just weeks ago, though, Wolf saw his career ended abruptly in a major reshuffling of the newspaper by its owner, the chain Lee Enterprises.

Having started in 1999 in Denison, Wolf's Bulletin-Review career came to a close April 21.

His newspaper run could have ended there, like those of so many thousands of journalists caught in the hurricane-force challenges facing American newspapers.

Amid the devastation in the newspaper industry, this is a bright opening brimming with potential.

But over the last 17 years, Wolf developed a working relationship with Lorena Lopez, the owner/editor of Denison-based La Prensa Iowa Spanish-language newspaper. They covered the same events, from high school graduations to local government meetings to joint interviews with dozens of presidential candidates — from Barack Obama in 2007 to Nikki Haley just weeks ago.

So Wolf's plight turned into inspiration for Lopez. The formidable editor of the Spanish-language paper, distribution of 6,000, is expanding its coverage, and launching a weekly paper in English in the Crawford County seat — The Denison Free Press. Lopez hopes to use the skills of talented, experienced Western Iowa journalists who have lost jobs to downsizing.

Lopez and Wolf share a passion for Denison and its orbiting communities. Now they will share a newsroom.

Wolf plans to join La Prensa full time, continuing to cover issues in Denison and surrounding communities in Crawford County with funding from the non-profit Western Iowa Journalism Foundation. Wolf's coverage will be published in English and Spanish on La Prensa's platforms, a move that will elevate the 100%-Latino-owned publication in Denison, one of Iowa's more diverse cities as the long-standing English newspaper experiences the effects of a significant downsizing.

"I've written about and photographed numerous individuals running for national and state offices, but I believe the most



Doug Burns

important people I've interviewed are those who go out of their way to make life better for others," Wolf said. "Over the years I developed a kind of philosophy, or mission statement, about the purpose for my career — to inform readers about their communities, to allow people to learn more about where they live and work and themselves, to help them realize that they are the lifeblood of their communities, and that what they believe and do matters."

With a \$25,000 challenge grant from nationally recognized philanthropists Ron and Jane Olson, Crawford County, Iowa natives — Ron, from Manilla, and Jane, Denison — the Western Iowa Journalism Foundation now has more than \$30,000 toward \$48,000 for expanded coverage in La Prensa.

Lopez says it is essential that government-accountability, community and feature reporting continues to be published in English and Spanish in the Denison area.

"Gordon's love of the community is admirable and he informs people in his outstanding local journalism," Lopez said. "He reports the facts. He doesn't confuse people. People respect him a lot in the community. We are so fortunate that he decided to stay in a rural community and inform the community. We were friendly competitors, but always supportive of each other's work. It will be an honor to work with Gordon."

Wolf, a graduate of Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa, previously worked as a journalist in Sioux Center, another western Iowa community.

Denison is for all intents and purposes a majority-minority city, one of the more immigrant-rich reaches of Iowa. I've followed Gordon and Lorena's work for two decades and they are among the more committed community journalists in Iowa. This joining of forces, of sources and trust and credibility and their networks and deep, hard-earned local knowledge, will turn La Prensa, which is freely distributed in Denison and other communities with strong Latino influences, into even more of a force in Iowa journalism.

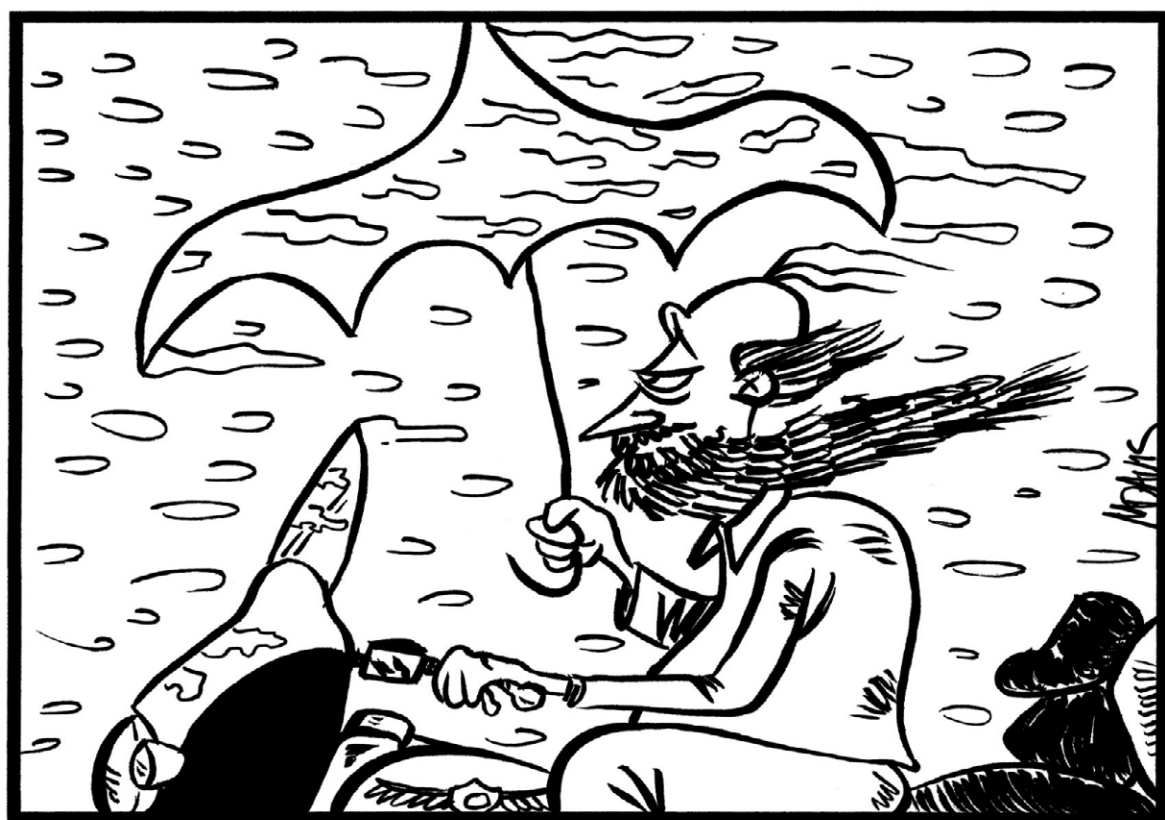
Historic populations of Iowans will learn more about immigrants and more recent Iowans will be connected to the generations of local folks who built western Iowa. Amid the devastation in the newspaper industry, this is a bright opening brimming with potential.

Lee Enterprises did not respond to a call for comment on this story.

This column was republished from Iowa Capital Dispatch under a Creative Commons license. Burns is an Iowa journalist whose family operated the Carroll Times Herald for 93 years. He is the founder and director of development for the non-profit Western Iowa Journalism Foundation.

## LOCAL LUNACY

by Michael D. Davis



Local motorcyclists deal with rain showers.

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