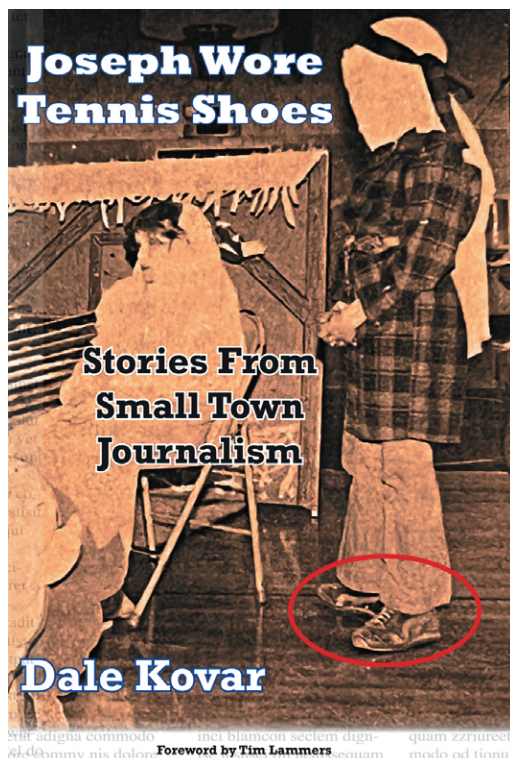


Here are a few sample pages from



Joseph Wore Tennis Shoes: Stories From Small Town Journalism

A local book by Dale Kovar
about his newspaper career in the west metro area

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the following, not necessarily in order of importance:

- my wife, Linda, who kept her vows of “for better or worse.”
- my business partner, Chris Schultz, who did the heavy lifting while letting me keep a hand on the steering wheel.
- Jesus Christ, who took the nails for me.



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Foreword

By Tim Lammers

DirectConversations.com

former editor of the Howard Lake Herald

I was honored when Dale Kovar asked me to write the foreword for *Joseph Wore Tennis Shoes*. Simply put, had Dale not had the foresight to give this dopey writer from Waverly, Minn., a chance to write for the Howard Lake Herald about 35 years ago, my life would be dramatically different.

I was working at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Minneapolis out of college in the late 1980s and writing two-line movie reviews for a court newsletter when a co-worker of mine suggested that I check with my local newspaper about publishing reviews there. As such, I popped a letter in the mail (remember when we used to write letters?) with some clips and Dale – the general manager at Winsted Publishing – replied that the work was impressive as something you’d see in a daily newspaper and offered me \$5 per column. Though I’ve never had a million dollars in my life, I can tell you with certainty that getting paid \$5 to write about movies made me feel like a millionaire.

Before too long, the Herald’s editor, Mikkel Kelly, took on a job at another newspaper and Dale offered me the chance to replace him. Naturally, I leaped at the opportunity and thus my baptism by fire as a newspaper editor began. Luckily, Dale’s expert guidance helped me foster my talents as a writer and learn about the layout and design of the newspaper. He also taught me how to use the darkroom to develop photos – something that’s become somewhat of a lost art in the digital age.

Over the years I've been fortunate to work with some of the greatest talents in Minnesota's media history in radio and television like Bill Carlson, Tom Barnard, Paul Douglas, Jordana Green, Adam Carter, and Diana Pierce, but when it comes to newspaper, Dale is the guy.

For someone working at a newspaper for the first time, Dale was very patient with me as I learned the ropes. Since I was still in my 20s, I was no doubt a pain in the ass at times, but it didn't deter Dale from bringing out the best in me. Today, I'm a Forbes.com contributor and without question, Dale's guidance at the Herald laid the foundation for what would become an amazing career.

If there's anything that sticks in my mind about working with Dale, it is his simple philosophy that he'd impart every time I would get writer's block. Dale would simply say, "Tell the truth." That ideal – an ideal that's simply become lost in journalism in recent years – would immediately loosen the logjam and help me finish the writing task at hand.

So, I can tell you with certainty that what you're about to read in *Joseph Wore Tennis Shoes* is the truth. Dale is and has always been an honest Joe, and you can't ask for a better person to be a mentor in the crazy, ever-changing world of journalism.

As such, please know what you're about to read is the truth ... mostly. After all, Dale has been known to embellish things a wee bit when pulling his April Fools' Day pranks, which you'll be delighted to read about in this book.



Introduction

First, I'd like to tell you what this book is not.

- It is not meant to be a full life story of an autobiography. There is a lot of personal stuff, but it's primarily about my work and writing. I hope you'll enjoy the articles about other people and topics that are included.
- it is not a documentary or comprehensive historical record.
- it is not a "how-to." I'll touch on some lessons learned, and someone interested in journalism – or what's left of it – may pick up some pointers, but this is not a textbook.

Instead, think of it as a newspaper itself. There is a mix of news articles, feature stories, and opinion pieces reprinted from throughout my weekly newspaper career. They are included because it's my book and I thought they were interesting or important. Everything is my writing unless noted.

I'll let the original articles tell their own stories, and fill in some background before or after. Some are slightly shortened where it doesn't affect the story, and what is reprinted is intact with only negligible editing. The book is generally chronological but certain articles are grouped by topic so the timeline does jump around a bit.

To help keep things straight, reprinted newspaper items are in a different font and narrower columns than the main text.

Joseph

One time while taking pictures at a Holy Trinity Grade School Christmas program in Winsted, it hit me. There was both the simplicity and routineness of it, and at the same time, the scene signified the spirit and values of small-town life.

Students were portraying the night of Jesus's birth in the manger. There weren't elaborate props. The kids had makeshift costumes over their regular clothes, while reciting the greatest story every told.

I had the fleeting thought: "If I ever write a book about newspaper work, I'll have to call it *Joseph Wore Tennis Shoes*."

More than 40 years later, one morning before getting out of bed, it popped into my head: what if I write a book? My mom had done a book about stories of her youth. My uncle had put together several books with collections of his newspaper column writings. Am I that old that I should do one too while there's time left? I guess the answer was yes.

And what it should it be titled? At first, I was going with *I Couldn't Think of Anything Else To Do* which was how I sometimes answered the question "How did you get into journalism?"

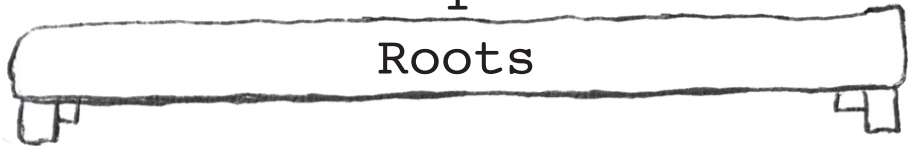
Then I recalled that Christmas program of 1981 and there was no doubt. So here is: *Joseph Wore Tennis Shoes*.



Dec. 17, 1981 • Winsted Journal

Holy Trinity Grade School Christmas program: Wise men are Matt Littfin, Guy Pariseau, and Bruce Koch; shepherds are Mike Henkel, Matt Hertel, Gerald Fasching, Roger Knott, Bill Gugemos, and Paul Karels; Mary and Joseph are played by Holly Holets and James Hausladen.

1



Roots

To tell a good story, let's start near the end. This column from when Herald Journal Publishing took over the Glencoe and Arlington papers tells a lot of local newspaper background.

McLeod County newspaper history: roots start in Lester Prairie

Nov. 3, 2023 • Herald Journal/McLeod County Chronicle/Senior Connections

As Herald Journal Publishing recently acquired the McLeod County Chronicle and Arlington Enterprise, here's a look back at tracing the roots of local newspaper history.

Interestingly, all roads lead back to Lester Prairie.

A Lester Prairie Journal began in 1895. In January 1901, a competing Lester Prairie News started, and then took over the Journal that summer.

Nearby, the People's Advocate started in Howard Lake in 1878, changing its name to the Howard Lake Herald in 1881.

The Winsted Examiner began in 1910, then becoming the Western Immigrant before going out of business. The Winsted Journal was formed in 1919.

Also in the area, the Glencoe Enterprise began in 1880, the Brownston Bulletin in 1892, Stewart Tribune in 1895, and Silver Lake Leader in 1901.

As the small communities were much more self-contained for decades with locally owned businesses up and down the main streets, the local newspapers car-

ried out their roles independently.

Neighboring newspapers weren't really competitors. It wasn't unusual for them to help each other out if a press broke down or a key employee was out for an extended time.

If anything, their focus was encouraging a shop-at-home mentality rather than having people get in their automobiles and travel to a larger town to save 14 cents on toilet paper.

In the 1960s a new printing technology known as "offset" came to the area. It involved essentially creating each page on a type of paper, then reproducing it onto a negative and plate to be printed on a large high-speed press.

Rather than each publisher operating his own small printing press, a "central plant" – Crow River Press in Hutchinson – was formed, with a large capacity press that could serve newspapers from several counties around.

In 1980, the local newspaper landscape began to change significantly.

In December, William McGarry purchased the Lester Prairie News from

Lew Buss, moved it to Glencoe, and re-named it the McLeod County Chronicle. Rather than starting new, this allowed it to maintain status as a publication qualified to print public notices and compete with the Glencoe Enterprise.

At the same time, Winsted Journal owners Floyd and JoAnn Sneer began a newspaper titled the Lester Prairie Journal. I was part of their six-person staff for that undertaking.

Also at the same time, Buss began a free-distribution paper named the Prairie Ad-News.

This series of moves established competing publications in both Glencoe and Lester Prairie.

Local newspapering was at its prime then. Slowly, more consolidation and technology advancements began to change the industry.

In 1983, the Sneers purchased the Howard Lake Herald to add to their business, then selling the group to Bill Ramige in 1986 who had taken over the Chronicle from McGarry.

The Winsted and Lester Prairie papers were merged in 1991, unfortunately timed that the first combined issue was done during the Halloween Blizzard.

That week, we left the office Thursday after work, took the kids trick-or-treating in several inches of snow, and didn't make it back to put the paper together until Sunday afternoon.

In 2001, Lester Prairie native Chris Schultz and I purchased the W-LP-HL group from Ramige, choosing the obvious name of Herald Journal Publishing.

In 2002, we acquired the Ad-News and merged it into the Winsted-Lester Prairie Journal.

Those papers went through a few more name changes such as the Winsted-Lester Prairie-New Germany Journal, and later the Winsted-Lester Prairie-New Germany Herald Journal. Quite a mouthful, huh?

The culture of our local communities

was shifting fast and this thing called the Internet really changed the game. People no longer lived, worked, worshiped, attended school, and shopped primarily in one town. It was a transportation free-for-all.

Schools were going through various consolidations as were many other lines of business. In many cases, businesses were no longer locally owned, if they existed at all.

Recognizing that many readers knew and were interested in people from other nearby towns, the Winsted-Lester Prairie-New Germany Herald Journal and the Howard Lake-Waverly-Montrose Herald Journal were combined in 2005 to simply become Herald Journal.

Having now combined three newspapers into one, HJ went on the buy the Dassel-Cokato Enterprise Dispatch later in 2005 and start the Delano Herald Journal from scratch in 2006 – back to three newspapers.

Meanwhile, the consolidation trends continued among our neighbors as well.

The Brownton Bulletin and Stewart Tribune became one paper, which was later merged into the McLeod County Chronicle as were the Silver Lake Leader and the Glencoe Enterprise.

Now we take another step, not in consolidating publications, but in common ownership as Herald Journal Publishing expands to Glencoe and Arlington.

For the record, Chris Schultz took over my ownership interests a couple years ago. We remain committed to local news, both online and in traditional print, and carrying on the newspapers' vital functions of recording and preserving history through news coverage, public notices, and preserving bound volumes of past issues.

Personal connections

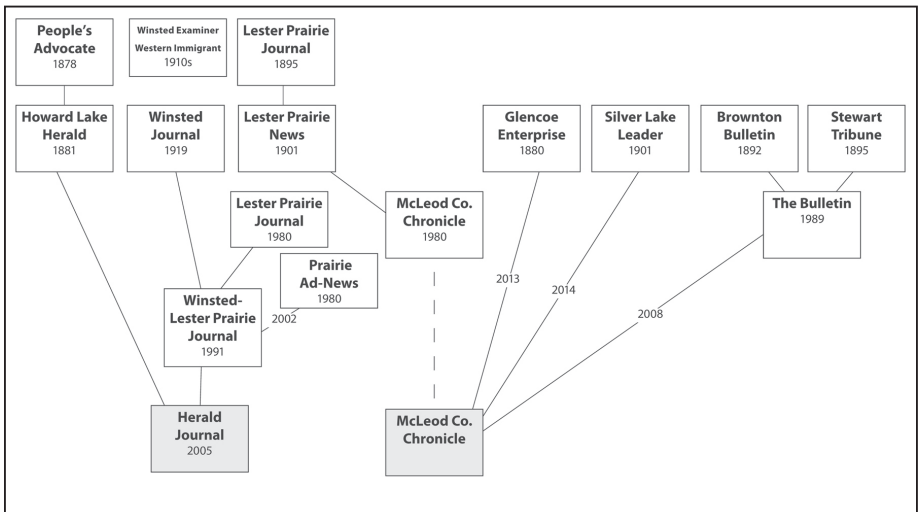
My newspaper ties go back to writing a sports column for the Silver Lake Leader while in high school. At the end of the year, Wilbert Merrill gave me a

\$20 bill, which seemed like an outrageous windfall.

My mother, Mildred Kovar, also did some submissions for the Leader, and then transitioned from factory work to a reporter job at the Hutchinson Leader where she was known as “The Country Girl.”

Also, there may not be too many readers left who remember that my uncle Milton Hakel owned and operated the Brownton Bulletin in the 1940s. Another uncle, Milt’s brother Art, also wrote some columns for the Bulletin.

And not to be outdone, my son, Kip, is the sports editor for Herald Journal.



2



My Backstory

Fall of 1974: it was my senior year at Silver Lake High School. We had just finished a successful football season with an 8-1 record.

My father, Edwin, was a World War II veteran. He had been in poor health from malaria and the trauma of war during my entire life. In July, while I pitched a rare victory for our Legion baseball team, he suffered a stroke and was taken to the hospital. He never returned home.

Dad passed away Nov. 6, a day after his 65th birthday. That same day I received a letter in the mail announcing my acceptance at Willmar Community College. That weekend was the high school play, in which I had one of the lead roles.

So within that week, my dad died on Wednesday, the play was on Friday, the funeral on Sunday, and I had a speaking part at the Veterans Day program on Monday.

Shortly after that, it was time for basketball season to begin, and as an immature 17-year-old in turmoil, I told Coach Larry Starks I wouldn't be playing because I refused to get my hair cut.

Advice to young people: don't give up your seasons of eligibility for foolish reasons. You'll never get that chance back again.

When things settled down, I was looking for something to do. I wrote a letter (because I was too shy to ask) to Wilbert Merrill asking if I could write a weekly sports column in the Silver Lake Leader. I don't know why, but I also asked if I could use a pen name. He said yes to both requests.

In January, the first "Off The Bench" by R. T. Johnson appeared in the Leader, and here it is:

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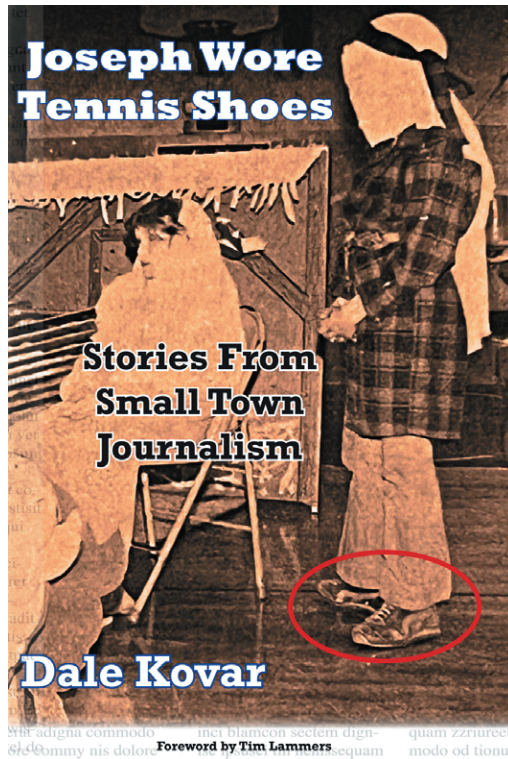
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