



Harry Rosenthal

February 21, 1927 - December 12, 2013

Harry F. Rosenthal, a veteran journalist who witnessed America's golden age of space exploration and covered presidents from Truman to the first Bush administration, as a reporter for The Associated Press.

From the start, Rosenthal was more than a top-tier wire-service newsman, always fast and accurate. He was a wordsmith. He sweated the details. He paced and fretted. In the old days when newsrooms still reeked of cigarettes, he would smoke and drink cups of coffee while pondering just how he wanted to tell a story.

"Writing bugs me," he said of his craft, "but it's the only way I like to make a living."

Curiosity, Rosenthal believed, was the essence of good reporting.

"My own approach to an interview is the same one I had at 16 when I went to my first burlesque show: I had an idea of what to expect but I wanted to see for myself," he once said.

Walter Mears, a retired AP vice president and former Washington bureau chief, said Rosenthal was "a great reporter, a gifted writer and an AP man to the core."

"Harry was an original _ a warm, wonderfully talented writer and reporter who loved his work, brought enthusiasm to every story he tackled and for decades graced our wires with elegant prose," said Louis D. Boccardi, the former president and CEO of the AP. "When someone would tell me, 'We'll have Harry do that,' I knew I could stop worrying and that I, and our millions of readers, would soon be enjoying a finely crafted story. He was marvelous."

Rosenthal discovered newspapering as a young American serviceman in the Pacific at the end of World War II. In 1950, he began his career in daily journalism with a job at the Evening Free-Lance in Hollister, Calif. He left after only a year to join the AP's San Francisco bureau, but some five decades later Rosenthal was still fondly remembered at the newspaper.

"Oh Harry," said the young man who answered the phone when an AP researcher called while preparing material for Rosenthal's retirement celebration in May 1997. "He's a legend around here."

He was also a legend at the AP, covering Truman from Missouri, Eisenhower from Kansas and Nixon in his downfall, his retirement and his death.

"He was the quintessential general assignment reporter in journalism's age of specialization. Off to the courts one day, the White House the next _ and then spotting up for an impish profile of Washington's flavor of the month," said Jon Wolman, a former Washington AP bureau chief. "At every stop, he satisfied the readers' curiosity with his enthusiasm and an eye for the telling detail. As a writer, he could dangle participles with the best of them."

He wrote about the My Lai massacre prosecution of Lt. William Calley, the trials of assassin Sirhan Sirhan and would-be assassin John Hinckley. He covered civil-rights marches and political campaigns and conventions.

"His credits range from civil rights coverage to major trials _ including Watergate _ to the White House. He did it all and he did it all well," said Mears.

But space travel was Rosenthal's passion and he was witness to more than 30 manned NASA flights, including the first moon walk, most of the Apollo missions and the Challenger shuttle tragedy. One of his greatest ambitions, never realized, was to be selected as the first journalist to go into space.

Covering a 1981 space shuttle landing, Rosenthal looked to the heavens to see Columbia "bursting like a silver wraith through mottled California skies."

"During the long, grinding days of manned space flight, Harry was like a campfire burning brightly _ people gathered around him for warmth and light," recalled Paul Recer, a retired AP science writer who covered space with Rosenthal. "He was generous with suggestions and wise counsel. We were all better journalists because Harry Rosenthal was there."

Boccardi called Rosenthal the AP's "go-to guy" and observed of his work, "He makes it look easy, but I know it's not."

In a letter to Rosenthal at the time of his retirement, President Clinton said, "America's tradition of hard work has made our country strong, and you can be proud of your contribution to that legacy."

Harry Rosenthal was born in Frankfort, Germany, in 1927. At age 11 and traveling alone, he fled the Nazis.

Upon his arrival in the U.S., and before his parents followed him, Rosenthal

wrote his mother and asked that she stop calling him by his birth name, Heinz. Now that he was in America, he said, "I am Harry, not Heinz. Harry."

He signed that letter, "Your son, Heinz."

He became a U.S. citizen in 1945.

Rosenthal was a soldier awaiting the invasion of Japan when the United States dropped the atomic bombs that forced the Japanese to surrender. He was then assigned to the staff of the Pacific Stars and Stripes in Tokyo as a photographer and proofreader.

While in Tokyo, he became fluent in Japanese. He gained a working knowledge of Chinese when, after his retirement, he spent a year on the staff of a paper in Shanghai. And, he never forgot his German.

"Once at a NASA news conference, a German scientist became thoroughly befuddled while attempting to explain something in English," Recer said. "Harry saved the day by asking questions in German and then translating."

During his long career at the AP, Rosenthal co-authored two books, "Triumph and Tragedy, The Story of the Kennedys" and "Calley."

The month he turned 59, Rosenthal began writing a news column aimed at older Americans.

"Signs of aging don't bother me," he wrote. "Bifocals? I had them when I was 35. Baldness? My hair was in full flight at 40. The inability to play basketball like I used to? Well, I never did play basketball."

Rosenthal's notion of exercise was pushing chess pieces around a board and

picking up a book.

He was a man of strong beliefs that, by today's standards, would label him a "liberal" to many. To Rosenthal, a Jew who had experienced the reality of Hitler's Germany, his opinions were expressions of the decency and compassion that made his adopted land a beacon of hope.

"I believe that not providing shelter for the homeless is an obscenity," he wrote in his first column. "I believe there should be no one, of any age, who goes hungry or lacks medical care."

His wife of 51 years, Naidene Beverly Rosenthal, died in October 2007, in Kansas City, Mo. She was a native of the city and the Rosenthals had moved back there several years after Rosenthal's retirement.

Also preceding him in death is his son, Daniel N. Rosenthal, and his son-in-law; Matthew S. Mulligan.

Survivors include his daughter; Lesli I. Rosenthal Mulligan and granddaughter, Megan Marie Mulligan.

Services will be 2:30pm Monday, Dec 16, 2013 at the Chapel of Hope inside Mt. Moriah South Cemetery, Kansas City, MO.

Cashatt Family Funeral Home has been entrusted with final arrangements - 816-587-8200.

Fond memories of Harry and words of comfort for his family may be left by logging onto his Memorial Page at: www.CashattFamilyFunerals.com. Cashatt Family Funeral Home has been entrusted with final arrangements.

Cemetery Details

Mt. Moriah South

10507 Holmes Road
Kansas City, MO

Previous Events

Service

DEC 16. 2:30 PM (CT)

Mt. Moriah South
10507 Holmes Road
Kansas City, MO

Tribute Wall



“ *Harry Rosenthal*

October 04, 2023 at 10:39 PM



“ *I am very sorry to learn about Harry Rosenthal's death. I was a colleague and friend of his late son David at the Reuters Washington bureau, and Harry and Naidene Rosenthal were always very kind to me over the years. We met several times in California -- where David lived and I worked at the Los Angeles Times -- and we saw one another on various occasions when I returned to Washington, the last time at the Gridiron Dinner in 2006. Harry had become blind by that time, but he recognized my voice, and I brought him up to date on my work and family. I will remember the entire Rosenthal family with gratitude and affection, and send my sincere condolences to Lesli.*

-- Philip Terzian

Philip Terzian - December 28, 2013 at 10:21 PM

RS

“ To the family : my sincere condolences. There is no greater pain than the death of a loved one. Sometimes it seems almost more than a person can bear. Jehovah God helps us with this in His word, He promises us that He will put a stop to all sickness and death will be no more (REV 21;3.4) Jehovah also shows His love for us through the ransom sacrifice of His beloved son Jesus Christ. What a wonderful gift to be given ! Then the hope of seeing our loved ones again on this earth, transformed into a paradise. The Bible tells us this was Jehovah's will when He created Adam & Eve. Please take your Bible and read: (Genesis 1:26,27; John 5: 28,29; Psalms 37:11,22,29). If you have any questions or comments, you can contact me at: ricruiz@aol.com Sincerely: Rick Ruiz Schwebel.

Rick Schwebel - December 17, 2013 at 05:45 AM