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Call Him Al

Posted on JANUARY 6, 2014 Written by IKE 15 COMMENTS

Al Volker passed away overnight, and there really will never be another one like him.

Al was the first person hired into the newsroom at ABC 33/40 back in 1996, coming on as Managing Editor. His TV career at the time spanned my entire lifetime, and he brought old-school journalism instincts from Miami, Detroit, and a host of other markets.

Al was the quintessential grizzled veteran. No one can truly say they had seen it all, but you were wise to never call his bluff. *"Noah's flood? I did the sound for that production."*

Do you have a Volker story to share? Leave it in the comments.

In the summer of '96, when many of us working in Tuscaloosa were still concerned that we might not be retained in the merger of WCFT and WJSU, Volker came down to give us our cursory interviews. This on the heels of being told repeatedly from the existing stations that we just didn't have what it took to report the news in Birmingham.

All of us were scheduled for brief half-hour interviews, and we honestly had no idea that they even knew our names, or had watched the newscasts. (There were many from our group that indeed stayed on... Dave Baird, Dyan Patterson, Casey Jones, Edward Lawrence, Mark Raines, and others...)

I remember walking into the conference room, tape in hand, when this sprightly older gentleman piped up and killed my concern.



"Name is Volker. You must be Pigott. They tell me you're a real asshole, but I don't see it in your work on the air. Don't worry, we'll get it in there."

And speaking honestly, that's the only coaching I ever needed from him. Permission to be myself, and unleash my inner sphincter. Leave it to Al to fine tune my entire style and work habits, with:

- Four sentences
- 32 words
- 36 total syllables.

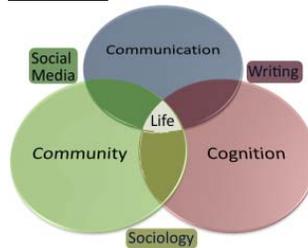
Leave it to Al to be the true living embodiment of crisp and clear news-writing.

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Volker was also more interested in the story behind the story.

One day, Charlton Heston was our guest on the noon newscast. He was waiting in the lobby, just a couple of minutes before newstime, when Al came speeding around the corner with a new script. Al would run (sprint) them to the newsroom, and seeing Volker at top speed was funny enough. As he rounded that corner, he shot a look at Heston, and yelled “**Jesus! It’s Moses!**”

He never got around to meeting Heston, or getting an autograph. He got what he wanted – a permanent anecdote.

I once pitted Al against our executive producer Bill Shory in a race of technology. Each was given a set of facts to turn into a page of copy, live on the air. Bill started tickling the keyboard of his PC – Al loaded a five-copy set into a manual typewriter and started banging away. Even with the physical sprint to the newsroom, Volker won handily. (Bill was no slouch...)

Note to Al

Al, we are going to miss you. Today’s mode and model for journalism is so different than the path you walked. Just know that you passed along enough of the fundamentals that we can adapt and evolve.

Do you have a Volker story to share? Leave it in the comments. And proofread it, please... Al is watching.

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Comments



EBONY HALL says:

January 6, 2014 at 9:55 am

Some may call the way he did news “old school,” but his wisdom is exactly what many newsrooms lack these days. I must admit, it’s been quite a while since I talked to Al, but as we reflect on his life, I hope those of us who did know him, will hold ourselves and others to higher standards.



IKE says:

January 6, 2014 at 10:41 am

Ebony, Al was always about getting the basics right. When you do that, the rest falls into place. He was a creature of the newsroom, but I’d like to think he passed along a greater legacy than that.

Thanks for stopping in.



DYAN LEE says:

January 6, 2014 at 8:56 pm

I loved Al. He was my favorite manager. He always lifted me up, made me feel good about my work, my stories, when many other people tried to tear me down. He was an incredible human being. Will be missed.

REPLY



JEFF FLOYD *says:*
January 6, 2014 at 10:29 am

Very well stated Volkerisms my friend. I worked with Al wgen he came north to Detroit in the Mid-70s and shared a friendship and Brother In Arms (Journalisticly & Musically) since then. You've done a nice job of giving credit where credit is due regarding Al's willingness to share his knowledge and experience as a method of guiding others. The memories are indeed fond ones and I think of Al every time I hear A Bodiddley Song.

REPLY



IKE *says:*
January 6, 2014 at 10:42 am

There are way too many stories to share about Al's love of music, and obscure trivia.

Suffice it to say that if Al said one thing and the Billboard reference book said another, I'd put my money on a correction in the next edition of the book.

REPLY



MELISSA LEE *says:*
January 6, 2014 at 1:46 pm

Ike,

This is a fantastic write-up. Volker would be proud...He will be missed by many.

REPLY



GLENN THERRIEN *says:*
January 6, 2014 at 1:50 pm

So very sorry to hear of Al's passing. I worked with him at WXYZ in Detroit when i was first hired there as a writer. He was a mentor to me in the business ...and at the bar. re-established contact a few years ago on facebook. he was still giving me tips on writing and news presentation ...30 plus years later. not to mention special "spirit" recepes. R.I.P. Al. You made a tremendous impression on my life.

REPLY



CANDACE BRADFORD *says:*
January 6, 2014 at 2:32 pm

There will never be another like Al Voker, because he was one of a kind. The earth was a better place because of him. You will be missed Mr Voker.
Candace Bradford (former account exc at ABC 33/40)

REPLY



IKE says:

January 6, 2014 at 3:15 pm

You're right, there won't be another one like him, because the system that spawned him doesn't exist anymore.

REPLY



BRRTT VOLKER says:

January 6, 2014 at 9:23 pm

Hold on now... Al spawn me. Im pretty sure they broke the mold on dad, but he snuck children out. .. This ain't over!

REPLY



DIXON HAYES says:

January 6, 2014 at 3:01 pm

Ike, IIRC, you were "Isaac" until Volker changed you to "Ike." I noticed you kept "Ike." Yes, he was quite a guy.

REPLY



IKE says:

January 6, 2014 at 3:08 pm

I didn't "keep" Ike... Ike kept me.

It is a very easy way to tell how long someone has known me. 😊

REPLY



DENNY SHLEIFER says:

January 6, 2014 at 4:19 pm

ike:

volker headlined a terrific skilled staff of professional camera guys and gals....reporters, anchors and producers that rocked detroit's finest tv station wxyz for many years....i was a lucky producer who worked side by side with him...al will be sorely missed.. i'm glad you got to share his wisdom and ability to spin a story and get it on the air.

REPLY



DENNIS MARTIN says:

January 6, 2014 at 9:03 pm

Great post Ike. Al will be missed. My favorite memory of Al: A produce fell and hit her head on her computer keyboard. She started bleeding profusely and bled all over the floor. Al walked in, looked at the blood stain on the carpet next to his desk, and casually said "Good, now this is finally a newsroom" and walked away. Classic Al.

REPLY



IKE says:

January 7, 2014 at 5:03 pm

This might be the quintessential Volkerism.

REPLY

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