When Joe McGowan, Jr., BS '52, boarded a ship bound for Cuba in 1962, he probably didn't know how historic his role would be as the only American reporter allowed in that country.

McGowan was on assignment for the Associated Press (AP) when he accompanied a $26 million "indemnification" shipment to Havana following the Cuban missile crisis. The ship he sailed on carried medical, food and agricultural supplies in exchange for Bay of Pigs prisoners.

Upon arriving in Havana, McGowan rushed down the plank when he spotted Cuban president Fidel Castro in the crowd. As a reporter, McGowan fielded questions of the communist leader. Castro agreed to pose for a photo on the ship, encouraging McGowan to "tell the world his story.

"It was the story of my life," McGowan says of the time he spent with one of the world's dominant political figures. The Cuba trip was a professional highlight, but it was hardly the only important story he would cover in coming years.

McGowan's AP assignments took him around the world to cover many historic events. He served in the Miami bureau, with assignments in Central America and the Caribbean. He covered the 1962 elections in Peru, Bolivia and Chile. McGowan was the first outside reporter in Bolivia when that country's president was killed. He also covered the May 31, 1970, earthquake in Peru that killed 75,000 people.

McGowan served in India from 1965-66 as chief of AP's bureau for that country, Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon, Afghanistan and the Maldives Islands. He covered the 1965 India-Pakistan war and was present for the selection of Indira Gandhi as India's prime minister. In 1962, McGowan also travelled to the Bahamas with President John F. Kennedy to summit meeting with British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan.

Today, McGowan heads AP's Denver bureau, a one-man staff for the twice-weekly Rocky Mountain News. He's held since 1978. The job brings him home and reported that they had seen "the world's youngest typesetter." McGowan's professional debut came at age 13, when he joined the Rock Springs (Wyo.) Daily Rocket-Miner staff as sports editor. Still too young for a typing course, McGowan coped with postgame deadlines by dictating his stories to a society reporter.

McGowan speaks of his years in Rock Springs with great fondness. Despite his extroverted, athletic personality, he says he was "a real taskmaster" who loved the English language and demanded total objectivity. He conveyed these qualities to his son Joe, his mother, Eda, was born on the family homestead north of Sheridan.

Young Joe exhibited a "tremendous curiosity about language and words" as a toddler, and he became an accomplished spellchecker by the time he was 4 years old.

He also gained some notoriety as "the world's youngest typesetter." Early on, McGowan told his parents he wanted to learn how to set type. His father obliged and brought home a small press, some type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized printing apron his mother made him, 1 1/2-year-old Joe set and printed a copy of his father's newspaper. Wearing the total-sized type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized type and stories that had run in his newspaper. Wearing the tot-sized type and stories that had run in his newspaper.

Joe McGowan's love for the written word began early, and it has continued through a long, distinguished career with the Associated Press. Now chief of the Colorado/Wyoming AP bureau, McGowan travelled the globe in earlier assignments to witness history in the making, then report on it to the people at home.

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