

LAST KING OF THE SPORTS PAGE:  
THE LIFE AND CAREER OF JIM MURRAY, 1919-1962

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2009

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To Jill, Cassie, Bethany and Luke

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my doctoral committee, Dr. William McKeen, Ted Spiker, Dr. Maria Coady and Dr. Ronald Rodgers for their support and guidance during the research and writing of this dissertation. Their assistance has been invaluable and without it this project would not have been possible.

This project also would not have been possible without the help of the friends, relatives and colleagues of Jim Murray who were willing to answer my questions and offer suggestions as to the best way to pursue this story. Among them were: Andy Crichton, Bill Christine, Bill Thomas, Blackie Sherrod, Bob Steiner, Carol Hamel, Bob Creamer, Frank Deford, Frank McCulloch, Furman Bisher, Gilbert Lilijedahl, Jack Disney, Jerry Suppicich, Joe Santley, Marge Everett, John Hall, Jon Sandberg, Eric Sandberg, Marie Hewins, Melvin Durslag, Richard Patrissi, and Rose D'Ambrosia. I'd also like to thank Matt Allen for allowing me to share the valuable research he had previously conducted into the Murray family history.

I also wish to acknowledge Dr. Mark Smith and Dr. Pat Miller of Valdosta State University for providing me with the support to pursue this project while at the same time helping to get me up and running as a lecturer and student-newspaper advisor in the English Department at VSU.

This project was greatly assisted by the research conducted by Peter Knapp at the Watkins Library at Trinity University, Ken Buckbee in Connecticut and Shane Wilson in Georgia. Thanks also to Dr. Winkler Weinberg for his medical wisdom.

Together, Dr. David Bulla of Iowa State University and I began research into the life of Jim Murray in 2006 and co-authored an article about Murray's role in the creation of *Sports Illustrated*. Dr. Bulla graciously stepped aside and allowed me to pursue this dissertation, and for that I am grateful.

Linda McCoy-Murray helped me more than I ever could have hoped for or dreamt. She patiently answered every question I asked, no matter how irrelevant it may have seemed (“What did Jim wear when he wrote his columns?”) She put me in touch with dozens of Jim’s closest friends and associates. And she invited me into her home, allowed me to spend hours sifting through Jim’s files and memorabilia in her garage, and even served as my tour guide and recreation director for four enjoyable days in La Quinta, California. For all of the above, I will forever be in her debt.

I wish to thank my parents, Mike and Jane Geltner, for all of the tremendous love and support they have provided me, on this project and in many other pursuits through the years. They have offered unquestioning encouragement in all my pursuits, and I will never be able to adequately express my appreciation.

The trio of Cassie, Bethany and Luke Geltner provided ample assistance by both cheering me on as I struggled to “bang out pages,” and giving me a respite whenever needed. They make my life better each and every day with their smiles and laughter.

And above all, I am thankful to my wife, Jill, for making my life worth living. She has patiently assisted me every step of the way toward this degree, and has always been willing to pick up the slack while I pursued my goals. Even more, though, I am grateful to her for always being there to help me to remember what is truly important in life.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2009

Chair: William McKeen  
Major: Mass Communication

This dissertation is a biographical and historical narrative covering the first half of the life of journalist and sports columnist Jim Murray, one of only four sports writers to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for journalism. At the height of his career, Murray was syndicated in more than 200 newspapers in North America and was one of the most influential and beloved writers for more than three decades.

Using an in-depth analysis of Murray's writing and his archival material, as well as qualitative interviews with his relatives, friends and colleagues, his story is chronicled here. This dissertation follows Murray from his childhood, through his early journalism career in Los Angeles, through his 13 years in the Time/Life Corporation, and finally to his ascension to the position of sports columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*. While writing for the *Times*, Murray would become one of the most important journalists on the subject of sports and American culture. The author attempts to illustrate and explain the episodes between 1919 and 1962 that put Murray on the path toward his eventual accomplishments. Further, the author attempts to place in context the times and circumstances in which Murray developed his style, voice, and journalistic philosophy, and examine how those circumstances helped turn him into a nationally prominent sports columnist at the *Times*.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Late in the afternoon on August 26, 1961, Jim Murray looked dejectedly out the window of his motel room, watching the rain wash through the streets of Cincinnati below. The same rainstorm had already washed out that night's Los Angeles Dodgers vs. Cincinnati Reds game, which Murray had hoped to use as the subject of his column for the next day's edition of the *Los Angeles Times*. Murray was now starting his second week on the road with the Dodgers, his second week living out of motel rooms, away from his wife and four kids back in Malibu. The first week had taken the team through San Francisco and St. Louis and had included a string of eight consecutive losses that had caused the Dodgers to give back most of the team's second place position in the National League standings. The mood among the Dodgers coaches, players and staff had gone steadily downhill. Tension ran high. Younger players were arguing with each other, veterans were snapping at waitresses, coaches and managers were going nights without sleep. Just the day before, Dodger first baseman Norm Larker, coming off a game in which he had struck out twice and dropped an easy foul ball, had nearly come to blows with one of the beat writers along for the trip.

"Would you have given me an error on that foul fly?" Larker demanded of the beat writer.

The beat writer shook his head.

"Why not?" challenged Larker.

"Because I felt sorry for you," the writer answered.

The response sent Larker into a rage.

"I don't want you feeling sorry for me," he screamed at the writer. "Get that once and for all."

It was in this atmosphere of losing and disgust that Murray struggled to think of a way to fill the 25 column inches the sports desk at the *Times* would be expecting from him in a few hours. He had already turned in six straight columns on the dismal travails of the Dodgers (“This isn’t a road trip, it’s a death march,” he’d written two days earlier<sup>2</sup>), covering topics from player nicknames to poker games to their sleeping habits on planes. But now the endless trip was sapping his creativity.

As he struggled, he remembered some sage advice from a city editor many years before: “Son, the best stories are floating right by your front door if you’ll only look out there.”<sup>3</sup>

It was an epiphany that both gave Murray the impetus to fill those 25 inches, and sent his column in a direction that would catapult him into the national consciousness for the first time.

Murray wrote:

I mean, people just don’t have any appreciation for what us truth-seekers go through on one of these road trips for the honor and glory of baseball.

For instance, you come into a city like Cincinnati at 3 o’clock in the morning. Now, if you have any sense, you don’t want to be in Cincinnati at all. Even in daylight, it doesn’t look like a city. It looks like it’s in the midst of condemnation proceedings. If it was human, they’d bury it.

You have to think that when Dan’l Boone was fighting the Indians for this territory he didn’t have Cincinnati in mind for it. I wouldn’t arm wrestle Frank Finch for it. To give you an idea, the guys were kidding on the bus coming in here, and they decided that if war came, the Russians would by-pass Cincinnati because they’d think it had already been bombed and taken.<sup>4</sup>

Those three paragraphs, on that rainy afternoon, achieved the short-term goal of chewing up a little chunk of the space Murray needed to fill in the next day’s sports section. What he didn’t know at the time was that he also had gone a long way toward finding his voice as a sports columnist, a voice that, in the next four decades, would become arguably the most recognizable in American sports journalism.

The reaction was immediate. Murray later wrote that Los Angeles is a city of transplants, and most of the 20,000 transplanted Cincinnatians living in Southern California clipped that column and sent it back to their hometown. By the time Murray and the Dodgers crawled back to Los Angeles, the column was in the hands of the Cincinnati newspapers and the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce. Murray was now known, and hated, in Southern Ohio. By the time the Reds met the New York Yankees in the World Series two months later, women were walking around the streets with homemade buttons that said “Murray for Idiot.”<sup>5</sup>

Murray and his editors at the *Times* knew they had struck a nerve. Soon, he was taking on cities from coast to coast, even going on road trips to the remotest of Northern Canada with the Los Angeles Blades minor-league hockey club in order to find suitable targets for his barbs. It would lead quickly to national syndication, elite status among his peers, and, eventually, national fame. But though it was his penchant for ribbing cities that gave him the boost he needed, Murray came to the role of *Times* columnist in early 1961 as a skilled writer and an experienced journalist. He already possessed the characteristics that would eventually lead to his success: an extensive knowledge of history and culture gained during childhood, a deep understanding of human nature and a personality that allowed him to relate to even the most adversarial of interview subjects, and, most memorably, a razor sharp wit with which he wrote laugh lines that would be repeated over and over by peers, readers and sports figures.

About New York Yankee manager Casey Stengel, Murray wrote: “Casey Stengel is a white American male with a speech pattern that ranges somewhere between the sound a porpoise makes underwater and an Abyssinian rug merchant.”<sup>6</sup>

About UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, he wrote: “John Wooden is so square, he’s divisible by four.”<sup>7</sup>

Writing about oversized Los Angeles Rams offensive lineman Bill Bain, Murray said: “Once, when an official dropped a flag and penalized the Rams for having twelve men on the field, two of them were Bain.”<sup>8</sup>

He wrote about Ohio State football coach Woody Hayes: “Woody was consistent. Graceless in victory and graceless in defeat.”<sup>9</sup>

About basketball referees, Murray wrote: “It’s a nice job if you have thick skin, poor hearing, and you like flying through blizzards, room service, old movies and Holiday Inns. A spy has a better social life. The piano player in a bordello gets more respect.”<sup>10</sup>

It is Murray’s humor and satire that is the most lasting legacy of his years at the typewriter. But the millions of words he typed while churning out the more than 10,000 sports columns are filled with a much wider array of topics, styles and techniques. He wrote profiles that captured the essence of his subjects with humor and pathos, never glossing over the negative, but somehow almost never appearing overly critical. He traveled extensively, viewing the epic events of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from press boxes across the nation and around the world. He didn’t shy away from divisive issues. He took moral stands on race, violence in sports, politics. He fielded the reams of letters demanding he “stick to sports,” but maintained the principle that his job as a journalist was to report the news, even if the news had little to do with the final score.<sup>11</sup> His column became a must-read in Southern California and beyond, with loyal readers, male and female, who looked to him for humor and sage commentary on issues throughout the world of sports and beyond.

While his contemporaries among sports columnists generally began their journalism careers covering sports in some fashion and worked their way up through the ranks, Murray took a different path, one that gave him a different perspective, and it came across in his writing. In

the first two decades of his career, Murray apprenticed under the umbrella of two of the titans of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American journalism, William Randolph Hearst and Henry Luce. As a crime reporter and rewrite man for Hearst's *Los Angeles Examiner* in the 1940s, Murray covered the lurid tales of murder and betrayal in Hollywood and beyond. He wrote of death and mayhem, all in a sensational style that fed the cravings of the growing Los Angeles metropolis. As a Hollywood correspondent for *Time* magazine, the beacon of the Luce Empire, he covered the elite of the motion-picture industry. Along the way he developed relationships with the movie stars and moneymen of the day, from Bogart to Wayne to Brando. When Luce had the idea to start the first national sports magazine, Murray was one of the team of editors and writers he handpicked to launch the publication. It was Luce, Murray said, who turned him into a sports writer.<sup>12</sup> Murray was instrumental in the development of *Sports Illustrated*, and then spent the next six years covering the West Coast for the magazine (while simultaneously covering Los Angeles for *Time* and *Life*.)

From this journalism education, he moved seemingly effortlessly into the role of sports columnist. Because he spent all those years covering news, he didn't carry along the baggage of journalism second-class citizen status that many sports writers hang onto. Instead, he used his background and skills to expand the nature of the role he was given. His knowledge of Los Angeles history and culture, both within sports and beyond, allowed him to develop a feel for the city and its inhabitants that made his column fit the city's persona. From February of 1961, he could be found on the front of the *Times* sports section without fail, six days a week (though he was rarely seen within the walls of the *Los Angeles Times* headquarters.) Though he confronted his share of physical and personal hardship in his life, including two heart surgeries, temporary blindness and the loss of his wife and youngest son, he rarely missed a column. He complained,

as many of the great columnists do, that the column took over his life. It became both his ultimate motivation and triumph, and his greatest burden. It was, he said, like riding a tiger: “It’s just like any other tiger ride. You may not want to stay on. But you don’t dare get off. Either way, it’s liable to eat you alive.”<sup>13</sup>

By the time Murray was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 1990, he had become one of the elder statesmen of American sports writers. He lived among celebrities in Bel Air, California. With a vacation home in Palm Springs, he fed his life-long love of the game of golf at the city’s elite country clubs. By this time, most of the athletes he wrote about treated an interview with Murray like a meeting with the Pope. He acquired journalism awards like the Yankees acquired pennants. He won national sports writer of the year 14 times, was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, and received innumerable honorary degrees and honors, accepting each and every one with humor and grace.

The status he had achieved late in life was illustrated at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. Murray was 72 years old. This was the year of the USA Dream Team, an assemblage of American basketball stars the likes of which had never been seen, including Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, and a team full of internationally known names. The hype surrounding the team had reached astronomical levels. Anticipation ran high among the media and throughout the Olympic Village. On arrival, Johnson, head coach Chuck Daly and some other members of the team were brought in by officials from the Olympic Committee for a press conference with the entire international press corps. The interview room was packed shoulder to shoulder. After a short question period, an Olympic official abruptly cut off the microphones and shut down the proceedings.

“Wait a minute,” Magic Johnson said.

The crowd, which had been shuffling papers and heading for the exits, refocused on the dais.

“The great Jim Murray is here, and he didn’t get to ask a question,” Johnson said.

The Olympic official sneered at Johnson, but grudgingly turned the microphones back on. Quietly, Murray asked his question.<sup>14</sup>

### **A Short History of the Sports Column**

Murray’s writing has as much in common with the sports columnists of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those that created the genre, as it does with his contemporaries or those who followed him. Sports journalism in America was an outgrowth of America’s interest with recreation, which began to develop in earnest during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spectator sports, starting with horse racing, and followed by prize fighting and eventually baseball, gathered popularity throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and coverage of such events followed suit. The first genuine sports publication was *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*, a monthly magazine devoted to horse-racing results, breeding and care, which debuted in 1829. *Spirit of the Times*, a sports journal which covered a variety of sporting pursuits, began publishing in 1831 and was the first successful publication of its kind. *Spirit* lasted for a good part of the century and eventually began covering baseball as the popularity of that sport exploded in the U.S. The journal’s coverage was regularly excerpted in American newspapers, which had not yet begun to cover sports events on a regular basis.<sup>15</sup>

The influence of American newspapers grew exponentially with the rise of the Penny Press, which began in New York in the 1830s. Before, newspapers were largely published for and consumed by society’s elite, with small circulation figures, a high subscription price and a focus on political news. Starting with the *New York Sun* in 1833, a new type of publication appeared which catered to the working class, with a price the “common man” could afford.

These new publications were the progenitors of the general newspapers that would become prevalent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These newspapers operated in part based on advertising revenue, were circulated mainly through street sales, and moved away from political partisanship and toward objective news reporting.<sup>16</sup>

The success of these new entities sent editors looking for new topics with which to entertain the masses. New York daily newspapers like the *Sun*, the *New York Herald* and the *New York Transcript* began covering prize fights, horse racing and track in the 1830s. The growth in the popularity of baseball led to interest in that emerging sport, and interest in college football soon followed. Newspapers prior to the Civil War used general assignment reporters to contribute sports coverage, or accepted submissions from subscribers. A few papers employed regular horse-racing writers, often specialists with a connection to the horse industry.<sup>17</sup> By the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, sports writing took another step in its evolution, with the appearance of the separate sports section. With Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* leading the charge, offering a sports section as early as the 1870s, leading newspapers in most large American cities began to hire trained sporting editors with staffs specifically dedicated to the coverage of sports.<sup>18</sup> The top writers of sports at the leading newspapers began to gain name recognition among fans and participants. Joe Vila of the *Sun* became associated with college football coverage, and the general public first became aware of Damon Runyon through his sports writing in the *Denver Post* and the *New York American*. As the century came to a close, spectator sports were increasingly becoming a part of the everyday existence of the American population. Major sporting events, such as heavyweight championship prize fights, major horse races and, starting in 1903, the baseball World Series, became national obsessions that would attract tens of thousands of spectators and hundreds of sports writers from across the country.

Some newspaper writers gained fame for their writing during these years, including Arthur Brisbane of the *Sun*, Charles Dryden of the *Philadelphia North American*, H.R.H. Smith of the *New York Times*, Ring Lardner of the *Chicago Tribune* and others.<sup>19</sup> Murray read Lardner in his youth and referred to him regularly in his writing and when discussing the Golden Age of sports throughout his life.

It was that Golden Age that produced the first large wave of sports columnists, as we understand the term today: a newspaper writer whose work appears on a regular basis, with his or her name prominently displayed, and producing a mixture of opinion, reporting, humor and anecdote, usually with a personal style that sets the writing apart from the objective sports reporting in the newspaper. The newspaper “column” was a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. Prior to about 1920, the term columnist was used to describe humorists, sketch writers and contributors of satire and miscellany. Often, these writers were talented subscribers to the newspaper who contributed their efforts on a regular basis, and many gained strong followings. Some popular humorists were widely syndicated by the late 1800s, running under titles such as “M. Quad” and “Mr. Dooley.” Will Rogers, the “cowboy philosopher,” offered a short commentary on public affairs that was carried widely in American newspapers through the 1930s. After the turn of the century, feature syndicates picked up on the popularity of such offerings and developed a wide variety of columns, which would be offered daily or every other day, on politics, art, music, sports, travel, and a variety of other subjects.<sup>20</sup> Political columns first gained wide syndication and notoriety based on the popularity of each column’s writer during these years. Some were serious political analysis by Washington correspondents from major newspapers that were in turn syndicated under the writer’s name. Walter Lippmann, first writing for the *New York World*, and later for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, was the most popular of these, and by 1940, Lippmann’s

column appeared in more than 140 newspapers and he was said to be the nation's highest paid columnist. Other political columns, such as the "Washington Merry-Go-Round" and "News Behind The News," offered more behind-the-scenes commentary on the ways of Washington and the political class.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1920s, spectator sports truly exploded in America. The Jazz Age had arrived. America was booming economically, enjoying newfound power in the world, and Americans were spending more of their money on recreation and frivolous pursuits. With the arrival of radio, the population was more aware than ever of events outside of their personal spheres. Sports leagues and promoters capitalized on this growing prosperity and interest, and the sports media was right there beside them. The Golden Age of Sports was also golden for sports writers, who became as highly paid and well known as the athletes they covered.<sup>22</sup> This was also the age of sportswriter as myth maker. Sports columnists turned out thousands upon thousands of column inches on the top athletes in the most popular sports, creating legends that ignored human foibles and sanitized the lives of the athletes for an adoring public. Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Bobby Jones, Red Grange and many others were turned into national icons, adored by millions, in large part due to the sports pages of newspapers, which at the time was still by far the dominant information source. (Radio was still in its infancy, but quickly gaining influence.) In turn, writers such as Lardner, Paul Gallico of the *New York Daily News*, Heywood Broun of the *New York Morning Telegraph* and Grantland Rice of the *New York Herald Tribune* developed name recognition and deep followings that went beyond their home cities. Rice was the dean of sports writers, by far the most famous and influential of the era. In 1925, when Babe Ruth was at the height of his celebrity and was rewriting baseball record books and single-

handedly raising the sport's popularity, he earned \$52,000, a figure which was three times more than the next highest paid baseball player. Rice earned the same figure.<sup>23</sup>

The writers of the Roaring '20s established the sports column and the role of sports columnist on the American sporting scene. Historians divide writers of this era into two camps: the "Gee-Whiz!" School, characterized by Rice and others who shared his style and attitude. These writers were the mythmakers who painted the athletes as larger than life in their columns. The "Aw Nuts" School of writers was made up of hardened cynics who were critical of their subjects and poked holes in the heroes that were created by their sports-writing brethren. With the arrival of the Great Depression and World War II, American journalism in general, and sports writing specifically, became more adversarial. Sports columnists lurched toward the cynical side of the spectrum. A second generation of sports columnists arrived, led by Arthur Daley of the *New York Times*, Stanley Woodward of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, and, Red Smith, who during this era wrote for the *Philadelphia Record* and the *Herald Tribune*.<sup>24</sup> Smith wrote his first column in 1936<sup>25</sup>, and his writing changed the nature of what a reader could expect from a sports column. He counted Ernest Hemingway among his fans, and his writing was studied by literature classes at Harvard and Yale. A master of irony and an uncompromising devotee of literature, Smith was the nation's second-most widely syndicated sports columnist by the end of the 1940s (Rice remained the first.)<sup>26</sup> Jim Murray would quickly ascend to the upper echelons of the profession when he joined the *Los Angeles Times* in 1961, and it would be Smith whom Murray would be compared to most often throughout his career.

By the time Murray joined the press box, television, which first appeared in 1947 and became ingrained in American life during the 1950s, had fundamentally changed the role of newspaper sports journalism. Print journalism had long since given up the primary role of

reporting sports results; columnists had to provide something that went far deeper than what a television viewer could see. Murray was at the vanguard of that evolution at *Sports Illustrated* in the '50s; as a columnist he would, with his own distinctive style, put a new twist on the half-century old tradition of the American sports column.

### **Methodology**

This dissertation is primarily a historical narrative. The author has extensively examined and attempted to interpret primary sources related to the life and career of Jim Murray. These include his published writings in newspapers, magazines and books as well as his available personal and business correspondence, unpublished writing, notes, clippings, personal collections and all other documentation available to the author. Secondary sources were consulted. Those include books and articles authored by friends and colleagues of Murray, as well as historical accounts of the journalistic enterprises in which he was involved and historical accounts of the times in which he lived and the industry in which he worked. In addition, the author conducted qualitative interviews with a number of relatives, friends and colleagues of Murray.

All of the above materials were evaluated by the author, and when contradictory or unsatisfactory information was discovered, the author used his best judgment to determine the source or credibility of the information in question. For example, some articles published in newspapers were not attributed to Murray in the particular publication, but the author makes the assumption that articles found in Murray's personal collection can be attributed to him. When confronted with incomplete historical records, the author attempted to use caution and recognize the limitations of the available materials in order to make the best possible appraisal of the materials.<sup>27</sup> The author analyzed all of the available materials and attempted to create an accurate and coherent composition.

## Literature Review

This section examines the literature that relates to the journalism career of Jim Murray, focusing on works that have been written that touch on periods of Murray's career. It also examines some of the works that relate to the media entities for which Murray worked, as well as some of the men and women whom he worked for and with. This section also includes some titles that cover areas of sports journalism history as it relates to Murray's career, books that were helpful in the researching and writing of this project. In regards to scholarly research, very little has been undertaken in the area of sports journalism that directly relates to the work of Jim Murray. Academic researchers have generally exhibited a news bias and have tended to ignore most aspects of sports journalism. *Journalism Quarterly* did not even have a subheading for sports until 1963. However, more attention has been paid to sports-related research in recent years. Most of the research can be placed in three categories: 1) studies of sports news content that address the question of what and how sports gets covered; 2) studies of specific sports writers; and 3) studies of consumers of sports content.<sup>28</sup> The great majority of the available literature on sports journalism history comes from newspapers, magazines and general interest books written by historians and sports writers.

In 1993, Murray published an autobiography, aptly titled *Jim Murray: An Autobiography*.<sup>29</sup> About one-third of the material he covered relates directly to his own life and career; the remaining chapters deal, sport by sport, with the major personalities and issues Murray wrote about during his time as a columnist. Murray told friends and relatives at the time that he had difficulty writing about his own life. The result is a book that reads like extended Murray sports columns in most sections. However, the chapters that are not sports related are rich in anecdotes concerning his childhood and career and provide a roadmap to incidents, people and issues that were important to him at various points in his life.

There have been five compilations of Murray's columns published to date. *The Best of Jim Murray* was released in 1965 and includes columns, which Murray chose, from the February of 1961, when he first started writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, to 1965. *The Sporting World of Jim Murray* was published in 1968, and contains columns written from 1965 to 1968. *The Jim Murray Collection* was published in 1988 as part of the Sportswriter's Eye series, and contains columns written between 1969 and 1982. Two compilations were published posthumously by the *Times*: *Jim Murray: The Last of the Best*, published in 1998, within months of Murray's death, and *Jim Murray: The Great Ones*, which is a sport-by-sport collection of profiles written by Murray about the most well known of his sports subjects. *The Last of the Best* includes speeches given by some of Murray's well known friends and peers at a memorial service held a month after his death.

John Scheibe's *On the Road with Jim Murray: Baseball and the Summer of '79* is a diary-style account of the year that Scheibe spent as Murray's driver and assistant while Murray was nearly completely blind. Scheibe, a *Times* sports copy editor at the time, was assigned to Murray by the *Times*. He chauffeured Murray to his day-to-day assignments and assisted Murray in all aspects of his job. He accompanied Murray on a number of road trips, including to the 1979 World Series in Baltimore and Pittsburgh. The account offers a glimpse into Murray's personal and professional life, and examines the *Times* sports operation and many of Murray's subjects, peers and acquaintances.

Will Fowler's *Reporter: Memoirs of a Young Newspaperman* consists of reminiscences of the Los Angeles newspaper industry in the 1940s. The book includes a chapter devoted to Murray's life. Fowler first met Murray on the staff of the *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1943 and the two became lifelong friends. Fowler details the relationship between the two, as well as covering

significant events and stories in Murray's life. The book also paints a portrait of life on the staff of the *Examiner* during that era, and includes profiles of and anecdotes related to many of Murray's friends and acquaintances.<sup>30</sup>

Another resource that covers that era of Los Angeles newspaper journalism is *Red Ink White Lies: The Rise and Fall of Los Angeles Newspapers 1920 to 1962*, by Rob Leicester Wagner. Wagner chronicles the battles between the several major daily newspapers that operated in Los Angeles during those years. Wagner interviewed Murray twice during the research for the book. Several of the major stories that Murray worked on are documented in *Red Ink*. Wagner highlights the intense battles for scoops and readership that took place during the height of the Los Angeles newspaper wars, following the story from the peak of newspaper activity through the eventual demise of several newspapers, concluding in 1962, when the *Times* accelerated its rise to market domination.<sup>31</sup>

Two of Murray's mentors during his years at the *Examiner* penned memoirs that delve deeply into the same period of newspaper history and touch on Murray's involvement as well. *Newspaperwoman*, by Agness Underwood, is the autobiography of the first female city editor on a major metropolitan American newspaper. Underwood eventually rose to the position of assistant managing editor of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* for the Hearst chain. Murray served under Underwood on the *Examiner* rewrite desk and worked closely with her through his years on the paper. "Newspaperwoman" details these years, as well as the rest of Underwood's storied journalism career. James H. Richardson's autobiography, *For the Life of Me: Memoirs of a City Editor*, also includes sections focusing on the *Examiner* city room during the 1940s. Richardson was the city editor for the *Examiner* who hired Murray in 1943, and served in that position for Murray's entire tenure at the paper. His memoirs detail his entire career in the

newspaper industry, as well as shedding light on Murray's role in a number of high-profile stories the two worked on together on the *Examiner* staff.

Murray spent his formative years working for the Hearst chain. A number of books have been written about William Randolph Hearst and his empire. W.A. Swanberg's *Citizen Hearst* follows the growth of the Hearst Corporation, the evolution of the Hearst style of journalism, and the subject's flamboyant lifestyle. *William Randolph Hearst: A Portrait in His Own Words*, edited by Edmond D. Coblentz, is a collection of Hearst's writings and recollections that deal with many aspects of his business and journalistic philosophy. *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, by David Nasaw, is a more recent examination of the life of Hearst. The author had the benefit of examining Hearst's previously unavailable personal papers.

Murray had little or no contact with Hearst, but he became a close confidant and personal friend of Henry Luce, whom he worked for from 1947 to 1961. Like Hearst, Luce had been the subject of numerous biographies and historical accounts. *Henry Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* is a scholarly treatment of the life of Luce which places him in the broader context of American journalism and examines the innovations and attitudes that came about due to the influence of the Time Inc., empire. The rise of Time, Inc. and the development of the Luce Empire are chronicled in *The Powers That Be*, David Halberstam's 1975 book that examines the rise of the modern American media through portraits of four moguls, Luce, Norman Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*, William Paley of CBS, and Phillip Graham of the *Washington Post*. The book provides insight into Chandler and his son Otis, who was the publisher of the *Times* during Murray's years with the company and with whom Murray also had a close personal and professional relationship. *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California*, by Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolf, is

a more in-depth look at the Chandler clan which follows the story through the mid-1970s, when the *Times* was at its peak of profitability. *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and The Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty*, by former *Times* reporter Dennis McDougal, is a more recent examination of the Chandler empire, placing more of the focus on the years in which Otis Chandler held the reigns. McDougal gives Otis Chandler much of the credit for transforming the *Times* from a second-rate, poorly run operation into one of the premiere media entities in America during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. McDougal also argues that unbridled greed and personal dysfunction led to the ultimate failure and end of the Chandler dynasty.

Murray's role in the creation and development of *Sports Illustrated* under the auspices of Time Inc. are discussed in Michael MacCambridge's *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine*, a scholarly look at the genesis of the magazine and its evolution from the early 1950s through the late '90s. MacCambridge interviewed Murray as part of his research for *The Franchise*. A section of the book is devoted to the initial planning and production of the magazine, in which Murray played a major part. The book also discusses Murray's involvement with *Sports Illustrated* through 1961, when he left Time, Inc. for the *Los Angeles Times*.

The subject of the growth and development of sports journalism in America is covered by a variety of academic publications. In addition, a number of anecdotal recollections exist on the subject in book form, thanks to the penchant sports writers have for the relating of their press-box war stories. *America's Sporting Heritage*, by John Rickard Betts, examines the growth of sports and recreation in America from the social, cultural and economic perspectives. Betts devotes a significant amount of space to the early pioneers in sports reporting and the effect of technological advancement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on the rise of spectator sports and its coverage. Betts also ties the growth of the sporting press to the increase in leisure time in the

lives of most Americans from the 1920s forward. He chronicles the enormous growth in the interest in sports across America during the eras of prosperity following World War I and World War II. *Sport: Mirror of American Life*, by Robert Boyle, is an examination of the impact of sport on life in America and the relationship between the two. Boyle was a colleague of Murray's at *Sports Illustrated* through the 1950s. He researched *Sport* during a series of assignments for the magazine. The book includes chapters that follow the rise of sports in the United States from colonial times through the 1960s. It also looks at the ways various levels of American society view sports and how sport had become ingrained in the American psyche. Boyle also deals with controversial cultural issues such as race, class and gender and how they relate to sport, subjects that were covered with regularity in Murray's column. In *Sports Reporting*, Bruce Garrison makes the point that "the development of sports journalism has paralleled the growth of the role of sports in America."<sup>32</sup> Garrison outlines the careers of some of the most famous and influential sports writers and columnists from the earliest sports coverage through the 1970s. Garrison includes Murray in the generation of writers who flourished in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The seminal work when it comes to an anecdotal history of American sports writing is Jerome Holtzman's *No Cheering in the Press Box*. Holtzman was a sports writer himself. From 1971 through 1973, he conducted interviews with 44 sportswriters who were part of the two generations of sports journalists prior to his. *No Cheering* contains 24 of these interviews. Together, they offer a view from the inside of the changes that took place in sports coverage from the early part of the century through the period in which Murray joined the fray. Some of Murray's contemporaries, including Red Smith and Jimmy Cannon, are included among the interviewees. Stanley Woodward, a sportswriter of some renown through the middle part of the

century, wrote *Sports Page* in 1949. The book examines every aspect of the profession at the time from the point of view of a working writer, and provides an enlightening view of the state of the profession in the decade prior to Murray's emergence on the scene. Woodward included a chapter about sports columnists, which provides an interesting description of the syndication process and the importance of columnists to the public persona of a newspaper. A much more current look at the life of a sports columnist is included in Leonard Koppett's *The Rise and Fall of the Press Box*, completed two weeks before his death in June of 2003. Koppett was a lifelong sports reporter and columnist in New York and Los Angeles starting in 1947. His book is both a personal history and an examination of the changes in the profession during Koppett's career, which overlapped very closely with that of Murray. Koppett argues that the prestige and exclusivity of the press box and the inner circle of sports journalism was slowly eroded, first by television and later by the rise of the Internet. Gene Wojciechowski's *Pond Scum & Vultures: America's Sportswriters Talk About Their Glamorous Profession* is a humorous look at sports writing in the modern era, containing anecdotes and episodes mostly from the 1970s and 1980s. A few of Murray's exploits are mentioned here, along with numerous anecdotes featuring Murray's friends and associates.

### **The Jim Murray Archives**

Murray's personal collection of letters, documents, notes, clippings, scorecards, articles, newspapers, photos and assorted other materials constitute an extremely rich resource from which to examine his writing, methods and thinking process. The majority of Murray's personal belongings are housed in the home of his widow, Linda McCoy-Murray, in La Quinta, California. The house was the couple's vacation home during the last years of Murray's life. Murray was a pack rat who saved artifacts from his life, including his first job in journalism, as well as some mementos from his childhood. He spent considerably less time organizing that

which he saved. McCoy-Murray has done considerable organizational work in the years since his death, but to date there are still boxes of artifacts that remain in the condition that he left them.

From examination of the materials, it appears Murray began saving clippings of his articles when he first started as a full-time professional journalist, for the *New Haven Register* in June of 1943. Several folders contain clips, cut and glued on cardboard, sometimes accompanied by handwritten notes explaining his involvement or the editing process. These clips date to his time at the *Register* and include clips from his years at the *Examiner*. The majority of the articles Murray clipped were published without a byline (as did most of his published writing during these years), so it can be assumed that he was saving clips of his own published writing.

Murray worked out of his home for the last 38 years of his career and kept his own filing system, which has been left largely untouched. The cabinet is organized by subject. A subject title such as “baseball” may contain notes he took about the Brooklyn Dodgers moving to Los Angeles in 1958 alongside clippings about Mark McGuire chasing Roger Maris’ home-run record during the summer of 1998, and material from the intervening decades as well. The files also contain some personal correspondence related to each particular subject. Also contained within his files are pages upon pages of the research and background reporting that Murray did during his years at Time, Inc. Since *Time* did not publish bylines during those years, these pages of research are invaluable in determining which stories and subjects Murray was involved with during the period between 1947 and 1961. In addition, the files contain hundreds of articles he clipped from other publications, presumably as ideas and research for his own columns.

McCoy-Murray has devoted a good portion of her organizational efforts to date to Murray’s letters, of which there are many. Murray saved letters from famous readers, sources, friends, acquaintances and colleagues throughout his life. He saved very few of the letters he

wrote himself, however. The majority of the letters in his collection are from people he featured in his column thanking him for his coverage, but there are also a great many that document disputes or substantive discussions concerning the content of his column and related issues. (A folder in his filing system is titled “Hate Mail.”) Murray answered fan mail out of his home office as well, but little of the mail he received from readers has been saved. Also included among the letters and within the filing system are work-related correspondence with Murray’s employers and supervisors, from editing comments concerning stories he had filed to mundane requests for vacation pay and medical insurance.

Murray also kept files of his own published writing, the majority of which are copies of his columns from his years at the *Times*. He also worked on a freelance basis for dozens of newspapers, magazines and other publications during his life. Some of these efforts have been saved as well. Murray clipped articles written by others about him, including profiles, book reviews, public appearances, etc., and he also saved many clipping about himself that were sent to him by friends and readers. Some unpublished works, mostly undated, are hidden throughout Murray’s personal materials. Though McCoy-Murray has given away some of his books, most of his collection remains, some titles dating back to childhood. An auction was held for some of his more valuable belongings and letters shortly after Murray’s death. Copies of the original letters that went in the auction remain in his personal collection.

The preceding is an incomplete description of what is currently available to researchers based on a three-day survey of the materials in February of 2009. A more thorough examination of the contents is needed, as is a professional archiving of the materials that remain in McCoy-Murray’s possession.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Murray, “Looking at the Losers,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1961.

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- <sup>2</sup> Jim Murray, "Please, No Flowers," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1961.
- <sup>3</sup> Jim Murray, "That She Blows!" *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1962.
- <sup>4</sup> Jim Murray, "There Are Hardships," *Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 1961.
- <sup>5</sup> "It Began in Cincinnati," *The Dayton Journal Herald*, February 13, 1974.
- <sup>6</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, *Quotable Jim Murray: The Literary Wit, Wisdom and Wonder of a Distinguished American Sports Columnist* (Nashville, TN: TowelHouse Publishing, 2003), 20.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>11</sup> Jim Murray, "Living Color," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1961.
- <sup>12</sup> Jim Murray, *Jim Murray: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 193), 42.
- <sup>13</sup> Jim Murray, "Ride on a Tiger," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1961. Murray wrote those lines after only one month on the job.
- <sup>14</sup> Frank Deford, interview by author, DATE.
- <sup>15</sup> William A. Harper, *How You Played the Game: The Life of Grantland Rice* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 5-7.
- <sup>16</sup> Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media* 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), 140-143.
- <sup>17</sup> Bruce Garrison, *Sports Reporting* (Ames, IO: Iowa State University Press, 1985), 225-226.
- <sup>18</sup> Harper, *How You Played the Game*, 8.
- <sup>19</sup> Garrison, *Sports Reporting*, 228-229.
- <sup>20</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History: 1690-1960*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 689-691.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 691.
- <sup>22</sup> Garrison, *Sports Reporting*, 230.
- <sup>23</sup> Charles Fountain, *Sportswriter: The Life and Times of Grantland Rice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 206-207. Jack Dempsey was the only athlete who earned more money than Rice during the 1920s.
- <sup>24</sup> Garrison, *Sports Reporting*, 231.
- <sup>25</sup> Ira Berkow, "Red Smith, Sports Columnist Who Won Pulitzer, Dies at 76," *New York Times*, January 16, 1982.

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<sup>26</sup> Fountain, *Sportswriter*, 270.

<sup>27</sup> James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan, *Historical Methods in Mass Communications* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1989), 139.

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Wanta, "The Coverage of Sports in Print Media." In *Handbook of Sports Media*, edited by Arthur A. Raney and Jennings Bryant, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2006), 105-106.

<sup>29</sup> The book was released with a cover jacket that included the title "Jim Murray: The Autobiography of the Pulitzer Prize Winning Sports Columnist."

<sup>30</sup> Fowler, who died in 2003, also produced an autobiography, to date unpublished. The work is cited in Wagner's "Red Ink, White Lies."

<sup>31</sup> Rob Leicester Wagner, interview by author, January, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Garrison, *Sports Reporting*, 223.

CHAPTER 2  
THE CONNECTICUT YEARS, 1919-1943

**A Place Called Sligo**

The first line of Jim Murray's autobiography reads "I was a Depression child."<sup>1</sup> In fact, Murray first came into the world just three days before the dawn of the 1920s, the Jazz Age, the beginning of a run of unprecedented American prosperity. It would be in Murray's formative years that he would suffer along with the rest of America through the Great Depression. The suffering he would live through as a young child, including two near-fatal diseases, the divorce of his parents and the constant shuffling of the adults in his life, was his and his alone.

Murray was born on December 29, 1919, at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut.<sup>2</sup> By then, the Murrays had been in America for two generations. Before that, the Murrays were a close-knit clan from near the small village of Knockawer, outside Tobbercurry in County Sligo in the farm country of Northeastern Ireland. Family records show that Jim's great grandparents on his father's side, Martin Murray and Margaret Killoran, lived in the hills of Knockawer on land owned jointly by members of the Murray family. The family subsisted on cattle and sheep farming, as did their neighbors and the rest of the rural region around Knockawer. It was an isolated existence. Occasional trips for supplies to the town of Sligo were the extent of contact with the outside world. Jim's grandfather, Michael Murray, was born October 14, 1861. He had five siblings, all of whom would join the second wave of Irish immigration during the final third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> According to family lore, Michael Murray had the same feeling about Ireland that Jim would have 80 years later about Connecticut: a strong desire to be somewhere else. Michael left Ireland at the age of 17, and always said he would have left much sooner if he had known how to swim. "He always used to say, if Ireland was a little bit of heaven, he hoped it was from the poorer section of it," Jim wrote.<sup>4</sup>

Michael Murray and his siblings were part of a wave of Irish immigration to the United States that had been going on for most of the century. The Irish Potato Famine of 1845 to 1849 caused unimaginable hardship in Ireland and left a population ripe for exodus, but the tide of immigration was already going strong by the time the famine began. Including the great famine, there were five catastrophic famines between 1818 and 1847. About 2 million people died of disease and starvation, which constituted nearly a quarter of the Irish population. The Great Famine, though, was a turning point. Many Irish believed they were sacrificed for the survival of the British merchant class. Feeling toward America, however, was just the opposite. Help came from those who had already made the move to America. In most major American cities, organizations raised funds for victims of the famine. American relief ships brought cargoes of corn and clothing. The federal government and members of U.S. Congress became involved in relief efforts. The response to Irish suffering played a large role in convincing the population of Ireland that America was their promised land.<sup>5</sup>

In 1860, around the time that young Michael Murray and his siblings came to America, the Irish made up about 40 percent of the foreign-born population of the United States. Irish immigrants were coming to America at the rate of about 50,000 per year. The majority of them ended up in the Northeast or Illinois. By the end of the century, the Irish population of America exceeded the population of Ireland itself. The first generation of Irish immigrants generally found work as laborers, doing the heavy lifting that was needed in urban America. They were masons, bricklayers, carpenters and sweat-shop workers, longshoremen, street cleaners, tailors and stevedores.<sup>6</sup> Michael Murray settled in Hartford, Connecticut, in the late 1870s. He had married Bridget Gallagher prior to immigration, and by the early 1880s, he was employed by the Pratt & Whitney Company of Hartford, where he would work for the rest of his life as a

machinist.<sup>7</sup> Pratt & Whitney was a successful firm that produced industrial machinery, and later in life Michael Murray spent his working days building airplane engines for commercial and military use.<sup>8</sup> His occupation was a stable source of income that kept the family fed and clothed, and helped the next generation of Murrays live through the Great Depression. The Murrays lived comfortably in Hartford, and before 1920 moved to West Hartford, a small, affluent suburb of Hartford.<sup>9</sup> Michael and Bridget Murray, Jim's grandparents, were his primary caretakers for most of his childhood and would play an enormous role in his development. They died within four months of each other in 1934.<sup>10</sup>

James P. Murray, Jim's father, was the third child out of the eight Murray siblings, born on October 31, 1889. Jim wrote very little about his father, so little written description of him exists. James was by all accounts a good student and a sparkling wit. In fact, he was supposed to be the first of the Murrays to attend college. A display of Irish stubbornness, however, kept that from happening. Late in his senior year of high school, James came to Latin class without having completed the day's lesson. He asked the instructor not to call on him, and after agreeing, the instructor called on James anyway. James stood up in class and said "Look, you son of a bitch, I told you I didn't do the lesson. Why'd you call on me?" He was sent to the principal and thrown out of school. Even after a deal was struck in which an apology would get James back into school and back on the road to graduation, he refused to apologize. He never graduated from high school, and instead of matriculating to Trinity College, where his son Jim would go 20 years later, he became a pharmacist.<sup>11</sup>

James married Jim's mother, Mary O'Connell, shortly thereafter. Mary, known as Molly, was born in Ireland. The O'Connells had come to America in 1896 when Molly was five years old<sup>12</sup> and settled in New London, Connecticut. Molly worked as a nurse through most of her

adult life. James and Molly had three children. Mary Elizabeth, known as Betty, was born in 1918, Jim in 1919, and Eleanor, born two years later. During these years, James was a successful druggist, at one time owning three separate pharmacies in the Hartford area. It was in the early years of Jim's life, however, that James' career and marriage would fall apart and send young Jim's life in another direction.

### **A House Full of Uncles**

When he was four years old, Jim Murray had what his family called a nervous breakdown.<sup>13</sup> What he actually had was an obscure disease called Saint Vitus Dance, or Sydenham's chorea, which causes the patient to lose control of his limbs, to lose the ability to walk, to twitch wildly, and to exhibit facial grimacing.<sup>14</sup> Saint Vitus Dance is often associated with streptococcal infection, such as strep throat, and can last for months, which was likely the case with Murray. A disease of this nature can throw a family into chaos even with modern medicine, and at the time there was little in the way of treatment. Murray's parents apparently weren't able to care for him sufficiently, and he moved in with his grandparents for what would be most of the rest of his childhood.

Things had already been going badly for the family at the time of Jim's disease. In the first years of his life, the family had been living in Hartford as a family, with Molly's sister Agnes, an insurance clerk, living in the household as well.<sup>15</sup> Prohibition had been in effect since 1920, and many druggists of the era supplemented their business by selling illegal liquor. Jim's father was no different. He kept a water cooler filled with gin in his shops, as did almost every other pharmacy in Hartford. Liquor laws were indiscriminately enforced, and after James got into a feud with a local cop,<sup>16</sup> the law came down on him. At 2 a.m. on January 13, 1922, police officers took him from his bed and brought him to the Hartford Police Station for booking. He was bailed out by his father for \$1,000 twelve hours later. The arrest made the front page of the

next day's edition of the *Hartford Courant*. The newspaper reported that police had arrested a bootlegger named Michael Delaney two days earlier. Liquor valued at thousands of dollars had been stored and sold out of James Murray's shop, and the police had been looking for him for two days. Justice moved quick in Hartford at the time; Delaney was already serving a 60-day sentence in Hartford County Jail by the time James Murray was hauled down to the precinct.<sup>17</sup>

James Murray pleaded not guilty to the charges, and the case went to court on January 28. In just two weeks time, all of his drug stores were out of business. The state's case hinged on the testimony of Delaney, who claimed to have sold nine cases of scotch to Murray, which were part of a shipment of liquor that had been stolen from Delaney. As reported in the *Courant*, it is difficult to understand why Murray and his lawyer fought the charges in court. Murray admitted to agreeing to buy the scotch from Delaney and admitted to receiving the scotch. His lawyer offered no defense after Delaney's testimony. Upon rendering his decision, the judge said there seemed to be something deeper involved in the case than what was disclosed in court. With or without the truth of the matter, he sentenced Murray to 20 days in jail. James Murray's career as a business owner was effectively over.<sup>18</sup>

Whether it was the strain of their legal and financial problems or the stress of a child with a major illness, the marriage of James and Molly could not withstand the difficulties. They split up when Jim was four, and from then on Jim was raised by committee, with his grandparents taking the lead. Divorce in an Irish Catholic family was a black mark of immense proportions, and not to be discussed in public. Jim was now property of the Murrays, and they closed ranks around him. His mother, to them, was as unwelcome a subject as the divorce. Murray's cousin, Carol Hamel, who was 13 years younger than Jim and later lived in the same household, said the subject was one that was never broached by family members. "In those days, that was that. That

was the end. And the rest of the family hardly mentioned her name. I don't know if you know or not, but the old Irish would, well, they would write her off."<sup>19</sup> Jim's sisters, Betty and Eleanor, remained with Molly, his father moved into an apartment, and Jim moved to West Hartford with the Murray clan.

By the time Jim made the move, his grandparents lived at 21 Crescent Street in West Hartford in a large, three-story home built for two families. The house had three bedrooms and a second kitchen on the second floor and three more bedrooms on the third floor – plenty of room to harbor an uncle or two and a few aunts and some cousins and other assorted relatives. During leaner times, more of the extended family would take up residence in the home. The living arrangements throughout the extended family were fluid; at one point during the depths of the Depression, Jim, his father and sisters all moved into the house at 21 Crescent Street, while Molly was forced to move back to New London to board with her parents. Jim also spent time living at times with his aunts, Margaret, known as Peg, and Katherine, known as Kit. Both took on maternal roles in Jim's upbringing. At times, Jim shared a room with his Uncle Frank. He was first exposed to sports by his father and his father's brothers, who would sit around the kitchen table, smoking cigars and arguing about the Red Sox or Jack Dempsey late into the night.<sup>20</sup> The roster would change daily. It included Jim's father, along with Uncle Martin, a fireman who eventually became fire chief of New Canaan, Connecticut; Uncle Jack, a machinist who moved to Fitchburg, Massachusetts; Uncle Frank, who managed and owned apartment buildings in Hartford, and later owned a diner frequented by boxers, and Uncle Charles.<sup>21</sup> "They were lively, funny, irreverent. Every boy should have uncles like these," Jim wrote.<sup>22</sup>

But it was Uncle Ed, the black sheep of the family, who Jim devoted the most ink to when he became a writer. Ed was a gambler, hustler and con artist who Murray said "hated work so

much, he didn't even like to watch it." Ed Murray dropped out of school in the sixth grade and from then on made his living with dice, cards and assorted other cons. He was a stocky, curly haired pug with a round face, a squashed nose and a quick temper. He resembled Jimmy Cagney. In the underworld, he went by "The Gimp," because he had one leg shorter than the other. Murray remembered coming downstairs and watching Uncle Ed boiling eggs and dice in the same pan. "The eggs he ate. The dice he squeezed into a wooden vise until they got in a shape they wouldn't come up a '6' or '8'." Ed would use the trick dice in illegal craps games. Once, the illegal dice slipped out accidentally, and Ed took a bad beating. Jim woke up to see his uncle's eyes swollen shut. He lanced them with a razor so Ed could get out of bed.<sup>23</sup>

Murray looked up to Uncle Ed and reveled in the tours of Hartford's backrooms and pool halls he received from his uncle. While his father and the other uncles took him to fights and ball games, Ed brought him to places like the Greek-American Club and the Parkville Young Democratic Club, illegal all-night establishments where gambling went on through the night. Throughout his life he repeated the many rules to live by that Ed shared with him:

"Never bet on a live horse or a dead woman."

"Never take money from an amateur ... unless he insists."

"Never play cards with a man in dark glasses or his own deck."<sup>24</sup>

As an adult, Murray usually played his Uncle Ed stories for laughs, but the Murray family held an honorable reputation in the community, and Ed often brought shame on the family. He was arrested on gambling charges more than a few times, and often bullied Murray's grandmother into financing his schemes. As a child, Murray feared him and fantasized about knocking him out. When Murray was a bit older and money was extremely tight, Uncle Ed stole

his shoes and slept with them under his pillow. Murray got up the courage and one morning jerked the shoes back from his Uncle. When Ed didn't attack him, Murray knew he was safe.<sup>25</sup>

Ed also introduced Jim to horse racing. He took Jim to Agawam Race Track in Massachusetts, where Jim won his first bet, on a horse named Kievex. Ed played the angles in the horse game, too, always looking for a way to bend the rules. One scheme he was particularly successful with, for a time, was called past-posting. He worked the scam with his partner Johnny Pachesnik. Ed would pay a spotter to watch the race and relay to Ed which horse was winning headed into the stretch. Johnny, meanwhile, would run up a minor losing streak, gaining the bookie's confidence. The bookie would get greedy and become willing to accept bets a minute or so after post time. Then Ed would come into the bookie parlor wearing a sweater with 12 buttons. The button that represented the winning horse he would leave unbuttoned. Johnny would place the bet, and the two would split their winnings. Unfortunately for Ed and Johnny, the bookie got suspicious when Ed came into the parlor wearing a sweater in 90-degree weather. He found their spotter, and paid him a little bit more than Ed was paying him. Pretty soon, Ed and Johnny were putting their money on losers, and the house, once again, got its money back.<sup>26</sup>

Ed was generous to a fault when times were good and would be back under his parents' roof when the money ran out. Murray's cousin, Marie Hewins, a generation younger than Murray, remembers Uncle Ed coming to Murray family reunions in later years. "He would have the back seat full of pastries, and all us kids just loved it. And another year he wouldn't show up at all. Later on in life, I found out why: he wasn't winning," she said.<sup>27</sup> Uncle Ed's hard living took its toll, and he died in 1954 at the age of 52. As much as anyone in the Murray family, Uncle Ed's outlook and attitudes are reflected in Murray's writing. Characters like Ed and his pals, who knew how to work angles and game the system, but ultimately found themselves on

the other end of a con, populate Murray's columns. He would write about crooked fight promoters and shifty horse players with humor and admiration. He would form easy associations with Uncle Ed-type characters he encountered throughout his days in journalism. At Uncle Ed's funeral in 1954, one of the many questionable characters in attendance approached Murray's sister Eleanor and said of Uncle Ed: "They was better crapshooters and better pool hustlers. But for one man for two events by one player, I'd have to take Eddie. He was one of the best."<sup>28</sup>

Though they never assumed the roles of primary caregivers for long stretches after Jim reached the age of 4, both Jim's father and mother remained involved in his life. James Sr. was a natty dresser and the source of Jim's quick wit. He was, according to Gerry Suppicich, a son of Jim's sister Betty, "a very smart guy by common consensus, the smartest of the Murrays, and they were all smart. They were all achievers." Eric Sandburg, son of Jim's aunt Eleanor, remembers his grandfather as friendly and bright. In the 1950s, when Sandburg was four-years-old, he asked James about a belt he was wearing. By the next day, James had bought one for him. "My mother thought it was ridiculous that a 4-year-old had a \$9 belt," Sandburg said.<sup>29</sup> The Murray family liked to imbibe, and Jim's father was no different. Once, he took Jim to a fight, and on the way back stopped into one of his friend's drugstores to play checkers for money. Jim watched as his father kept getting up to fill his glass from the water cooler. Pretty soon, his eyes were red and his speech was slurred. It was an image that stuck with Jim.<sup>30</sup> James and Molly stayed in touch while Jim was a child, and even into adulthood. Among the many letters Jim saved is a get-well card, dated September 24, 1957, signed "Mom & Dad."<sup>31</sup>

Jim had a more contentious relationship with his mother, Molly. Though she was frozen out to a degree by Jim's father's family and often had to go through them to get in touch with Jim, she still managed to be overbearing toward her son, and Jim fought to keep her at arm's

length. In later years, she tipped the scales at 250 pounds and was known to berate relatives to the point of tears at family gatherings. Suppich, who traveled with her years later to visit Jim and his family in Los Angeles, remembers her as a headstrong woman. “She was a tough old Irish War Horse, a tough old bitch ... I can’t describe Jim’s relationship with her, other than to say California might not have been far enough away,” he said.<sup>32</sup> When she died in 1968, Sandburg attended her funeral. After the viewing, he went outside to smoke a cigarette. Jim came over with an anguished look on his face. “If one more old bitty tells me how wonderful she looks,” Jim said, “I’m going to tell them to go fuck themselves.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Don’t Call Me Bud**

West Hartford in the 1930s was a melting pot, with Swedish, Italian and Irish families representing the majority, but with several other ethnicities thrown in. It was a bucolic suburb where pre-teens played baseball in the street, traded baseball cards and played checkers on the stoop. Or they sat around outside of Terry’s Drug Store, down the block from Jim’s grandparents’ house on Crescent Street, and drank soda pop (when they could afford it) and argued about the Yankees and the Red Sox.<sup>34</sup> Around the neighborhood, Jim was known as “Bud” Murray, thanks to his little sister Eleanor, who couldn’t pronounce “brother” and instead called Jim “Budder.”<sup>35</sup> Jim developed his sense of humor at a young age, and his lifelong desire to be a playwright surfaced early. He would write and direct neighborhood productions, and enlist his sisters Eleanor and Betty to star in them. Kids from the neighborhood would watch the results.<sup>36</sup> One of the major radio stars of the 1930s was Kate Smith, known as the “Songbird of the South.” Jim would MC his neighborhood shows, and he would introduce his sister: “You’ve heard of Kate Smith, the Songbird of the South. Well, let’s give a big hand to Eleanor Murray, the Song Horse of the North.”<sup>37</sup>

At the age of 10, Jim was once again felled by disease. This time, it was rheumatic fever, and it was very nearly fatal. As with his earlier bout of Saint Vitus Dance, rheumatic fever is the result of a strep infection, and the fever is usually seen two weeks after a case of strep throat. The virus often attacks and weakens the valves of the heart, as in Jim's case. He developed pneumonia and pleurisy, and last rites were performed for him at Our Lady of Sorrows Church. He hovered between life and death for days.<sup>38</sup> After the development of antibiotics in the 1960s, incidence of rheumatic fever went way down. In the 1920s, however, the only treatment was aspirin, given to reduce inflammation, and the disease was very often fatal.<sup>39</sup> Jim's recovery would take years, during which he spent innumerable hours on bed rest. Even into high school, he was on a reduced schedule that had him attending classes in the morning and back home in the afternoon. Sometimes he would be so overcome with boredom that he would yell and scream, upsetting his Aunt Peg, who looked after him through many of these years. Carol Hamel, Peg's daughter, was 12 years younger than Jim. She remembered that as a youngster, she was often told to "keep things on an even keel" so Jim wouldn't get upset. Once, Carol and Aunt Peg heard Jim screaming in anger from his room on the third floor. When they went to investigate, Jim, already a grammar hound, was disgusted with a split infinitive he had found in the *Hartford Times*. He demanded to use the phone so he could call the city desk and complain.<sup>40</sup>

But all the time spent in his room allowed Jim to develop an extraordinary understanding of history and culture. "I read everything. I knew as much about history as Toynbee. I knew about Hitler (from John Gunther's books) before some Germans did and certainly before any Americans.," he wrote.<sup>41</sup> He wrote and received letters from the prime minister of Ireland, and he wrote his first award-winning story for a newspaper contest, for which he won \$5. He devised

a baseball game using playing cards (a jack was a single, a queen was a double, etc.) and refined the rules until the game approximated real baseball statistics.

Despite missing class time, Jim was a good student. He attended Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School through elementary and middle school, where writing and language was stressed. Students wrote a theme paper a week, and grading was strict.<sup>42</sup> In 1933, when he was in the eighth grade, Jim made the municipal spelling bee, where he was the most nervous contestant on stage. He misspelled impetus -- I-M-P-E-T-O-S -- and his competitive spelling career was over.<sup>43</sup> By this time, Jim's closest friend was Joey Patrisi, who lived down the block on Crescent Street. The two would go to Terry's Drug Store and read the *Hartford Courant* and whatever sports magazines they could afford. Joey was the best athlete in the neighborhood, and Jim would join him on the fields when he was healthy, or just watch when he wasn't up to playing. The two went to stay with Jim's Uncle Jack's family in Massachusetts during the summer several times. They would go to see the Hartford Laurels, a Class A minor league baseball team in the Boston Braves organization. Joey went on to play college baseball at Staunton Military Academy and had an opportunity to play in the Yankees farm system, but his baseball career was cut short by World War II.<sup>44</sup>

On Labor Day, 1933, Jim went to Yankee Stadium to see a double header between the Yankees and the Philadelphia Athletics, a chance to see Babe Ruth, and his other favorite player, Jimmy Foxx of the A's. In a steady rainstorm, Jim got to see a version of the most celebrated sports act of the era: Ruth knocking one over the fence, wobbling around the bases on his spindly legs, and tipping his cap to the crowd. "It was, looking back on it, my first lesson that the event itself had to be dramatized," he wrote. "We were there, in a sense, because we had been lured

there by years of purple prose. The home run itself was hardly a cataclysmic event. But Grantland Rice made you think it was.”<sup>45</sup>

### **The First in the Family**

Jim graduated from William Hall High School in West Hartford in May of 1939, and in the fall, he took the path that his father was supposed to take 20 years before and matriculated at Trinity College in Hartford. He dreamed of attending Dartmouth, but family finances would not allow it.<sup>46</sup> Trinity was a fine alternative, however, and his aunts and uncles were thrilled to have one of their own in higher education. On his application to Trinity, Jim wrote that he expected to become a journalist, “although sometimes I think I’d like to join the diplomatic, or consular service. I consider the latter, perhaps, because I have a lust for travel.”<sup>47</sup>

At the end of the 1930s, a college education was still a relative rarity in the United States. During that decade, American universities and colleges would collectively award less than 100,000 degrees annually. By 1947, 2.3 million students would be enrolled in American colleges and universities.<sup>48</sup> Trinity College was founded in 1823, the second college in the state of Connecticut to open its doors. A small liberal arts college of less than 300 students in 1939, Trinity has an Episcopalian heritage, but was a non-religious entity by the time Murray arrived. The school had undergone an expansion during the ’30s, and by the time Murray set foot on campus, it boasted collegiate-style Gothic architecture that gave the campus the feel of medieval academia.<sup>49</sup> The liberal arts doctrine of the school fit nicely with Jim’s interests, and he threw himself into the study of history and English, the two areas where he concentrated the majority of his efforts. He commuted to school, living with the Foleys at 21 Crescent, and working as a waiter to pay tuition costs.<sup>50</sup> During his spare time, he also wrote for the *Trinity Tripod*, the campus newspaper, wrote fiction and plays for the *Trinity Review*, and worked as a campus correspondent for the *Hartford Times*.<sup>51</sup>

Jim's first year at Trinity could be called the peak of his competitive athletic career, in terms of actual performance. As a kid, he was fast and athletic, but a nervous outfielder who usually hoped the ball would be hit to somebody, anybody, other than him. He would promote fights in the neighborhood, roping off a ring with clothesline, and grudgingly step in to the ring himself when one of the fighters didn't show up. His own boxing career ended when a Boy Scout from a rival troop named John McMahon beat him senseless, giving him a bloody nose and a cut lip. "I can still remember wondering why in the hell the bell didn't ring when we had obviously been fighting for a half-hour," he wrote.<sup>52</sup> But baseball was a different story. Jim loved the sport. So when he got to Trinity as a freshman, he earned a spot on the freshman baseball team, his first real shot at organized athletics. He became "the most nervous right fielder the Trinity College frosh team ever had." During his short time on the team, he nearly decapitated the first baseman with a peg from the outfield. He was a college baseball Moonlight Graham, who never even got an official at-bat. Once, he was in the on-deck circle as a pinch hitter when the batter in front of him hit into a triple play.

Jim was beginning to get the idea that a baseball career was not to be. His career highlight was a practice home run off the team's top pitcher, Nick Sica.<sup>53</sup> However, it wasn't Sica, or his coach, or any pitcher who ended Jim Murray's playing days. It was his Aunt Peg. Jim was still under his aunt's roof at the time, and had joined the team without her knowledge. Education came first, and the family still worried about Jim's health, so he knew they wouldn't be supportive of a baseball career for the family's first college student. Early in the season, Jim inadvertently left his uniform on the bus. Somehow, it found its way back to his aunt, and at her urging, Jim quit the team a short time later.<sup>54</sup>

Despite not achieving success on the diamond, college life suited Murray. He made friends easily, and even with his work responsibilities, participated in many extracurricular activities. He spent four years as a member of Trinity's Political Science Club, was secretary of the International Relations Club, and was a member of the Trinity Club as well.<sup>55</sup> By that time, Jim's sister Betty was married, and for recreation Jim would bring his friends to Betty's house on the weekends, to deal cards, play croquet, and have a few drinks.<sup>56</sup> While he was pursuing the pleasures and goals of college, however, many of his friends from the neighborhood, kids he had grown up with, were on their way to war zones far away. Hitler's Germany had invaded Poland and the Second World War had begun in the first month of Murray's freshman year in 1939. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declared war on Japan during his junior year at Trinity, and Murray, like most young men his age during this era, wanted desperately to be in uniform. The Selective Training and Service Act had become law in August of 1940, before the United States entered the war, and in 1941 the age of induction was set at 21 to 27 years. Murray and those in his age group were the backbone of the U.S. armed services.<sup>57</sup> Murray tried to enlist, but, as he knew he would be, was rejected because of his heart ailment. Nearly 30 percent of enlistees during World War II were given 4-F classification, "not acceptable for military service,"<sup>58</sup> and Murray fell into that category. He contacted every political official in the Hartford area in an attempt to get around the classification, but to no avail. He was destined to remain on the sidelines for the duration of the war.<sup>59</sup>

### **Writing for Money**

It's difficult to overestimate the level to which life in America was focused on the war in the spring of 1943. On May 16, the day Jim Murray received his degree, the United States launched the largest air attack yet into German air space, showering the Nazi naval base of

Emden with bombs. American and British air forces carried out sweeps in France, while the American air war in the Mediterranean continued unabated. In the Pacific, American troops were

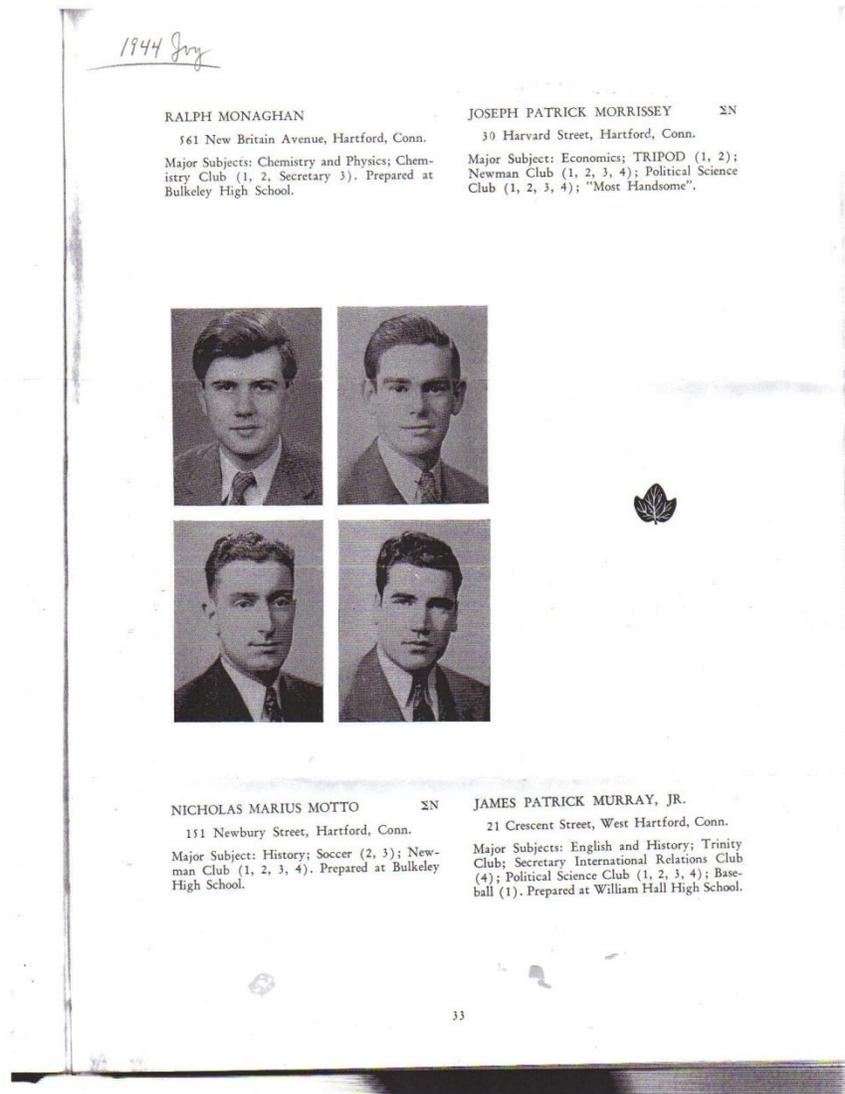


Figure 2-1. Jim Murray's photo and entry in the 1943 *Trinity Ivy*, the Trinity College yearbook. Reprinted with permission of The Watkinson Library, Trinity College.

making progress against the Japanese on the island of Attu in Alaska, the only battle during World War II to take place on American soil. Japanese planes attacked allied positions in New Guinea. U.S. President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill were in

meetings to plan war strategy.<sup>60</sup> Adolf Hitler, the day before, had installed himself as one-man ruler of Germany indefinitely.<sup>61</sup> At home, news was no less concentrated on the war effort. The front page of the *New York Times* included stories headlined “Meat Vanishing: No Relief Seen Here for 2 Months,” “144 Seized in City as Draft Dodgers,” and “East Must Reduce ‘Gas’ Use or Face Drastic Steps.”<sup>62</sup>

The war seeped into graduation ceremonies at Trinity College as well. Trinity Class Day, a traditional event held at the college the day prior to commencement in which students receive awards and give humorous speeches about their four years on campus, took on a gloomy tone. The Class-Day chairman spoke of how the members of the class knew they were living on borrowed time and how some of their classmates were in uniform already, and many more would be by month’s end. The featured speaker at the event was a Trinity alumna from the class of 1918, who related the experience of the graduating class to his class, full of soon-to-be soldiers headed to Europe to fight in the first Great War.<sup>63</sup> So it was a subdued affair on Sunday night at the Trinity College chapel when Murray finally received the first college degree in his family. Remsen Ogilby, president of Trinity, had declared that morning that the class of 1943 would be the last graduation of a normal class at the college for four years. Colonel Robert Butler of the U.S. Army delivered a commencement address in which he heaped invective upon the Germans and Japanese.

But for Murray, it was still a time to celebrate accomplishment. He and 59 of his classmates received their Bachelor of Arts degrees in the Trinity chapel on a warm Hartford evening. The Murray family brought a large contingent to the occasion, which was celebrated as a milestone for the Murray clan. Murray had little time to celebrate himself, however. Before graduation, he had already lined up a job with the *New Haven Register*, with a weekly salary of

\$23.50. New Haven is about 40 miles south of Hartford, a slightly smaller city, on the Atlantic, known to most people as the home of Yale University. For the first time, Murray would be living on his own, having secured an apartment in New Haven.<sup>64</sup>

Because of the war, able-bodied men who were still on American soil were scarce. The young men who would normally populate newspaper city rooms were, to a large part, directly involved in the war effort, so cub reporters were few and far between. Murray joined a news staff at the *Register* of mostly older, experienced veterans of the newspaper business, and a few 4-Fers like himself. And as last man in the door, he initially drew the cub-reporter assignments. Soldiers returning home, restaurants short on food due to rationing, New Haven's first woman Post Master, and other similar stories fell to the *Register's* newest reporter. In his first month on the job, he covered the always divisive issue of the ice-cream shortage in New Haven. In a story appropriately headlined "Heat Creates Great Demand for Ice Cream," Murray wrote:

If you're a lover of ice cream (and who isn't?), you'd better call up right now and reserve a stool at your favorite soda fountain for your next treat. Because the way gallons of that priceless dessert have been disappearing from the fountain refrigerators these days with Old Sol doing his best to parboil the poor working people make it likely that you'll no longer be able to drop into the nearest dispensary on the old catch-as-you-can basis and order your favorite double-scoop sundae.<sup>65</sup>

Murray went on to supply his readers with the vital information that ice cream had been ranked seventh on the federal government's list of essential industries, and, due to its lower milk content, hungry New Haveners would be more likely to get their hands on sherbet products in the near future.

As the summer wore on, Murray tried to add flair to his soft-news assignments and society-page features. In the late summer, he earned his way onto the police beat, albeit as a brief writer, mopping up the misdemeanor-level misdeeds of the New Haven criminal element.

Murray, from the very beginning, was dutifully clipping his writing, all of it unbylined, and gluing clips into a journal, meticulously writing notes concerning his coverage and delineating the sections of the finished product that he had produced. On a page he marked “police beat,” he compiled a collection of crime briefs that the city desk had proffered on him. He wrote about a string of four stabbings in New Haven, an illegal Italian lottery, a 19-year-old who refused to take his soldier’s oath, and, in a story to which Murray could offer a wellspring of personal knowledge thanks to his Uncle Ed, a dice game that turned violent.

A dice game last Saturday night which turned out to have all the markings of a frontier-day barroom melee when two of the participants were discovered to be toting firearms to the scene yesterday resulted in sentences being meted out to seven offenders the aggregate total of which is equal to several months in jail and more than two hundred dollars in fines.<sup>66</sup>

Murray was now working “67-hour weeks,”<sup>67</sup> and in that time he was accumulating skills beyond the city desk whenever he could. He wrote movie previews, outlining the new Hollywood offerings premiering at New Haven’s theatres, he wrote editorials, he wrote headlines for the copy desk, and he took publicity jobs to earn a little extra cash. (On his first publicity job, he wrote a 2-column story for the Yale Hope Mission to earn a cool \$5.)<sup>68</sup> During the fall, he took on another extra assignment that would lead to his first published sports writing. The *Register’s* sports editor was a man named Dan Mulvey, who Murray called a “newspaperman’s newspaperman,” meaning he didn’t care who did his work for him, as long as it got done. Mulvey let Murray go along on Saturday nights to cover Yale football games and serve as the photographer’s assistant, writing cutlines when Mulvey was editing copy. He got a seat in the Yale Bowl press box, the first one he had ever been in. Murray diligently clipped his cutlines and added notations: “Wrote above cutlines on Sat. Midnite of Army game when Dan Mulvey was tied up.” He would, Murray later wrote, “take a few digs at the Yale team and sit back and wait for a reaction that never came”:

Ray Scussel, Yale's standout performer in the 39-7 rout by Army, is shown underway late in the second period on a spectacular dash from Yale 25 marker to Cadet 38. Tackled by Army defensive halfback Minor after the swift 37-yard dash, the "Scooter" gave Blue fans one of their all-too-infrequent chances to root as he outran the entire Cadet team along the west sideline before being caught by Minor in a last-ditch tackle.<sup>69</sup>

Even at this point, only a few months into his fledgling journalism career, Murray was preparing to move on to bigger things, and apparently to get out of Connecticut. He had begun submitting articles on spec to *Time* magazine, with no success.<sup>70</sup> And he began compiling a list of Los Angeles editors and saving them in his clipping book with an eye toward future employment. The effort was beginning to seem justified in the fall of '43, as Murray quickly showed himself to be a determined, energetic reporter who liked to get his hands dirty. By November and December, Murray's stories were appearing on the front page regularly. He took weekend assignments that gave him access to the major crime and disaster stories without the turf battles with other reporters. On Saturday, November 13, he was on cop duty when a shooting made for some weekend excitement.<sup>71</sup> Murray's exhilaration leaks through in handwritten notes he took in his clipping journal from the coverage: "The best part about this story is the wild ride to the scene I had with Ralph Harsh and Eddie Shields. I was sitting in the detective bureau when the call came in and I jumped in the car with Harsh and Shields and rode to the place where the shooting was, past trucks, thru red lights, around corners on two wheels, etc."<sup>72</sup>

Murray's stories became gradually bigger and juicier. In November, he covered the case of a war worker who beat his wife nearly to death after catching her "necking" with an unidentified soldier.<sup>73</sup> "I went up to the jail to see the brute," Murray wrote in his journal. The week before Christmas, he covered a fire that burned an entire city block to the ground, including 13 businesses.<sup>74</sup> ("What a pip!" he wrote.) That same month, he covered a story that would illustrate Murray's readiness to move on from New Haven, and at the same time earn him a connection that would help him in the very near future. Acting on a tip from the Chief of the Connecticut

State Police, Leo Carroll, with whom Murray had developed a relationship, he stumbled on the kind of lurid love-triangle that would occupy a good portion of the next decade of his career. An heir to the wealthy Almadon family had been having an affair with a married woman, and the woman's husband had shot him to death. Murray reported the story, his first murder case, and brought it to his editors at the *Register*. The *Register* passed on the story. A disappointed Murray took the story to the Walt Cochrane, the Connecticut bureau chief for the Associated Press. The Associated Press was impressed with the story, which was played big in New York and Washington, D.C. newspapers. Cochrane would enthusiastically recommend Murray to his colleague, Hub Keavy, in AP's Los Angeles bureau a month later.<sup>75</sup>

Murray's decision to head West was firm by December. His six-month apprenticeship at the *Register* was short but fruitful, and now he felt ready for the next challenge. A variety of forces had been pushing him in that direction, actually any direction that led him out of Connecticut, for some time. He had clearly outgrown New Haven and the *Register* journalistically. Fires and police briefs had excited him initially, but New Haven was a small city; Murray spent much of his time reporting on incidents which wouldn't merit two lines in a major metropolitan daily. Now he had learned that if he got his hooks into a really big story, his own editors were likely to turn it down. Aside from journalism, Murray was ready for adventure. He'd spent his entire life in the Northeast, and now was watching his childhood friends and his college classmates leave regularly, headed for places that he'd read about and dreamt about. He was also ready to get outside of the grips of his family, particularly the strange and strained relationship he had with his parents. He had developed a kind of claustrophobia related to all of his relatives, and New Haven was the first step toward extricating himself.<sup>76</sup> But by now it was proving to be not far enough. Finally, it was his own 4-F status and the constant reminders that

his peers were defending the country in Africa, the Pacific and across the world, and he was still in Connecticut. Worse, his peers were dying. He later said he couldn't stand to look into the eyes of mothers whose sons had been killed or maimed in the war. He knew they were looking at him, thinking "Why is my son dead while that Murray boy is still walking around the streets of Hartford?"<sup>77</sup>

Murray stayed in New Haven and worked Christmas day. He covered two house fires, one fatal, an auto accident, and traffic on Broadway Street. On December 29, 1943, he reported on his first and last real murder that would find its way into the pages of the *Register*. James Streeto, the caretaker of the Boxwood Manor Summer Resort in Old Lyme, Connecticut, 15 miles up the coast from New Haven, had been stabbed, shot and bludgeoned with a blunt-force instrument. His sweetheart, Miss Delphine Betrand, said three unidentified youths had done the deed, but she was being held in New London County Jail as a suspect. "A Triumph!" Murray wrote in his journal. "I scooped the AP on this." He had been tipped off by Edward Hickey, the Connecticut State Police Commissioner, an "old friend of the family." Murray wrote:

State Police found Streeto already dead, lying in a pool of blood half out of the kitchen door on the floor of the closed-in rear porch. Blood streaks on both the kitchen door and the rear porch door, just short of where he fell, led to the belief he may have been attempting to grope his way out of the building when death struck him. Veteran police investigators described it as a particularly "vicious" killing and ventured the belief that intense hatred must have driven the assailants.<sup>78</sup>

It was, hands down, his bloodiest story yet.<sup>79</sup> And it was good practice for where he would end up next, a newspaper where blood was expected and appreciated, where, in fact, the editors shouted through the newsroom for reporters to pour on the blood in buckets. The year 1943 in New Haven had closed with a deadly flourish, and Murray had only three more days during which he could call the state of Connecticut his home.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> State of Connecticut, Bureau of Vital Statistics, *Birth Certificate*, Dec. 29, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Allen, interview by author, Feb. 12, 2009. The history of the Murray family in Tobbercurry was compiled by genealogical researchers at the behest of Allen. Allen, Jim Murray's grand nephew, has travelled to the region several times and maintained a relationship with members of the Murray family still living in Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Murray, "Only Irish Need Read," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-25.

<sup>7</sup> Obituary of Michael F. Murray, *Hartford Courant*, May 17, 1934.

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Weaver, *Hartford: An Illustrated History of Connecticut's Capital* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982), 80-81, 116.

<sup>9</sup> This account comes from genealogical research done at the behest Matt Allen. The Hartford, Connecticut, City Directory lists a Hartford address for the Murrays in 1900 and 1910. By 1930, the directory lists them as living in West Hartford.

<sup>10</sup> Obituary of Bridget A. Murray, *Hartford Courant*, August 23, 1934.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> United States Government, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Hartford, Connecticut, 1920, series T625, Roll 183, Page 164.

<sup>13</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Winkler Weinberg, interview by author, February 2009.

<sup>15</sup> United States Government, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Hartford, Connecticut, 1920, series T625, Roll 183, Page 164.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> "Arrest Druggist as Delaney's Aid: James P. Murray Stored Liquor and Sold Liquor, Police Assert," *Hartford Courant*, Jan 13, 1922.

<sup>18</sup> "Druggist Murray Sentenced to Jail," *Hartford Courant*, January 29, 1922. James Murray gave notice of appeal and furnished bond of \$1,200 at the time. The *Courant* did not report further on the case, so the question remains as to whether the appeal was heard and whether Murray served the sentence. James Murray would work for other pharmacists to earn a living for the rest of his life, in addition to other jobs. On his application for admission to Trinity College in 1939, Jim Murray listed his father's occupation as factory worker.

<sup>19</sup> Carol Hamel, interview by author, January 29, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Marie Hewins, interview by author, January 24, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

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- <sup>22</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Jim Murray, *The Sporting World of Jim Murray* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1968), 32-33.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>25</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 7.
- <sup>26</sup> Jim Murray, "Uncle Ed Would Be A Proud Name Dropper," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1990. Murray wrote this column on the occasion of the first running of the Jim Murray Handicap at Hollywood Park in Los Angeles.
- <sup>27</sup> Marie Hewins, interview by author, January 24, 2008.
- <sup>28</sup> Murray, *The Sporting World*, 34.
- <sup>29</sup> Eric Sandburg, interview by author, November 14, 2008.
- <sup>30</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> James and Mary Murray, letter to Jim Murray, September 24, 1957.
- <sup>32</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008. Suppicich said Jim's mother traveled to visit Jim in California about four times between 1943, when Jim moved West, until 1968 when she died.
- <sup>33</sup> Eric Sandburg, interview by author, November 14, 2008.
- <sup>34</sup> Rose D'Ambrosia, interview by author, February, 2008.
- <sup>35</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.
- <sup>36</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.
- <sup>37</sup> Eric Sandburg, interview by author, November 14, 2008.
- <sup>38</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Dr. Winkler Weinberg, interview by author, February 2009.
- <sup>40</sup> Carol Hamel, interview by author, January 29, 2008. Jim's grandparents died in 1934 and his Aunt Peg, whose married name was Margaret Foley, assumed the role of primary caretaker for Jim.
- <sup>41</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 3.
- <sup>42</sup> Rose D'Ambrosia, interview by author, February, 2008.
- <sup>43</sup> Jim Murray, unpublished, undated manuscript, 1. This manuscript appears to be the first three pages of an autobiographical piece.
- <sup>44</sup> Richard Patrissi, interview by author, January 7, 2008. Joey Patrissi served in the Army Air Corps in Panama during World War II. He died at age 42.
- <sup>45</sup> Jim Murray, *Murray*, 12-13. Murray may have misremembered when he actually saw Ruth hit the home run. In his autobiography, and in his column, he sets the date for the game as Labor Day, 1933. On that day, the Yankees did

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indeed play a double header against the A's, but Ruth did not hit a home run. He played in the first game and sat out the night cap, in which Lou Gehrig hit a game winning home run.

<sup>46</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> James Murray, Application for Admission, Trinity College, January 17, 1939.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education, A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 247-248.

<sup>49</sup> Trinity College, "College History," <http://www.trincoll.edu/AboutTrinity/CollegeHistory.htm> (accessed March 19, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> As a campus correspondent for the *Times*, Murray worked for City Editor Max Farber. He remembered Farber telling him that newspapers were palladiums of democracy. "I was mightily impressed – as soon as I looked up 'palladium,' which I had associated in my mind more with Benny Goodman than the Hartford Times," Murray wrote.

<sup>52</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Jim Murray, unpublished, undated manuscript, 1-2. This manuscript appears to be the first three pages of an autobiographical piece.

<sup>54</sup> Carol Hamel, interview by author, January 29, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> *Trinity Ivy*, (Hartford, Connecticut: Trinity College, 1943), 33.

<sup>56</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Parrish, ed., *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopedia of World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 560.

<sup>58</sup> Nebraska Studies, "Recruits – The 4-F Classification," [http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/frameset\\_reset.html?http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/0801\\_0106.html](http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/frameset_reset.html?http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/0801_0106.html) (accessed, March 19, 2009).

<sup>59</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> "War News Summarized," *The New York Times*, May 16, 1943.

<sup>61</sup> "Hitler Gives Himself His Job Indefinitely," *The New York Times*, May 16, 1943.

<sup>62</sup> Headlines from page 1, *The New York Times*, May 16, 1943.

<sup>63</sup> "60 Seniors Graduated by Trinity: Masters Degree Given to Nine at Commencement Program; Local Men in Group Honored," *Hartford Courant*, May 16, 1943.

<sup>64</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.

<sup>65</sup> "Heat Creates Great Demand for Ice Cream: Sabbath Business Exhausts Supplies of Most Parlors at 6 P.M.," *New Haven Register*, June 22, 1943.

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<sup>66</sup> “Gun Carriers At Dice Game Fined, Jailed,” *New Haven Register*, 1943.

<sup>67</sup> Jim Murray, unpublished, undated manuscript, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Murray also sold a 13-line brief titled “Seeks Apartment of Suicide 5 Minutes After Her Death” to the *Bridgeport Sunday Herald*, a local weekly facetiously called “The Bible” because the locals would buy it on the way home from church. For this story, Murray received \$1. The story is about a New Haven resident who called to inquire about an apartment vacancy immediately after the apartment’s resident had committed suicide. The landlord had alerted the police.

<sup>69</sup> “Army vs. Yale,” *New Haven Register*, October 24, 1943.

<sup>70</sup> Eleanor Welch, *Time* magazine, to Jim Murray, August 18, 1943. “Thank you for your piece on candidate Odell. Since his is so far a one-man campaign, we could not use it. However, if he indulges in any more high jinks and becomes more of a public figure, let us know,” Welch wrote.

<sup>71</sup> “Two Men Held in Wooster St. Shooting Fray: Feud Boils Over Into Gunplay – No One Hurt,” *New Haven Register*, November 14, 1943. The shooter in this case was James “Fats” Gambardella, who fired his automatic weapon at Roco Candella after a dispute over the setting up of a clothesline.

<sup>73</sup> “Third Person Involved in Wife Beating: Curtis Gives Version of Assault As Victim Takes Turn for the Worse,” *New Haven Register*, December 4, 1943.

<sup>74</sup> \$400,000 Loss In Broadway Fire: 13 Business Places Ruined During the Night,” *New Haven Register*, December 24, 1943.

<sup>75</sup> Will Fowler, *Reporters: Memoirs of a Young Newspaperman*, (Malibu, CA: Roundtable Publishing, 1991), 115-116.

<sup>76</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.

<sup>78</sup> “Clinton woman Now Suspected In Man’s Death: State Police Commissioner Reports Miss Betrand on ‘Definite’ List,” *New Haven Register*, December 30, 1943. On March 17, 1944, when Murray was two months into his job at the *Los Angeles Examiner*, he received a letter from Connecticut State Police chief Leo Carroll. “Well it is lots of work, but remember this always, that if it were not for this violent and untimely death, your path and mine would not have crossed,” Carroll wrote. (Leo F. Carroll to Jim Murray, March 17, 1944.)

<sup>79</sup> Delphine Betrand pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of manslaughter and was sentenced to 10 to 15 years in Prison on April 11, 1944. She admitted to shooting James Streeto and bludgeoning him with the butt of the pistol after Streeto told her he would not marry her, as he had previously promised. (“Woman Gets 10-15 Years In Slaying,” *Hartford Courant*, April 12, 1944.)

CHAPTER 3  
THE *LOS ANGELES EXAMINER* YEARS, 1944-1947

**California Dreamin’**

So like the forty-niners, the Joad Family and the Brooklyn Dodgers, Jim Murray succumbed to the great golden dream of California and pointed a course West. Los Angeles held the allure of mystery and opportunity. It was, Murray would find, a place where you could slice away your past and remake yourself, find a new identity and place a stake in fresh, unmarked territory. It offered endless sun, a topography that, to an Easterner, felt as exotic as the Moon, and exploding growth that was just waiting to be exploited. Just 20 years before, Los Angeles had been little more than a blip on the United States Census. Between 1920 and 1940, the city’s population nearly tripled, reaching more than 1.5 million people in 1940, with nearly 2.8 million in the County of Los Angeles. The decade of the 1940s would continue the expansion, and by 1950 the city’s population would top 1.9 million.<sup>1</sup>

Murray had been planning his exodus for some months, and set the end of the year as his launch date. On January 2, 1944, he took the money he had saved from his 7-month tenure at the *New Haven Register* and a few suit cases, went down to the station in Hartford and boarded a steam train bound for Los Angeles. He also brought along a list of contacts at Los Angeles newspapers and wire services that he had compiled while at the *Register*. Murray was embarking on a trip that would take him beyond the boundaries of the Northeast for the first time in his life. To this point, he had been to New York City and Boston, spent some time at his Uncle’s home in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and taken a few rides on the Hoboken Ferry in New Jersey, but that was the extent of his travel. The rails during the war years were overloaded with

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 403.

military personnel, and Murray's train was no different. Around Chicago, he struck up a conversation with a uniformed female traveler, but the stares of male GIs, which Murray interpreted as ominous and slightly threatening, ended the relationship before it began. But the euphoria of discovery was thick, and Murray years later remembered the excitement of the journey. "He told me he went through the town of Rancho Cucamonga as they were approaching Los Angeles, and he loved the name, and the names of the other Southern California towns; they were so lyrical. The windows were down, and he could smell the orange blossoms. He thought he had died and gone to heaven," said Linda McCoy-Murray, Murray's second wife.<sup>2</sup>

When he got to Los Angeles, the euphoria of adventure wore off as he began to realize that he had no job and only \$106 to his name. His first stop was the Los Angeles bureau of the Associated Press. Bureau chief Hub Keavy was already aware of him after the recommendation from his colleague, but no position was available at the time.<sup>1</sup> Murray had a list of contacts in the city, including the City News Service, the *Los Angeles Herald Express*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Los Angeles Examiner*, but no personal connections at those outlets, and had no success.<sup>2</sup> Murray rented a room in Ocean Park, a small, neighborhood in the Southwest corner of Santa Monica that in those days was populated mostly by Jewish immigrants.<sup>3</sup> He went to see Keavy again and received the same response, but this time Keavy put in a call to Bud Lewis at the *Times*. Lewis told Murray to come back a week from Thursday, but Murray knew he would be flat broke by then. With desperation creeping in, he went back to Keavy at AP.

"I hate to do this to you, kid, but go down to see Jim Richardson at the *Examiner*," Keavy told him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.

Murray did as told. On a bright, 80-degree Los Angeles day, he showed up at the *Examiner* office wearing a rust-colored overcoat, wing-tipped shoes, a button-down collar and a vest.

Richardson pegged him for a fresh East Coast transplant immediately.

“Do you know where City Hall is?” he demanded.

“No,” said Murray.

“Do you know where the FBI is?” Richardson asked.

“No,” said Murray.

“Do you even know where Figueroa Street is, for cryin’ out loud?” Richardson barked, his anger rising.

“No,” said Murray.

Richardson threw his pencil down.

“Well, can you write?”

“Oh, Mr. Richardson,” Murray said. “I can write like a son of a bitch.”

Richardson hired Murray on the spot and told him he could start the very next morning.

Murray enthusiastically accepted, and asked Richardson for an advance on his salary.<sup>5</sup>

So fortuitously, Murray was to start his Los Angeles newspaper career at the *Examiner*, a crime and scandal-fueled Hearst broadsheet instead of the *Times*, which at that time was a stodgy Republican rag that existed mostly to put forth the anti-unionist sentiment of publisher Harry Chandler. Los Angeles in 1944 was a thriving newspaper market with four dailies competing for the ever-expanding readership. There was the *Los Angeles Daily News*, an evening paper which had been founded by Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. in 1923 as a clean alternative to the scandal sheets of the day but by 1944 had evolved into the city’s only Democratic voice. There was the *Los Angeles Evening Herald & Express*, an afternoon tabloid that reveled in sensationalism and was

used as a model for Hollywood movies of the day that depicted yellow journalism. There was Chandler's *Times*, which stayed above the fray, and in doing so had made itself a regular presence on the "worst American newspapers" list. And, finally, there was the *Examiner*, William Randolph Hearst's favorite paper, and the city's leading newspaper since the turn of the century.<sup>6</sup>

By the time Murray joined the chain, the Hearst brand was firmly established in American journalism. Indeed, the term "yellow journalism" came from an early Hearst comic strip, "The Yellow Kid," and entered the lexicon as a way to describe Hearst's revolutionary approach to newspapering. William Randolph Hearst had been born into wealth. His father, George Hearst, had set out to pan for gold in 1850 and had made a fortune mining the Pacific Coast for gold, silver and copper. In 1887, at the age of 23, young William persuaded his father, then a U.S. Senator, to let him run the *San Francisco Examiner*, which George Hearst had acquired against a bad debt. W.R. Hearst began to develop his populist style of journalism, which relied on flashy headlines, color comics, gossip and a healthy dose of jingoism. He quickly doubled the circulation of the *San Francisco Examiner*, and then set his sights on New York. He bought the floundering *New York Morning Journal* and promptly raided the staff of Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, then the leading paper in the city.<sup>7</sup> Hearst spent lavishly and led his papers into crusades, most famously fanning the flames of American outrage with headlines and editorials that eventually pointed the country on the course toward the Spanish American War.<sup>8</sup> During the next three decades, he built a media empire that by 1935 included 28 newspapers, 13 magazines, eight radio stations, two motion-picture companies and assorted other real estate and mining entities that together was worth \$220 million. At that time, his corporation employed 31,000 people.<sup>9</sup>

In 1904, Hearst had been elected to the United States House of Representative, and he quickly launched a candidacy for president. It was as another outlet to get his message to potential Democratic Party voters that Hearst started the *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1904.<sup>10</sup> The *Examiner* rapidly rode the Hearst formula to the position of No. 1 morning newspaper in Los Angeles. In the 1940s, the newspaper had the highest circulation in the West, but it was a day-to-day, edition-to-edition battle for supremacy that had editors, reporters and photographers engaging in anything short of outright crime to gain an edge over the competition. Editors thought nothing of sending staff members into competing newsrooms to surreptitiously steal news pages to get a jump on a story. Reporters regularly blackmailed or bribed police captains and government officials in order to get exclusive information. A favorite practice among photographers and reporters was stealing pictures out of the homes of the families of crime and disaster victims.<sup>11</sup> “In the old days, the competition was fierce,” said Melvin Durslag, an *Examiner* sports reporter when Murray joined the staff. “We used to do all we could think of to get a scoop. We used to fight each other like dogs for stories.”<sup>12</sup>

And at the forefront of the daily pursuit of the sensational was Jim Richardson, once famously called “the last of the terrible men.”<sup>13</sup> Richardson was a bellowing, blustering terror on reporters, editors and photographers given to thunderous outbursts when he felt his staff wasn’t upholding his standards of cutthroat journalism. Many of these outbursts concluded with a firing. Richardson had started in Los Angeles newspapers in 1913, when, on a family vacation, he witnessed the collapse of the Long Beach auditorium. He left the volunteers helping the dead and maimed and called the story into the *Los Angeles Herald*, fighting off the injured and rescuers so he could keep the phone line open and deliver the entire scoop to the paper.<sup>14</sup> From there, he fought, lied and backstabbed his way to the top of the Los Angeles reporter pool, and became the

youngest city editor in the Hearst chain. He lasted only a few months before embarking on a decade of hopping from job to job, bottle to bottle, and wife to wife (there were four of them.) He awoke from a bender in a Japanese whorehouse on Christmas morning 1936, and looked around at the dank, depressing room trying to remember where he was.<sup>15</sup> He never drank again, and in 1937 began his second tenure as the *Examiner* city editor. This run would last 20 years.<sup>16</sup> During those years he drove himself and his staff to insanity, throwing tantrums related to the most important of stories and the most inconsequential of briefs. He ran through a string of assistant city editors, who were forced to sit at the desk next to him and take the brunt of his fury. One after another either slipped into alcoholism or left the business entirely.<sup>17</sup> Richardson was despised by a great many of those who worked under him during his tenure, and Murray had his share of dust-ups with his boss. The two remained friends well after Murray left the *Examiner*, however. “You have to salute Richardson on one big point: it was never dull,” Murray wrote 10 years after leaving the paper. “In fact, it was fun to work for him.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Life in the Big City**

The morning after his impromptu hiring, Murray dutifully reported for work at the *Examiner* office at Broadway and 11<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Los Angeles, a five-story, cream colored stucco building with an enormous American flag flying over it. The structure took up an entire city block, and on street level, passersby could view the *Examiner*'s huge black presses whirring away. The building had a small elevator, but reporters normally climbed the 38-stair marble staircase up to the opaque doors with the words “CITY ROOM” in large block type.<sup>19</sup> The difference between coming to work in the sleepy newsroom of the *Register* in the one-newspaper town of New Haven and the nerve center of a Hearst newspaper was shocking. The *Examiner* City Room housed more than 100 staffers, including city side, the sports department, the copy desk, the rewrite desk, the art department and the society department. Dozens of

Remington and Royal typewriters clacked away in the area called “the bullpen,” which housed reporters and rewrite men. Editors yelled “copy!” while copyboys ran paper from desk to desk. The tension level in the City Room would gradually increase throughout the day, and by late afternoon, it would reach a boiling point, said Joe Santley, a writer on the rewrite desk in the ’40s. “About deadline time, for the first edition, the damn place was a mass of smoke. There was pipe smoke, cigar smoke, cigarettes; the second hand smoke was as bad as a 4-alarm fire,” Santley said.<sup>20</sup>

Richardson showed no quarter on new reporters. Once, he barked at a cub reporter to get out on an interview. The cub stopped at his desk to leaf through the phone book. Richardson stared through him with his one good eye (he lost the other one in a sling-shot accident when he was 7).

‘What the hell are you doing?’ he demanded.

“Looking up the address,” the reporter stuttered.

“Never mind the address,” Richardson yelled. “Get the hell out there!”<sup>21</sup>

Richardson had a series of initiation rites which every new reporter was required to go through. He would send each newbie on a bogus meatpacking story at a slaughter house, so they would be exposed to blood and organs; they would cover a gory car wreck; they would be required to watch an autopsy be performed; and, in a task that would prove most psychologically damaging to the reporters, they would have to take liquor-drenched dictation from the Hearst movie columnist Louella O. Parsons.<sup>22</sup>

Murray started out like any other greenhorn, writing obituaries and two-graph fire stories (some of which would have made the front page at the *Register*.) He was put through Richardson’s initiation rituals like any other new hire. On March 4, 1944, he got his chance to

interpret Parsons drunken gibberish, an interpretation which would run coast-to-coast throughout the Hearst chain and beyond. “Some time in late November, Loretta Young and Lieutenant Colonel Tom Lewis will welcome the stork, and if there are any two people happier in the world I haven’t met them,” he typed.<sup>23</sup>

Murray seemed to survive the phone call, but it was one of his very first *Examiner* stories that left a deeper impression on his psyche. Richardson sent him to report on the story of six-year-old Margaret Wade, whose leg was amputated after she was hit by a car. The fact that the girl’s father witnessed the accident raised the drama level enough for Richardson to devote eight inches of column space to it. Murray wrote:

The child was returning from Huntington Drive School, where she is a second-grader. She saw her father leaving for work and ran across the street to meet him.

She may never run again.

Her left leg was amputated at General Hospital while her agonized parents waited in a ward corridor. She had been struck by a car driven by Mrs. Magda Singleton, 73, of 917 Locust Street, Pasadena, and carried under its hurtling wheels for 140 feet before they came to rest against a pole.

Mr. Wade, whose unhappy task it was to pick up his child’s broken body, was bitter: “They sent the child home alone at 10 a.m. to get a written excuse for the previous day’s absence,” he said.<sup>24</sup>

After he finished his shift, Murray took the \$8 he had remaining from his first paycheck (his starting salary was \$38 a week), and spent it on toys for Margaret. He brought the toys to General Hospital, where he was told by the nurses on duty that he’d have to take them back. I’m with the *Examiner*, he told them. “Take these to Margaret, or I’ll bring the power of the press down on you.”<sup>25</sup>

When he wasn’t being put through psychological gymnastics by Richardson, Murray got to savor one of the rewards of Los Angeles journalism, at least for one night. One the night of March 2, 1944, Murray got the plum assignment of covering the Academy Awards. As he did at

the Yale Bowl a few months earlier, he tagged along to save somebody else from the menial task of writing captions. Murray's interest in movies reached far back into childhood. Back in Hartford, he spent many hours at the Rivele Theater taking in Hollywood's latest features. His early infatuation with journalism had much to do with the foreign correspondents portrayed in the Hollywood noir films of the 1930s. He loved the movies of Ronald Coleman, David Niven, and any other actor who would put on a trench coat and carry a Luger on screen.<sup>26</sup> At this time in his career and for years forward, he harbored dreams of writing for the stage and the screen.<sup>27</sup> At the *New Haven Register*, he had been allowed to take a shot at the Hollywood beat, which consisted of writing synopses of the films that were opening that week at the cinemas in the New Haven area. He previewed the films of '40s Hollywood icons Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, men who would become the subjects of his profiles a decade later, and his close friends a decade after that.<sup>28</sup> New Haven's Paramount Theatre even pulled quotes from Murray's stories and added them to their advertisements. "Deanna was never better – J. Murray, Register" read an ad for the Deanna Durbin-Joseph Cotton film "Hers to Hold." (Murray's future Hearst colleague Louella Parsons is quoted further down the ad display.) And Hollywood was still on his mind when he made the decision to come West. Before leaving for Los Angeles, he asked one of his professors at Trinity to write him a letter of recommendation to bring to Hollywood screenwriter Alan Scott:

The bearer of this note of introduction, James Murray, is a Trinity graduate of the class of 1943. He distinguished himself at Trinity through his writing and as a good and reflective student. His ambition is to be a scenario writer and I thought it worthwhile to introduce him to you, who has made such a good success in your chosen field. If you can be of help to Murray I shall appreciate it as a personal favor.<sup>29</sup>

The Academy Awards ceremony Murray covered in 1944 was the first one in which the festivities moved from a banquet to a theater setting. The event, which originated in 1936, had grown in stature as the movie industry in Los Angeles increased in reach and influence. That

year, it was moved to the Grauman's Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard. Murray joined a crowd of more than 2,000 and watched as "Casablanca" scored the best movie and best director awards.<sup>30</sup> Photos of best actress Jennifer Jones, a 24-year-old first-time actress who starred in "The Song of Bernadette" and screen veteran Paul Lukas, star of "Watch on the Rhine," ran in the March 3 *Examiner*, with Murray's captions telling the glamorous story.<sup>31</sup> Less than three months removed from stringing together film capsules for the *Register*, he was roaming the same theater as Ingrid Bergman, Humphrey Bogart, Rosalind Russell, Greer Garson and the many other top screen superstars of the day.

### **Of Passion and Crime and Greed**

Richardson ran off many a cub reporter, but Murray proved immediately to be an asset to the *Examiner*, and the primary reason was the very skill he promised his boss at his interview: deftness with the language. However dedicated Richardson was to getting the ultimate scoop, he was equally dedicated to purple prose that he felt made news stories sing and Hearst newspapers fly off the racks. He was always looking for writers who could turn a run-of-the-mill story into a masterpiece with one glorious lead. Once, Richardson pulled a story of the Associated Press wire about a devastating tornado that had hit a small town in Kansas in the middle of the night. The first sentence read: "The little town of Koming, Kansas, died in its sleep last night." Richardson became apoplectic with excitement and made it his personal mission to find and hire the writer of the lead. He found him a few months later on the copy desk of a Chicago paper and brought him to the *Examiner*.<sup>32</sup>

Richardson demanded the lead of each and every story be given the Hearst treatment. It was a lesson he had learned three decades before, during his first days as a reporter for the *Los Angeles Herald*. He had written a story about a court appearance by a woman who had been arrested for public drunkenness. An older *Herald* reporter who had taken an interest in

Richardson looked over his shoulder and offered his advice. “You’ve got to put a hop on them like a pitcher puts a hop on his fastball,” the reporter told him. “Of course we’re sensational. So is life. Remember that. The Bible’s sensational and so is everything else worth reading.”<sup>33</sup>

Murray quickly proved to have the chops to write for Richardson. The straight news leads that appeared on his briefs during his first few weeks quickly morphed into Hearst-style nuggets that earned him praise in the newsroom. When he was given a throwaway assignment about a Pasadena woman who killed herself unexpectedly out-of-town, Murray spiced it up enough to earn him 15 inches of column space:

Born unwanted – and dead by mistake. That was the official version yesterday which Chicago authorities put upon the tragic suicide of Miss Virginia Thompson, beautiful Pasadena girl who poisoned herself in her fiancé’s apartment there Tuesday in the apparently mistaken belief that she had lost his love.<sup>34</sup>

The *Examiner’s* editors awarded a weekly and monthly prize for the best written story, and Murray quickly began accumulating the \$25 and \$50 war bonds that came with winning the awards. In June, he won story of the month when he covered the downward spiral of actress Frances Farmer, who had gone from leading roles in A-list films to debilitating mental illness:

Frances Farmer lost her way yesterday on the road back to fame and riches in Hollywood. She reached the end of the road – not in the glittering palaces of filmland’s greats where she once contributed such a rich and warming heritage, but in a grimy dusty jail cell in Antioch, California, where the listing “vagrant” hung like a tarnished ornament on her famous name.

She was tattered, destitute – clad in blue dungarees and denim shirt, nervous, irritable, “a strange light” in her eyes.<sup>35</sup>

In July, Murray won the best written story award again for his coverage of a blind man who regained sight after experimental surgery. (Murray would have a similar experience himself 45 years later.) By now, some of his stories were receiving bylines, a sign of privilege among the *Examiner* staff. He wrote:

Blind for 30 years, and then –

“I looked up and there was a tree – the most beautiful thing in the world.”

Simply, in a voice devoid of emotion, William Firber described a miracle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a century in which wise men have said a miracle couldn’t occur. He thinks he’s going to be able to see again.<sup>36</sup>

Murray continued to monopolize the awards. Within six months of joining the *Examiner*, he was promoted to the rewrite desk, and for a time was the youngest rewrite man in the entire Hearst chain. The promotion of a relative newcomer so angered fellow rewrite man Reggie Taverner that he quit the staff, calling Murray “Richardson’s bobo.”<sup>37</sup> Newspapers in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had a rewrite desk, separate from the copy desk, where the newspaper staff’s best writers would take information from reporters, sometimes called legmen, and organize and improve them to prepare the stories for publication. A good rewrite man was difficult to find, and promotion to the rewrite desk would lead to a salary increase of at least \$5 a week.<sup>38</sup> The duties of a staffer on the rewrite battery would vary. About half of the time, they would man the desk and rework the stories of other reporters, often called in from the field. The other half of the time, Richardson or an assistant city editor would send them out on their own assignments.<sup>39</sup>

One downside of taking the promotion and the extra \$5 a week was the fact that as a rewrite man, one would spend a great deal more time within close range of Richardson’s wrath. Murray was now in the line of fire. Once, Richardson handed Murray the story of an unknown bum who had hanged himself in a skid-row fleabag motel. Murray didn’t think it was worth a story, but he wrote it straight: “John Jefferson, 51, was found dead in his room at the Hotel Barclay yesterday. Police dubbed it a suicide.” He handed it over to Richardson.

“No, we need something with a little more oomph in it,” Richardson said.

Murray thought he was kidding. “Oh, come on,” he said with a laugh. He rewrote the lead twice more and each time Richardson handed it back to him and glared.

Finally, Murray thought “What the hell? I’ll give him what he’s asking for.” He wrote: “John Jefferson, 68, at the Barkley Street Hotel yesterday knotted a light cord around his neck and stepped off a chair into eternity.”

He handed it to Richardson.

Richardson looked at it, laughed, and threw it in the waste basket. He told Murray, “OK, go down to Gallagher’s and have a beer.”

The incident inspired another *Examiner* rewrite man, Johnny Reese, to write a poem that would later be published and displayed by the Los Angeles Press Club, entitled “Jim Richardson’s Rewrite Man”:

The rewrite man was writing the death  
Of a miserable Skid Row whore  
From the after effects of a drinking bout  
Some two or three weeks before.

The facts were simple and dull and brief  
And he had it almost done  
When suddenly came the raucous voice  
Of James H. Richardson.

“On that murder case,” the Great Man said,  
“You can give it lots of play  
“Go into the mystery angle, too,  
For we’re short of news today.”

The rewrite man gave a startled cry  
At the mention of mystery.  
And round-eyed, turned to the desk and said:  
“Were you addressing ME?”

“Of course,” said the Man, and his voice grew thick,  
“Some merciless sadist slew  
“This innocent child of East Fifth Street  
“Tho’ he probably loved her, too.

“Get into your lead that a ghastly smile  
“Was pitiful on her face;  
“And in saying how she was slain, hark back to  
“The the Peete and Denton case.

“And somewhere high in your story tell  
“Of the marijuana ring  
“That made this maid in the seventh grade  
“A wretched, besotted thing.

“Oh, yes, in your opening sentence quote  
“MacArthur on the Flag,  
“Ignoring the coroner calling her  
“A syphilitic bag.

“Write wistfully of the cocktail glass  
“That broke as her body fell.  
“The artist will alter the photograph  
“Of the gallon of muscatel.

“Mention a wilted yellow rose  
“To tincture it with romance,  
“And refer somewhere to an evening gown,  
“Forgetting she wore no pants.

“The barroom bum she was living with,  
“We’ll call her mystery man.  
“And try to mention the Japanese  
“And the Communists if you can.

“Get excited about the drama here  
“Of passion and crime and greed.  
“Write a good objective story, and  
“Get all of this in your lead.

“Give me a take as soon as you can;  
“I want to give it a look.  
“But don’t start in till you’ve got the facts.  
“... And hold it to half a book.”

The rewrite man, with a ghastly leer  
That the Great Man didn’t see,  
Started again, and finished at last  
At twenty five after three.

The climax came the following week.  
He was gratified to set  
The prize for the finest writing to

Appear in the overset.

#### MORAL

It served the bastard right, of course,  
As philosophers will note,  
For being a rewrite man at all  
When he could have slit his throat.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 3-1. Jim Murray removed hail from the windshield of a car in the winter of 1944, shortly after moving to Los Angeles and joining the staff of the *Los Angeles Examiner*. The photograph was published in the *Examiner*.

#### Love and marriage

By the summer of 1944, Murray had settled into his role on the rewrite desk and started to adjust to life in Los Angeles. He lived in a rented upstairs room from a family named Quinn in Ocean Park.<sup>41</sup> When commuting to and from work via streetcars proved to be untenable, he saved up his rewrite money and bought a used Pierce Arrow automobile, a large, box-shaped four-door used clunker from the turn-of-the-century car manufacturer that had shut down eight years earlier. The car had a statue of an Indian with a bow and arrow as a radiator cap, and

Murray said “it was the last of that run on the assembly line.”<sup>42</sup> The car was a gas guzzler, and Murray would have to save his gas-ration stamps to get enough fuel for a trip to the beach.

About three months after Murray joined the *Examiner*, another young reporter with Eastern roots, Will Fowler, joined the staff. Fowler was only 21 when he started at the *Examiner* in the spring of '44. He and Murray quickly became close friends. They would develop a lifelong friendship; each would be god parents to the other's children. Fowler joined the *Examiner* after a 2-year stint in the Coast Guard. He had enlisted on July 4, 1942, and after two successful convoys in which his unit sunk Japanese submarines, he had developed a high fever. Doctors discovered that the illness had caused a hole in his lung, and in 1944 he was medically discharged and ready to begin a newspaper career that for Fowler had been a foregone conclusion.<sup>43</sup>

Fowler was destined for the newspaper business, and more specifically the Hearst chain. His father, Gene Fowler, was newspaper royalty, a legend among Hearst men. During the heyday of Jazz Age celebrity journalism, Gene Fowler was a household name who counted among his friends the biggest names of the day, from writers such as Runyon, Lardner, Winchell and Rice to athletes and sporting celebrities such as Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey and John McGraw. He had grown up in Denver during the last years of the Wild West. He drifted into journalism; during a college course he took on the subject, his professor shared the old journalism cliché that a dog biting a man isn't news, but the opposite is. Gene got the point, turning in a sample headline that read “Hydrant Wets Dog.” He went professional and made his reputation at Hearst's *Denver Republic*, where he offered his home to an out-of-work, ragged Jack Dempsey years before the fighter became known to the world as the Manassas Mauler and heavyweight champion of the world.<sup>44</sup> Fowler had made his way East, first in Chicago, then coming to New York. He

famously demanded a \$100 weekly salary from Hearst to come aboard the staff at the *New York American* when the going rate at that time, 1918, was \$35 weekly. “If the young man from Denver places that value on his services, then he must be worth it,” Hearst said.<sup>45</sup> He became the youngest managing editor of a metropolitan newspaper at the *American*. After a decade of New York newspaper exploits, much of it as a sportswriter, Fowler moved his son Will and his family west to Hollywood, where he became a top author and highly paid screenwriter. His circle of friends included W.C. Fields, John Barrymore, and Jimmy Durante, the latter two of whom he penned best selling biographies.<sup>46</sup>

Gene Fowler was a childhood idol of Murray’s, as he was for thousands of young men who idealized the world of 1920s journalism. Will, named William Randolph after the Chief, was born in 1922. His father devoted his time to newspapers rather than fatherhood, but as a teenager Will served as a designated driver for his father, and used it as an opportunity to develop relationships with his father’s famous friends. He was particularly close with Fields, whom he referred to as Uncle Claude. Fowler’s first *Examiner* byline would be Fields’ obituary, actually written by his father and phoned into the *Examiner* city desk.<sup>47</sup> In the summer of 1944, he and Murray quickly bonded, and along with Joe Santley, Mel Durslag and a few other staffers, they fell into a routine of chasing stories until deadline, and then chasing women and drinks in the bars of Los Angeles after that day’s *Examiner* was put to bed. They frequented the famed Ambassador Hotel and some of the clubs that surrounded it, including an *Examiner* favorite, the Balboa Club, on 12th and Hill Street. At the small club near the Ambassador, they met Nat King Cole, who had just formed the Nat King Cole trio.<sup>48</sup> The city room at the *Examiner* was populated by heavy drinkers, as was the entire profession in that era, and a long day in the newsroom inevitably ended on a bar stool. “In those days, guys drank, and we went to bars.

That's what we did," said Durslag. "I was raised by a bunch of drunks. I started very young on the paper, and I worked with a lot of drunks. They all drank. They kept a fifth in their drawer. The real alcoholic was the guy who kept a half pint in his pocket."

Murray felt comfortable in a bar and adapted easily to the lifestyle. However, his time as a bachelor would be short. In the summer of 1945, Murray stepped into the 575 Club, a small neighborhood bar at 575 South Fairfax, and quickly became infatuated with the girl on the piano. Gerry Brown had come to Los Angeles around the time Murray had. She had grown up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and played the piano through childhood. In Los Angeles, she had landed a job as a medical receptionist, and asked the owner of the 575 Club if she could play for free for customers, to keep her skills fresh. Murray's advances were rejected initially. A short time later, he was on a double date with a friend and two dental hygienists. He excused himself to call the 575 Club, where a friend on the other end told him, "I've got Gerry Brown here expecting you. I've convinced her you were crazy about her but I can't keep her much longer." Murray threw some money on the table, raced out of the restaurant, and piloted his Pierce Arrow through the streets at top speed, arriving as Gerry was leaving. He convinced her to stay that night, and less than a year later convinced her to be his wife. The couple was married in October of 1945 and honeymooned at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, coming home a day early when they ran out of money.<sup>49</sup>

Murray's rewrite desk salary had increased to \$38.50 a week by the time he got married<sup>50</sup>, enough to move him and his new bride into an apartment in Park La Brea. Park La Brea was an enormous new complex built by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company that spread across many blocks in the Miracle Mile section of Los Angeles. It consisted mainly of two-story garden apartments amid rows of green lawns, built specifically to mesh with the surrounding

neighborhoods. Park La Brea's inhabitants ran the gamut of age, race and ethnicity, and its quiet streets allowed for a sheltered urban existence.<sup>51</sup> The Murrays' apartment, located at Sixth and Fairfax Avenue, was very close to the hub of Los Angeles professional sports in 1945, a decade and a half before the major professional leagues would make their way West. Three blocks over, at Third Street and Fairfax, sat Gilmore Field, home of the Hollywood Stars Triple-A baseball franchise. A few blocks to the west was Gilmore Stadium, built in 1934, where the Hollywood Bears minor-league football club played their games, and midget automobiles raced. Also within a few blocks was Pan-Pacific Auditorium, home to the Los Angeles Monarchs ice-hockey team, and also the facility where USC and UCLA played home men's basketball games.

Murray's professional life was still devoted to news, but in his new neighborhood he spent much of his free time attending sporting events and familiarizing himself with the Los Angeles sports scene.<sup>52</sup> And the franchise that had the most character at the time was easily the Hollywood Stars. At that time, the Stars were owned by Bob Cobb, owner of the Brown Derby restaurant chain, a local landmark with its flagship restaurant located at the intersection of Hollywood and Vine. It was here that the who's who of show business regularly showed up to eat, and be seen eating. Cobb had four Derbies in the Los Angeles area, known for their brown dome roofs and the signature dish which he had invented, the Cobb salad. The walls of the Derby were lined with caricatures of Hollywood's biggest stars – having your caricature on Cobb's wall in the 1940s and '50s meant you had ascended to the top of Hollywood's pecking order. Gilmore Field, named for Los Angeles oil barons, had opened in 1939, a single-deck, all-wood stadium with only a few feet between the baselines and the crowd. For night games, which became more common after World War II, the entrance to the field sported a lit movie marquee announcing that evening's competitors. Spectators flocked to see the games (the Stars were first division in

the Pacific Coast League in these years), but also with the hopes of spotting Danny Kaye, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Barbara Stanwyck, Bing Crosby, Gracie Allen, Gary Cooper or some of the other celebrity regulars, some of which doubled as minority investors to the Stars.

Cobb was a showman who took his promotional instincts from the restaurant to the ball field. The team for a time fielded female cheerleaders to excite the crowd. Another season, Cobb decided to do away with uniform pants for the Stars, and replace them with striped shorts.<sup>53</sup> One opening day, Cobb had paper-mache stars placed at each position in the field, and as each regular was announced to the crowd, they would leap through the stars.<sup>54</sup>

Murray spent a lot of time at Gilmore Field and at the other venues when he could. Newlywed life, however, didn't last very long. The Murray's first child, Theodore (named for Boston Red Sox slugger Ted Williams), was born in July of 1946, the same week that millionaire aviator Howard Hughes crashed his experimental plane into a Hollywood mansion. Murray remembered this period in his life as idyllic; he was free to perfect his craft while Gerry devoted herself to the family. In the newsroom, Murray was still consistently winning the *Examiner's* best story awards, and he was developing a higher profile as a writer. Writing under the byline James Murray, his name appeared more regularly in the pages of the *Examiner*.

With the end of World War II, the steady population growth of Los Angeles accelerated. "The city of L.A. ... was becoming America's Camelot. Every GI who passed through California couldn't wait to get back. As soon as the war was over, he went back to Omaha, Des Moines or Schenectady, picked up his clothes, and made tracks back to California," Murray wrote.<sup>55</sup> The city was beginning to develop the characteristics that would later define it, and Murray was there to cover it for the *Examiner*. He wrote about the financing and building of the Hollywood Freeway, a mammoth undertaking that would put the city on the road to its auto-centric

personality.<sup>56</sup> He wrote about the air pollution that overtook the city in the 1940s and earned it the reputation as the smog capital of North America. But the *Examiner* paid the bills with crime and passion, and Murray was soon to happen upon a series of stories of that nature that would place his byline on the front page and eventually pave the way for his exit from the world of daily journalism.

### **The Halls of Justice**

Despite the regularity of Richardson's outbursts, Murray normally preferred manning the rewrite desk over accepting assignments that took him out of the office. By 1946, he had some seniority and was occasionally sent on the road for important stories. In February of 1946, he went to Phoenix to cover the divorce trial of wealthy socialite Gioia Gould, heiress and great granddaughter of railroad baron Jay Gould. Gould had married the "short, slightly built Philadelphia socialite" William Grimditch, and the marriage had produced two children. However, while Grimditch was in the army, Gould had come West and fallen in love with wealthy Arizonan Blake Brophy, conveniently recorded it all in a diary, and then let the diary fall into the hands of her jilted husband. Murray wrung all the drama he could out of the trial, of which there was plenty, as Gould wept daily as Grimditch revealed the contents of the diary, and later admitted her love for Brophy on the witness stand.<sup>57</sup> Gould was eventually awarded custody of the children and the unhappy couple parted ways.

The Gould divorce led to Murray's coverage of another trial later in the year, one that made the front pages on both sides of the Atlantic. In October, Murray went to Las Vegas with a team of *Examiner* staffers to cover the trial of Irish war bride Bridget Waters. Waters had married an American Air Force officer named Frank Waters who had been stationed in Ireland during the war. Shortly after the war had ended, Brigit Waters became pregnant. She informed her husband, who promptly announced he wanted nothing to do with the baby or his war bride,

gave her \$50, and left for France. Brigit Waters had the baby, and her husband made his way back to his home state of Nevada, where he met a Las Vegas showgirl named Lucille Griffith. The happy couple decided to marry, and Frank sought a divorce in Las Vegas court. The judge on the case flew Brigit and child across the ocean to contest the divorce. The reunion of the estranged couple was not amicable, and Brigit shot her husband dead with a three-inch pistol while holding the couple's 16-month-old baby in her arms.<sup>58</sup>

The Bridget Waters story rang all the bells in the *Examiner* city room. It had sex, infidelity, passion, murder, and for good measure, a Vegas showgirl. Sensing a story that could hold the attention of Los Angeles for weeks on end, Richardson sent Murray, Fowler and photographer Ferde Olmo to Las Vegas, where the team immediately began following Richardson's guidelines for chasing stories, which always placed the emphasis on scoops and was notoriously light on ethics. Las Vegas was still a tiny outpost in the desert that was just beginning to sprout the casinos and hotels that would blossom in the next decade. Waters was being held at the city's four-cell jail, and Fowler quickly sought out and befriended the city official in charge of the jail, supplying him with whiskey, gambling money, and a "whore so high priced he couldn't turn her down." The next morning, he phoned the official and let him know then that he was a reporter for the *Examiner*. With his increased bargaining power, Fowler secured exclusive rights to photograph and interview Waters behind bars. An Associated Press photographer followed Fowler and Olmo to the jail and managed to get a photo of Waters, but Fowler had the antidote for this problem, too. He broke into the curio shop that AP was using to transmit photographs, disabled their equipment, and then found a pilot to fly him back to Los Angeles with the film, ahead of the competition.<sup>59</sup>

The trial happened to coincide with the opening of the Flamingo Hotel on the burgeoning Las Vegas strip. The Flamingo was the brainchild of Los Angeles gangster Bugsy Siegel. Siegel already had a long and confrontational history with the *Examiner*, thanks to the antagonism of Richardson. Siegel fancied himself a Hollywood insider and sought to distance himself from his mobster past. He let it be known that he didn't like the name Bugsy, which he had earned thanks to his violent temper decades earlier as part of the New York mob. Richardson made it a point to refer to Siegel in print as Bugsy, and when that didn't get enough of a rise out of the mobster, he began to use the introduction "Benjamin 'Don't Call Me Bugsy' Siegel" throughout the *Examiner* news pages.<sup>60</sup> Murray had not crossed paths with Siegel in Los Angeles, so he was meeting him for the first time when he received a personal tour of the still incomplete Flamingo along with a delegation of British reporters in town for the trial. He was struck by Siegel's movie-star good looks, as well as the incredible opulence of the new hotel. Siegel was spending freely of the mob's money, and would be dead within eight months, the victim of a mob-ordered execution in a Hollywood mansion. Murray later surmised that it was the cost overruns at the Flamingo that led to Bugsy's demise.<sup>61</sup>

The Waters trial got underway on October 21, 1946. Murray played up the Western justice angle as the proceedings began: "In this 'last frontier' town where the law of the 'six-gun' is still vividly remembered, Bridget Waters, Irish war bride accused of killing her American husband, indicated today she may rely on that old western defense, 'justifiable homicide.'"<sup>62</sup> The judge seated a jury of "gruff western types,"<sup>63</sup> and the blue-eyed, 26-year-old war bride (as she was repeatedly referred to in the *Examiner*) commenced to do her part to gin up the type of story that Richardson had been hoping for. Waters' lawyer made sure the 18-month-old child, who had been injured in the shooting, was ever present during the proceedings. Waters regularly shrieked

as testimony was read and wept uncontrollably in court, as well as during “exclusive” interviews Murray and Fowler conducted at the Las Vegas jail. Fowler and Olmo pulled off another coup during the trial, securing a photo of Griffith, the showgirl. After Olmo had failed to get a photo of Griffith by roaming the grounds outside her house, Fowler convinced James Young, the Las Vegas Assistant Coroner, that Griffith needed to be present at the trial. Young brought Griffith to the courtroom, which was packed with locals interested in the proceedings. Olmo snapped a photo of her in the crowd. When the other photographers present asked him which woman was Griffith, he pointed to another woman in the crowd. Another scoop had been secured.<sup>64</sup>

The trial continued, highlighted by the presentation of the murder weapon, a three-inch gun that Murray described as “so small it looked like a watch charm.” He wrote: “The fevered flush which has marked her features for the past two days disappeared as her attorney commented when shown the death bullet. ‘I can’t see it, it’s so little.’ Waters brow knitted into a frown as the little nickel-plated revolver with which Frank Waters was killed was placed on the table.”<sup>65</sup> Brigit Waters’ pre-trial sworn testimony had portrayed a murder scene in which she had fired the fatal bullet as Frank Waters kneeled near his child, but in court it morphed into a violent struggle and an accidental shooting, according to the defense description. Either way, both judge and jury bought into Brigit Waters’ version of events and her woman-scorned portrayal. The defense rested and the judge gave the case to the jury on Saturday, November 2 and by Sunday night Waters had been found guilty of a lesser charge, involuntary manslaughter. Five days later, as the cries of her 18-month-old toddler echoed through the Las Vegas courtroom, Judge A.S. Henderson let Waters off with what would turn out to be a 17-month prison stint. “My heart goes out to the defendant and her child. But on behalf of the people of the State of Nevada I feel I must sentence this woman to the state prison,” he said.<sup>66</sup>

Murray would later write that the Bridget Waters trial and outcome prompted the notion that murder was just a misdemeanor in Nevada.<sup>67</sup> The *Examiner* team had been on the offensive throughout the trial, with their competition following days behind. And Murray's byline had been a fixture on the *Examiner* front page for two weeks. On return to the *Examiner* offices, he found himself in that familiar position for a newspaperman back from a road trip: he'd out-spent his expense account. To balance his finances, he decided he had spent the discrepancy, \$99, on cab fare. He turned in his expense report to Richardson, including the cab expenses. Richardson, who had been elated with the coverage, immediately focused on the questionable charge.

"Good God, Murray, didn't you ever walk anywhere?" he screamed. "Ninety-nine dollars! My God, you could spit across the whole town!"<sup>68</sup>

### **We Slept With Our Shoes On**

As the calendar turned to 1947, the *Examiner* was reaching its pinnacle of achievement as a newspaper. It was the circulation leader in burgeoning post-war Los Angeles, and, under Richardson, had such a finely honed news operation that Los Angeles police investigators often came to the *Examiner* for leads on fast-moving cases.<sup>69</sup> The staff was experienced and highly motivated, and they fed off the thrills and bloodlust they found when pursuing crime stories. Durslag was on the sports desk in those years, and remembers watching the news team in action. "Richardson recognized good work when he saw it. That's why the city-side was so good. God, we had some good writers," he said.<sup>70</sup> In the first few months of 1947, they would turn their attention to two of the biggest crime stories in Los Angeles history. One would go down as the city's most sensational slaying ever (until the saga of O.J. Simpson 50 years later). The other would captivate the city for months, and eventually lead to Jim Murray's departure from the *Examiner* staff.

On the morning of January 15, 1947, Fowler and photographer Felix Paegel were returning from reporting a story when they heard on the police scanner that a drunken woman was lying in grass east of Crenshaw Boulevard. When they arrived on the scene, ahead of the police, what they actually saw was the naked body of a young woman. It was in two pieces, having been surgically sliced in half across the middle. Paegel snapped two photos of the body before the police arrived, and the two phoned Richardson and then rushed back to the newsroom with the film. So began the case of The Black Dahlia, and the *Examiner* had been dealt, by luck, a tremendous jump on the story to end all stories.<sup>71</sup> Paegel's photos – one of the body, the other of Fowler kneeling beside it with an *Examiner* peeking out of his jacket pocket – were used on the front of the Extra that the paper published just a few hours later. As Paegel emerged from the darkroom with the dripping wet prints, the city staff gathered around Richardson's desk for a gander. "Take a good look," Richardson said. "This is what you'll all be working on today."<sup>72</sup>

The Black Dahlia case took over Los Angeles and the city's newspapers for the next month. Though the *Examiner* was far ahead from the outset, it was Jack Smith, then a rewrite man for the *Daily News*, who wrote the most memorable lead to the story. (Smith's column would later anchor the *Times* news section during many of the years the Murray's column anchored the *Times* sports page.) He wrote: "The nude body of a beautiful young woman, cut neatly in two at the waist, was found early today on a vacant lot near Crenshaw and Exposition Boulevards." An editor had inserted the word "beautiful," though neither had seen the woman, because, as Smith later said, all dead naked women found in Los Angeles in those years were beautiful.<sup>73</sup>

The *Examiner* was the first to identify the victim, Elizabeth Short, by transmitting her fingerprints to contacts at the FBI in Washington. Short turned out to be the stereotypical

Hollywood murder victim, a young girl from somewhere back East, in this case Medford, Massachusetts, who had come to California in search of stardom. *Examiner* reporters were also the first to find Short's mother, Phoebe Short. Under Richardson's direction, a reporter called Phoebe Short and initially told her that her daughter had won a beauty contest. Then, after all the significant information had been acquired, he told the victim's mother the actual truth.<sup>74</sup>

The story crawled forward fast enough to maintain intense reader and editor interest, but not toward any real conclusion. It turned out Short had a series of boyfriends in the months leading up to the murder. One in particular, Red Manley, became the focus of an intense manhunt by police and reporters, but after much newsprint was exhausted, Manley's alibi checked out. An anonymous tip sent *Examiner* reporters on a hunt for a trunk full of love letters and photos of Short with former boyfriends. The trunk was found at the Greyhound station, unleashing another round of *Examiner* exclusives. Scoops were coming so fast, the *Examiner* began pushing all other news off the front page to page 3. In all, the case remained on the *Examiner* front page for 32 consecutive days.<sup>75</sup> The *Examiner* also ran sidebars to each major scoop, lauding their own work and fermenting the image of the hard-bitten city reporter to the eager public.<sup>76</sup>

For all the effort and manpower devoted to the case, however, an arrest was never made in the Black Dahlia case. Most of the air went out of the story when the key suspect was exonerated. After the story had faded somewhat, the killer mailed an envelope containing the contents of Short's purse to the *Examiner* building. He had also made taunting phone calls to the city desk. Through the years, more than 500 people have confessed to the crime.<sup>77</sup>

What pushed the Black Dahlia completely out of the Los Angeles consciousness was the next big crime drama to enrapture the city. For this one, Murray took a starring role in the

coverage. The case of the Overell Yacht Murders made a far lighter historical footprint, perhaps because it eventually came to a satisfying conclusion, but at the time it drove newspaper circulation and interest even beyond that of the Dahlia case. At its height, copies of the *Examiner*, priced at five cents, were selling on the streets for \$1. “If I am remembered for one thing as a newspaperman,” Richardson wrote, “it should be the Overell case.”<sup>78</sup>

It was “Romeo and Juliet,” set amongst the rich and spoiled of Los Angeles. A young, cocky pre-med student and war hero, George “Bud” Gollum, wanted to marry his girlfriend, Louise Overell, the slightly plump, pampered heir to the Overell furniture fortune. Walter and Beulah Overell didn’t like the idea. Around midnight on March 15, 1947, a tremendous explosion killed the Overells on their yacht, the *Mary B*, which sank in 16 feet of water. The young lovers had dynamited the yacht after beating the Overells to death with a ball peen hammer.

The *Examiner* ran photos on Sunday, but coverage began in earnest on Monday morning. Richardson radioed to Fowler and asked him if he had seen the story in the Sunday edition. Fowler said no. Richardson cursed him, slammed down the radio, and turned to Murray on the rewrite desk and asked him the same question. Murray hadn’t read the Sunday edition either, but he didn’t want to suffer the same reaction. “Sure, I read it,” he said. The answer would get Murray a ticket to Santa Ana, where he would spend March 17 to October 6 living in a motel, covering the case along with two dozen other reporters and photographers from Los Angeles newspapers and the news services.<sup>79</sup>

When a second set of dynamite that had failed to ignite was found, wired to a timer, the young lovers were arrested and jailed. Early on in the coverage, Murray was working the courthouse and had heard a rumor that Gollum and Louise had been surreptitiously passing notes

to each other at the jail house. Richardson had heard the rumor, too, and began to press Murray to find out more. “The letters were reported to be so sensational in nature that they would make the Marquis De Sade blush,” Murray remembered. “Richardson knew I didn’t have time to steal any letters. One night when I was drinking with Maury Godchaux of the *Times*, and feeling lonely for my family, I phoned Richardson and asked him to let me go home.”

Gerry had recently given birth to Tony, the Murrays’ second son. It wasn’t the time for an extended road trip. But Richardson, who preferred his reporters to be single and unattached, didn’t want to hear it.

“OK, if you don’t want to cover the biggest story in the country, then you can come home and I’ll get you a nice job writing the weather report,” he told Murray.

Soon thereafter, Murray crossed paths with “a derby wearing, cigar-smoking Irishman” named George Gallagher who worked for the State Attorney’s office and was a font of knowledge about the California justice system. Gallagher passed Murray a golden tip: The letters were being passed between Gollum and Louise via a jailer, who was photocopying them before he passed them along.

“Bells went off in my mind and a light blazed as I tried to look unconcerned, sidling toward a telephone to call the city desk,” Murray remembered.<sup>80</sup>

Richardson made the next move. As city editor for a Hearst paper, he had considerable pull within state politics. Hearst knew how to use his newspapers to influence politics and elections, so politicians understood it was usually in their best interest to remain on good terms with those who made news decisions at the *Examiner* and the other Hearst papers. To anger Hearst or his top editors might mean the end of one’s political career. This time, Richardson went to the Attorney General, Fred Howser. Howser agreed, and a plan was put in place. An

*Examiner* reporter would pick up a motel key at a designated location. The letters would be in the motel room, under the blanket on the bed. Richardson chose Lloyd Emerson, a veteran reporter, to make the pick-up. Murray, who was not informed of the plan or the whereabouts of the letters, would unknowingly act as a decoy. When the letters made it back safely to the newsroom, Richardson claimed the story for himself. The *Examiner* editor, Ray Van Ettish, assigned Richardson a single room, with one copy editor and one linotype operator to set the type. To fool the competition, which regularly sent someone to grab an early edition of the *Examiner* in case of scoops, Richardson had the press run dummy copies without his story.<sup>81</sup>

Readers of the following day's *Examiner* were greeted with a 22-column scoop that ran from page one back to page three, 22 columns of news the competition didn't even know existed. Gollum's letters, Richardson wrote, were full of "vile salaciousness," much of it unprintable. It's hard to determine what that would constitute by today's standards, however. Judging from the excerpts that Richardson did feel were tame enough for his readers, it would seem the level of vileness that Bud Gollum was capable of was relatively low. Gollum wrote in his letters: "If necessary, I'll kidnap and carry you off somewhere so that no one will be able to find us and I'll make passionate and violent love to you. I adore you. Your lovely hair, your eyes, your lips, your wonderful neck." But the results at the time were undeniable, and Richardson's troops were in awe. "One of my most precious memories is what happened the next morning when I walked into the local room. As I walked to my desk, the reporters simply stared at me in silence. No one said hello or offered congratulations or anything. But I could feel what they were thinking. Why, the old bald-headed son-of-a-bitch really put one over," Richardson wrote.<sup>82</sup>

Murray learned of the transaction when he read it in the *Examiner*. But the rest of the press believed it was he who had pulled off the scoop. Attorney General Howser came down from

Sacramento to investigate the “leak” in his office. He declared that a reporter had broken into his safe to steal the letters. Was it Murray? asked Godchaux of the *Times*. Hoswer indicated it was. The focus of the press now turned on him. Rivals dropped their coverage at the police station and the courthouse to follow Murray around. His notes were stolen. A reporter was found hiding under his bed. He heard strange clicks on his telephone calls.<sup>83</sup> “In fact,” Murray remembered, “it wasn’t too many days before I began to believe it myself.”

The trial lasted for 19 weeks, and more than 120 witnesses testified. In the end, the jury found the couple innocent, deciding that Walter Overell had mishandled dynamite on his boat, and dismissed evidence of the hammer beating. The letters were declared inadmissible. (Near the end of the trial, Murray had broken a story that the jury was tainted because a juror falsely claimed friends of the defendants had intimidated her.)<sup>84</sup> When the verdicts were read, a tremendous cheer erupted from the crowd of hundreds gathered around the courthouse as reporters raced for the telephone banks in the courthouse hallway, and fought their way to Louise to ask her if the marriage was still on. “No!” she snorted.<sup>85</sup>

The Overell case was not only another in the long historical line of miscarriages of Los Angeles justice, it was the final major hurrah in Murray’s career as a newsman. His coverage of both this case and the Waters case had raised his profile within the industry, if not among the general public. And professionally, he was beginning to feel as though he was outgrowing the *Examiner*. The excitement of chasing Hollywood divorces and sensational crime stories was diminishing, just as the demands of that type of work was infringing on his personal life. He and Gerry now were raising a family and had a life to maintain, one that would work better with more money and a less hectic schedule.

In late 1947, Time/Life approached fellow *Examiner* rewrite man Joe Santley about a position. “I was just back from the war and I didn’t feel ready for it, so I suggested they talk to Jim,” remembered Santley.<sup>86</sup> Sidney James, *Time*’s Los Angeles bureau chief, was aware of Murray from his coverage of the Overell case and some of his other work, and was excited to add him to the interview list.<sup>87</sup> *Time* interviewed 40 people for the position, but it was Murray who received the offer. It was the money, he said, that sealed the deal. *Time* offered \$7,000 a year, a figure that would more than double his salary, as well as much better benefits than he received at the *Examiner*.

As a farewell celebration just before he left the staff, Fowler asked his father to bring some of his famous friends along for a night out with Murray. Some of Murray’s closest *Examiner* friends were joined by Gene Fowler, ex-heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey, famed newspaperman Rube Goldberg, and, to Murray’s amazement, the dean of sportswriters, Grantland Rice. The group gathered at the famous Romanoff’s restaurant in Beverly Hills and celebrated late into the night.<sup>88</sup> It was a fabulous final act for a time in his life that he would always remember fondly. In four years, he had become a skillful writer and an experienced journalist. And now, he was going from the Hearst chain to *Time* magazine, a move, he would write many years later, which was like going from a honky-tonk to Park Avenue.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Folwer, *Reporters*, 116.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Murray, personal journal of newspaper clippings.

<sup>3</sup> Pitt, *Los Angeles A to Z*, 363.

<sup>4</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 116.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 1-2.

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- <sup>6</sup> Rob Leicester Wagner, *Red Ink, White Lies: The Rise and Fall of Los Angeles Newspapers, 1920-1962* (Upland, CA: Dragonflyer Press, 2000), 9-10.
- <sup>7</sup> “Career of Hearst Marked by Power, Increased Wealth, Crusading and Controversy,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1951.
- <sup>8</sup> Emery, *The Press and America*, 285-295.
- <sup>9</sup> “Hearst Built Corporate Empires in Newspapers, Magazines, Radio and Real Estate,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1951.
- <sup>10</sup> David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 170. Hearst’s name was presented for the presidential nomination at the Democratic convention in St. Louis in July of 1904, but he lost the nomination to Alton B. Parker.
- <sup>11</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 145-147.
- <sup>12</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.
- <sup>13</sup> Joe Santley, interview by author, February 3, 2009.
- <sup>14</sup> Jim Murray to Ed Copps, *Time* magazine, New York, August 6, 1957, 3. Background notes for *Time* magazine story “City Editor,” August 19, 1957.
- <sup>15</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.
- <sup>16</sup> “City Editor,” *Time*, August 19, 1957.
- <sup>17</sup> Jim Murray to Ed Copps, *Time* magazine, New York, August 6, 1957, 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Jim Murray to Ed Copps, *Time* magazine, New York, August 9, 1957, 3. Additional background notes for *Time* magazine story “City Editor,” August 19, 1957.
- <sup>19</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 7-8.
- <sup>20</sup> Joe Santley, interview by author, February 3, 2009.
- <sup>21</sup> Jim Murray to Ed Copps, *Time* magazine, New York, August 6, 1957, 12.
- <sup>22</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 23.
- <sup>23</sup> Louella O. Parsons, “Loretta Young Awaits Stork: ‘So Happy, Declares Film Star, Wife of Lieut. Col Tom Lewis,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, March 5, 1944.
- <sup>24</sup> “Father Sees Girl Injured,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, February 18, 1944.
- <sup>25</sup> Jim Murray, “Goodbye to a Friend,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1962.
- <sup>26</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.
- <sup>27</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 18.
- <sup>28</sup> “Many Favorite Stars In Week’s Film Bill,” *New Haven Register*, fall, 1943.

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- <sup>29</sup> Jim Notopoulos to Mr. Alan Scott, January 17, 1944. It is not clear whether Murray or Notopoulos had any personal connection to Scott. Scott was nominated for best original screenplay for the film “So Proudly We Hail!” that same month, his only Academy Award nomination.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Osborne, *65 Years of the Oscar: The Official History of the Academy Awards* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 78-79. The ceremony held in 1944 was also the first in which the winners of the best supporting actress and best supporting actor awards received Oscar statuettes. Prior to that year, they received only plaques. The ceremony was also broadcast via radio to the armed forces serving overseas. The radio broadcast was hosted by Jack Benny.
- <sup>31</sup> “Academy Awards,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, March 3, 1944.
- <sup>32</sup> Jim Murray to Ed Capps, *Time* magazine, New York, August 6, 1957, 2.
- <sup>33</sup> Jim Richardson, *For the Life of Me* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954), 49-50.
- <sup>34</sup> “Fiancé Declares Girl’s Tragic Suicide Mistake,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 14, 1944.
- <sup>35</sup> “Miss Farmer Found Guilty of Vagrancy,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 29, 1944.
- <sup>36</sup> James Murray, “Man Sightless for 30 Years, Regains Vision,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 3, 1944.
- <sup>37</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 125.
- <sup>38</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.
- <sup>39</sup> Joe Santley, interview by author, February 3, 2009.
- <sup>40</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 120-123.
- <sup>41</sup> Linda McCoy-Murray, interview by author, February 19, 2009.
- <sup>42</sup> Folwer, *Reporters*, 117.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>44</sup> Jim Murray, “Last of the Bison, *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1961.
- <sup>45</sup> “Author Gene Fowler Dies at 70,” *Associated Press*, July 3, 1960.
- <sup>46</sup> “Gene Fowler is Dead on Coast; Author and Newspaper Man, 70,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1960. A prolific writer, Gene Fowler is known for two lines in particular. He is credited with writing “I think I’ll slip out of these clothes and into a martini,” though it has often been credited to Robert Benchley. And he originated this line, still found in journalism texts: “Writing is easy; all you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead.”
- <sup>47</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 6, 95-97. W.C. Fields died on Christmas day, 1946.
- <sup>48</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.
- <sup>49</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 124-125.

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- <sup>50</sup> Murray's salary was soon raised to \$50 a week when he threatened to jump from the *Examiner* to the Associated Press.
- <sup>51</sup> Pitt, *Los Angeles: A to Z*, 383.
- <sup>52</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 119.
- <sup>53</sup> Kevin Nelson, *The Golden Game: The Story of California Baseball* (San Francisco: California Historical Society Press, 2004), 257-262.
- <sup>54</sup> Richard Beverage, *The Hollywood Stars: Baseball in Movieland, 1926-1957* (Placentia California: The Deacon Press, 1984), 102.
- <sup>55</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 128.
- <sup>56</sup> "New Super Highway Connecting Sand Fernando Valley, L.A. Planned," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 22, 1944. The Hollywood Freeway was completed in 1948.
- <sup>57</sup> James Murray, "Gioia Admits She Fell in Love With Arizonan," *Los Angeles Examiner*, February 25, 1947.
- <sup>58</sup> James Murray, "'Didn't Intend to Kill,' Bridget Sobs on Witness Stand," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 30, 1946.
- <sup>59</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 146-147.
- <sup>60</sup> James Richardson, *For the Life of Me* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1954), 3-5.
- <sup>61</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 129.
- <sup>62</sup> James Murray, "New Waters Defense Plan: War Bride May Claim Slaying of Husband Justifiable," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 22, 1946.
- <sup>63</sup> "Waters Judge Aided Her Once," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 21, 1946.
- <sup>64</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 147.
- <sup>65</sup> James Murray, "3-In. Revolver Killed Waters," *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 28, 1946.
- <sup>66</sup> Gene Sherman, "Bridget Waters Jailed for One to Five Years," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1946.
- <sup>67</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 129. Waters served time in Carson City, Nevada, and was paroled on May 3, 1948, and deported to Ireland. (*Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1948.)
- <sup>68</sup> James Murray, "8-Ball Parade." *8 Ball Final*, 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Edition, Los Angeles Press Club, 1950, 6-8.
- <sup>69</sup> Richardson, *For the Life of Me*, 296.
- <sup>70</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.
- <sup>71</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink*, 208-209.
- <sup>72</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 75.

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<sup>73</sup> “Jack Smith, Urbane and Wry Times Columnist, Dies,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1996. Smith was also credited by many as the writer who coined the moniker “Black Dahlia.” However, in memoirs, both Richardson and Fowler wrote that the nickname came from the *Examiner*’s Long Beach correspondent, Bevo Means, after hearing Elizabeth Short referred in that way by customers at the coffee shop where she often ate lunch in the months before the murder.

<sup>74</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink*, 213-214.

<sup>75</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 85.

<sup>76</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink*, 218.

<sup>77</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 85.

<sup>78</sup> Richardson, *For the Life of Me*, 282.

<sup>79</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink*, 220.

<sup>80</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 128-129.

<sup>81</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink*, 221-222.

<sup>82</sup> Richardson, *For the Life of Me*, 289-291.

<sup>83</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink*, 222.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>85</sup> Gene Sherman, “Beulah, Bud Acquitted; Crowd at Court Cheers,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1947. Louise Overell married a guard from the Santa Ana jail nine months after the trial. The couple divorced a short time later. Overell died of acute alcohol poisoning in Las Vegas in 1965.

<sup>86</sup> Joe Santley, interview by author, February 3, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.

<sup>88</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 132.

<sup>89</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 131.

CHAPTER 4  
THE *TIME* YEARS, 1948-1953

**Joining the American Century**

It was 1948, World War II was receding into the past, and Jim Murray had become upwardly mobile, much like his country. The post-war boom in the United States had firmly taken hold. The U.S., then nearly three years beyond its military triumph around the globe, had emerged from the war as the dominant economic power in the world. Influence abroad and affluence at home defined the mood of the country. By any historical standards, the economic growth in the 50 states was phenomenal. In the 1940s, the U.S. made up 7 percent of the world's population, but possessed 42 percent of the world's income and more than half of the manufacturing output around the globe. America produced 57 percent of the world's steel, 62 percent of the world's oil, and more than 80 percent of the automobiles. American per-capita income was more than 50 percent greater than the next highest countries, the Western European nations. The economic statistics were indicators that told the story of the new reality that Americans were beginning to feel in the late 1940s. Most Americans ate better, made more money, lived more comfortably and generally lived a higher quality of life with unlimited opportunity than did their parents.<sup>1</sup>

The influx of money into the pockets of Americans meant tectonic shifts in the country's culture as well. The country was becoming dominated by the middle class. The post-war class system began to resemble a diamond, instead of a pyramid, as it had always in the past, with the middle class accounting for the central bulge, the 60 percent of the population that fit that description. The country was becoming more educated as well – a college education was now accessible to young people from average families. During the late '40s, millions of Americans abandoned the country's cities and headed for the suburbs to escape the traffic, crime and

congestion. And, in a development that Murray had bore witness to on *Examiner* assignments,<sup>2</sup> the era of television was emerging and beginning to change how Americans received their news and viewed their world.<sup>3</sup>

The cultural changes that had occurred and would continue to occur in the coming years made it an opportune time for Murray to make the move from metro news reporting to national news magazine work. And he was landing at a magazine that, thanks to its eminent founder Henry Luce, would come to symbolize, as well as tirelessly promote, the new American dominance around the globe. For a journalist in the late 1940s looking to make his mark, *Time* was the pinnacle of the industry. *Time, Inc.*, was born 25 years prior, when Henry Luce and Britton Hadden, recent Yale graduates and editors at the *Yale Daily News*, discovered an unfilled niche in American journalism: the need for a publication that would “organize and departmentalize the news of the week.” The idea was to synthesize the important issues of the day – world affairs, science, technology, arts, industry, etc. – and make it accessible to busy Americans. By the end of the 1920s, the idea had taken off and *Time* had a national circulation of more than 200,000. Hadden died in 1929, and Luce took control of the corporation and directed it to new heights. First, he added *Fortune*, a business publication aimed at those in the top income brackets. The company’s research staff and news-gathering organization grew along the way. And in 1936, he launched *Life*, a photo-dominated magazine that soon became immensely popular.<sup>4</sup> By February of 1948, when Murray joined the staff, *Life* had far eclipsed *Time*, and had become a money-making juggernaut, with a circulation that had climbed to nearly six million readers. (The circulation of *Time* was then between two and three million.)<sup>5</sup>

Right from the start, Murray had to adjust to a very different working environment. The quiet offices of the Los Angeles bureau of *Time/Life*, located in posh Beverly Hills, were very

different than the smoke-filled, cacophonous environs of the *Examiner* city room. The Los Angeles bureau was the second largest in the Time/Life Corporation, behind only the Washington, D.C., bureau. The headquarters of Time/Life were located at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. About 25 people worked out of the Beverly Hills office. Several were photographers who worked exclusively for *Life*; the majority of the rest were correspondents who reported for all of the company's publications. Murray quickly found that working in the far-reaching Time/Life news service was a completely different type of reporting. Instead of getting his assignments from Richardson or an assistant city editor, just a few desks away, his marching orders now usually came from 3,000 miles away, in the New York office. About 60 percent of the work done at the bureaus was at the direction of headquarters. With their remaining time, reporters could pursue stories and pitch them to the bureau chief, who would then try to sell New York on the idea.<sup>6</sup> The backgrounds of his co-workers had changed as well. *Examiner* writers and editors had often kicked around Los Angeles from paper to paper, or perhaps started out in the newspaper business as a copy boy and hung around long enough to find their way onto the writing staff. To find the starting point of the majority of the *Time* staff, however, one needed only look northeast, to the Ivy League. A Time/Lifer was a highly educated, ambitious and skilled journalist who, Murray would write later, immediately wanted to cover the State Department, the White House or Winston Churchill.<sup>7</sup>

### **Hollywood Reporter**

Though his beat would eventually include politics, crime, sports and much of the rest of the happenings in and around Los Angeles, Murray was ostensibly hired to cover Hollywood for *Time*. His duties included writing a regular background report on the ins and outs of the movie business, much of which would find its way into the magazine's Cinema section. Bureau reporters would produce lengthy background dispatches, rich in anecdotes, quotes and human

interest, and send them off to New York, where the information would be combined with the work of other reporters and fashioned, by the New York editing staff, into an article that fit nicely into the *Time* style. “Basically you just sat down and shoveled it out,” said Frank McCulloch, who started at the Los Angeles bureau with Murray and later became bureau chief. “Your job was to transport a guy sitting in a New York office some hundreds or thousands of miles to the scene of the story you were doing, and make the sights, sounds and smells real to him. So you always over wrote, unless you were on a very tight deadline, you always over wrote, because that was your function.”

Just like he did four years earlier as a cub reporter at the *Examiner*, Murray grabbed the rookie assignments that he was given early on and managed to use them to distinguish himself. An early story in *Time*'s Americana section looked at oddities cropping up in American manners and morals. *Time* still ran largely without bylines, but the Time/Life news service would include in-house bylines, coveted by writers. On this particular story, the brand-new Murray outshone his counterparts and scored points with the home office. “Three guys participated in the research; Murray set the tone of the story by his excellently written piece on Ozzie Osborne<sup>8</sup> but both Jones and Shay ... had to be rewritten to fit the style that Murray set. If anybody, Murray should have had the byline,” wrote a New York editor in a memo to the Los Angeles bureau.<sup>9</sup> The Osborne portion of the article that Murray contributed eventually appeared in *Time* as a single sentence of 26 words.<sup>10</sup>

As he quickly gained the confidence of his superiors and the New York office, Murray grew into his role as the magazine's chief Hollywood correspondent. The American movie industry at the time was in a state of flux. Several factors were changing the ways movies were made, and the players in Hollywood were struggling to develop a new order. The traditional

Hollywood system that had grown out of the early days of the film industry allowed the major studios to control the production, distribution and exhibition of films. Writers, directors and actors were usually employed with long-term, fixed contracts with a single studio. In 1948, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the majors had an illegal monopoly over the industry and ordered distribution and exhibition to be run separately. At the same time, the film industry was looking over its shoulder at the growing influence of television, which many at the time regarded as the death knell for film.<sup>11</sup> Hollywood box office did decline in the early 1950s as television rapidly became available to the growing American middle class, but the actual threat would pale in comparison to the overreaction among movie-makers. “The movies panicked,” Murray wrote later. “No one told them this had merely multiplied the number of theater screens by a few million and that product would be more needful than ever. Hollywood simply got its paws up in the air and rolled over.”<sup>12</sup>

*Time* devoted considerable space to entertainment, and the magazine’s top editors liked to break up the weekly parade of politicians and statesmen with the occasional Hollywood starlet. Murray’s job, in addition to covering the business angle of the movies, was to identify suitable cover subjects, make contact and begin the reporting. That part of the job was made more difficult by the fact that the late 1940s and early ’50s was a male-dominated era in the Hollywood film industry. Names like Cary Grant, John Wayne, Kirk Douglas and Humphrey Bogart dominated the screen and filled cinema seats across the country. Many of the female stars of years earlier – Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck – were no longer causing the box-office stampedes that they did five and 10 years prior. Murray’s job as a talent scout for *Time*, then, mirrored the work being done by the studios. Hollywood, *Time* reported, was “turning loose an army of assistant producers (and relatives) to scout the nation’s soda fountains

for blondes ... a big, fumbling, talent-hunting monster has been set loose in the land.”<sup>13</sup> Murray did his part, and during his early years at *Time*, Hollywood’s great female hopes such as Betty Hutton, Ava Gardner, Lucille Ball and Elizabeth Taylor appeared as cover stories. Taylor, Murray said, with her purple eyes, was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen.<sup>14</sup>

### **A Parade of Stars**

Murray’s eye for female screen talent put him on the trail of Marilyn Monroe when she was just a blip on the Hollywood radar. He first met Monroe when she was a mistress of Joe Schenk, chairman of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and one of the most influential men in the industry. Director Joe Mankiewicz gave Monroe a bit part in the film “All About Eve” in 1950 as a joke for Schenk, and she lit up the screen and quickly began generating buzz. Murray pitched a story on her to *Time* editors, who agreed, hoping to eventually to spin the project into a multi-page photo spread of the blonde beauty in *Life*. Murray got to know her during the next few years, detailing her rising career arc in the pages of *Time*. On one occasion, he showed up to take her to dinner at 7 p.m. and waited for an hour and a half for Monroe to get ready, during which she went through four to seven dress changes.<sup>15</sup> Murray interviewed her through dinner, but around dessert Monroe began to look distracted.

“What’s wrong,” he asked.

“Jim,” she said, “would you mind if I left with someone else?”

“Not as long as you introduce me,” he said.

“OK.” Monroe waved her arm, and Joe DiMaggio walked over to the table.<sup>16</sup>

DiMaggio, recently retired but still one of the most popular athletes in the country at the time, had met Monroe after a photo of her in the sports page of a newspaper had caught his eye.<sup>17</sup> The courtship was in full flight at the time of Murray’s encounter. The couple would marry months later, in January of 1954, in a barely kept secret at San Francisco’s City Hall. Murray

later called her “five feet six inches of whipped cream,” but his New York editors couldn’t help but quantify Monroe’s sexual powers: “Her figure (5 ft. 5 in., 118 lbs., bust 37 in., hips 37 in., waist 24 in.) inspires whistles across the land.”<sup>18</sup> The marriage didn’t last through the end of 1954, but Murray developed a relationship with DiMaggio that would last years longer.

Another of the many lasting friendships that developed through Murray’s film industry coverage was one with singer and actor Bing Crosby. Crosby’s reign as a recording and box office star dated back to the mid-1930s, and Murray would see him from afar at Hollywood Stars baseball games, where Crosby was a part owner. Murray went to Crosby’s office on the lot at Paramount Studios to interview him for a story. Crosby’s secretary told him to wait in an outer office. Thirty minutes dragged by, and Murray thought the singer had forgot about him. He approached the secretary and was assured that Crosby knew he was waiting. Another hour passed. Murray told the secretary he had other appointments and was on deadline. The secretary opened the door to Crosby’s office.

“Mr. Crosby, the man from *Time* magazine is still here,” she called.

“Fuck him!” Crosby called back.<sup>19</sup>

A little mistreatment at the hands of a star with an oversized ego was part of the price to be paid to hold down one of the most coveted beats in the Time/Life empire. Where a few years earlier he attended the Academy Awards as a photographer’s assistant, now he was an invited guest with prime aisle seats, as he was at the major movie premieres.<sup>20</sup> Marlon Brando was another actor who put Murray through his own little initiation rites. Murray went to meet Brando for a cover profile at the actor’s home in the fall of 1954, when Brando was just entering the upper echelon of Hollywood stardom. A new breed of star, Brando was a rebellious independent thinker who delighted in riling the Hollywood power structure and those who ran it. Films such

as “The Wild One” and “On the Waterfront” had made him an important commodity. Murray showed up at Brando’s 5-room bungalow behind the Beverly Hills Hotel for a scheduled appointment. He knocked, rang the bell, knocked again, to no avail. He sat on the steps and waited, then knocked again. Finally, after an hour, he was pinning a note to the door when Brando threw it open and laughed heartily. He had been reveling in Murray’s discomfort from behind the front window.<sup>21</sup>

Later, Murray took Brando to a restaurant for breakfast. Brando ordered eggs, and when the waiter brought them, he was not satisfied. He sent them back, and on redelivery, sent them back again. Finally, Murray paid the check and told Brando he knew a place where he could get Brando his eggs just how he liked them. The pair drove to the Murray home, and Gerry answered the door with a towel on her head to see Murray and Brando standing before her.<sup>22</sup>

The Brando profile ran as a cover story in October of 1954. Brando had already made a habit of sparring with the Hollywood press, and the profile that Murray had worked on exacerbated that antagonism. At the time, Murray’s old compatriot from the Hearst chain, Louella Parsons, was one of two Hollywood gossip columnists who wielded tremendous power in the industry – the other was Hedda Hopper of the Esquire Feather Syndicate, whose column ran in the *Los Angeles Times*. The two were rivals, and each were said to have the power to shut down production of any Hollywood film if they so desired. Both had played a large part in the birth of celebrity journalism.<sup>23</sup> The *Time* profile included a lengthy section on Brando’s battles with the two, including the revelation that Brando “now calls Hedda ‘The One with the Hat,’ and Louella Parsons ‘The Fat One.’”<sup>24</sup> That little gem, it turned out, was not one that Brando wanted to see in print.

This was one occasion where Murray was helped by *Time*'s no-byline policy. Shortly after publication, Brando wrote a letter of apology to Parsons and forwarded a copy of it to Murray, along with a long, rambling letter to Murray explaining himself. Brando found Murray blameless in the inclusion of the insult. He placed the blame for the insult appearing in the article on "the guy who wrote the article." He failed to understand that it was Murray who had given the quote to the New York editors who included it in the published article. At any rate, Brando didn't appear overly concerned about the faux pas. Brando wrote to Murray:

I really think that most of the time (Parsons) is really just a big poop, but out of respect to what I believe to be fair she deserves some consideration. ... I want you to know that the piece was as fair and truthfully wrought as it could possibly be this side of a lengthy biography. ... I appreciated, more than any other aspect of the experience, two things: one of which is the new perspective he lent me of myself in relation to the world about me and secondly is your having been as honest and thorough as you were. Most of all it was your lack of preconception and your insistent openness of mind that made it the most pleasant experience with the press to date. Please give my very best to Frances.<sup>25</sup> I hope that she and the kids are well. Looking forward to having some dinner blabber or something with you.<sup>26</sup>

The ability to turn a somewhat adversarial interview situation into a friendly experience was a gift that Murray would come to rely on and one that would allow him to create profiles that were rich in the human interest his editors demanded. His position at *Time* opened doors, and his character and manner allowed him to take full advantage of the access. "It depended on your personality, knowledge and so forth, as to what you got out of the stars, and Jim was a perfect interviewer," said McCulloch. "Whatever the quality is, he had it in great amounts, empathy, and persuasion. (They) always knew they were going to be treated fairly."<sup>27</sup>

Murray got to know John Wayne while reporting a story on him in 1952. Murray had been promoting the idea of a Wayne cover story for months before, but none of the *Time* editors had ever seen one of Wayne's formulaic Westerns or war movies. Theater exhibitors, however, knew all about Wayne, and he was proving to be box-office magic. Murray played poker with Wayne

and the two developed a lasting friendship. As the box-office receipts piled up, the *Time* editors eventually bit on Murray's cover pitch, and Wayne graced the cover in early 1952.<sup>28</sup> During the reporting of the story, Murray went to interview John Ford, the legendary director who was behind the camera for Wayne's latest, "The Quiet Man." Ford told Murray he didn't care for *Time* magazine or their superior attitude, and proceeded to browbeat Murray throughout the interview. Finally, Murray had had enough. He told Ford, "Well, I didn't care for much for 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,' either." He braced for a violent response, but instead Ford hooted with laughter.<sup>29</sup> Wayne was impressed with the cover story when it appeared and with Murray's efforts. "Lots of fellows get paid for doing this kind of work, but lots of fellows don't put in the care and effort that you do to yours," Wayne wrote.<sup>30</sup>

### **Man of the World**

After he had a few years of Time/Life paychecks under his belt, the Murrays were ready to graduate from apartment dwellers to homeowners. Murray had decided that living in the middle of the city was not the right environment in which to raise children.<sup>31</sup> They moved to a roomy white house in a neighborhood called Pacific Palisades with a walled-in backyard that gave the couple's two young sons a safe place to play. The home was less than a mile from the beach; in the backyard you could smell the Pacific salt in the air.<sup>32</sup> Pacific Palisades was about 17 miles outside of downtown Los Angeles. The modernist-style homes became a desirable suburb in the late 1940s and 1950s and attracted artists, architects, writers and theater people.<sup>33</sup> The Murrays' third child, Pam, their first daughter, was born in 1951, followed in 1953 by Eric, who the family would call Ricky.

That same year, Frank McCulloch came aboard as a correspondent for *Time*. McCulloch would go on to be one of Murray's closest friends and the man who would play the most direct role in turning him into a sports columnist. McCulloch was the son of cattle ranchers from

western Nevada, and served in the Marines in World War II. Afterward, he worked his way from small newspapers in rural eastern California to a position at the *Reno Evening Gazette*, where he wrote for the AP and UPI wire services on the side. His work was recognized by *Time*, and he was hired on, initially as a correspondent in the Los Angeles bureau. He quickly came to be viewed as someone with leadership potential, and after short stints in Dallas and New York, was back in Los Angeles as the bureau chief.<sup>34</sup> Murray and McCulloch developed an immediate friendship. They felt kinship as two non-Ivy Leaguers in a sea of Princeton, Yale and Dartmouth graduates. (McCulloch had graduated from University of Nevada-Reno.) They also shared a similar World War II experience. Where Murray's heart had kept him out of the service, McCulloch also had a heart condition that kept him stateside. He spent the war in the Marines' public relations office in San Francisco.<sup>35</sup> McCulloch and his wife, Jackie, became social friends with the Murrays; the two young couples went to plays and sporting events together regularly.

It was during his years in the Los Angeles bureau that McCulloch first made his mark journalistically. Through persistence, he managed to become the one journalist to gain the complete trust of Howard Hughes, then one of the world's richest men and a top film producer and aviation mogul. To secure an interview, he called Hughes' publicist and said "I know I'll never get to see him, but let me give him 100 written questions. I'll give him a chance to be as careful as he wants." To his surprise, he picked up the phone a week later and the voice on the other end said "This is Howard Hughes." McCulloch went on to write more than a dozen pieces on Hughes, and he became Hughes' confidant. McCulloch would go on to have a distinguished journalism career, first as a war correspondent, and later as a editor and chief at several California newspapers. He served as *Time's* Southeast Asia bureau chief from 1963 to 1967, and

was considered one of the most distinguished of the early Vietnam War reporters, and one of the first to become disenchanted with the American war effort.<sup>36</sup>

Though the Hollywood beat took up the majority of Murray's time, he got the chance to branch out into other areas of *Time's* coverage, from politics to crime to religion. He convinced *Time* editors to devote some coverage to the early crusades of Billy Graham in 1949, after the idea had been rejected several times. The article eventually filled an entire page in *Time's* religion section.<sup>37</sup> Graham later said appearing in *Time* was the most important breakthrough in his rise to fame. In a letter to Murray after the article appeared, Graham wrote: "I have heard comments from various parts of the world on your fair and complimentary presentation of the cause of evangelism. This has gone a long ways to help in putting evangelism to the forefront across our nation in our churches."<sup>38</sup>

In 1952, he got his first shot at presidential politics, when he was assigned to cover the West Coast campaign of Richard Nixon, then a young California congressman running for vice president on the Dwight Eisenhower ticket. Nixon, then 38, had been chosen because of his influence in California, but was still a relatively unknown politician nationally. Murray viewed the trip, which was to be a whistle-stop train through the Northwest, as a fun little excursion and a chance to get a break from the movie crowd. It turned out to be a stressful lesson in deadline reporting.

Just as Murray joined the campaign, the *Los Angeles Daily News* and the *New York Post* broke a story about a secret slush fund that a group of California Nixon supporters had created. Nixon's men thought it had been overblown and it wouldn't catch the attention of the national press corps, but they had miscalculated. *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times* picked up the story, and the controversy threatened to force Nixon off the ticket. Eisenhower, who hadn't

been in favor of Nixon as the vice-presidential choice, did little to ease the situation. (Nixon famously phoned Eisenhower to ask for public support, telling the general “There comes a time in matters like this when you either have to shit or get off the pot.”)<sup>39</sup> As the firestorm grew, the Eisenhower campaign cut off the train tour early for Nixon to fly down to Los Angeles, so he could appear on television to explain himself. With the press in tow, Nixon and his handlers flew down to L.A. on a Monday night in preparation for the speech on Tuesday morning. The problem for Murray was that *Time* went to press on Monday night. Before the flight left from Oregon to L.A., Murray received a call from Max Ways, *Time*’s national affairs editor and one of the top men in the company.

“We need to know what Nixon will say in that speech tomorrow. Is he taking himself off the ticket, or will he fight on?” asked Ways.

“How am I supposed to find that out?” Murray screamed.

“Just do it,” warned the editor.

Murray fretted through the entire flight from Oregon to Los Angeles. Access to Nixon was blocked off by his handlers. Murray decided to wait until Nixon used the rest room. Late in the flight, Nixon made his move, and Murray waited for him to emerge. When he did, Murray grabbed his arm and told him of his predicament, *Time*’s deadline, and how he must know the contents of the speech. Nixon considered the request, and then told him to see Jim Bassett, one of the candidate’s top men, before the flight was over.

An hour later, Bassett came down the aisle and began reciting pieces of Nixon’s campaign speech to Murray. Murray was perplexed at first, but then he understood. Bassett was telling him that Nixon was going to L.A. to give his stump speech, so he wasn’t going to pull his name off the ticket. When the plane landed, he called New York to deliver the news, and then retired to

the bar at the Ambassador Hotel, where the press was staying, to celebrate. One drink in, however, his calm was once again disturbed. A reporter for United Press came to the bar and told Murray the wire service was coming out with a “rocket” that said Nixon was getting off the ticket. Murray’s stomach shot into the back of his throat. *Time* was about to be 100 percent, irreversibly wrong, and it would be completely his fault. He sprang up, went back to the phone, called Nixon’s suite, and got another of Nixon’s men, Bill Rogers, on the phone. At Murray’s urging, Rogers went to ask Nixon, and when he came back on the line, he said, “The candidate says, quote, Murray’s got the story. What’s he worried about?”<sup>40</sup>

The next day, Nixon went on television and gave his celebrated “Checkers” speech. It was a maudlin, melodramatic presentation, but it worked to settle the controversy and keep Nixon on the ticket. Nixon looked into the camera and declared that the only gift he had taken was a dog. “It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate . . . Black and white spotted. And our little girl—Tricia, the 6-year-old—named it Checkers. And you know, the kids, like all kids, love the dog and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we’re gonna keep it,” Nixon told the nation.<sup>41</sup> Shortly thereafter Eisenhower threw his support firmly behind his ticket mate. During the episode, Eisenhower had made the comment that his campaign should be as “clean as a hound’s tooth,” so after the controversy died down, Nixon decided to create the “Order of the Hounds Tooth,” made up of all those who had played a role in the incident. Murray was invited to join, and in early 1953, after Nixon had assumed the office of vice president, Murray received his official Hound’s Tooth membership card and emblem.<sup>42</sup>

### **Finding a Voice**

The life of a *Time* field correspondent had plenty of advantages – money, access, sense of importance – but there were some drawbacks, too, particularly for those with literary ambition, which meant almost everybody in the news service. The correspondent knew that the thousands

of words he typed each week would go through layer upon layer of editing, and would be virtually unrecognizable when it appeared in the magazine. “If you wanted to encourage yourself, you could find phrases and even paragraphs you had written, and once in a long, long while, especially when you filed a story as the magazine was about to close, once in a long while you’d find your story virtually untouched. But that was rare,” McCulloch remembered. The frustration caused some writers to eventually move on to other pursuits, but the majority felt lucky to be on the Time/Life payroll. “Sometimes a reversal of content made you angry, but there were two other considerations,” McCulloch said. “One was the prestige of working for *Time*, and the other, more important one was that *Time* put you in position to cover the world’s best stories. And so that second one was a huge compensation, and you eventually would adopt an attitude that said ‘I know I’ve done the best I could, and I hit that one out of the ballpark, and what they’ve done with it in New York, I just can’t help that.’”<sup>43</sup>

One thing a correspondent could do in an effort to break free of the anonymity was to offer his services to *Life*. *Time*’s sister publication often ran bylines, gave writers the occasional chance to break out of patented *Time* style, and, of course, had a circulation of nearly six million. Murray asked for and received the opportunity in April of 1950, and used it to show an early ability to generate an emotional response from readers. The article, headlined “I Hate the Yankees,” was also Murray’s first real published sports opinion piece, though to call it a sports column would be imprecise. Running about 30 column inches in the “Life’s Reports” section of the magazine, the first-person piece described in detail why the New York Yankees domination of baseball for the past three decades was strictly a financial proposition. In 1950, the Yankees had won 16 of the last 29 American League pennants, and 12 of the last 29 World Series. Murray used his space to dispel what he called “the great Yankee myth,” that the team had received some

mystical quality from the great Babe Ruth that had propelled them to be champions for eternity.

Of the myth, Murray wrote:

Nothing could be more preposterous. For my money the Yankees were and are superchampions for the same reasons General Motors or U.S. Steel or Standard Oil are superbusinesses. They have more fans paying more money than any other club in the history of the game. ... I would as soon (feel sorry for the Yanks) as I would feel sorry for Standard Oil because it was getting slightly the worst of it in a marketing fight with an independent gas station in East Podunk ... So if a lot of people seem to be picking the Red Sox to win, and if DiMaggio is slow rounding into shape again this year, don't shed any tears over it. The 'poor old New York Yankees' have always managed to get along somehow.<sup>44</sup>

The New York Yankees had an enormous national following that had grown out of the sports boom of the 1920s and their stars, from Ruth to Gehrig to DiMaggio, were legendary and beloved from Maine to California. So it was unsurprising that *Life* readers let it be known that they felt the same way about Murray as he did about their team. The magazine devoted two pages to letters, mostly negative, about Murray's declaration of hatred. "I Hate the Yankees" was the worst article I ever read in *Life*. It upset the whole family, especially my 10-year-old daughter, an ardent Yankee fan," wrote Paul Hahn of New York City. "Mr. Murray must be a crackpot. I do not believe Mr. Murray was qualified to write an article on any major league team, since he is assigned to a minor league town," wrote George Wile of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. "I can't recall ever having read anything so irritating," wrote Charles H. Quinn of Ojai, California. One of the few supporters asked to see "a picture of this brave man who had the courage to write that article," so a one-column photo of Murray, holding a bat over his shoulder and grinning, was included in the letters section.<sup>45</sup>

"I Hate the Yankees" was notable for several reasons. First, as Murray's first bylined article about sports, it was one he cherished and often mentioned in later years when his sports column would touch upon similar issues. Secondly, the article was his first personal experience with the visceral reaction that an opinionated sports article can engender in his readers. The

point-by-point, fact supported style he used in the piece was one he would repeat in his early sports writing for *Time/Life*.<sup>46</sup> The article no doubt led to considerable discussion within the Los Angeles bureau and through the New York offices of *Life*. An article that generated enough of a response to call for publishing a photo of a heretofore anonymous cog in the news-service machine was rare, and after it ran, Murray's name was known to many more of the 3,000-plus employees of Time, Inc.

Thirdly, a line from "I Hate the Yankees" was remembered long after April of 1950, and in fact became one of the more enduring lines Murray would write. The comparison of the Yankees to U.S. Steel and General Motors (see above) had legs. It soon became a sort of catch phrase that was found often in the baseball writing of the next few decades, or the length of time the Yankees remained dominant.<sup>47</sup> Murray was aware of this, and wrote a column in 1966 for the *Los Angeles Times* claiming credit for the line:

It all began when I heard the guy on television say "Well, it was Bennett Cerf who once said 'Rooting for the Yankees is like rooting for U.S. Steel' because he articulated for so many people what they had already come to feel."

OK, now, you want to know who said it first? You're looking at him. Old Numero Uno. James Patrick Murray.

You don't believe it? All right. Do you happen to have a copy of *Life* for April 17, 1950 around the house? Gen. Eisenhower is on the cover. He always was in those days. Open to Page 23 and you'll find a story titled "I Hate the Yankees" by a guy identified as "James Murray, Time-Life correspondent in Los Angeles."<sup>48</sup>

Later, the line was most often attributed to Red Smith, who was already established as a leading sports columnist when "I Hate the Yankees" appeared in *Life*. Murray addressed the issue in his autobiography, claiming credit once again, but acknowledging the ephemeral qualities of the public sphere. "Red Smith didn't say it. I did. In the *Life* piece. I lived with it. Because I have since had many things I never said ascribed to me. I call it 'the Dorothy Parker' syndrome,'" he wrote.<sup>49</sup>

## **A Hidden Talent Emerges**

“I Hate the Yankees” was perhaps the most public in a series of assignments that paved the way for Murray’s future evolution into the role of sportswriter. While he was on the Hollywood beat, Murray’s knowledge of and interest in sports slowly became known to editors throughout the news service, and eventually many would become dependent on him on those rare occasions that *Time*’s leadership chose to devote column space to sports-related subjects. Murray claimed the responsibility fell to him because “nobody at Time Inc. gave a hoot about sports.”<sup>50</sup>

One of his first sports-related assignments came from *Time*’s fact-checking department, and it allowed him the opportunity to meet a personal hero of his, golfer Ben Hogan. Hogan had won the U.S. open the previous summer, along with nine other tournaments, establishing him as the premiere golfer at that time. He would become the first golfer on the cover of *Time*. *Time*’s sports editor Marshall Smith spent a week with Hogan in October of 1948, but by the time the magazine was ready to publish the piece in January of 1949,<sup>51</sup> the researchers assigned to the story decided too much time had passed to rely on Smith’s notes, and every fact in the piece needed to be run by Hogan. Because Hogan was in Los Angeles for the Los Angeles Open tournament, the researchers sent a 5-page, single-spaced list of questions to Murray. He received the list just hours before the magazine was scheduled to go to press.

Murray waited in the locker room for Hogan to finish his practice round, and then for the famously meticulous golfer to try putt after putt on the practice green until darkness had fallen. When he finally made himself available to Murray, he showed the same attention to detail with the article that he had with his golf game. He disputed many of the facts on Murray’s list, as the Time Inc. presses in Chicago waited, at a tremendous cost, for Murray to deliver the final version of the story. Hogan refused to OK a statistical chart on his average shot distance, arguing that

there could be no “average” shot because of the variables involved: wind, weather, etc. Finally, Hogan compromised, and the presses were set in motion, several hours behind schedule.<sup>52</sup>

More sports assignments began to come Murray’s way, with him taking a more substantive writing and reporting role in the projects. *Time* put sports personalities on the cover of the magazine even less frequently than it did movie stars, but at least a page of each issue was dedicated to sports. When sports topics were chosen which had a Southern California connection, Murray was usually the correspondent who would get the call. He worked on a cover story on Olympic sprinter Mel Patton<sup>53</sup> and did the majority of the research for a cover piece about decathlete Bob Mathias.<sup>54</sup> He said he was assigned the feature on Notre Dame star quarterback Johnny Lattner<sup>55</sup> because “he was A) knowledgeable about sports and B) Catholic.”<sup>56</sup> For the Lattner article, Murray traveled to South Bend, Indiana, to cover the football game between Navy and Notre Dame in October of 1953. With the majority of the piece written, *Time*’s New York editors sent strict guidelines for his coverage: “During the game watch for at least one well executed defensive play in which Lattner does well . . . Let us know to whom the game is dedicated. If the first half is dedicated to a Saint let us know. . . . In the event that our heroes lose the story line will change to how the Irish and particularly Lattner act in defeat.”<sup>57</sup>

When the Lattner cover story hit newsstands, Murray was already a few months into the next stage of his career with Time/Life. His reputation for sports expertise had gotten him in on the ground floor of the next great project of Henry Luce’s prolific journalism career. The secret project pointed Murray east, to the New York headquarters of Time/Life, where he would assume a new position in the company, and begin the transition from news writer to sports writer.

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 61-65.

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- <sup>2</sup> KTLA, the first commercial television station in Southern California, broadcast for the first time on January 22, 1947.
- <sup>3</sup> George Moss, *America in the Twentieth Century* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 273-277.
- <sup>4</sup> Emery, *The Press and America*, 459-460.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert T. Elson, *The World of Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise, Volume Two: 1941-1960* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 182-183, 436-437.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Pat Barbee, "Seasoned Pro," *Beverly Hills 1-2-3*, June 3, 1992, 7.
- <sup>8</sup> The Ozzie Osborne referred to here is George Hamilton "Ozzie" Osborne, a 34-year-old Virginia man who set the record for flagpole sitting – 52 days, 13 hours, 58 minutes – not the bat-eating glam rocker who emerged four decades later.
- <sup>9</sup> Los Angeles memo, *Time/Life*, October 1, 1948.
- <sup>10</sup> *Time*, *Americana*, "Manners & Morals, September 20, 1948.
- <sup>11</sup> Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 154-155.
- <sup>12</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 19.
- <sup>13</sup> *Time*, "Big Dig," August 22, 1949.
- <sup>14</sup> Eric Sandburg, interview by author, November 14, 2008.
- <sup>15</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 21.
- <sup>16</sup> Rick Reilly, "King of the Sports Page," *Sports Illustrated*, April 21, 1986, 82.
- <sup>17</sup> Nelson, *The Golden Game*, 256.
- <sup>18</sup> *Time*, "Storybook Romance," January 25, 1954.
- <sup>19</sup> John Scheibe, *On the Road with Jim Murray: Baseball and the Summer of '79* (Encino, CA: Encino Media, 2007), 41.
- <sup>20</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 19.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 27.
- <sup>22</sup> Eric Sandburg, interview by author, November 14, 2008.
- <sup>23</sup> Sam Kashner and Jennifer Kashner, *The Bad and the Beautiful: Hollywood in the Fifties* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 278-292.
- <sup>24</sup> *Time*, "A Tiger in the Reeds," October 11, 1954.
- <sup>25</sup> Brando appears to have misremembered the name of Gerry Murray.

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- <sup>26</sup> Marlon Brando to Jim Murray, October 9, 1953.
- <sup>27</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.
- <sup>28</sup> *Time*, “The Wages of Virtue,” March 2, 1954.
- <sup>29</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 24.
- <sup>30</sup> John Wayne to Jim Murray, February 28, 1952.
- <sup>31</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 133.
- <sup>33</sup> Pitt, *Los Angeles, A to Z*, 375.
- <sup>34</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.
- <sup>35</sup> Jason Felch and Marlena Telvick, “Unsung Hero,” *American Journalism Review*, June/July 2004.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* It was a phone call from Howard Hughes to Frank McCulloch that exposed Clifford Irving’s biography of Hughes as a fraud. Irving claimed to have worked with Hughes on the book, and had sold the rights to *Life*, when Hughes called McCulloch to tell him that he had never met Irving.
- <sup>37</sup> *Time*, “Sickle for the Harvest,” November 14, 1949.
- <sup>38</sup> Billy Graham to Jim Murray, November 28, 1949.
- <sup>39</sup> Patterson, *Great Expectations*, 256-257.
- <sup>40</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 36-40.
- <sup>41</sup> Patterson, *Great Expectations*, 256-257.
- <sup>42</sup> Richard Nixon to Jim Murray, February 20, 1953. Murray later wrote that he flew home early from a vacation in Hawaii in 1960 to cast his vote for Nixon. He said he felt he still owed him for his help in the Checkers incident.
- <sup>43</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.
- <sup>44</sup> James Murray, “I Hate the Yankees,” *Life*, April 17, 1950, 26-36.
- <sup>45</sup> *Life*, Letters to the Editors, April 24, 1950.
- <sup>46</sup> Murray addressed the topic of New York Yankee dominance many times once he became a full-time sports columnist, often humorously. Filing from the 1962 World Series in San Francisco, he wrote “The New York Yankees are not a baseball team. They’re a monopoly in spikes and batting helmets. First Place, Inc. If they were a normal business, they’d be trust-busted into four first-division teams” (“Yankees, THE A.L.,” October 12, 1962).
- <sup>47</sup> Two examples are similar lines found in the October 21, 1953, and January 6, 1954, issues of *The Sporting News*.
- <sup>48</sup> Jim Murray, “The Old Breed,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1966. Bennett Cerf was a founding publisher of Random House and published a number of compilations of stories, jokes and puns.

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<sup>49</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Barbee, "Seasoned Pro," 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Time*, "Little Ice Water," January 10, 1949.

<sup>52</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 81-83. The Hogan cover story was one of a series of articles to which the *Time* sports cover jinx can be traced. Hogan was in a life-threatening auto accident shortly after the cover appeared. Three years earlier, the Illinois racing stable of Elizabeth Arden Graham burned down the day a *Time* cover on Arden reached newsstands. A year later, baseball manager Leo Durocher was suspended as manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers the day before a cover profile on him came out. The legend later morphed into the *Sports Illustrated* cover jinx.

<sup>53</sup> *Time*, "2 Minutes to Glory," August 2, 1948.

<sup>54</sup> *Time*, "The Strength of Ten," July 21, 1952.

<sup>55</sup> *Time*, "All-America," November 9, 1953.

<sup>56</sup> Walt Cieplik, "Jim Murray: King of Sports," *Writer's Digest*, August 1977, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Byron Riggan to Jim Murray, telegram, October 31, 1953. Notre Dame defeated Navy, 38-7.

CHAPTER 5  
THE *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* YEARS, 1953-1960

**‘Fair, But Not Objective’**

“Henry Luce, indirectly of course, turned me into a sports writer. But first, indirectly of course, he turned me into a journalist.”<sup>1</sup> Murray’s contact with Luce had been limited prior to 1953, but the famously hands-on CEO made his way to every outpost in the Time/Life chain, so their paths had crossed enough to give Luce an awareness of Murray and his work. Now, however, they would work side-by-side in the creation of what was at the time known only as Project X.<sup>2</sup> And Luce would prove to be Murray’s last true mentor, one who would change the way Murray would view his role as a journalist and a writer.

Having started *Time* magazine, with classmate Briton Hadden, almost immediately after college in 1923, Luce was still only in his late 40s when Murray joined the company. Murray, like most of Luce’s subordinates, however, considered him larger in life than the president of the United States. Luce, though, was a down-to-earth leader who appreciated and depended on input from his employees. He developed personal relationships with as many Time/Life employees as he could and asked them all to call him Harry. On the day Murray joined the Time/Life staff, Luce was on one of his annual four-week shifts as managing editor of *Time* (a position he’d long ago given up as a full-time pursuit.) Murray’s first piece of advice about Luce came from a veteran of the bureau. “If you don’t know, you better say so. Harry’s on the deck this month, and he can’t abide a lie. He’ll forgive you for anything but laziness and lying.”<sup>1</sup>

A journalist to the core, Luce had an exceedingly inquisitive nature and Time/Lifers came to be ready for a slew of questions whenever he was around. When he would make his

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Murray, “Henry Luce: The Printed Word’s Dearest Friend,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1967.

intermittent trips to bureaus, the staff member who had been assigned to transport him around town would often make a dry run, memorizing facts and names about the geography and history of the region, to be prepared for Luce's inquisition. On one occasion, the Los Angeles bureau reporter who drew the assignment to drive Luce from Los Angeles to San Francisco was unable to go on a dry run. By about halfway through the ride, the writer was becoming overwhelmed by the questioning. After a few more miles, the two passed a large excavation for a new building.

"What's that?" Luce asked.

"Harry," the writer said wearily, "that's a hole in the ground."<sup>3</sup>

Luce's America-first view of the world soaked every page of every publication his company produced, and indeed his idea of journalism held that total objectivity was a myth and it was the job of the journalist to provide analysis and point of view. His formula for team journalism, comprehensive reporting that also offered more than a dash of perspective, raised the level of discourse in America and informed the middle class. "The basic view, in the largest sense, was Luce's idea that this was the American Empire, this was the century of the American Empire, and that was his view of the world," said McCulloch. "And boy that permeated. . . . The editors, all of whom were promoted over time working for him, his editors all reflected that view. They wanted to keep their jobs, so they damn well better reflect that view."<sup>4</sup>

A meeting with Luce could be a tense experience for a young reporter. He had a commanding presence. He was tall and stood straight with ice-blue eyes, thick eye brows and a gaze "so piercing it was like staring into the noon sun."<sup>5</sup> He talked rapidly, firing his questions and arguments in staccato bursts, his mind often outracing his speech and confusing those who couldn't keep up. "Harry Luce," one of his employees once said, "is so damned articulate he can't get a sentence out."<sup>6</sup> But he appreciated and respected those who could match his

arguments, and often allowed his subordinates to change his positions. On editorial matters, he strived to achieve consensus with his top editors before handing down a decision, a process that would often be exasperating to his editors. One once said to him, “Harry, I wish you wouldn’t give us so much argument. Why don’t you just give us a few orders?” He was infinitely involved in every aspect of the Time/Life operation. Memoranda “erupted or flowed in an unceasing stream from his desk” on all aspects of the business.<sup>7</sup> But he felt a tremendous kinship toward all members of the Time/Life family and strived to maintain the feel of what he called a “small, big business.” It was a tradition within the company that upon the birth of a child, each Time/Life staffer would receive a sterling silver porringer, engraved to the child “from Henry R. Luce and the rest of her father’s friends at Time, Inc.”<sup>8</sup>

Luce was always open to ideas from Time/Life employees, and in the early 1950s a development department was created to evaluate ideas from the field and choose the best of them to be considered for implementation. One of the early submissions that came to the department was a memo from a young executive named Robert Cowin. After conducting a readership survey in Columbus, Ohio, Cowin was amazed by the number of women respondents who said their husbands spent too much time devouring various sports publications. Time/Life, Cowin opined, could produce its own sports magazine, one that would far surpass what was currently on the market. Such a magazine would be tapping into the growing market of weekend athletes and sports aficionados who were awash with more free time for recreation.<sup>9</sup> Cowin’s memo didn’t make the cut in the development department, but when it eventually reached Luce’s desk, it became, over the objections of many members of the company’s brain trust, the next great project for Time/Life, Inc.

## The Great Experiment

By June of 1953, Luce and his lieutenants had come to the decision that the company should move forward with plans to develop a new sports publication. The idea had been tried before by several different publishers, to varying degrees of success, but no national sports magazine had been able to sustain any real success. Despite market analysis conducted by his own staff that showed there wasn't enough advertising to support such a magazine, Luce firmly believed sports was the great untapped market in publishing. He had no particular knowledge of or interest in sports himself, but he had noticed that dinner-party conversation always drifted in that direction.

“Why does every conversation end up being about sports?” Luce asked an editor.

“Because sports, like music, is a universal language,” he was told. “Everybody speaks it.”<sup>10</sup>

In July, Murray received a phone call from Ernie Haverman, a well-respected reporter and editor at *Life* who had been tapped to lead the new project. Haverman had been chosen because of his experience as a sports writer at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* years earlier. Now he was putting together a small team that would come to Time/Life headquarters in New York and begin the job of developing a prototype. Murray had been recommended by Clay Felker, a *Life* reporter who was picked for the project because, similar to Murray, he was known as the rare Time/Life staffer with a sports background.<sup>11</sup> Haverman asked Murray to come to New York and join the team. Only weeks earlier, Murray had declined a similar offer from another editor who wanted him to participate in the creation of a culture-oriented magazine. With this offer, however, Murray was intrigued. The next week he took the train east.<sup>12</sup>

When Murray arrived in New York, he found the newly formed department already in disarray. At the time there were only seven members of the team, and Haverman kept to himself

in a separate office with the door closed. Murray quickly got the sense that throughout the building, the new magazine, derisively referred to as “Muscles,” was thought to be a short-term dalliance of Luce’s that would soon be abandoned in favor of more important ideas.<sup>13</sup> Editors had already begun taking the opportunity to dump questionable expenses, such as junkets to the Caribbean, on the project’s expense account, confident that the expenses would disappear along with the project.<sup>14</sup> Haverman had already become disenchanted with the project, a fact that he would disclose shortly, so the responsibility fell to Murray to determine what the group would cover and who would provide the coverage. He assigned himself to a fight card at Madison Square Garden and sent other writers around the country to events he felt had national significance.<sup>15</sup> And the team’s duties went beyond producing editorial content. They even assumed the responsibility of walking dummy pages over to Madison Avenue advertising agencies for early review.

Less than two weeks after Murray’s arrival, Haverman dropped a bomb that would almost shut down the project before it got started. His 11-page memo titled “A Report on Sports” detailed the litany of reasons that led Haverman to the conclusion that a weekly sports magazine was doomed to failure. “I feel that we should abandon the project, that any time or money we spend on it will be wasted and that if we should ever actually publish, it would be a costly failure,” he wrote. The reasons he offered were not new, but they were the prevailing wisdom within the halls of the Time/Life building:

- The sports readership did not have a common interest to tie the magazine together. Sure, there were readers for special interest sports magazines, such as *Field & Stream*, *Yachting* and *The Sporting News*, but subscribers to those magazines were satisfied and would not read a magazine that covered their subjects of interest along with others that did not interest them.
- There just weren’t enough sporting events of national interest to fill the pages each week. It’s difficult to imagine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century climate of 24-hour sports entertainment

saturation, but in the early 1950s, sports was heavily regional and seasonal. Baseball, the most national of sports, only went as far west as the Mississippi River on a major league level, and attendance had been in decline since the late 1940s. Pro football was growing, but was a Northeastern and Midwestern phenomenon. Pro basketball was relegated to the East and still thought of by many as a bush-league sport, drawing small crowds in minor league towns like Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Rochester, New York. Most believed college sports fans were only interested in their own school and conference. The National Hockey League had only six teams, four in the United States. Haverman foresaw a long winter with nothing to fill the pages of the magazine.

- There weren't enough sportswriters who could produce articles that would rise to the level of quality expected from *Time* and *Life* readers. Consequently, the expense of hiring a staff or editing the work of outside writers would be prohibitive.
- The readers that would pick up the magazine were not the type of people that Madison Avenue advertisers were interested in reaching. Sports fans were either actual or overgrown adolescents, or working-class types who couldn't afford the types of products that Madison Avenue was selling to magazine consumers.<sup>16</sup>

Two months later, Haverman wrote to Murray to explain himself. "As you probably guessed, I lost faith in the project and asked to be relieved," he wrote. "I still feel that nothing will ever come of it. ... Of course, Luce can be awfully dogged about one of his ideas, and Sid James is a very persuasive optimist, anyway."<sup>17</sup>

Haverman proved to be prescient, if only on that last point. Luce chose to ignore his well-reasoned arguments, and Sidney James, an editor known for his unyielding enthusiasm and the same man who had hired Murray for *Time* five and a half years earlier, was given the reins. Murray and the staff of the experimental department found out about the change on James' first day on the job when he walked through the doors of the 17<sup>th</sup> floor offices.

"What are you doing here, Sid?" Murray asked.

James pointed his finger at Murray. "Do you believe in this magazine, Jim?" he demanded.

"Oh, you bet, Sid!" Murray responded with uncharacteristic energy.<sup>18</sup>

James proceeded to pose the same question to the rest of the crew, getting similar responses. It was with that type of overriding passion that James drove the project forward.

After his stint in Los Angeles, James had moved up to assistant managing editor of *Life*. Now he took on the project and brought an immediacy to it, refusing to get bogged down by Haverman's arguments and the negativity within the company.

Luce, who had been in Rome, where his wife, Clare Booth Luce, was serving as ambassador, now came back to New York and became intimately involved in Project X. Heretofore an unknown entity to most of the small staff, he now became a regular presence in their lives. "Sometimes it seemed that we saw more of Luce than we did our wives," one staffer said. He had regular lunches with the members, peppering them with his trademark questions.<sup>19</sup> Staffers often got the call to take Luce to a sporting event and provide an explanation of the sport. His total ignorance of the subject was a constant source of humor. At one meeting, Luce recounted a recent outing with an official in Rome who had taken Luce to a basketball game.

"He took me to a sports event where he threw the ball in to start the basketball game between the Globemasters and some other team," Luce recounted.

"The *Globetrotters*, Harry," a staffer interjected.

"Globemasters, Globetrotters; it doesn't make a difference," Luce said.<sup>20</sup>

In the fall of 1953, Murray headed back to Los Angeles, but continued to contribute to the project, which now was quickly accumulating staff and beginning to produce copy and pages. In January of 1954, the first prototype was produced and sent to *Time* subscribers in Minnesota.<sup>21</sup> It was titled simply *The New Sports Magazine* and was 140 pages long, filled with a mix of spectator and participatory sports articles, from wrestling to fox hunting. On the cover was an overhead shot of spectators, most, as in the fashion of the day, wearing hats, intently observing a sporting event which was taking place outside the frame of the camera. Luce saw promise, in both the final product and Murray's contribution. "I have just read your 'Footloose Sportsman'

for the Los Angeles area. It's just fine ... and I want to congratulate you on this piece and even more, on all the work you have done in the last few months. ... Fingers must always be crossed about futures, but it does indeed look as if we have a good magazine coming up," Luce wrote to Murray.<sup>22</sup>

A second dummy issue went to press in April 1954, but the decision to publish still had not been made. Murray joined the advertising and editorial staffs of the new magazine at a convention in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, that month where it was announced that the decision had been made to go ahead. With publication for the first live issue set for August, the magazine still had no name. Murray and some of the others on the experimental staff advocated the title *Fame*, which would nicely tie the company's titles together as *Time*, *Life*, *Fame* and *Fortune*.<sup>23</sup> Luce preferred *Sport*, but the name was owned by MacFadden Publications, which was demanding \$250,000 for the rights to the name, a figure Luce was unwilling to pay. In the end, Time/Life was able to obtain the title *Sports Illustrated* from a friend of publisher Harry Phillips for \$5,000.

Finally, on August 16, more than a year after Murray had received that fateful phone call, the inaugural issue of *Sports Illustrated* reached newsstands. The cover photo was Milwaukee Braves slugger Eddie Matthews batting in a game at Milwaukee County Stadium. Inside, the magazine was a mix of pieces contributed by Time/Life staff writers, many written in the *Time* style, and others produced by well-known contract sports writers such as Red Smith and Herbert Warren Wind, writing on their subjects of expertise.<sup>24</sup> Reaction was overwhelmingly positive. Subscription orders poured in. Even President Eisenhower, whom Luce had sent a copy, complimented it, writing "I know I shall find much of interest in it, perhaps too much for my

own peace of mind.” The idea had become a reality, but it would be nearly a decade of tinkering and financial losses before it would finally hit its editorial and financial stride.<sup>25</sup>

### **Part-time Sportswriter**

As with all start-ups, *Sports Illustrated* struggled to define itself in its first years of existence. Was it a general interest sports-rag geared toward the everyday beer-and-a-hot-dog bleacher bum? Or was it a high-brow literary sports journal for Ivy Leaguers to read over tea in the smoking room at the country club? Or, as long-time *Sports Illustrated* writer Dan Jenkins called it before he joined the staff, “a slick cookbook for your basic two-yacht family.”<sup>26</sup> In the early days, the majority of editors and writers in the Time/Life family thought it should lean toward the latter, while those who were producing the magazine on a weekly basis began to feel like the only route to ultimate success was to move toward the former. Time/Life advertising executives hungrily eyed the wealthy readership of the *New Yorker* and other high brow publications, and believed these were the readers Madison Avenue desired. With James at the helm, the push from above for coverage of upper-crust leisure activities had a willing ear. In the first year of the magazine’s existence, one staff writer alone wrote 36 articles on yachting.<sup>27</sup> Andy Crichton, an editor who joined the staff of the magazine in 1954, felt at the time there was a growing sentiment that the magazine was being pulled in the wrong direction. “On the first coverage we did of the America’s Cup Yacht Race, and we had 8 or 10 or 12 pages laid out,” Crichton remembered. “It was dummed up ... for (James) to go through Sunday evening, and he turned the pages, on this long yacht story, and he closed up the last page, and said ‘That’s where we live.’ And a couple of us said to ourselves, ‘I don’t think so.’”<sup>28</sup>

Murray, back in his position in the Los Angeles bureau, quickly became *Sports Illustrated’s* de facto West Coast correspondent. His contributions straddled both sides of the leisure sport vs. spectator sport debate, and, in total, underscored his expertise in an extremely

wide swath of sports subjects. One week, he would analyze the upcoming college-football season; the next issue he would write about Ch. Crown Crest Rubi, an afghan breed winner at the Westminster Dog Show. Murray's first bylined article appeared in the magazine in January of 1955. It was a feature piece about Santa Anita racetrack, Southern California's premiere track, which at the time was a runaway financial success and a growing national attraction. As he would through his tenure at the magazine, Murray wove his connections within and knowledge of the Hollywood movie industry into his coverage of sports. Photos of MGM founder Louis B. Mayer and actress Betty Grable ran alongside Murray's text, which lovingly characterized one of the gems of the racing industry:

Out in Arcadia, Calif., a warm sun dappled down on a million pansy blossoms and a crowd of 30,000 felt a pleasurable shiver of anticipation as a gaudy gentleman in the scarlet greatcoat and furry top hat of a Dickensian outrider strode to the center of the harrowed track and raised his long-stemmed bugle to his lips. It was the call to the colors for the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Santa Anita Park racing season. A moment later a dozen sleek, shiny thoroughbreds, their jockeys' silks glistening in the sunlight, burst onto the track and minced toward the starting line. To the racegoer, it was the prettiest sight in the world.<sup>29</sup>

It was at that same track, less than two months later, that Murray got involved in his first major sports story, one that would also prove to be an early chance to leave a national footprint for *Sports Illustrated*. In the mid-1950s, horse racing was riding a decade-long wave of popularity and was challenging baseball as the top spectator sport in America. With a little extra money in their pockets, Americans felt free to spend some of their excess at the track. And outside of Las Vegas, there was very little competition for the American gambling dollar. In 1949, 19.7 million patrons visited the country's race tracks; by 1959, that figure rose to 33.5 million. During those same years, the amount of money wagered at tracks rose from \$1.4 billion to \$2.5 billion.<sup>30</sup>

In late February, Murray covered the Santa Anita Derby, which was the coming-out party for the next great star of the sport, a horse named Swaps. Swaps was owned by an

Arizonan named Rex Ellsworth and trained by his friend Mesh Tenney, both devout Mormons. In 1933, Ellsworth, the son of a rancher, had rented a truck and driven to Lexington, Kentucky, with \$600, money he intended to use to start his racing stable. He had come back to Arizona with six mares and two weanlings, and gradually built a thriving thoroughbred business, one that would eventually become the most successful in the western U.S.<sup>31</sup> Choosing functionality over appearance, Ellsworth eschewed the Kentucky-style horse farm of white picket fences and majestic barns in favor of the v-mesh wiring of a western cattle pen. With no money for purchasing horses with top bloodlines, Ellsworth and Tenney managed to use their knowledge of conformation and skill of preparation to develop a string of winners.<sup>32</sup> By 1955, the Ellsworth operation was an unquestioned success, and Swaps, a long, tall, and wide chestnut colt with dazzling speed, would be their first opportunity to showcase their stable nationally.

In the Santa Anita Derby, Swaps went off as the second favorite, and after grabbing the lead halfway through the race, “he came into the final turn like a scat halfback – way wide but fast, Murray wrote.”<sup>33</sup> Swaps won by half a length, and, as happens following all major stakes races in the winter and early spring, talk turned to the Kentucky Derby. Swaps was both bred and trained in California, and it had been 33 years since a California-bred horse had won the Kentucky Derby. California race fans seized upon Swaps as the next great Western hope. Arriving at Churchill Downs prior to the race, Tenney became incensed when he noticed a sleeping security guard, and decided to bed down in the stall with his prize colt. “Cowboy Sleeps with Horse” was the headline on one of the following morning’s newspapers, and soon thereafter Tenney and Ellsworth were dubbed the “Cowboy Race Kings” by *Life*. The public became infatuated with Swaps and his eccentric owners, and an East vs. West racing showdown was born.

The other half of the brewing rivalry was Nashua, a quirky, quick-tempered Kentucky-bred colt that had the backing of the Eastern racing establishment. Nashua was owned by William Woodward, Jr., heir to the Kentucky breeding fortune of William Woodward, Sr., a member of the American racing royalty. The horse was trained by Hall of Fame trainer Jim Fitzsimmons, who had trained two Triple Crown winners, Gallant Fox in 1930 and Omaha in 1935.<sup>34</sup> On the morning of the Kentucky Derby, Western bettors anted up enough to make Swaps the favorite, but by the afternoon Eastern money came in and Nashua was the bettors' choice. Swaps was to be ridden by Bill Shoemaker, a young star of the sport in 1955 who would go on to become both a Hall of Fame jockey and a close personal friend of Murray's. On Nashua was Eddie Arcaro, another top-tier jockey, one who was known to have a heavy hand with the whip. When the gates opened, free-running Swaps grabbed the lead, and Arcaro and Nashua waited for "that nice little California sprinter" to come back to him. But Swaps never did. He turned on the speed down the stretch and pulled away, leaving Nashua in his wake.

"That would have made a fine happy ending for a movie if that were the end of it," Murray wrote later.<sup>35</sup> Instead, the story continued, helped along by Murray himself and his colleagues at his upstart new magazine, less than a year old at the time. To the dismay of the Eastern racing chiefs, Ellsworth packed up Swaps and took him home, forsaking the final two legs of the storied Triple Crown, the Preakness and the Belmont. Nashua won both races, and public sentiment for a rematch quickly materialized, helped along by the coverage in *Sports Illustrated*. Whitney Tower, the magazine's lead horse-racing writer, spearheaded the magazine's push for a match race between the two horses. In the June 13, 1955 edition of the magazine, he broke the story that both camps had agreed to such a race, to take place in August at Arlington Park in Chicago, with \$100,000 going to the winner. Match races were a rare

occurrence, a once-in-a-generation spectacle that could ignite the horse-racing world. In 1938, Seabiscuit had beaten War Admiral in a match at Pimlico that captivated the country during the depths of the Depression. *Sports Illustrated* hyped the Swaps-Nashua match-up through the summer, with the help of the trainers, who freely engaged in what would years later be known as trash talk. “Swaps can beat Nashua at any distance from a half-mile to two miles,” Tenney said. “Nashua can beat Swaps doing anything,” Fitzsimmons retorted.<sup>36</sup> Murray did his part from California. Ellsworth and Swaps took up a good part of his time. He covered the colt’s return to the track at Hollywood Park in June, where Swaps trounced the best thoroughbreds California had to offer and set a world record in doing so. In July, Murray contributed a lengthy profile on Ellsworth, complete with a four-page photo spread of the horseman in his trademark jeans and cowboy hat at home with Swaps at “his modest Chino ranch.” Murray’s piece expressed the pride of the California racing establishment. “Around Hollywood Park they are no longer asking whether Swaps is better than Nashua, it’s whether he’s as good as Man o’ War. ... A pair of Arizona cowboys has not only crashed the select circle of championship horse breeders, they have temporarily taken it over.”<sup>37</sup>

When the race finally went off in August, it was a disappointment. Swaps gouged his foot on a rock weeks before the race, and Ellsworth called for the race to be postponed. But it was scheduled for closing day at Arlington Park, and too much money and hype had been invested. The show would have to go on. When the gates opened, Swaps ran gamely, but was clearly in pain. “Swaps’ head veered right and his normally smooth stride was so scrambled, he looked like a drunk coming out of a bar under a push,” Murray wrote later.<sup>38</sup> By the stretch, Swaps was far behind and made no real attempt on the lead. Arcaro, who, Murray wrote, had practically started to whip the horse in the paddock, kept flogging Nashua through the finish line, winning by a

comfortable six lengths. Nashua would win Horse of the Year in 1955, and Swaps would come back in 1956 with one of the most successful years in the history of racing, winning eight stakes races and breaking three more world records.<sup>2</sup> The two champion colts would never face each other again, but they had helped to significantly raise the profile of a struggling magazine in its first year of existence.

Table 5-1. Topics covered in bylined articles authored by Jim Murray for *Sports Illustrated*, 1954-1961.

Topic	Number of articles	Percentage of total
Horse Racing	16	21%
College Football	16	21
Baseball	8	10
Professional Golf	7	9
Boxing	5	7
Professional Tennis	3	4
Professional Football	3	4
Track and Field	3	4
Sailing	2	3
Mountain Climbing	2	3
Other (Professional Basketball, Croquet, Dog Show, Fans, Olympics, Biography, Travel, Water Skiing, Auto Racing, Motorcycle Racing, College Golf – one article on each topic)	11	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	

### A Deadly Serious Fan

Despite his time and energy being split between the new magazine and his other duties in the Los Angeles bureau, Murray became one of the early writing stalwarts of *Sports Illustrated*.

<sup>2</sup> Craig Harzmann, “The Boy of Summer: Swaps’ Magical Spree Delighted Fans 50 Years Ago,” *The Blood Horse*, June 2006. In a strange footnote to *Sports Illustrated*’s coverage of the Swaps-Nashua rivalry, the magazine chose William Woodward, Jr., as the magazine’s Sportsman of the Year for 1955. James and the editors were ready to approve a photo of Woodward, his wife Ann, jockey Eddie Arcaro and Nashua for the cover when it was learned that Ann Woodward had shot and killed her husband. The editors substituted Brooklyn Dodgers’ pitcher Johnny Podres for Woodward for the honor.

In its early days, the magazine's coverage of major events often was not up to *Time's* standard of excellence for deadline writing. Time/Life staffers with limited knowledge of sports and writers for hire often slipped into the play-by-play style of newspaper sports coverage, providing little or no perspective. Murray and a few other select writers began to use their space in the magazine to go beyond the plays and the outcome, and discuss the scene around the event. The better articles gave a larger context to the events and offered readers analysis not found in daily newspapers.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, Murray made sure the West Coast was not ignored in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*. His Hollywood connections remained evident. He wrote about Humphrey Bogart's love of sailing, Gary Cooper's life as a sportsman, and the penchant some Hollywood titans had developed for playing croquet.<sup>40</sup> He reported and wrote profiles of Southern California sports stars and personalities from a wide variety of sports, and recommended many others through his regular backgrounders.

The small editorial staff of *Sports Illustrated* operated on the lower rung of the Time/Life ladder of importance while working at double the pace. (The magazine was producing 60 pages of editorial content each week compared to *Time's* 40 pages, with far fewer bodies.) But the job was another opportunity to escape the anonymity of *Time*, and the personal recognition that came with seeing their names in print kept the morale of the writers high.<sup>41</sup> For Murray, it was a chance to experiment with another type of journalism. Starting in 1956, he wrote a number of opinionated essays on topics designed to both make his point and raise the passions of his readers. The articles were given prominent play in the magazine, often running alongside artistic representations of the topic and Murray's take on it. He approached the pieces much in the same way he did with his *Life* article titled "I Hate the Yankees" years before: reasoned arguments strongly supported with historical examples, coming down firmly on one side of the debate. The

response was similar: pro and con responses would fill the magazine's letters sections for weeks afterward.

In June of 1956, the editor of a Murray-authored article titled "American League? Phooey!" introduced the piece with a nod to Murray's growing notoriety: "James Murray is no junior circuit upstart but a deadly serious fan who (in the days before his current disenchantment) named his oldest son for Ted Williams. Murray is fully prepared to defend his stand all summer long, if need be, against all serious dissenters." In the piece, Murray charts the long history of American League dominance in professional baseball, which he traces to the early 1920s, when John McGraw's New York Giants were overtaken by the New York Yankees of Babe Ruth. Following "Murray's Law," which states that baseball history is a series of recurrent cycles, he describes how the advent of the black Major Leaguer had brought the National League back to the verge of prominence: "Jackie Robinson, it is my intention to prove, was to the National League what Babe Ruth was to the American. He was a revolution. The sociological aspects of his advent are not germane here. ... The baseball aspects are."<sup>42</sup> The content of the article, and the flame-fanning headline, lead to "a barrage of post-marked garbage aimed directly at me," Murray wrote later.<sup>43</sup>

Later that same summer, Murray used another one of his essay-style articles to perform his journalistic duty and give voice to the voiceless: he made a plea for the poor, persecuted everyday sports spectator. "James Murray speaks with the authority and passion of a fan of many years standing," the editors wrote in a short lead-in to the article. The piece, titled "The Case for the Suffering Fan," recounts the many indignities fans of the mid-1950s suffered, from ancient stadiums to hard seats to crooked parking-lot attendants to obstructed views. Alongside the article ran pencil drawing of cheerless fans and their angry tormenters by famed illustrator

Robert Osborn. Attendance was spiraling downward in baseball in the 1950s as television's foothold continued to grow. The great majority of baseball stadiums at the time were more than 30 years old, and the amenities had fallen below modern standards. Murray placed the blame squarely upon the shoulders of baseball's cheapskate ownership, from which he saw a casual disregard of the needs and wants of their customers. He predicted that the migration away from the nation's ballparks would continue if circumstances remained the same. To illustrate, he drew upon what must have been a lifetime of slights and humiliations attending sporting events on his own dime:

People ask: What's happening to the fan? Where is he? Well, I have news. The fan is there, right where he's always been – still tooling around the antiquated ball park in the family sedan looking for a place to park; still emptying out his pockets to pay off that shark who steered him to a fender-denting hold outside the left-field wall, or giving his last eight bits to the usher, the one who's buying income property with the accumulated tax-free tips he gets for dusting off reserved seats. Could even be, in mid-game, he's still climbing ramps because he didn't tip the usher and so got sent off in the wrong direction. But anyway, he's still around, the fan is, behind his pole or maybe standing in line outside the rest room, the one with only one door and just enough facilities to take care of a Cub Scout den. He's still around, but maybe not for long.

Or maybe he isn't around, at that. Maybe he finally listened when the little woman stamped her foot for the umpteenth time and said: "The ball park? That filthy hole? Not on your life! We're going down to the Loew's High where they have Rossano Brazzi kissing Katharine Hepburn's hand in Technicolor on a Wide Screen with Stereophonic Sound, and where they have those big comfortable loge seats with air-conditioning and hot popcorn and cold Coke if you feel like it." Maybe he thought of the splintery plank seats which he would get for his reserved-seat ticket, and the sweating effort of cheering himself hoarse for a pack of athletes who would make obscene gestures at him or take to the public prints to claim they didn't deserve his services at 50 grand per year. So maybe he did turn to the little woman, thinking: it's just too much trouble to get there, it's too uncomfortable when I am there, they treat me like I'm not wanted anyway; and maybe he said: "Honey, you're right. Loew's it is. And Saturday, instead of going to the ball game, I'm gonna try and break 100."<sup>44</sup>

For the first time, Murray allowed his humor to show in his published writing. The humor of personal experience is present throughout the piece. Murray's fictional fan is placed in satirical situations which run the gamut of the belittling experiences of the everyday fan, or more accurately, Jim Murray the fan. *Sports Illustrated* correspondents from cities around the Major

Leagues contributed anecdotes of fan mistreatment at the various stadiums. And Murray incorporated comments from Bob Cobb, Brown Derby proprietor and owner of Murray's favorite hometown minor league club, the Hollywood Stars, to support his premise. The piece was one of the first in which Murray exhibited an ability to use wit to both entertain his readers and drive home his point.

The sports essays were an attempt on the part of the editors at *Sports Illustrated* to make better use of Murray's emerging talents. But most of the time, his unique skills as a writer never made it to Time/Life readers. One editor who noticed Murray's flair early on was Robert Creamer, an editor who had been on the staff of the magazine since before the first issue. Creamer said Murray was often handcuffed by the magazine's formulaic design, which didn't often allow for writers to employ personal style. Murray's style came through loud and clear in his inter-office background reports for all of his Time/Life assignments. "We all knew Jim could write," Creamer remembered. "It was fun reading his dispatches. ... And it was great to read. But unfortunately, we weren't smart enough to just run them that way, I guess. ... I think it hampered Jim, because he worked in this format, he supplied the material for the writers to do their pieces, but I think it kept his light under a bushel."<sup>45</sup>

### **Ocean of Joy**

By 1956, Murray had been in the employ of Time/Life for eight years. The company's great wave of growth had yet to crest, and it paid its employees well. Murray's salary was up to \$15,000, a figure which went a long way in California in the 1950s. He was professionally satisfied, and well compensated to boot. "I have a great job. I have a New York salary in California," he told Creamer. With his income creeping into a higher bracket, the Murray family made another move, one that would provide both an immediate increase in quality of life and long-term financial dividends. The family left Pacific Palisades and moved about 25 miles up the

coast to Point Dume, a community at the western edge of the city of Malibu. The new home was on a promontory overlooking the Pacific Ocean, with a sweeping ocean view, something that had long been a dream of Murray's.<sup>46</sup> The city of Malibu had been largely left alone by development until the 1930s, when the Pacific Coast Highway was completed. After that, many movie-industry heavyweights migrated north, and the area became known as the Malibu Movie Colony. Barbara Stanwyck, Jack Warner of Warner Brothers Studio, Clara Bow and Murray's childhood favorite Ronald Coleman were all Malibu residents at one time.<sup>47</sup> Point Dume was still in its infancy when the Murrays arrived. Murray said the move made his commute to the bureau "hideously long," but the view, and the peace that came along with it, was well worth the tradeoff.<sup>48</sup> The purchase also would be a profitable one for the Murrays. Once again, they'd acquired real estate in a location where land values were soon to go through the roof. When he finally sold the Point Dume property 18 years later, the buyer was Bob Dylan, and Murray had made a small fortune on the investment.<sup>49</sup>

The Dylans would have never moved in had it not been for the power of *Time* magazine, because the home would have likely burned to the ground. Wildfires are a constant threat in Malibu, where houses are set off on separate hills, surrounded by brush. One day, Murray heard reports of a wildfire in Point Dume while he was at work at the bureau. He rushed home. He soon reached a police blockade, and pleaded to the officers that his wife and four children were in the home and he should be let through. Nobody is allowed past this point, he was told. Murray hopped back in his car, and drove another route toward the home, only to encounter another police blockade. This time, he pulled out his *Time* press pass, and announced he was covering the fire for the magazine. The cops deferred, and Murray was able to get to the house before the

fire reached his property. He climbed on his roof with a water hose and successfully defended his new home from disaster.<sup>50</sup>

Though it wasn't as dangerous as a fast-moving Malibu blaze, there was another persistent threat to Murray's paradise: the whims of Time/Life editors who wanted to draw him back East. Even before the formation of the sports-magazine task force, the home office had been pushing for him to transfer to another office, with the carrot being career advancement. It was customary within the company for correspondents to move throughout the news service on their way up the ladder. Murray's close friend Frank McCulloch was transferred from Los Angeles to Dallas to New York and back to Los Angeles between 1953 and 1960.<sup>51</sup> At one point, Murray was offered, in fact strongly advised, to accept the position of bureau chief for the company's Boston bureau. The Boston chief, Jeff Wylie, was slotted for Los Angeles. Fortunately for Murray, Wylie thought even less of the idea than he did, and soon left the company to enroll at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The switch died in a New York board room, and Murray's grip on his beloved Los Angeles was once again safe for the time being.<sup>52</sup> The constant pressure to vacate the West Coast would take its toll, however, and eventually accelerate his departure from Time/Life.

Another minor annoyance to Murray's comfortable existence in Los Angeles was the habit the New York office had of sending reporters west to encroach on what Murray had come to view as his turf. Of course, California was far too large a territory for a single correspondent to cover for a national sports magazine. But on occasion, Murray bristled at the idea of a New York writer being sent out to cover what he felt was his story. When the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles in 1958, Murray covered the story for *Time*, doing the bulk of the work on a cover story on Dodgers' owner Walter O'Malley.<sup>53</sup> (The New York Giants moved to San Francisco

that same year.) However, when the teams began play out West, Creamer was dispatched to cover the inaugural series. The slight was just one example of the type of occurrence that tended to stick in Murray's craw. "I don't know whether it was an injustice to him or not," said his friend Mel Durslag, who was still writing for the *Los Angeles Examiner* at the time, "but he got pissed off at New York and at *Time*. He was mad at them."<sup>54</sup>

### **A Fateful Choice**

At the dawn of the 1960s, Murray's journalism career remained on the slow arc toward the world of sports. He had spent a dozen years in the Los Angeles bureau. He continued to carry out his duties as a correspondent in the *Time* news service, filing his weekly reports, the Los Angeles Letter and the Hollywood Letter, as well as contributing background dispatches when called upon on California politics, crime and culture. But his output for *Sports Illustrated* was growing. His byline was appearing as often as many of the magazine's full-time writers. In August of 1960, he co-wrote a two-part, 15-page series on a successful mountain-climbing expedition to the summit of Dhaulagiri, a previously unconquered peak in the Himalayas and the seventh highest peak on Earth.<sup>55</sup> In the months following, he covered auto racing, track and field, boxing, professional and college football and other assorted sporting events and topics, all resulting in bylined articles in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*. In December, he took his first extended road trip for the magazine, spending a week in various Eastern cities with the Los Angeles Lakers over the Christmas holidays. The team had moved from Minneapolis to Los Angeles during the summer of 1960. For his piece, titled "A Trip for Ten Tall Men," Murray largely kept the actual basketball game action off stage, instead concentrating on the daily life of professional players in the fledgling National Basketball Association, as they moved through the airports, hotels and bars of the urban Northeast. Using dialogue and characterization and taking the story beyond the

point where traditional sports writing leaves off, Murray's article was exactly the type of writing that would become the magazine's calling card and foment its eventual success.<sup>56</sup>

Before "Ten Tall Men" ever appeared in *Sports Illustrated*, events had already been set in motion that would send Murray's career in a new direction. After his stints in Dallas and New York, Frank McCulloch had returned to Los Angeles as bureau chief. Like Murray, he felt it was just a matter of time before a transfer order would come in from the Time/Life home office. A few years earlier, in 1957, McCulloch had written a profile piece for *Time* on Norman and Buffy Chandler, publishers of the *Los Angeles Times*. The Chandlers had been impressed with the article and enamored with McCulloch. The three kept in touch. In 1960, the Chandlers' son Otis was promoted to publisher of the *Times*, and was putting together a new team of top editors. At the suggestion of Norman and Buffy, McCulloch was considered for the position of managing editor, the second rung on the newspaper's editorial ladder, below editor Nick Williams.<sup>57</sup> "I thought it over, and I said I'd have to have a pretty big salary," McCulloch remembered. "And they said 'What do you mean by that?' And I said I'd have to have \$20,000. So they chewed on that for a while and said OK, we'll do it." McCulloch had been earning \$19,000 at Time/Life.<sup>58</sup>

After he gained his footing, McCulloch began the task of trying to improve the quality of the writing staff at the *Times*. His strategy was essentially to hire his friends away from Time/Life. Eventually, he would hire away enough talent from the Los Angeles bureau to cause Henry Luce to plead for mercy. "I had good personal relationships with them, and I paid them a little more money than they were making at the time," McCulloch said. "And the *Times*, of course, particularly at that time, was enormously dominant in Los Angeles. If you worked for the *Times*, it was just fine in L.A. I don't think any of them had a hesitancy about doing it." Murray was the first person on McCulloch's hit list.

Around the same time, the push at Time/Life's New York office to bring Murray back to the East was rising again. This time, however, the offer was much more enticing. He was asked to come to New York to take a position as one of the top editors at *Sports Illustrated*. The magazine was undergoing a shake-up at the top levels in 1960. Andre Laguerre, the man who would eventually pilot the magazine toward financial and editorial dominance, had been Luce's managing editor in waiting for four years. In April, when Sid James was promoted to publisher, Laguerre was handed the reins of the magazine.<sup>59</sup> Murray's name had been tossed around as a candidate for a top position, and now the offer was beginning to sound like one of the "take-it-or-leave-it" variety.<sup>60</sup>

The Murrays celebrated Thanksgiving in 1960 with his friend Will Fowler and family. Murray and Fowler discussed the apparent turning point in Murrays' career. He was sitting on offers from *Sports Illustrated* and the *Los Angeles Times*. A decision needed to be made, and soon. Both offers meant more money. Staying with Time/Life meant security and upward mobility, but, of course, it meant hats, overcoats and snow shovels as well. The *Times* offer would be a leap into the great unknown. Murray had never written a single sports column for publication. He was well known to Los Angeles area journalists, but to Los Angeles readers he was almost completely anonymous. But the column, he told Fowler, would be a new challenge.

"I never gave it much thought," Murray confided to Fowler, "but what the hell is a sports columnist's routine?"

"You just keep hoping the next guy you talk to will give you an idea for a column," Fowler told him. "If he says 'Come on over to the house for a drink' and nothing else, avoid him."

"Well, I've got four kids now, and I'm really fed up with galoshes," Murray said.<sup>61</sup>

A few days later, he told McCulloch he'd chosen the *Times*. After he went downtown to the *Times* offices to make it official, he stopped by the home of Mel Durslag on the way back out to Malibu. Durslag and Murray would now be competing lead sports columnists on the two top newspapers in Los Angeles. Just nine months earlier, the position that Murray had just accepted had been offered to Durslag. *Times* editors had brought him to the Biltmore Hotel for a drink and made him an offer. Durslag turned them down. "Maybe I didn't make the wisest choice, but I passed, because I'd worked for Hearst for all those years," he recalled.

Now Murray was at Durslag's home to tell him he'd accepted the *Times* position. Murray was just beginning to comprehend what he had signed up for: six sports columns a week, every week, from now to eternity. "We were talking about writing a column, and he was sort of trying to get himself organized, see. He'd never done that before. ... And I said the first thing you have to do, Jim, is develop a routine. You need to develop a very rigid routine when you write a daily column," Durslag said.<sup>62</sup>

Luce and the *Time* family were discouraged but resigned to the fact that Murray had chosen California over them. The decision was not unexpected. Murray had burned no bridges and remained held in the highest regard at *Time*. "I salute you especially as one of the pioneers who, along with the rest of the very privileged few, were in at the beginning to stand up before the slings and arrows. There is something very special about a pioneer and something especially special about a magazing pioneer in the mid-Twentieth Century," James wrote to Murray when he heard the news.<sup>63</sup> Murray went home to Malibu and began to prepare himself. "The opportunities for falling off a high wire were certainly present," he wrote later. "I remember going to bed that night thinking, 'I hope I've done the right thing.'"<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Murray, "Henry Luce: The Printed Word's Dearest Friend," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1967.

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- <sup>2</sup> Michael MacCambridge, *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 19.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Champlin, "Memories of Henry Luce, His Life and Time," *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1967.
- <sup>4</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.
- <sup>5</sup> Jim Murray, "Henry Luce: The Printed Word's Dearest Friend," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1967.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Champlin, "Memories of Henry Luce, His Life and Time," *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1967.
- <sup>7</sup> Elson, *The World of Time, Inc.*, xi-xiii.
- <sup>8</sup> Champlin, "Memories," *Los Angeles Times*.
- <sup>9</sup> Elson, *The World of Time, Inc.*, 339-341.
- <sup>10</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 14-15.
- <sup>11</sup> After leaving *Time/Life*, Clay Felker achieved success as the editor of *New York* magazine, cultivating the careers of writers such as Tom Wolfe, Gloria Steinem and Jimmy Breslin.
- <sup>12</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 34-35.
- <sup>13</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 20-21.
- <sup>14</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 35.
- <sup>15</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 20-21.
- <sup>16</sup> Elson, *The World of Time, Inc.*, 343.
- <sup>17</sup> Ernie Haverman to Jim Murray, September 30, 1953.
- <sup>18</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 41.
- <sup>19</sup> Elson, *The World of Time, Inc.*, 344.
- <sup>20</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 32.
- <sup>21</sup> For sentimental reasons, the prototype was tested in the same way that *Life* was introduced 18 years earlier, right down to the first sentence of the mailing: "The enthusiasm now prevailing in the offices of *Time* and *Life* is one which I hope you will share in the very near future."
- <sup>22</sup> Henry Luce to Jim Murray, December 26, 1953.
- <sup>23</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 42.
- <sup>24</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 45-47.
- <sup>25</sup> Elson, *The World of Time, Inc.*, 353-354. The magazine first turned a profit in 1964, and revenue grew steadily thereafter.

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- <sup>26</sup> Jim Murray, "Magazine Illustrated Sports Importance," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1997.
- <sup>27</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 68.
- <sup>28</sup> Andy Crichton, interview by author, August 29, 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> Jim Murray, "Strub's Santa Anita," *Sports Illustrated*, January 10, 1955.
- <sup>30</sup> Mary Simon, *Racing Through the Century: The Story of Thoroughbred Racing in America* (Irvine, CA: Bowtie Press, 2002), 153-154.
- <sup>31</sup> Jim Murray, "California Gets a Gleam in the Eye," *Sports Illustrated*, February 28, 1955, 12.
- <sup>32</sup> Simon, *Racing Through the Century*, 170-171.
- <sup>33</sup> Jim Murray, "California Gets a Gleam in the Eye," *Sports Illustrated*, February 28, 1955, 12.
- <sup>34</sup> Simon, *Racing Through the Century*, 170.
- <sup>35</sup> Jim Murray, "The Derby and Swaps," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1961.
- <sup>36</sup> Simon, *Racing Through the Century*, 165.
- <sup>37</sup> Jim Murray, "At Home with Swaps in California," *Sports Illustrated*, July 18, 1955, 52-57.
- <sup>38</sup> Jim Murray, "The Derby and Swaps," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1961.
- <sup>39</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 71, 73-74.
- <sup>40</sup> James Murray, "All Right, Louie, Drop the Jib," April 30, 1956, "The Gary Coopers' Sporting Life," June 1, 1959, "The Wicket Men of Hollywood," January 30, 1956, *Sports Illustrated*.
- <sup>41</sup> Elson, *The World of Time, Inc.*, 359-360.
- <sup>42</sup> James Murray, "American League? Phooey!" *Sports Illustrated*, June 11, 1956, 11-13, 74.
- <sup>43</sup> Jim Murray, "Nationals --- Phooey!" *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1961. In this column, Murray blamed the virulent response to his *Sports Illustrated* article on the editor: "...it wasn't angry enough for my editor. So he hung a title on it that was certain to win me the rotten-egg award for 1956 - 'American League? Phooey!' That satisfied him enough to hang my name under it and send it out in a world he was sure would include a lot of American League fans."
- <sup>44</sup> James Murray, "The Case for the Suffering Fan," *Sports Illustrated*, August 20, 1956, 36-43.
- <sup>45</sup> Robert Creamer, interview by author, March 22, 2007.
- <sup>46</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 134.
- <sup>47</sup> Pitt, *Los Angeles A to Z*, 313-314, 397.
- <sup>48</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 134.

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<sup>49</sup> Gerald Suppicich, interview by author, November 19, 2008. Bob Dylan purchased the property in 1973, along with three other homes in the area, to create a small compound overlooking the Pacific. He divorced shortly thereafter and his wife and several children remained.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, December 17, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 131-132.

<sup>53</sup> *Time*, "Walter in Wonderland, April 28, 1958.

<sup>54</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Norman Dyhrenfurth and James Murray, "Ordeal on the Approaches," *Sports Illustrated*, August 29, 1960, 35-49; "The Thrust to the Summit," *Sports Illustrated*, September 3, 1960, 47-53.

<sup>56</sup> James Murray, "A Trip for Ten Tall Men," *Sports Illustrated*, January 10, 1961, 52-59.

<sup>57</sup> David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 286.

<sup>58</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, December 17, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> MacCambridge, *The Franchise*, 86-88.

<sup>60</sup> Both Murray's friend Will Fowler, in his book "Reporters," and John Schiebe, in his book "On the Road with Jim Murray," write that Murray was offered the position of managing editor (or in Fowler's case, "Editor in Chief") of *Sports Illustrated*. It seems unlikely, however, since Andre Laguerre had been promoted to that position just months before. It is more likely that Luce saw Murray as a good candidate to take a high-level editor position at the magazine, and assist Laguerre, with whom Murray was well acquainted.

<sup>61</sup> Fowler, *Reporters*, 134.

<sup>62</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Sidney James to Jim Murray, January 18, 1961.

<sup>64</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 133.

CHAPTER 6  
THE *LOS ANGELES TIMES*, 1961-62

**Megalopolis**

The Los Angeles of 1961 was an entirely different entity than the overgrown coastal village that Jim Murray had encountered when he stepped off the train 17 years earlier. The wave of growth that he had been part of had continued unabated. The highway system, the origination of which he had chronicled during his days as a cub reporter, had sent out tentacles in every direction, earning Los Angeles the moniker of the Freeway City. Transplants from every region continued to grow the population, and the residential base was topped with a floating population of tourists, conventioners and visitors.<sup>1</sup> The population growth had fueled the rise of spectator sports. In the past three years, the city had gained three professional sports franchises: the Los Angeles Dodgers and the California Angels in baseball and the Los Angeles Lakers in basketball. The Los Angeles Sports Arena had opened in 1959 as a home for the Lakers and other sports and entertainment events. A stadium would be completed at Chavez Ravine as a home for the Dodgers the following year. Los Angeles, which had been drawing more than a million spectators to its minor-league teams for years, was finally in the process of becoming a major-league city.<sup>2</sup>

The playing field in the newspaper industry had changed since Murray had been gone as well. Television, which was just a speck on the media radar in the late 1940s, had by 1961 fundamentally changed the way news was communicated. Though the city's daily newspapers were still recording strong circulation figures and maintained a somewhat loyal readership, a thinning of the herd was in progress, as it was in most major metropolitan areas in the country.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wagner, *Red Ink, White Lies*, 287.

And while the *Los Angeles Examiner* was the city's leading newspaper while Murray was on its staff, Hearst's favorite newspaper was on a downward spiral in the late 1950s and early 1960s that would lead to its demise in 1962. The *Los Angeles Times*, Murray's new home, now dominated the market. The previous year, circulation at the *Times* was 532,078 on weekdays and 970,027 on Sundays, while the *Examiner's* figures were 384,760 on weekdays and 678,280 on Sundays.<sup>3</sup> The two afternoon papers, Hearst's *Herald-Express* and the Chandlers' *Mirror*, still held circulations of between 300,000 and 400,000, but the highway system and the increased reliance on automobiles had drastically reduced the demand for an afternoon news product. Within two years, the Chandlers would shutter the *Mirror* and Hearst would merge the *Herald-Express* and the *Examiner*, and Los Angeles would become a two-newspaper town.

And it was the *Times* that would come to dominate the market. The Chandler family had run the *Los Angeles Times* since the 1880s, when Harry Chandler had married the daughter of General Harrison Gray Otis, who had purchased control of the company a few years earlier from a partner. From the very beginning of the Otis-Chandler partnership, the paper had been a staunchly conservative voice of the city's business elite, always ready and willing to provide a voice for management and be an enemy to labor. For the first half of the century, the paper served as an instrument of the Republican Party in California, a reactionary rag that *Time* magazine called "the most rabid Labor-baiting, Red-hating newspaper in the United States."<sup>4</sup> By the 1940s and 1950s, the *Times* was a national laughing stock. A national poll conducted by *Time* in the late 1950s named it the second worst paper in the United States. Humorist S.J. Perelman famously wrote that during a train stopover, "I asked the porter to get me a newspaper, and unfortunately, the man, hard of hearing, brought me the *Los Angeles Times*." NBC News anchor

Chet Huntley joked that he would “always read the *Los Angeles Times* and know that I could be reasonably accurate by going 100 percent in the other direction.”

Circumstances had begun to change in the late 1950s. For one, the *Times*, which had always been the city’s dominant paper in terms of advertising due to its close ties to the business community, capitalized on the market growth far more than its competition. In 1960, the *Times* was the top newspaper in the entire country in the amount of news published and in the amount of advertising.<sup>5</sup> The Chandlers felt hurt by their status in the industry as a punch line and longed to join the upper echelon of their industry. With the financial foundation in place, they decided to make an effort to change the paper’s reputation. In 1958, the Chandlers handed control of the *Times* over to their son Otis, then 31 years old, and recently graduated from the family’s executive initiation rituals, having worked in various departments throughout the company. Around the same time, Nick Williams was given the post of editor. Upon his hiring, Norman Chandler gave Williams this direction: “I want the *Times* to be fair, and I want it to dig in, to investigate, and to report what it learns.” The character of the paper changed completely from that day on, Williams later said.<sup>6</sup> The newspaper began to strive for editorial excellence and, at the same time, it began to dominate the Los Angeles market. Bill Thomas, who was city editor at the *Times* in the early 1960s and would later become the paper’s top editor during the 1970s and 1980s, said the change in attitude and outlook came about quickly under the direction of Otis Chandler. “Two things happened: Otis became publisher, and with that came the infusion of a lot of people with a totally different journalism purposes and methods,” Thomas recalled.<sup>7</sup> The editorial staff received a boost when the *Mirror* closed and the top talent from that staff joined the *Times*. And McCulloch did his part with his raiding of the *Time* bureau.

## A Good Man in a Bar

McCulloch saw the *Times* sports department as yet another way to improve coverage and drive up readership. With the influx of sport franchises and interest, Williams and McCulloch gradually increased the paper's news hole for sports by 20 percent. Unlike the paper's news department, the *Times* sports section had earned an excellent reputation for coverage over the years. When Murray joined the staff, the sports editor was Paul Zimmerman, a veteran of the Los Angeles sports scene who was beloved by his staff. One of the lead columnists was Braven Dyer. Dyer was another old-timer, having been on the *Times* sports staff since the 1920s, when he was one of a group of regional sports writers who helped Grantland Rice choose the annual college football All-America team for *Collier's* magazine. Dyer was a well-known figure on the Los Angeles social scene, with connections throughout the city's sports scene and within the movie industry.<sup>8</sup> In 1961, Dyer was preparing to cover the California Angels first season. Frank Finch held the Dodgers beat at the time. Finch had a sharp wit, present both in the newsroom and in his copy, though he had a penchant for using clichéd language from the golden age of sports writing. The rest of the colorful sports staff included turf writer Bion Abbott, Cal Whorton, who covered boxing and the Los Angeles Rams, Al Wolf and a team of experienced copy editors and photographers.<sup>9</sup>

Murray was joining a sports staff with a solid core of writers and editors, and he came aboard in an unconventional manner. Generally, sports editors handled the hiring, and a columnist position had to be earned through several years of exemplary coverage on an important beat. Murray was hired by the newspaper's top brass, and handed the plum assignment of page-one sports columnist. (The *Times* also published columnists regularly on the inside of the sports section.) Murray knew he would face resentment initially. According to McCulloch, the two discussed the situation before Murray joined the staff. "Jim sold himself as an individual and

as a journalist to the other people in the sports department,” he recalled. “And his column was so immensely popular so quickly, and it enhanced the sports section so immensely, that everyone, whether they liked him or not, had to recognize that.”<sup>10</sup> Murray’s ease at developing friendly relationships with people, which had allowed him to glide freely through the movie industry and create an enormous network of friends and contacts, helped him quickly assimilate at the *Times*. Durslag remembered Murray in those years as having a quiet, friendly, unassuming quality that made people want to be around him. He spent a lot of time socializing and drinking with the other writers, both at the *Times* and at the other newspapers, and was completely comfortable in social situations. He was, Durslag said, “a good man in a bar.”<sup>11</sup>

On February 5, 1961, the *Times* announced its new columnist to its readers. In an article stripped across the top of the sports section, headlined “Jim Murray to Write Feature Sports Column in Times,” Murray’s actual biography was recounted, along with a tongue-in-cheek description Murray submitted about his athletic career: “At age 8, he set a new world’s record for the 37½-yard dash (the distance from the nearest street corner to the light pole in front of his home.)” Murray’s “sharp eye and quizzical typewriter” would now appear in the *Times*, the article stated, six days a week, page one, starting the following Sunday.<sup>12</sup>

The rival *Examiner* took note of their new opposition. The following Sunday, the day Murray’s first column was to appear, the *Examiner* ran an article across the top of its sports section championing its own columnist, Durslag. “Durslag’s Column Now a National Feature” screamed the headline. The article heaped on the praise of Durslag, with comments from William Randolph Hearst, Jr.,<sup>13</sup> and sports editor Ben Woolbert, who let readers know that “Mel’s column never sends you to the dictionary. He puts simple words together. It’s not just the words. It’s HOW he puts them together.” Get the real sports dope here, the *Examiner* was telling its

readers. Not from some ex-*Time* man from back East with a multi-syllabic vocabulary. The article went on to say that Mel Durslag could now be read regularly at all Hearst newspapers throughout the land, but the focus would still be squarely on Southern California.<sup>14</sup> What Durslag later called a “friendly rivalry” had been formally announced.

### **Let’s Dot Some I’s**

In the winter of 1961, there was no shortage of fodder for a sports columnist. The Los Angeles Lakers, with a rookie named Jerry West and an established star named Elgin Baylor, were in the midst of their first season in the city. The California Angels were preparing to open training camp as a Major League baseball team for the first time, and the Los Angeles Dodgers were preparing for the fourth season in the city, and their last at the Los Angeles Coliseum. (Dodger Stadium at Chavez Ravine was under construction, not without controversy, and would be ready for opening day 1962.) Heavyweight boxing champion Floyd Patterson was preparing for his third bout with challenger Ingemar Johansson of Sweden, with whom he had split the previous two matches. And at the track, the Kentucky Derby prep season was just getting underway. To announce his newfound presence in the *Times*, Murray chose to touch on all of these subjects, and many more. Running down the left side of the sports page, with a pencil drawing picturing an erudite Murray with thick-rimmed glasses, a bow-tie and the smallest trace of a grin on his face, his introductory column was a series of one-liners about Murray, his outlook and the Los Angeles sports scene. He wrote:

I have been urged by my friends – all of whom mean well – to begin writing in this space without introducing myself, as if I have been standing here all the while only you haven’t noticed. But I don’t think I’ll do that. I think I’ll start off by telling you a little about myself and what I believe in. That way, we can start to fight right away.

First off, I’m against the bunt in baseball – unless they start batting against the ball John McGraw batted against. The last time the bunt won a game, Frank Chance was a rookie.

I think the eight-point touchdown in football has had it. It’s added nothing to the game unless, of course, you count the extra bookkeeping.

I was gratified by the reaction to the announcement Jim Murray was to write a sports column, an immediate and interested “Who??!” Mel Durslag did throw a bouquet, though. I’ll read the card as soon as I take the brick out.

I came to Los Angeles in 1944 (the smog and I hit town together and neither one of us has been run out despite the best efforts of public-spirited citizens) and my biggest sports disappointment was the 1955 Swaps-Nashua race, which I helped to arrange. I have never believed Bill Shoemaker was properly tied on his mount that day when they sprang the barrier. But I will ask Bill – and believe what he says because his next lie will be his first.<sup>15</sup>

The tenor of his column was to become apparent to his readers right from the starting gate. His subject matter for the first month included very little analysis or description of current sporting events or teams. Instead, Murray employed that “quizzical typewriter” that his editors had hyped. His early columns presented a slightly off-kilter view of secondary sports issues, if they could be considered issues at all, such as how many vowels a baseball player needs in his last name to be successful, or how a computer would perform if given the job of managing a professional baseball team. Instead of the top sports stars, Murray’s early columns more often focused on marginal characters on the fringes of the sports world: perpetually broke horse players, crooked fight promoters, minor league baseball veterans or second-rate club golfers. And they were packed with humorous anecdotes, many going back decades, and a generous helping of sports (and world) history. His goal was apparent. He was writing to entertain; informing was secondary.

*Times* readers reacted strongly, some positively, some less so. A reader named Craig Barker wrote the paper to say Murray had just lost one reader because of his “attempt at the Pulitzer Prize for humorous sports writing.” Another reader wrote to let Murray know he wasn’t at *Sports Illustrated* anymore, so he could stop writing about “fox hunting, underwater polo and Indian wrestling.” Others demanded more baseball writing (Murray responded by saying he would write about baseball when somebody was playing baseball) and fewer history and English

lessons. And of course, he began to hear the familiar request that he go back where he came from. “If you distort the facts and resort to sarcasm, we’d all consider you would be better off back east,” wrote reader Robert G. Fitch, who said he spoke for all Dodger fans. Murray received more than 100 letters of praise in the first month, as well, however, including many from his celebrity friends, such as George Kennedy and Frank Capra.<sup>16</sup>

Only one month in, he reported that the column had already begun to consume his life. It was an observation he would make for the rest of his life. He tried to sweet talk Gerry, telling her she hadn’t lost a husband, she’d gained a columnist. He said he’d already become essentially worthless at any task beyond his all-encompassing chore of filling the column. Like all columnists, he wrote, he was now “a guy who would starve to death on a desert island because he’d spend all his time looking for a Western Union to send the funny line he just thought up for the place.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Boys of Summer**

As the Southern California heat index began to rise and Murray grew more comfortable with the life of a columnist, he began to develop his own personal sports beat, which included many of the haunts he was familiar with as a longtime Los Angeles sports fan. Coming up with six subjects a week was a difficult task, even in a sports-obsessed newspaper market like Los Angeles. (Durslag was still required to produce seven columns a week at the *Examiner*.)<sup>18</sup> He found he could get a column or two out of a day at Hollywood Park or Santa Anita race tracks. A major fight card at the Olympic Auditorium would produce one or two preview columns, usually profiles on fighters, trainers or other assorted boxing riff-raff, as well as a recap column the morning after the event. A short trip to Las Vegas for a golf tournament or a boxing card would produce two or three columns, and a trip to Palm Springs, just a 90-minute drive from Los Angeles, for Angels spring training offered unlimited subject matter. The remaining days could

Table 6-1. Topics covered in Jim Murray's column for the *Los Angeles Times*, 1961.

Topic	Number of columns	Percentage of total
Baseball	45	22%
Boxing	32	16
Pro Football	19	9
Horse Racing	17	8
College Football	16	8
Golf	16	8
General (multi-sport columns, Broadcaster/journalist profiles)	15	7
Track and Field	5	3
Personal	5	3
Letters	4	3
Auto Racing	3	2
Pro Wrestling	3	2
Holidays	3	2
Mountain Climbing	2	1
Harness Racing	2	1
Hunting	2	1
Other (Karate, Hollywood, Gambling, Rodeo, Bullfighting, Lifeguarding, Weightlifting, Surfing, Tennis, Yachting, Ice Hockey, Chess)	12	6
<b>Total</b>	201	

be filled in with think pieces, straight humor columns, and the odds and ends of the sports scene (and his own life) for which he could conceive an angle. In one two-week stretch in the dog days of summer, before the baseball pennant races heated up, he wrote about spending a day with a lifeguard at the beach in Malibu, taking his son Teddy fishing in his new dinghy (“the S.S. Nervous Wreck”), comparing quotations from famous historical and sports figures, and the national chess championships. “Watching a chess match has all the pulsating excitement of watching a pitcher warm up, or a hair fall. . . . It’s like watching grass not grow,” he wrote.<sup>19</sup>

But baseball was still the national pastime in America in the early 1960s, and both Murray’s readers and editors wanted to see it prominently played in his column. He devoted

significant time and space to the Angels, who were struggling through their inaugural season in the American League, and the Dodgers, who seemed to be headed to a World Series, only to give away the pennant on that fateful road trip Murray took with the team in August. The national issue which dominated sports pages across the country in the late summer of 1961, however, was the chase for Babe Ruth's home-run record, and the infamous Ford Frick asterisk. By July, New York Yankee sluggers Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle were far ahead of the pace that Babe Ruth followed when he set the record of 60 home runs in a single season, a number that had attained mythical status in baseball. Ruth was a baseball legend, and all that he symbolized about the Golden Age of the sport was intertwined with the magical number of 60 home runs, set in 1927. For 1961, the baseball season had been expanded from 154 games, which it was when Ruth played, to 162 games. On July 17, Frick, the commissioner of baseball and a close friend and ghost writer of Ruth's, handed down an official ruling: if it took Maris or Mantle more than 154 games to break the record, it would go into the holy baseball record books with an asterisk. That way, Ruth's renowned number could live on.<sup>20</sup>

Baseball was a house divided. Everybody hated somebody: Frick, Maris, Mantle, or Ruth. Or all of the above. Murray weighed in for the first time on July 25. He took aim at Frick. "Ford Frick isn't the worst commissioner of baseball in history, but he's in the photo. I make him no worse than third place," he wrote. He pointed out the faulty logic in Frick's argument that a new record would be illegitimate because it was set under different conditions. Where do you draw the line? Murray asked rhetorically. Should modern hitters have to face the same number of spitballs that Ruth faced? Hit as many home runs into the wind as Ruth did? Hit as many home runs to left field as Ruth did? He wrote: "If some batter hits 61 home runs, THAT is going to be

the record, as far as baseball is concerned. . . . That ought to satisfy Frick. If it doesn't, he can take his fat pension and retire and become personal custodian of Ruth's record."<sup>21</sup>

The column brought the inevitable letters accusing Murray of being a Yankee hater and much worse.<sup>22</sup> Frick's decision further hyped a home-run chase that already had captured the imagination of the nation. In September, Murray joined the legions of baseball writers covering the story in Chicago to see the side show for himself. Maris had hit 56 home runs at that point, Mantle, 53.<sup>23</sup> The games had become a side show. Fans, even those of opposing teams, expected a home run every at bat. The stands emptied after each time Mantle and Maris batted, and the home team pitcher was booed for striking them out. There were so many reporters around, Murray wrote, "if we were wearing sheets it would look like a lynching."<sup>24</sup> The 1961 home run chase was, to that point in time, the high-water mark for sports-media feeding frenzies, with television raising the ante, and the players, the reporters, and baseball management were not prepared for the storm. The Yankees organization offered Mantle and Maris no protection and provided no buffer from the media; reporters, most of whom they did not know, followed them to breakfast, to the hotel, to the stadium, wherever they could find them.<sup>25</sup>

Murray quickly grew bored of the chase, both Maris and Mantle's chase of the record, and the media's chase of Maris and Mantle. As would become his pattern, he was loath to follow the crowd of reporters. Pack journalism was not in his nature. He had joined the Yankees press corps in Chicago in mid-September and followed them to Detroit, where the team finally cut off access to Maris (Mantle had fallen behind and was largely out of the race by then.) In the visiting dressing room, the reporters sent a delegation to Yankee manager Ralph Houk to speak to Maris. Houk blew up at them.

"It's my clubhouse and I'll run it any damn way I please!" he shouted at them.

Maris was a reticent Midwesterner who had neither the skill nor the desire to win over the fans or the media. By late September, the immense pressure had gotten to him. With Mantle out of the picture, he was now the sole focus of the press and the fans. He developed rashes and his hair began to fall out.<sup>26</sup> Murray was sympathetic to his plight, and confessed to be rooting for him to break the record: “The fence, the pitchers, the commissioner of baseball, the ghost of Ruth will be picketed out in right field for Maris – the toughest shift in history. I hope he hits the ball right through all of them and into that glass case in Cooperstown,” he wrote.<sup>27</sup>

Maris hit his 60<sup>th</sup> home run on September 26 and went into the last game of the season, on October 1, with one last shot at the record, albeit a record now with an asterisk. By then, Murray had come off the road and Frank Finch was in New York to record history for the *Times*. In the fourth inning, Maris drilled a fast ball off Boston Red Sox pitcher Tracy Stallard into the right field stands at Yankee Stadium.<sup>28</sup> He had accomplished a nearly impossible feat, but the record was tarnished, and the press was slow to let up. After the game, a radio reporter asked him if he had thought of Mickey Mantle as he was rounding the bases after the home run.<sup>29</sup> Murray put the feat in perspective the following day, declaring that Maris’ accomplishment was far greater than that of Ruth: “Ruth was not battling history as well as the pitchers. And the commissioner of baseball did not level a brush-back pitch at him in the middle of it. He did not have to play with one eye on the calendar. . . . Ruth coasted in. Maris clawed his way in. That’s why I’m glad he made it.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Stirring the Pot**

The very next month, Murray ventured into an area far more emotionally charged than home runs and asterisks. He traveled to Birmingham, Alabama, to cover a football game between Georgia Tech and the University of Alabama, and in the process inserted himself into the growing struggle for civil rights. University of Alabama was a football powerhouse in the early

1960s, under the leadership of head coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. Bryant, 48 years old at the time, was a gruff, hard-drinking Arkansan known to browbeat reporters and do far worse to his players. He had come to Alabama three years before and quickly turned the program into a winner. He had become a hero to whites across the South.<sup>31</sup> The Crimson Tide football team was all white, like the entire student body of the University of Alabama. Segregation was strictly enforced. What drew Murray to Alabama was the brewing controversy over the upcoming Rose Bowl, which was supposed to feature two of the top college football teams in the nation. Both Alabama and UCLA were undefeated and each was considered a likely candidate for the Rose Bowl. UCLA featured black players, however, and the team was threatening to boycott if Alabama was invited to play in the game.

In 1961, the civil-rights movement was gaining steam, and to say the white establishment in the South was on edge was an understatement. The possibility for violence and conflict was present whenever the subject turned to race. The Congress of Racial Equality, a growing civil-rights organization, had begun conducting “freedom rides” in the Deep South in the spring of that year. Groups of blacks and whites moving together would deliberately enter segregated restaurants and stores. They were often met by violent mobs and ended up beaten and jailed. Earlier in the year, in Anniston, Alabama, less than 40 miles east of Birmingham, a Greyhound bus in which a group of freedom riders had been travelling had been burned. A mob tried to hold the riders on the bus while it burned, and when the riders escaped the vehicle, they were viciously beaten.<sup>32</sup>

It was in this highly charged racial atmosphere that Murray came to Bryant’s hotel room in Birmingham’s Bankhead Hotel. A soft rain fell outside the window as Bryant leaned back on his bed and began fielding questions from the assembled press.

“Coach Bryant,” Murray asked, “What did you think of the announcement out of UCLA that the colored players would not take the field against your team if it got to the Rose Bowl?”

Bryant thought for a moment.

“Oh, I would have nothing to say about that. Neither will the university, I’m sure,” he responded.

The hotel room went silent as the reporters shuffled papers and looked at the floor.

A local reporter had turned beet red, Murray noticed. The reporter gathered himself and spoke.

“Tell them West Coast nigger lovers to go lick your boots, Bear,” he growled, his eyes fixed on Murray.

After the meeting broke up, Murray was approached by two Southern reporters, Fred Russell of the *Nashville Banner* and Bill Lumpkin of the *Birmingham Post-Herald*. “Forget the remark of that knot-head,” Lumpkin told him. “That’s not the attitude.”

Murray’s column the following day was a screed against the racial bigotry of the South. Not a word about the Georgia Tech-Alabama game was mentioned. “It doesn’t make any sense,” he wrote. “It’s worse than un-American. It’s un-human. The water fountains in the airport jar you. ‘Colored only.’ The pretense is that the world is divided into people and non-people. If you don’t notice them, eat, drink, or go to school with them, they’re not there.”

Murray went on to write that Russell and Lumpkin had told him that the Alabama football community expected the boycott.

“It does seem short sighted. Seem like they’re pushing us back in our place and how can this help?” Lumpkin asked Murray, who agreed with the point in print and argued against the boycott. He wrote: “The tragedy I have found in Birmingham is that the bullies of white

supremacy have first cowed and terrified their own people. Let's not force them back in those bedsheets. At least not unless we're sure that's the way they want it."<sup>33</sup>

As Murray now knew would happen, his column in the *Times* was mailed back to Alabama, with the expected results. He was called a "Communist Red Moscow Rat," accused of having a "Negro father," and threatened that he would be tossed from the window. Upon being forwarded the column by a reader, John Bloomer, managing editor of the *Birmingham News*, wrote "Mr. Murray has a sophomoric intellect that, in this case, is far from amusing."<sup>34</sup> Murray was surprised, however, to see that the outpouring of abuse was smaller than he had expected. He received letters of support from both *Times* readers and some Alabamans. Other *Times* readers, however, wrote to tell him to stick to sports on the sports page. This was something he clearly had no intention of doing:

"I am a journalist, of sorts. I went down to a state in the South which also belongs to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only, it not only doesn't like it, it doesn't know it. Or won't admit it. A writer – even a sportswriter – is supposed to cover news.

The real news of the game I covered had very little to do with the score. It had to do with the smell of roses and the color of the players. That's what I wrote about. That's what this business is about. That's the way I intend to play it."<sup>35</sup>

Alabama ended up playing in the Sugar Bowl in Louisiana instead of the Rose Bowl. UCLA faced Minnesota in the 1962 Rose Bowl, so the threatened boycott never materialized. Eighteen months later, the federal government forced the integration of University of Alabama,<sup>36</sup> but Bryant's football squad remained all-white. What eventually forced integration of the Crimson Tide team was when bowl committees became uncomfortable inviting segregated Southern teams to the party. Alabama and the rest of the Southeastern Conference desegregated by the end of the decade (Alabama's first black player joined the team in 1970.) Murray traveled back to Alabama in 1970, this time to Tuscaloosa, home of University of Alabama, when the Tide first agreed to host a team with black players, USC. He was going South again not to see

who would win the game, he wrote: “The point of the game will be Reason, Democracy, Hope. The real winner will be the South. It’ll be their first since the second day at Gettysburg, or maybe, The Wilderness.”<sup>37</sup>

### **City Assassin**

While Murray was doing his part for the civil-rights struggle, the wheels were in motion in a chain of events that would eventually bring his column to newspaper readers across the United States. Prior to his trip to Alabama, he had gone to New York and Cincinnati to cover the 1961 World Series. The Reds had overtaken the Dodgers in the National League, but were overmatched against the American League champion Yankees, and the series was a glum, one-sided affair, which New York won in five games. In Cincinnati, Murray witnessed the impact of his lighthearted attack on the city just a few months before. His photo ran on the front page of the *Cincinnati Post and Times-Star*, with the tag “most hated man in Cincinnati.” He was hung in effigy in downtown Cincinnati, and fans held up signs at Crosley Field that read “Boo Murray!”<sup>38</sup>

The impact was also not lost on the *Post and Times-Star*. The newspaper received more than 250 pieces of mail when it published one of Murray’s attacks on the city, more than had ever been received for a single article. *Post and Times-Star* sports editor Pat Harmon contacted the *Los Angeles Times* to inquire about publishing Murray on a syndicated basis. The *Times* turned him down, telling him they didn’t feel Murray was syndicate material.<sup>39</sup> McCulloch, however, felt otherwise. He called Rex Barley, then the top executive with *Los Angeles Times* Syndication, and recommended Murray.

“I haven’t read him,” Barley said.

“Well, you better start,” McCulloch urged.

Barley took samples of Murray's column with him on his next sales trip to pitch *Times* editorial content for syndication. He returned with 10 newspapers signed on to publish Murray, quite a good haul for a first-time effort.<sup>40</sup>

To that point, Murray had sprinkled in a paragraph here and there poking fun at cities. Now, he made it the centerpiece of his act. In the winter of 1962, he stepped up his travel, and he now began taking road trips in part for their sports value, part for the destination itself. He tagged along on a mid-western swing with the Lakers, which brought him to Detroit, St. Louis, Morgantown, West Virginia, and Dayton, Ohio. Murray took his best shot night after night. Detroit, he wrote, "was like staying up all night on a cake of ice, then taking a cold shower upon arising."<sup>41</sup> In St. Louis, he wrote, the city had a bond issue with the campaign slogan "Progress or Decay" and decay won in a landslide.<sup>42</sup> West Virginia was so poor, he wrote, "it not only didn't know the depression was over, it didn't even notice when it started."<sup>43</sup> Dayton, for some reason, got off scot free.

Soon, cities began to return fire. The *West Union Record* of West Union, West Virginia, published an editorial in response to Murray's visit: "We have been assailed by the lowest form of the writing profession – the sports hack. The author of this piece of flagrant misrepresentation is a bespectacled Irishman named Jim Murray who looks more like a fugitive from the roof gutter of a post office than he does an Irishman." The article went on to say Murray looked like a gargoyle, was drunk on weak beer when he wrote the column, and it was their fond hope that Murray would eventually starve to death. Murray reprinted the entire editorial in the *Times* and clearly enjoyed the exchange: "Well, Mr. West Virginia *West Union Record*, you're a brave man and a journalist of the old school and I salute you. I wouldn't dare reprint your editorial if it

weren't about me. Mr. Chandler and his lawyers wouldn't let me. But tell me: How do you describe Castro?" he wrote.<sup>44</sup>

Durslag, at the *Examiner*, watched the appearance of Murray's city columns and thought it a brilliant way to fill that ever-present empty white space on the sports page. "Jim didn't start out young, so to catch up, he made some noise with the knocking of cities," he recalled. "You see, when you knock a city, you set up two columns for yourself: one, you knock the city, second, you hear from the mayor, and you say 'Boy, is the mayor of Pittsburgh mad at me!'"<sup>45</sup>

Durslag wasn't the only one aware of Murray's neat trick. Reporters, editors and even residents in other cities began to be aware of the Murray treatment. Just a few weeks after the Laker road trip, Murray accompanied the Los Angeles Blades, a minor-league ice hockey team, to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and Spokane, Washington. A minor league ice-hockey road trip ordinarily wouldn't attract a page-one sports columnist, but for Murray it was too good to pass up. When he arrived in Edmonton, it was 40 below and it felt like "God had left the door open."<sup>46</sup> But when he got to Spokane, a delegation of city officials met him at the airport begging him to rip their city and make them famous.

"Listen," a sports writer from the Spokane newspaper said. "You can say it's the biggest collection of used bricks in the world. They ought to knock it down and ship it to North Hollywood for fireplaces. How's that?"

"Terrible," Murray told him.

The sports writer tried again.

"You can say that on Saturday night, there's nothing to do but watch the trains come in."

"But I've never been here on a Saturday night," Murray protested.

“Who cares?” the sports writer responded. “I’ve been here so many Saturday nights it makes me sick.”<sup>47</sup>

Murray began to hear it in the press box, too. Bill Christine was a sports writer for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in the early 1960s when he first met Murray. He would join the *Times* many years later and the two would become close friends. “If Jim came to a town, and he wouldn’t write about the town right off, somebody in the press box would say ‘When are you going to knock our town?’” Christine remembered. “It was almost a Don Rickles thing. If Rickles didn’t make fun of you, you weren’t anybody. Well, if Murray didn’t knock your town, then there was something wrong with your town.”<sup>48</sup>

Murray enjoyed riling people up and was reaping the benefits. Each month, more newspapers were requesting his column. After one year in syndication, he was appearing in more than 50 newspapers nationwide. He could be read in Boston, Chicago, Las Vegas, St. Louis and dozens of smaller cities in between. (The *Cincinnati Post and Times-Star*, first to request his column, was now a satisfied customer.)<sup>49</sup> There were always people lacking a sense of humor who were lurking, however, ready to take the fun out of the whole enterprise. In August of 1962, another Dodger road trip brought him to Pittsburgh, which he proceeded to eviscerate in print: “They cleaned the smoke out a few years ago and 600,000 people pointed to the sun in dismay and said ‘what’s that?’” And: “You can tell a native Pittsburgher because he looks as if he’s just been rescued from a cave.” And: “They have a gastronomical equivalent of silicosis here which is known as a ‘Kolbassi’ sandwich, samples of which were sent to the FBI and identified as botulism in a casing.”<sup>50</sup> Murray was in Cincinnati by the time the column ran in the *Times* and made its way back to Pittsburgh. The mayor of Pittsburgh had spoken out against Murray, and had seen no humor in the situation. He demanded an apology, while insulting Los Angeles at the

same time. A Pittsburgh television station had offered to pay Murray's way if he'd fly back to Pittsburgh and come on the air to explain himself. ("What made me suspicious is he didn't say anything about return transportation," Murray wrote.)<sup>51</sup> The angry letters poured in to the *Times*. "What an ignorant man (Murray) is! He certainly demonstrated his poor sportsmanship in the crude and slanderous article," wrote H.K. Baum of Pittsburgh.<sup>52</sup> Then, in the press box at Crosley Field in Cincinnati, he was told he had a phone call. A caller from Pittsburgh was on the line, and said he and several of his friends were going to find Murray when he came to New York (the Dodgers were scheduled to play the New York Mets a few days later) and "have a talk." Murray called the FBI, but was told he was on his own. "He hasn't violated any federal law – yet. If he kills me, of course, that's another matter," Murray wrote.<sup>53</sup>

The Mets games went off with no violence, at least against Murray. It wasn't the last time a reader would fail to see the humor and threaten some type of retribution. (A few years later, board members at Churchill Downs race track considered denying Murray press credentials to the Kentucky Derby after he wrote that Louisville, where the track is located, "smelled like a wet bar rag.")<sup>54</sup> He would continue to take aim at cities from Warsaw, Poland to DuQuoin, Illinois, for the rest of his career, but never to the extent that he did in his first few years writing the column. He weathered the vicious letters and the humorless city officials through the years, and mistakenly gained a reputation, in some areas, as a mean-spirited writer, which he was not. For the most part, his vitriol was aimed at places and institutions, not at individuals. But most took it in good humor. Early in 1962, after a St. Louis sports editor opined that Murray wrote his city material for commercial reasons, he offered a response that summed up his philosophy behind the columns:

If you care, I'll tell you my thinking behind it. Some years ago, when even President Eisenhower couldn't go there, a sports-writing colleague of mine went to Moscow to cover

a track meet. He was the only guy in a whole magazine empire who could be cleared to go there. I couldn't wait to read the copy.

Know what it was about? A track meet. So help me. For all the clues in the prose, it might as well have been taking place in Compton. I don't know who was at fault – editors, censors or whoever. But I remember I was never so disappointed in my life.

I resolved right then and there never to get so afflicted with press-box myopia that I would not comment on the surroundings if I found them as interesting as the event. I propose to continue to do so.<sup>55</sup>



Figure 6-1. Cartoon depicting Jim Murray's practice of writing humorous columns about cities and towns, *National Observer*, August 19, 1972.

Murray's profile rose swiftly. The *Times* syndication department aggressively marketed him to newspapers, with tremendous success. Murray received half of the proceeds, which, within a few years, would bring him around \$50,000 a year, on top of his *Times* salary.<sup>56</sup> And the national visibility led to recognition from his peers. In the fall of 1961, his old friends at *Time* published an article acknowledging his "wry humor" and "iconoclastic approach." "Murray has built a reputation and following that, in just six months, qualifies him as one of the best sportswriters in the U.S.," the article declared.<sup>57</sup> He was nominated for the National Sportscasters

and Sportswriters Association national sports-writing award, along with Red Smith of the *New York Herald-Tribune* and Furman Bisher of the *Atlanta Journal*.<sup>58</sup> And a resolution was read by the Los Angeles City Council declaring that Murray had “aided in the growth of Los Angeles to acquire the status of sports capital of the world.”<sup>59</sup> The recognition, combined with growing comfort in his routine, gave him a more positive outlook about his decision to become a sports columnist than he had exhibited in his early days at the *Times*. On the anniversary of his joining the *Times*, he wrote that being a columnist still felt like riding a tiger: “The only trouble a year later is that the tiger is beginning to look friendly.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Caughey and Laree Caughey, *Los Angeles: Biography of a City* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 399-401.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Shirley, ed., *Sports Pages of the Los Angeles Times* (New York: Harold N. Abrams Inc., 1983), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Editor & Publisher, *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* (New York: Editor & Publisher Co., Inc, 1961), 34-36.

<sup>4</sup> Halberstam, *The Powers That Be*, 107-108.

<sup>5</sup> “Times Again Sets New National Records in '60: Leads All Papers in News Published (Ninth Year), Advertising (Sixth Year),” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1961. The *Times* held this title consecutively until 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001), 215-219.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Thomas, interview by author, December 12, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> John Hall, interview by author, January 23, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Williams, “Members of the All-Star Team,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1961.

<sup>10</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> “Jim Murray to Write Feature Sports Column in Times,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1961, M1.

<sup>13</sup> William Randolph Hearst, Sr., died in 1951, and his son took over as chief of operations for Hearst, Inc.

<sup>14</sup> “Durslag’s Column Now National Feature: Hearst Service Gains Examiner Writer; Continues Top Local Sports Coverage,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, February 12, 1961.

<sup>15</sup> Jim Murray, “Let’s Dot Some I’s,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1961.

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- <sup>16</sup> Jim Murray, "Boos and Bravos," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1961.
- <sup>17</sup> Jim Murray, "Ride on a Tiger," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1961.
- <sup>18</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.
- <sup>19</sup> Jim Murray, "Chess and Cobwebs," *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1961. The championships featured an 18-year-old Bobby Fisher, who refused to show up for the final match, which ended in forfeit.
- <sup>20</sup> "Ruth's Mark Safe After 154 Games," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1961.
- <sup>21</sup> Jim Murray, "Ford Frick's Gopher Ball," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1961.
- <sup>22</sup> Jim Murray, "Week of Schneider," *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1961.
- <sup>23</sup> "Cronin Disagrees With Frick, Says 162 Games OK," *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1961.
- <sup>24</sup> Jim Murray, "M&M, Chi and Rain," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1961.
- <sup>25</sup> David Halberstam, *October 1964* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 168-170.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.
- <sup>27</sup> "Jim Murray, "Failure at 58? *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1961.
- <sup>28</sup> Frank Finch, "Maris Comes Out Swinging, Hits 61," *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1961.
- <sup>29</sup> Halberstam, *October 1964*, 169.
- <sup>30</sup> Jim Murray, "I Love Maris," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1961.
- <sup>31</sup> *Time*, "A Bear at 'Bama, November 17, 1961.
- <sup>32</sup> Moss, *America in the Twentieth Century*, 330.
- <sup>33</sup> Jim Murray, "Bedsheets and 'Bama," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1961. Alabama won the game, beating Georgia Tech, 10-0.
- <sup>34</sup> John W. Bloomer to Mrs. W.C. Farrar, December 1, 1961.
- <sup>35</sup> Jim Murray, "Living Color," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1961.
- <sup>36</sup> John Herbers, "Wallace Denies Yeilding to U.S.: Backers Are Said to Stress Fear of School Rioting," *New York Times*, September 5, 1963.
- <sup>37</sup> Jim Murray, "End of A Charade," *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1970.
- <sup>38</sup> Jim Murray, "Series Fun in Cincy," *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1961.
- <sup>39</sup> Douglass Looney, "Public Snitch Lets Quips Fall Where They May," *National Observer*, August 19, 1972.
- <sup>40</sup> Frank McCulloch, interview by author, April 3, 2008.

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- <sup>41</sup> Jim Murray, “Malibu to Zero Plus,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1962.
- <sup>42</sup> Jim Murray, “Candy for the Lakers,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1962.
- <sup>43</sup> Jim Murray, “A Side of Beef,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1962.
- <sup>44</sup> Jim Murray, “Fire When Ready, Suh,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1962.
- <sup>45</sup> Melvin Durslag, interview by author, January 30, 2009.
- <sup>46</sup> Jim Murray, “Man at Mach 1,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1962.
- <sup>47</sup> Jim Murray, “A Root for Home,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1962.
- <sup>48</sup> Bill Christine, interview by author, December 19, 2008. Don Rickles, in fact, was a friend of Murray’s, and Murray occasionally went to Rickles for material for his column. He would often credit Rickles for particular lines in a column.
- <sup>49</sup> Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate, 1962.
- <sup>50</sup> Jim Murray, “Slag Heap of the East,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1962.
- <sup>51</sup> Jim Murray, “A Taste of Rubble,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1962.
- <sup>52</sup> H.K. Baum, letter to the editor, *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1962.
- <sup>53</sup> Jim Murray, “Now For Philly,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1962.
- <sup>54</sup> Douglass Looney, “Public Snitch Lets Quips Fall Where They May,” *National Observer*, August 19, 1972.
- <sup>55</sup> Jim Murray, “Kook’s Tour,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1962.
- <sup>56</sup> Douglass Looney, “Public Snitch Lets Quips Fall Where They May,” *National Observer*, August 19, 1972.
- <sup>57</sup> *Time*, “Good Sports,” September 1, 1961. The article went on to list some other top sportswriters, including Durslag, Furman Bisher of the *Atlanta Journal*. Red Smith was still the “best, most polished, literate and readable of them all,” *Time* determined.
- <sup>58</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Jim Murray Nominated for Award,” January 7, 1963.
- <sup>59</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Jim Murray Cited By City Council,” November 29, 1962.
- <sup>60</sup> Jim Murray, “A Year Later,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1962.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Murray stayed on the tiger for the rest of his life. Like many of the legendary sports writers to come before him, he kept his seat in the press box until he had taken his last breath, and his final column rolled off the presses hours before that final breath. After he'd been writing the column for only a decade, he had begun to discuss when he would give it up. Through the remainder of his career, he threatened repeatedly to stop writing the column and either move on to other pursuits or retire altogether. At the time of his nomination for the Pulitzer Prize in 1990, plans were already in place for him to retire completely the following year.<sup>1</sup> But it never happened. He wrote for eight more years. Murray died after returning home from a trip to San Diego to cover the Pacific Classic at Del Mar race track.

This dissertation has shown how the first half of Jim Murray's life, and the circumstances that surrounded his early journalism career, prepared him for what he would become: one of the most influential writers and commentators on the subject of sports and American culture in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1963 until his death in August of 1998, Murray continued to hold the position of lead sports columnist in the *Times*. At his peak, he was syndicated in more than 200 newspapers. Murray would go on to be an influence for a generation of journalists and sports writers. Eventually, in 1990, he would become the fourth sports writer to win a Pulitzer Prize, one of the myriad of journalism honors he earned throughout his life. Characteristically, he accepted the award with a shrug. "This is going to make it a lot easier on the guy who writes my obit," he said.<sup>2</sup>

The three other sports writers to win the Pulitzer Prize – Arthur Daley, Red Smith and Dave Anderson, all of the *New York Times* – each spent their entire journalism career covering sports. Indeed, Murray stands out among his contemporaries as one of the few who spent

significant time as a news reporter. Eighteen years covering crime, politics, Hollywood, culture and many other topics gave him a perspective that was unique to the sports page. In addition, he spent a childhood immersed in history and literature, providing him a deep reservoir of knowledge, which he used to contextualize the people, places and events that populated his writing.

When Murray joined the staff of *Time* magazine, he was a young but experienced newsman with a flair for writing. It was under the tutelage of Henry Luce and the editors at Time/Life that he perfected the skills that he would utilize for the rest of his career. *Time* had created its own style of in-depth reporting and analysis that allowed the writer or writers to offer clear, perspective and dispassionate assessment of their subject. At *Time*, Murray learned what was needed in the way of reporting to be able to create a penetrating profile piece. He learned to work outside of the pressure of daily deadlines, instead only under the pressure to produce complete and thorough journalism. Though the home office often proved to be an annoyance to him, and he got used to receiving memos from New York telling him he didn't have the goods, the experience taught him what was needed before a subject could truly be covered effectively. When he was called upon by Time/Life to assist in the creation of *Sports Illustrated*, Murray was already an effective magazine writer adept at the method of producing high-quality editorial content. Newspaper sports writers, Murray and his fellow *Sports Illustrated* staffers found out, had not developed the analytical and reporting skills to be able to produce articles that met the Time/Life standard of quality. To Murray, it was already second nature.

So when he joined the staff of the *Los Angeles Times*, Murray was an accomplished writer at ease producing coverage at the highest levels of American journalism. And he was joining an institution that was just beginning to strive for the same sort of editorial excellence Murray had

spent the last two decades perfecting. In the years immediately after Murray joined the *Times*, it would go from an extremely profitable but underperforming regional news organization to the editorial voice of the Western United States. In the 1960s, with its newfound focus on editorial quality, the *Times* began earning the status as one of America's elite newspapers. The paper's coverage of the Watts Riots in 1965 earned the *Times* a pair of Pulitzer Prizes and at the same time gave it the cachet to begin attracting top talent from across the country. The newfound reputation of the newspaper combined with the allure of Southern California brought the *Times* a slew of applications from the Ivy League and an infusion of new talent that further invigorated the push toward excellence.<sup>3</sup> Concurrently, the *Times* was experiencing even greater financial success. What had always been a profitable enterprise now reached stratospheric levels. It had become the largest media conglomerate in the West, and it published more advertising than any other daily newspaper in the world for 25 straight years. And the leadership, from Otis Chandler on down, made sure the company's winnings were used in pursuit of editorial glory. *Times* writers and photographers would go to the ends of the Earth to pursue a story, always flying first class, dining at 5-star restaurants and hopping from continent to continent to chase down the slimmest of leads.<sup>4</sup> It was a tremendous pulpit from which to preach, and for Murray it allowed him to travel freely in pursuit of any story or subject. And it put his writing in front of millions of readers across the nation.

From the beginning, Murray understood that he was writing not just for the regular readers of the sports page, but for the general readership. His philosophy on writing was that people liked to read about people, not things. He believed his objective was to entertain. People like to be "amused, shocked, titillated or angered," and if you can do that, they will accept whatever information or message you choose to include.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning, he also understood that half

of the reading audience was women, and he did not want to write them out of his audience, as most other sports writers did. He went to great pains to make sure his writing wasn't too technical, and was accessible to as many readers as possible. "If I write something like 'blitz' or 'bogey,' I'll explain it. Guys in my business, they don't realize the public, particularly female readers – of whom I have a lot – don't know what the hell you're talking about. It doesn't interrupt the flow too much to define 'blitz.'"<sup>6</sup> *Times* editors caught on, as well. Murray regularly was chosen by readers as the most popular writer in the paper, above even the enormously popular local columnist Jack Smith.<sup>7</sup> For a sports columnist to attain that status was extraordinary. The *Times* syndicate department understood this as well, advertising Murray to other newspapers as a writer who could attract as many women readers as men.<sup>8</sup>

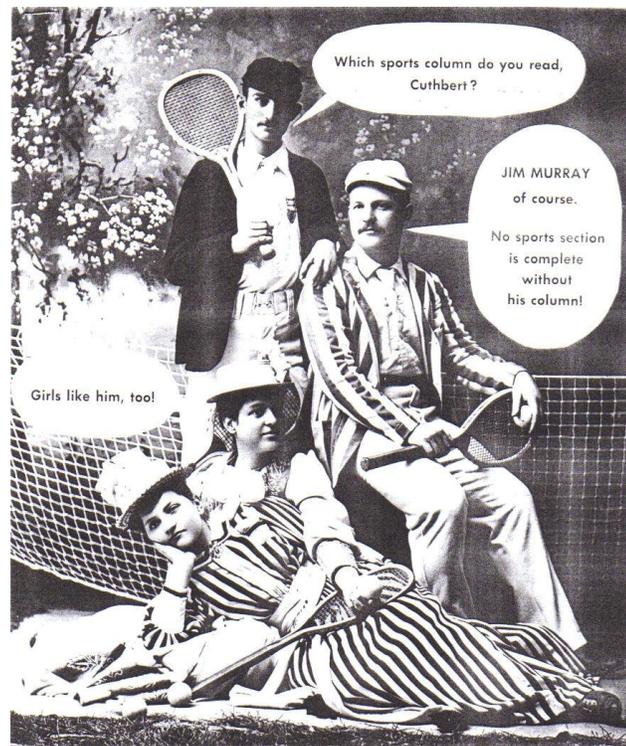


Figure 7-1. *Los Angeles Times* Syndication advertisement for Jim Murray's column, 1962.

To be sure, he was not beloved by all. He was staunchly opinionated, and rarely backed down from stands he took. He felt it was unwise to apologize for something he'd written or offer

retraction.<sup>9</sup> He could form opinions about people based on surface observation and then stubbornly stick to those positions. Still, his positions evolved over time. He hammered Muhammad Ali in print for years before reversing his stance toward the boxer. Those on the receiving end of his comical attacks on cities or institutions often failed to see the humor in the writing and felt it crossed the line of good taste. His defense was always simple: lighten up. But his use of humor, to some, could become overuse. Critics often said his column could devolve into a gag bag, competitive one-liners that would amount to nothing of substance.<sup>10</sup>

But what little criticism existed was easily drowned out by praise. His innate ability to find humor in situations and to find unique and creative ways in which to approach his subjects allowed him to stand out from the thousands of voices competing with him daily. While most writers made an attempt at humor, Murray's wittiness was incorporated into nearly everything he wrote. It was the Murray flavor, oft-imitated by his peers and the generation of writers that followed. His column often read like a comedy act, a string of progressively more outrageous one-liners that would both invoke laughter and present an original characterization of his subject. He mixed word play, inventive language, outrageous metaphor, hyperbole, sarcasm, and self-deprecation, all with a humorist's deft touch and sense of timing. His colleagues, when writing about the same event or individual, could feel safe in choosing an angle for their story, because they knew they would not step on Murray's toes.<sup>11</sup> His column, each and every time, would be distinctly Murray. His readers knew it, too. He was able to write in a way that transcended newsprint and allowed readers to develop a personal connection to him.

Murray's prolific output during his 37-year career at the *Times* is certainly ripe for further study for journalism historians. His style and influence have become his most lasting legacy, but the particulars of his coverage and writing can shed light on the evolution of his profession and

on certain significant events in which he took part. For instance, his forward-looking stances on racial issues started right out of the gate, and he continued to be a champion of civil rights within the American sports scene for the remainder of his life. In addition, his views on certain issues and individuals evolved throughout his life. What caused these changes? And how did his own style and method evolve through the final three and a half decades in which he was writing? To answer these questions and others, a thorough documentation of Murray's column writing is essential to place this important journalistic career in historical context.

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<sup>1</sup> Entry form, Pulitzer Prizes in Journalism, *Los Angeles Times*, January, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Callahan, "Murray: Reflecting Truth and Our Age," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Thomas, interview by author, December 12, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> McDougal, *Privileged Son*, 315-316.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, *Jim Murray*, 215.

<sup>6</sup> James Sogg, "Hemingway in a Press Box," *L.A. Village View*, October 15, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Thomas, interview by author, December 12, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Jim Murray, "Power of the Press," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1961.

<sup>10</sup> Georg Meyers, "Venom! Columist Seattle Loves to Hate is Hatefully Lovable, or Vice Versa," *Seattle Times*, January 1, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Christine, interview by author, December 19, 2008.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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