Many tries, many triumphs: Bowden worked for his community

I've tried it as a horse trainer, an engineer, a journalist, a politician, and now as a newspaper editor. But the one thing that has always been a constant in my life is the passion for journalism. It's a career that has given me the opportunity to meet so many different people, from all walks of life. It's also given me the chance to work with some of the most talented journalists in the business. It's a career that I love and I'm proud to have chosen.

One of the things that has always been important to me is giving back to the community. I've always believed that the media should be a force for good in society, and that's why I've been so involved in the community. I've been a member of the local community board, and I've also been a part of several community events. I've also been involved in the local newspaper, and I've been a part of the editorial team since it was founded.

One of the things that I'm most proud of is the way that the newspaper has grown over the years. We've gone from a small, local newspaper to a national publication, and we're now one of the most respected newspapers in the country. I'm proud to have been a part of that, and I'm proud to have been able to give back to the community in that way.

In the end, I'm just a man with a passion for journalism and a love for my community. I've tried many things in my life, but I know that I've found my true calling in journalism. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve as an editor of the newspaper, and I'm looking forward to the future of the newspaper and the community it serves.
30 years and millions of words later ...

I had been editorial page editor a year when News Journal Publisher Braden Ball called me to his office and, with a quick roll of his unlit El Trelles cigar, bluntly asked: “Could you run that entire news department?”

Stunned, words choking my throat, I snapped, “Yes sir, I could try.”

“You’re the editor,” Ball said. “Go back to the newsroom, call the staff into the conference room and tell them you’re editor-in-chief.”

“Right now?”

“Right Now!”

“Yes sir.”

It was a long walk, remembering 12 years earlier I had walked into the News Journal for the first time; seeing the editor who hired me, Marion T. Gaines; a 37-year-old replacement editorialist remembering salad days as a writer of ball (sports editor), and then — at last — a dayside job as news editor of the evening Pensacola News.

It has now been a long walk, the first steps taken in the publisher’s office May 18, 1966.

Thirty years.

Yet only yesterday, writing editorials in the 1960s and 1970s about redeveloping a worn and mostly abandoned downtown; championing historical preservation, the cultural arts, need for a civic center; the verbal fisticuffs enlivening both City Hall and courthouse; my first crusade: consolidated government; millions of columns and editorial words about the neglected historic fabric of the Pensacola Bay area.

Today Pensacola’s downtown is a model for Florida. The city has four preservation districts, and the City Council has an angelic, harmonious quality and the Escambia commissioners have discovered the 20th century as opposed to the dirt road 1930s, vogue of the 1960s.

It was only yesterday, lamenting in 1960s columns, editorials and blunt editorial cartoons about shameful neglect of Pensacola harbor fortifications crumbling and rusting in the sands and the unplanned overdevelopment of barrier island beaches.

Now they are in good hands: Gulf Islands National Seashore, the fruits of a long editorial crusade, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year as the nation’s largest, and often the most visited, and certainly the most visited national park in Florida.

Only yesterday, dreams of reclaiming Pensacola’s bayfront in the 1960s and 1970s — now a goal of the 1990s; working on grassroots goals-setting Action ’76 for the bicentennial, including a Civic Center, four-year University of West Florida and saving the Saenger as a performing arts theater.

Only yesterday, fighting county commissioners for the governmental center. Now the cramped Judicial Center will be expanded; commissioners hope to join the rest of the city by restoring the Old Custom House, scene of a continuously changing cast of politicians such as O.E. “Tex” Edwards, King of the County Grady Abritton and Dr. No himself, Kenny Kelson.

Thirty years.

I once wrote granddaughter Jessica: Let the laughter of your successes rise above the whimpers of your disappointments.

I’m joyed to have been at the Romana/Jefferson nerve center as activist-advocate-critic from the 1960s to the 1990s — a journalist walking into the morrow for new challenges and the music of presses running at midnight.

J. Earle Bowden is editor and vice president of the Pensacola News Journal.

Olympic visitors should seek out Foxfire