

Who Will Tell Us the News? In His Latest Book, Greg Guma Recounts a Life Guided by Alternative Media

By [Norman Stockwell](#)

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Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

In advance publicity for this book, Greg Guma's fifteenth, the author [describes](#) it as "a media saga, a personal story, and a cautionary tale." Guma is no stranger to alternative media.

Beginning in 1968 as cub reporter for the Bennington Banner in southern Vermont, in the 1980s and 1990s he served as editor for [Toward Freedom](#), a historic left magazine (for which I have also written) that published for more than six decades. Guma also edited the alternative weekly *The Vermont Vanguard Press* and later went on to co-found another weekly, the *Vermont Guardian*. But the period that makes up a large part of this volume is the story of his term—which began in 2006—as executive director of the Pacifica Radio Network.

Pacifica Radio Network, [founded](#) in 1949 in Berkeley, California, by pacifist Lewis Hill, has been a shining light of alternative media for decades. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the network was going through a huge internal struggle over the management and governance of the five member stations. The network also served dozens of [affiliate](#) community radio stations around the country (one of which I worked at, and I found myself a participant in many of the struggles at the network as they played out). The battles over the vision and the future of this vital resource were referred to by many as a pro-democracy movement and resulted in new bylaws and new leadership.

All of this occurred at the same time the United States was involved in [two](#) successive [wars](#) in the Persian Gulf and another in the [Balkans](#). It was a time when independent media was needed more than ever. It was also a period of [massive consolidation](#) in broadcast media and the burgeoning of a [new class](#) of low-power FM radio stations to serve hyperlocal communities.

It is onto this playing field that Guma was hired as executive director for Pacifica in a period of some calm between the storms. In 300 or so detailed pages of reminiscence and analysis, he tells the story of his time at Pacifica, his goals, and the perils and pitfalls of working in such a volatile and transformational environment. The recollections of Guma's two-year stint at Pacifica are both revealing and sometimes brutal. He provides details of internal conflicts and hopes unfulfilled.

But the book is not only about Guma's time at Pacifica; rather, woven between the chapters are stories of his own growth and transformation, the 1960s, his time with a young Bernie Sanders, and much more. But all of it circles around the various forms of alternative (and some mainstream) media that informed and guided his life and his work.

Guma notes that the muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens of the early twentieth century (who also wrote for *La Follette's Weekly*, the precursor of *The Progressive*) was a role model. "As a teenager I chose writers, not assassins or athletes, as guides and subjects of admiration," he writes.

Ultimately, although much of it is historical, the book is very forward-looking, taking on the bigger questions of what we do now as our very democracy—and our planet—are under severe threat.

"I still believe that a profound change is underway, the birth of a global consciousness. It has not been halted by crony capitalism, endless wars, demagogues, or cultural counterrevolution," says Guma near the book's end. "The best way to resist the drift toward authoritarian thinking and change the outcomes is to hold onto realism, skepticism, imagination, and our aspirations for a better world."

Managing Chaos is a great read. The stories are reminiscent and sometimes poignant if you were there, but always informative of an important period of our history even if you weren't.

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Managing Chaos: Adventures in Alternative Media

Author: [Greg Guma](#)

ASIN: B0D9RXBTQH

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Paperback: 317 pages

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An eye-witness account that explores the unique, tumultuous history of Pacifica radio and alternative media in America.

Filled with episodes from an eclectic career, Greg Guma's 15th book discusses the evolution of radio and television, the impacts of concentrated media ownership, the rise of the alternative press, his complex relationship with Bernie Sanders, his work in Vermont before and during a progressive revolution that changed the state's power structure, and decades later, what happened while he managed the original listener-supported radio network.

leaving behind an intimate chronicle of what he saw as Pacifica's post-revolutionary CEO and episodes from his earlier life as a stressed out student, rookie reporter, radical organizer and unconventional editor, Guma explores the challenges of maintaining democratic institutions in a culture of distrust and polarization, of striking the delicate balance between truth and advocacy, observation and participation, and of handling conflicts with persuasion instead of force.

Managing Chaos is a media saga, a personal story, and a cautionary tale.

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