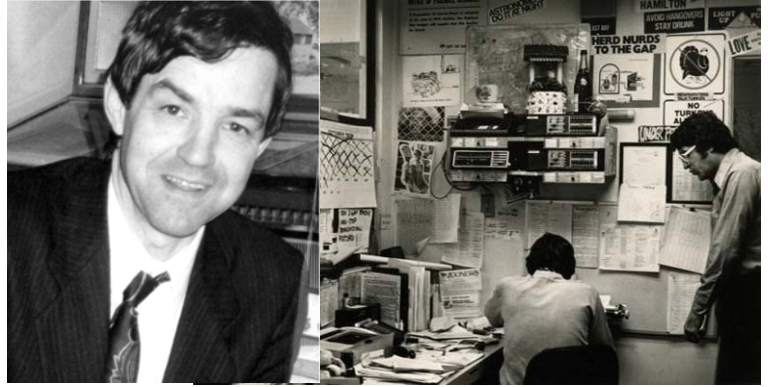


# Harry Fuller - Gone to the Birds



**Class of 2001**

*Silver Circle Profile*  
By: **Kevin Scott Wing**



**Harry Fuller** has gone to the birds. And, he's proud of it.

The man who served as KPIX's general manager and the news director of the same as well as at cross-town rival KGO-TV – and was an early pioneer with the Internet and new media — left the busy, hectic life of Bay Area television news several years ago for a calmer life in rural southwestern Oregon.

It is there where the 65-year-old Fuller and his wife now lead their lives in a somewhat more relaxed manner.

And, birds – species of every kind – are a big part of Fuller's life. These days, he gives bird-watching tours, leading dozens of field trips for a number of organizations. He's shown bird aficionados and ornithologists on numerous professional tours in Oregon, northern California and the United Kingdom.

Fuller, who was inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences' San Francisco/Northern California Chapter in 2001, worked his way up the TV news ladder quickly.

A native of Rolla, Missouri – "Ozark country," Fuller says – he left it in 1967 to head to San Francisco during the famous "Summer of Love." He began graduate school that summer at Stanford.

By the time he was finished there, Fuller was ready to make his mark. His first TV job came in 1969, when he was hired as a news messenger for KPIX.

"I would pick up film from our camera crews," Fuller says. "In the spring of '69, I was driving over to Berkeley to pick up film from the crews who were covering the People's Park riots."

At that time, Fuller's immediate supervisor was **Fred Zehnder**, who was the station's assignment manager who later became news director at KTVU.

"As a messenger, I got to know the back streets of San Francisco pretty well," Fuller says.

Fuller recalls how small the newsroom was at KPIX in those days. "We had probably 30 people working in the newsroom at that time;" but he

added it was perfect for the era, at a time when every station's 11 p.m. newscast was "a big deal."

And, as the '70s arrived, Fuller moved up the ladder at KPIX, promoted to produce the 11 p.m. newscast.

In 1971, after two years at KPIX, Fuller moved over to cross-town rival KGO-TV as a news producer.

At that time, Fuller was producing "the Bay Area's only 4:30 p.m. newscast," he says. "It was an hour show, and then we'd follow it up with network news at 5:30. KGO hadn't been successful at that point with a 6 p.m. news show, so the station aired movies at 6."

Fuller, by then in his mid-20s, was producing a newscast that was anchored by two Bay Area stalwarts of the the local TV news business, **Fred Van Amburg** and **Jerry Jensen**.

Fuller eventually began producing the station's late news. And, to show how viewers' habits favored the late-evening newscasts, KGO-TV produced "big numbers" in those earliest years of the 1970s.

"We were having a 50 share at 11 p.m. almost every night," Fuller says.

After two years at KGO-TV, Fuller decided it was time to make a change. Feeling a calling to return to his home state of Missouri, Fuller packed up his family and moved back to the Midwest, accepting a job as a news director at KTTR, a radio station in his hometown of Rolla. The year was 1973.

By the end of 1974, Fuller knew he wanted to return to the Bay Area. He wasn't making enough money in Missouri. So, he called KPIX. **Paul Jeschke**, who later became known to a younger generation of viewers as a general assignment reporter at KGO-TV, was KPIX's news director in 1974.

Jeschke was looking for a 6 p.m. producer. Fuller knew he could do the job, so he was hired and headed back to the Bay Area, rejoining KPIX in January of 1975.

Fuller's ascent up the station's management ranks was swift. He was eventually promoted to executive producer. Shortly thereafter, he became

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the station's assistant news director.

That time in Fuller's career was a defining one, too. He won the first of three Emmy® awards, for the live coverage of the **Patricia Hearst** verdict.

"It was one of the first uses of live cameras at KPIX," Fuller recalls. "We did three hours of straight, live coverage of the verdict, without scripts."

In 1977, Fuller went back to KGO-TV to become the station's assignment manager, after KPIX news director **Joe Russin** was fired, and it did not appear that Fuller would succeed him. At KGO-TV, news director **Pete Jacobus** brought Fuller back.

Fuller says the 1970s, in particular the last half of that decade, was a great time to be working in TV news in the Bay Area.

"The Bay Area was a great market in the 70s," he says. "The market was volatile, and extremely competitive. We'd have a knockdown, drag out battle between the three network stations to be number one in the Bay Area."

Fuller's tenure as KGO-TV assignment manager covered some of the decade's biggest news stories originating out of the Bay Area, including the Jonestown massacre and its connection to northern California, and the assassinations of San Francisco Mayor **George Moscone** and Supervisor **Harvey Milk**.

If the early 1970s witnessed KGO-TV as an also-ran in the early evening news race, one can certainly say that the station's fortunes had done a complete reversal for the better by the last half of the decade. KGO-TV and its *News Scene* team – headed up by Van Amburg and Jensen, were No. 1 in the Bay Area at 5, 6 and 11 p.m. The other stations couldn't touch them.

As for the late news on KGO-TV, Fuller says the 11 p.m. show became a powerhouse. Late news "was king," he said. It was around this time, too, that ABC's prime-time schedule was No. 1 in the country for the first time since the network launched in 1953.

"Van and Jerry and *News Scene* were just huge," Fuller says. "Our news audience was gigantic. If you added up all the KGO shows, the cumulative shares would've been in the 80s and 90s." In sheer numbers, the station's 6 p.m. show would "regularly do a 10, 12 or 15 rating. The 11 would do a 20 or 25, and

that's a rating, not a share."

Fuller eventually became the station's managing editor during the first half of the 1980s. A number of news directors came and went. In 1984, assistant news director **Andrew Shinnick** was named acting news director at KGO-TV. But, Shinnick did not want the permanent post, so Fuller put in a bid for it.

In January of 1984, KGO-TV gave Fuller a shot as news director, likely one of the best moves the station brass could ever make up to that time.

The following year, the station moved from its cramped digs on Golden Gate Avenue in the seedy Tenderloin neighborhood to its new ABC Broadcast Center on Front Street.

In 1986, it had been five years since AIDS first became widely known to the Bay Area, the nation and the world. In the mid-1980s, there was a polarizing paranoia toward the disease, particularly anyone who had it.

One day, KGO-TV photographer **Lorne Morrison** approached Fuller. Morrison had bumped into **Paul Wynne**, who was the station's entertainment reporter in the early 1980s.

Wynne was also dying of AIDS.

Morrison posed a question to Fuller: Could we put Wynne on the air again, but this time, to feature himself in a first-person account of what it was like to have AIDS?

Fuller met with Wynne, who, by then was emaciated. Fuller hired him, and Wynne would go on to crank out a series that would become memorable, a series that would become etched in the minds of Bay Area viewers for a long time.

"Paul did this series for us," Fuller says, "as the first AIDS victim in the world to go on TV to share his story. The series followed him through his daily struggles."

On Wynne's first installment of his series, he closed it with this line: "You may not know anyone who has AIDS. You do now."

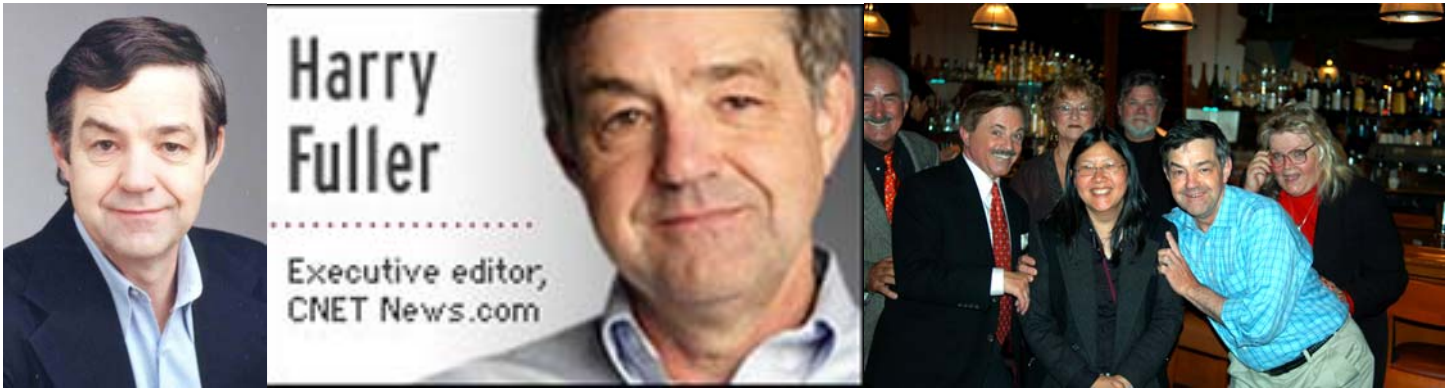
Wynne was able to put together 11 or 12 segments for the series before growing too weak to continue. He died shortly after.

"It was the most important thing I think we ever did," Fuller says.

A couple of years later, Fuller's team would cover

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the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake so extremely well that the news department would eventually be awarded a George Foster Peabody Award for its efforts.

"Anyone who worked during and through that quake, well, let me say it was just the biggest story to hit the Bay Area in 30 years," Fuller says. "It was an interesting time. The station, and ABC, was broadcasting the World Series (between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics). We had an entire crew staffed at Candlestick (Park) because of the game. And, we also had our helicopter up over the Bay Bridge to cover traffic as people came into the city to watch the game. We were in the right place at the right time."

One of the saving graces in the moments following the earthquake was a power generator that KGO-TV had in case of a power outage. In the weeks and months before the quake hit, ABC management in New York wanted to get rid of the generator to save money. It had cost them \$250,000 at the time. But, Fuller and KGO-TV relented, saying that the station is built on landfill, and "we're in earthquake country."

"We had to fight tooth and nail for that damn generator," Fuller says.

KGO-TV got its way and kept it. It paid off handsomely when the station's power was knocked out moments after the quake struck.

"We were back on the air almost immediately," Fuller says. "It took the other stations awhile to get back on the air. And it was even more embarrassing for KRON, which was in the dark for four hours until they could get their power back on."

In 1990, upper management began to change at KGO-TV. Fuller was unhappy about that and felt it was time to go. One day, he went over to rival KPIX to speak with his friend, anchor **Dave McElhatton**, the station's longtime anchor.

McElhatton told Fuller that the station was looking for a new news director. With that, a secret weekend meeting was set up between Fuller and **Carolyn Wean**, the station's general manager. After the meeting, Wean sent Fuller a proposed deal. By Monday, Fuller signed the deal and was on his way back to KPIX for the third time in his career, this

time as news director.

KGO-TV did not engage in employment contracts with its management, so Fuller was free to leave without any legal matters to tend to.

During his four years as news director at KPIX, Fuller presided over a new 10 p.m. newscast, the result of CBS's decision to allow KPIX to move the network prime-time lineup from an 8 p.m. start to a 7 p.m. launch.

That was February 1992 – not only in time for February sweeps, but the Winter Olympics, which were broadcast on CBS.

Fuller says this was "one of the most exciting times in terms of competition" in the Bay Area market. *Eyewitness News* began at 10 p.m., going head-to-head with the established *The 10 o'clock News* on KTVU and KRON's early prime experiment of its own, with *NewsCenter 4 at 10 p.m.* KGO-TV and ABC were the only ones carrying prime-time programming during the traditional period.

A year later, CBS ended the experiment, and KPIX reverted to the traditional 8-11 p.m. prime-time schedule.

In 1994, Fuller became the station's vice president and general manager after Wean left.

In the mid-1990s, the Internet was hardly what we know it today. But, Fuller recognized the power of the burgeoning medium, and made his mark early. Considered an Internet and new media pioneer, Fuller launched a Web site for KPIX in 1995. It was one of the first Web sites for any TV station – any news organization, for that matter — in the nation.

Fuller eventually became vice president and general manager of CBS New Media, where he was the first to manage Web site development for all CBS O&O television stations. While there, Fuller also developed content partnerships for the CBS network's national Internet service.

Sensing that new media and the Internet were the ways to go, Fuller eventually became executive news director at San Francisco's Tech TV, formerly ZDTV. At the time, Tech TV had meager beginnings, but a lot of potential and promise. It had been producing an hour-long technology show for MSNBC, but that was it. Fuller was given the task of bolstering Tech TV's presence in the industry, given the responsibility of creating, designing, developing and

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# Harry Fuller



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managing the new entity's news content.

"We did some of the first audio streaming in the country," Fuller says. "We also had an online radio station, and **Terry McElhatton** ran it for me (after his departure as news director at KNTV).

In 2001, CNBC hired Fuller as executive director to head up its European news financial operations in London. In 2005, Fuller returned to the Bay Area to become executive editor at CNET in San Francisco, adding more of his influence to New Media than ever before.

In 2007, Fuller and his wife wanted out of the rat race. They sold their San Francisco home, escaping big-city life for rural Ashland, Oregon.

One of Fuller's big interests is in ornithology, the study of birds. He has been teaching classes on early American ornithology, bird song and field identification at the California Academy of Sciences and local Audubon societies. He has also led countless bird-watching field trips throughout Oregon, northern California and the United Kingdom. He is an active volunteer with the Rogue Valley Audubon Society and the Klamath Bird Observatory.

"Birds are alive, and there are lots of things to learn about them," Fuller says. "There's an enormous amount of information about birds that people want to learn about."

Still savvy about the media and where its future lies, Fuller says digital media "has changed the social and news landscape of the planet."

"I think it's going to accelerate," he predicts. "Stuff will get smaller, cheaper and better. The old media will become a dinosaur faster than we think."

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# TV Department Falls Under Budget Axe



By **Felix Mendoza**

Known for its successful alumni, such as *Star Wars* creator **George Lucas** and Academy Award nominated actor **Jeremy Renner**, Modesto Junior College is saying "Fin" to their Film and TV department. Faced with an \$8 million budget gap, the Yosemite Community College District Board of Trustees, voted unanimously last month to cut MJC's Mass Communications department. Other departments getting the axe are German, French, Italian, Architecture, Industrial Tech, Engineering and Dental Assisting, leaving the students with basically a general education college only.

"You know how many of our students' lives are dangling dangerously on the ropes of higher education and vocational training," **Laura Paull**, a journalism instructor at MJC criticized the Board of Trustees in a heated public comment hearing last month, "This is a frightened response to alarmist politics."

The Board cut departments based on a number of factors including what they claim is a lack of jobs in the field. "California is the media mecca of the world," **Carol Lancaster Mingus**, a Film and Television instructor told the Board of Trustees, "There are jobs here."

In a letter sent to the Board of Trustees prior to their vote to eliminate MJC's Mass Communication and other programs, our NATAS President **Javier Valencia** asserted that MJC plays an important role in the training of media professionals in our area. "We hope that you can find a creative way to save this department so they can continue to educate students about the importance of a free press, and continue to provide future contributing members to our industry."

But four hours of pleas and testimonies in MJC's packed 900-seat auditorium, along with hundreds of letters and emails, were of no avail.

Ironically, the very building where the Board of Trustees meeting was held, along with its state of the art TV and Radio studios, was completely renovated less than three years ago (costing taxpayers \$33 million dollars and funded by the state and a voter approved local Measure E bond). One student shouted, "Mind the fresh paint!"

No help is forthcoming from the state this year, as Governor **Jerry Brown** proposes to cut community colleges \$400 million in the next state's fiscal budget, leaving many communities in California asking, "Who's next?"