



Tom Sinkovitz has been a prominent presence on television in the Bay Area for nearly 25 years. You know him as a good friend and an awesome colleague -- someone who defines excellence in broadcast journalism. Bay Area viewers have known him as a trusted, solid news anchor on the principal newscasts of two stations in the nation's sixth-largest market. His presence has certainly been felt in those two Bay Area newsrooms where he held court -- from 1990 to the mid-2000s at San Francisco's KRON 4, and for several years following at KNTV NBC Bay Area in San Jose. Through the years, if you were among those who worked with him, he made us better journalists: our reporting got better, our writing improved, our newscasts took a couple of steps closer to perfection. Now, find out more about him, where he grew up, that he has a twin brother who is also a news anchor, how he got his start in the business, and more.

Where did you grow up?

I've always wrestled with that question. I got bigger in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area where I was born and raised, but I'm not sure I've ever grown up. My wife, **Paula**, HAS grown up, so I figure that's enough for one family.

Do you have siblings?

I have a twin brother, **Jim**, who is in the broadcasting business. I also have an older brother and sister, both living in central Pennsylvania. I'm fortunate. We have remained very close over the years. In fact, my sister, **Barbara**, doesn't like to fly. So, she's visiting with me right now, having rode Amtrak to San Francisco for three unpredictable days.

When did you first realize that you wanted to be in television news?

It was actually the other way around. I was sort of in the business before I realized what was happening around me. I joined the Marines just months out of Wesley College. That was in the spring of 1968. As I graduated from Boot Camp at Paris Island, South Carolina, the Marines assigned me a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)

of "Broadcast Specialist." WHAT? A series of fortunate events ended with me in the newsroom of the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN), the newsroom featured in the **Robin Williams'** movie, *Good Morning Vietnam*. They were a very committed group of journalists who thankfully saw me as a blank canvas. They introduced me to the skills and standards that guided



With wife, Paula

my career. It was then that I realized I wanted to be in news -- but not necessarily television news. **Dan Rather** once asked the question, "if not for television, would you be a newsperson?" I could honestly say yes to that question. I wanted a credential more than anything.



Still, by the time I returned to my hometown, it was clear to me that I could make a living in the television business and through persistence, opportunities came

my way.

Who has inspired you in your career?

Obviously, the people at AFVN. They were so very serious about facts and fairness. CBS News was as its pinnacle at the time as well and what a model that newsroom was for professionalism. I loved studying their consistency and their craftsmanship. As a young civilian journalist years later, I was fortunate to be in the company of some of those legendary CBS reporters. For all of the discussions we had about journalism, two stories that had little to do with reporting stand out. One was a conversation with **Richard C. Hottelet**, CBS's United Nations correspondent. We were discussing the **Ayatollah Khomeini**. Hottelet, always the master of alliteration, looked at me and said, "Who knows what bees are buzzing in that poor bastard's bonnet?" On another occasion, during my Harrisburg station's coverage of Three Mile Island, I was talking with CBS correspondent **Gary Shepard** about the network. I asked him if he'd had to deal with the element of being star struck in New York. Gary told me that after ten years at CBS, he was using the middle urinal in the lavatory just outside the New York newsroom. Moments later, he realized that he was surrounded by **Walter Cronkite** and **Harry Reasoner**, who were in the midst of an editorial discussion while doing other business. Gary said he sprinted back to his desk

to call his father and tell him what just happened. But I digress. I have had a series of mentors at just the right times over the years. There was the legendary **Al Schottlekotte** in Cincinnati, and another reporter there named **Jon Esther**, who showed me that there is a story in just about everything and everyone when a storyteller is involved. A couple reporters in Atlanta fit that mold, including **Jon Shirek**, who had the ability to encapsulate a story in a word or two. The night after Hurricane Hugo ripped through Charleston's Battery Park, the epicenter of southern Aristocracy, Jon proclaimed in a live report that Hugo had "insulted" Charleston. I must say, too, that the peer pressure at KRON could be downright scary at times, but they were standards that everyone in the building was expected to meet. It was an extraordinary place to work during its heyday and that legacy was an inspiration.

Who inspired you as a person?

I know this is a popular response, but my parents would be my answer. My mother was a deeply religious woman who refused to see any bravery in her decision to leave her home in Charlotte, North Carolina at 17 years of age with her father literally in pursuit of her. She jumped on a train and got off -- alone -- in New York City to begin the career she wanted in the clothing industry. Ultimately, she became the general manager of several major retail stores and spent her life in that capacity. I can't imagine what life must have been like for a young, attractive woman before there were any equal pay statutes or sexual harassment laws. But she rejected any arguments I made about her being one of the pioneer feminists in our society. She will always be that in my mind. My father was simply a man who put his family above all else. He was a steel worker who had to follow whatever jobs there were and he put up with so much to provide for his family. I remember that he would finish a shift in Wilmington, Delaware, climb into his car and drive two and a half hours to see the last two innings of whatever baseball game my twin and I were playing in, then give us a hug and words of encouragement and drive back to Delaware for the next day's work. How do you measure that?



Principal anchor at KNTV



At KRON, early 2000s

Regulatory Commission arrived to manage the flow of information. He read the room correctly and held news conferences several times every day to give us status reports. I still correct people who spit out the nuclear industry's position that Three Mile Island was proof of how safe nuclear power is. Anyone who was there knows how close we came to a disaster.

Tell me more about your twin brother. It's not every day that twins are news anchors.

Jim works at WGAL TV in Lancaster, which has always been the power house station in central Pennsylvania. He got into the business because he looked at me and thought, "if he can do it, I certainly can." And he's been doing it for over forty years now. We worked together for some of those years in Harrisburg. In fact, for a few weeks before I moved to Cincinnati in the late 70's, we co-anchored together at WHP-TV. Jim is a meat-and-potatoes kind of reporter. Nothing flashy. He just knows what's under every rock in his community and he's got a strong relationship with the WGAL audience.

What was it like working on the Three Mile Island story?
 It was a story that took a long time to sort out on a personal level. We were working on a major story to be sure, one that might have ended with us having to abandon our hometown for the better part of a lifetime. I remember meeting with my mother and my sister and asking them to leave so that I could concentrate on the story should there be a massive evacuation order. (They wouldn't do it.) The difficulty in covering the story was that we all knew so little about what was going on inside the plant. An entire day after the near meltdown began, the Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania held a news conference to say that state emergency preparedness officials were getting conflicting and erroneous information from Three Mile Island's owner, Metropolitan Edison. There was shock and near-panic throughout central Pennsylvania until a man named **Harold Denton** from the Nuclear



Okay, we've covered some heady topics here, like Three Mile Island. Time for something a little light. Like we like to ask everyone, what's your favorite ice cream flavor?

I like ice cream way too much. I'm still a night owl from all the years of doing the late newscasts. Sometimes, my wife buys a half gallon of it and tries to hide it in the freezer. If I find it, I can put away the whole thing while I watch sports summaries until long after everyone else has gone to bed. Chocolate, please.

Stay tuned!

Join us in July when we give the Q&A to **Diane Dwyer**, the longtime anchor and reporter from KNTV NBC Bay Area who's also known for her previous work at KTVU Channel 2.

Spencer Christian Visits His Old Stomping Grounds
KGO-TV ABC7 Chief Meteorologist Fills In On "Good Morning America"