



Keeping the faith

Catholicism provides “calm in the storm”
for major newspaper editor

On an early summer day in 1966, at the urging of his grandfather, eight-year-old Paul M. Keep became reporter, editor and publisher of his own newspaper. He also was the typesetter and delivery boy.

The Daily Press offered a weather forecast, reported neighborhood happenings and included the occasional poem or essay. The paper was one page, printed in the Courier font. It cost two cents. Keep published seven editions, the last one featuring a tribute to the Fourth of July, garden tips and the news that neighbor “Gene Boling is getting along fine. He will enter the hospital for a second operation on July 4.” This final *Daily Press* published on July 1, 1966. It was time for young Paul to enjoy the rest of his summer.

Exactly 43 years later, on July 1, 2009, 51-year-old Keep became editor of *The Grand Rapids Press*, the third-largest newspaper in Michigan and the 79th largest in the United States.

A lot has happened to Keep – and to the newspaper industry – in the 43 years between those milestone days.

One of the most notable happenings, for Keep, was becoming a Catholic.

Keepsake

His path to Catholicism started in Kalamazoo, where Keep grew up.

He had returned home to start his career at the *Kalamazoo Gazette* after obtaining a bachelor’s degree in political science from Miami University in Ohio (1979) and a master’s degree in journalism from the University of Missouri (1983). In Kalamazoo, he covered the city beat, interviewing notables and reporting the daily scoop around City Hall. The tables turned and Keep found himself in the “hot seat” when a young lady pursuing a master’s degree needed to interview a reporter for a thesis paper. Keep obliged and, by the end of the interview, he knew he wanted to ask the inquisitive young lady out. She accepted his invitation.

Suzanne Counsman and Paul Keep married just one year later.

By Molly Klimas



>> Paul and Suzanne Keep's wedding day



>> Keep and his wife Suzanne.

"I'm so thankful we found each other," Keep said.

Their union was not without differences. Suzanne was born and raised a Catholic and wanted the same upbringing for their future children. Paul was raised a Presbyterian, but agreed to raise their three children – Sarah, now 20; Caroline, now 18; and John, now 14 – as Catholics.

"I always went to church with Suzanne and the kids – but I was usually the one in the 'crying room' with the baby," he joked.

The children got older and Mass on Sunday became a part of the rhythm of life. "I found I liked the routine and order of the Mass," Keep said.

He'd round up the family, and they'd usually be at Mass early. It provided a balance to the frenzy of newspaper life: breaking news and press breakdowns, dwindling deadlines and career promotions that kept the Keep family crisscrossing Michigan every few years.

Then, about 10 years ago, the newspaper industry began to change in ways no one could have predicted. The rise of the Internet and a deteriorating economy led to a significant decline in advertising revenue, which had provided 70 to 75 percent of the typical newspaper's operating funds. Newsrooms, like all other newspaper departments, had to find ways to reduce

costs while still trying to bring readers the news they needed. Nationally, some newspapers folded under this pressure. Others declared bankruptcy. Some reduced the number of publishing days. And the challenges continue.

Flint, had long been the poster-child for hemorrhaging jobs, and the city's newspaper, the *Flint Journal*, felt the related pains long before other newspapers across the country. Keep, who had been named editor of the paper in 1999, felt the tension first-hand.



>> A family shot (his wife is the photographer) on a beach in Sarasota, Fla. (from l-r) daughter Caroline, Paul, his mother Joan, his son John, his father Pliny and his oldest daughter Sarah.



»» (l-r) Keep and his wife Suzanne talk with Russ Daniel, of Independent Bank, during a fundraising reception for God's Kitchen in Grand Rapids. Keep, who is very active in charity work, serves on the board of Catholic Charities West Michigan.

"I had reached a crossroads, and Mass was the calm in the storm," Keep said. "It helped me to deal with the stress at work, knowing God has a plan, and that things will work out as they are meant to work out. This peace made me realize that I wanted to participate fully in the Mass, as a Catholic," he said.

Keep talked it over with his wife. "She encouraged me, never pressured me," he said. She ultimately became his sponsor in the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) process.

For eight months, he studied, read Scriptures and met with other RCIA candidates and catechumens for weekly classes. As a result, he better understood the Mass and what it meant to be truly Catholic. At the Easter Vigil Mass in 2001, he received the sacraments of initiation – confirmation and holy Eucharist (he had already been baptized as a baby) – coming into full communion with the holy Catholic Church.

"It was so significant to me," Keep said of the experience.

His mother-in-law gave him a cross necklace, which he has worn ever since.

The family celebrated with a big dinner, just like they had done when their children had received sacraments for the first time.

"Becoming a Catholic has made us closer as a family and has brought Suzanne and me even closer," Keep said.

Keeping calm, cool, collected

The newspaper industry's problems haven't gone away, but Keep feels equipped to tackle them, now as editor of *The Grand Rapids Press*.

He is only the eighth editor in *The Press*' 119-year history, and he couldn't be more different than his immediate predecessor, Mike Lloyd, the beloved bull-in-a-china-shop Lou Grant of Grand Rapids.

"Paul is the opposite," said his administrative assistant, Linda Miller. "He has his own style and very calming influence."

Keep's special skill is listening – indeed, these first 90 days as editor have been a "listening tour" of sorts in which Keep has asked subscribers

Paul Keep's career path:

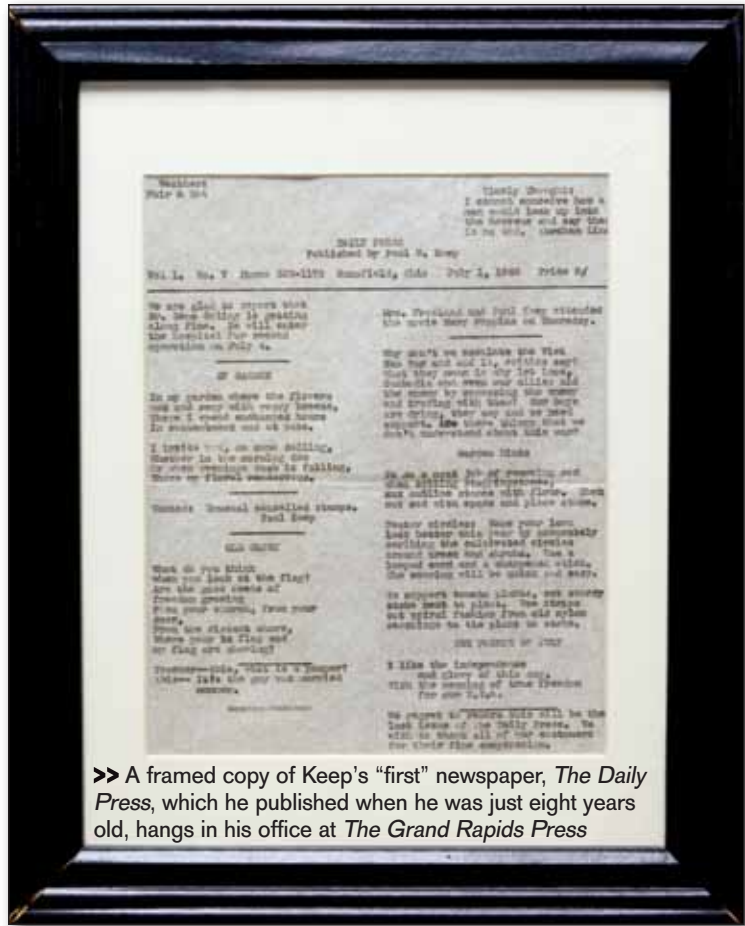
- *Kalamazoo Gazette* (1983 – 1989): reporter, business editor and assistant metro editor
- *Muskegon Chronicle* (1989 – 1993): news editor
- *Bay City Times* (1993 – 1999): editor
- *Flint Journal* (1999 – 2006): editor (In 2006, the Journal was recognized as the Michigan Press Association's Newspaper of the Year in its circulation category.)
- *Muskegon Chronicle* (2006 - 2009): editor and then publisher (In 2009, the Chronicle won the Associated Press' top two awards in its circulation category – for news writing and photojournalism.)
- *The Grand Rapids Press* (2009 – present): editor

and advertisers and the community at-large how *The Press* can serve them. Keep graciously accepts invitations to lunch meetings where people want to pick his brain – but he usually ends up picking theirs. At a recent luncheon with a group of public relations practitioners, Keep was the first to ask: “Tell me about yourselves, your clients, your story ideas – and how we can better work together for our readers.”

He welcomes phone calls and emails and even droppers-by who have an idea or suggestion. He recently was asked by the third-grade class at Lakeside Elementary School in East Grand Rapids to visit and talk about his job. Despite his busy schedule, he made the time.

His calm exterior unintentionally conceals a multi-faceted Keep, hints of which are reflected in the way he keeps his office: Keep, the sentimentalist – a collection of coffee mugs from each place he’s ever worked ... Keep, the candyman – jars of goodies that invite people to chat for a bit ... Keep, the connoisseur – a collection of some of *The Press*’ best photography on an office wall ... Keep, the Catholic – My Daily Prayer Book on his desk near his phone ... and finally, Keep, the little boy who always knew he wanted to be a newspaperman – a framed copy of that final edition of the *Daily Press* is next to the window that looks out on *The Press*’ newsroom.

Paul M. Keep is calmly, and faithfully living his dream.



>> A framed copy of Keep’s “first” newspaper, *The Daily Press*, which he published when he was just eight years old, hangs in his office at *The Grand Rapids Press*



>> Keep with Jeff Cranson, *The Grand Rapids Press*’ deputy metro editor, during a recent editorial meeting.